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INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAMS AND
FOSTER YOUTH PERCEPTIONS

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Kristin Kay Anthony-Mahler
Robin Patrice McCall

June 2002


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FOSTER YOUTH SATISFACTION

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by
Kristin Kay Anthony-Mahler
Robin Patrice McCall

June 2002

Approved by:


Dr. Sondra Seung Ja Doe, Faculty
Supervisor Social Work

June 7, 2002
Date


James Meehan, M.S.W., Social Services
Supervisor II County of Riverside
Department of Public Social Services


Dr. Rosemary McCaslin,
M.S.W. Research Coordinator

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to conduct a descriptive and exploratory analysis of Riverside County's Independent Living Skills Program (ILSP) and its ability to prepare foster youth for successful adult transition. A vital component of the study was the exploration of perceived preparedness through the eyes of the participants enrolled in this program. The study utilized a quantitative and qualitative research method to assess the ILSP participants' perceptions of preparedness for adult transition, using the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment scale and open-ended questions. Research findings revealed that the majority of the foster care participants enrolled in Riverside County's Independent Living Skills Program perceived themselves to be relatively well prepared for adult transition.

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and emotionally. You have taught me so many valuable lessons throughout the years. I thank you for guiding and encouraging me to be a strong woman. I thank you for your unconditional love. I thank you for teaching me the art of perseverance. Above all, I appreciate all you have sacrificed in order to make my life better. I feel honored to have you as my mother, as well as a friend. I love you!

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On behalf of Robin Patrice McCall:

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Therefore, you have the need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. Hebrews and 11: 1 and 10:16

I would like to acknowledge my Savior, the Lord thy God, in whom I had great faith in to get me through this program. God promised me that I would be a Social Worker. He did not promise that the journey would be easy, but He

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DEDICATION

On behalf of Robin McCall:

This thesis is dedicated to my loving and supportive family, friends and professors: Richard Johnson, Stephanie and Nicole Johnson, Dantai McCall, Diontanaé Davis, Ailena Vargas, Eileen and Louis Myles, Evenlyn (Joyce) Murray, Angela and Judi Ukiru, Dr. Maul, Ms. Terry Strong, Ms. Zoila Gordon, and Mr. Preble.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The contents of Chapter One present an overview of the critical need to provide training and resources to foster youth who are transitioning out of the system into adult life. This chapter includes a brief description of policies involved in the inception of Independent Living Programs. Finally this chapter will discuss current social work practice roles, the purpose behind the proposed study and the significance that Independent Living Programs bring to the field of social work.

Problem Statement

A recent report by the Government Accounting Office (GAO) showed that approximately 77,000 young people were in the foster care system as of September 1998. According to the report of GAO (1999), almost 20,000 adolescents leave the foster care system each year because they are recognized as adults and are expected to live independently. Even from a young age, children living within the foster care system recognize that one day they may be left on their own. They understand that the system will no longer provide financial and medical assistance and will offer little ongoing emotional support. When

these youth turn eighteen and are terminated from the foster care system, many are pushed out into a world that lacks parental care or social support networks. In addition, many leave with minimal achievement in education and work experiences, money management and, housekeeping skills, as well as inadequate access to transportation, and housing. Unfortunately, adolescents who are deficient in many of these skills and resources are often socially and emotionally unprepared to deal with the environmental stressors that are associated with adult life.

Outcome studies done by Westat (1991), Barth (1990), Courtney and Piliavin (1998) have revealed that a substantial number of youth exiting the foster care system, who have not participated in independent living programs, are likely to once again become a cost to society. The research indicates that many of these adolescents become homeless, are incarcerated and become dependent on public assistance. The above-mentioned studies have shown that there is a great need to provide foster youth with appropriate living skills and training to become self-sufficient.

Fortunately, the United States Congress has recognized the significant needs of youth in foster care, and as a result, has enacted legislation to provide for

Independent Living Programs that assist youth in transitioning out of the foster care system. According to Mallon (1998), one identified independent living program has shown to be successful with foster youth transitioning out of care: the New York City Independent Living Partnership with Green Chimney Life Skills Program. This program, however, has put little emphasis on investigating the opinions and satisfaction of foster care youth. Although outcome studies are helpful, it is also necessary to receive feedback from foster youth in order to establish the strengths and weaknesses of the programs and identify further needs of the adolescents.

Through studying independent living programs and adolescent feedback, researchers are better able to recognize the specific needs of foster youth making the transition into adult life. Once this information is obtained, independent living programs can tailor their program to meet the identified needs of their clients.

Policy Context

There are several policies that have positively affected the life span of foster youth and independent living programs. Initially, a Federal Independent Living (FIL) Program was established in 1986 through the addition of Section 477 to Title IV-E of the Social Security Act.

This program was initiated as a result of concerns from human service professionals and the general public who had recognized a problem that a large number of adolescents released from the foster care system were returning to the care of the state as adults (Stone, 1987). There were several amendments to this program (FIL) in 1990, which extended eligibility of services to foster youth up to the age of 21. Then in 1993 under the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (P.L. 103-66), the Independent Living Program was permanently reauthorized. Next, in 1997, The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) was passed and focused on the safety, permanency and well-being for all children in the foster care system (Casey Family Programs, 2000). In addition, ASFA required that all young adults in foster care must have a permanency plan. However, independent living was not considered a permanent plan arrangement (Allen, Epstein, Metiner, Nixon, & Pizzigati, 2000). In 1999, The Foster Care Independence Act (P.L. 106-169) was reformed and expanded. This new legislation was named the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program and was authorized under the Title IV-E section of the Social Security Act. It was designed to further assist adolescents in becoming self-sufficient while transitioning out of the foster care system.

Practice Context

Currently, social workers are involved in various practice roles related to foster youth and independent living programs. At the federal level, social workers advocate for appropriate services, resources and opportunities that are available to children who are involved in the foster care system. Many social workers have lobbied for new laws, testified at congressional hearings, and educated stakeholders about the critical and essential need to provide foster youth with life skills education and training, which will enable them to master adult responsibilities and become autonomous citizens of society.

At the state level, social workers collaborate with state officials to revise and implement current independent living program regulations, policies and procedures. Furthermore, these social workers oversee and monitor the functioning of these newly implemented programs at a county level. Social workers at the county level are involved in implementing these policies and procedures into private and public independent living programs such as transitional assistance homes, emancipation homes, and county child welfare programs. According to Shari Twidwell, Director of Governmental

Relations and Political Affairs of the National Association of Social Workers, California Chapter, social workers interpret current policies, establish appropriate resources, coordinate and communicate with stakeholders, provide case management, and collaborate and contract with additional agencies for services (personal communication, October 18, 2001).

Purpose of the Study

This study was specifically concerned with identifying strengths and deficits of Riverside County's independent living program in the areas of staff training and resources available to foster youth. The issues reviewed included: social support, education, employment, money management, housekeeping, transportation, and housing. In addition, the study was interested in learning about foster youth's perceptions of gaps in program services within the independent living program service system.

The study focused on foster care youth, aged eighteen to twenty-one, who were currently enrolled in the foster care system and were participating in the independent living program. This study utilized a questionnaire with qualitative and quantitative survey items, which assessed

foster youth's satisfaction with each of the services provided by the independent living program.

This research study can be differentiated from other studies of independent living programs. Several studies have looked at outcomes of foster youth who have transitioned into adulthood. Among the findings, Westat (1991) found that two to four years after leaving the foster care system, forty-six percent had not completed their high school education, fifty-one percent were unemployed, while sixty-two percent had not maintained a job for at least one year. Courtney and Pilivian (1998) found that twelve to eighteen months after leaving the foster care system, thirty-seven percent had not completed their high school education; thirty-nine percent were unemployed, while nineteen percent had not held a job since leaving care. Finally, Barth (1990) found that one to ten years after leaving the foster care system, thirty-eight percent had not completed their high school education, twenty-five percent were unemployed, and fifty-three percent reported being affected by financial hardship. Furthermore, according to Mallon (1998), one evaluative outcome study of a New York City based independent living program operated by Green Chimneys Children's Services was conducted and the research

findings are as follows. Three-quarters of the study participants had completed their high school education or had obtained their GED (general equivalency diploma), approximately seventy-two percent had obtained full-time employment at discharge, and sixty-five percent had obtained a savings account.

Due to the minimal number of outcome studies of independent living programs and the lack of feedback from the foster youth participants, little information has been obtained on whether foster youth consider the program to be beneficial to their success in the adult world. With this in mind, this study focused on identifying the specific and detailed reasons from the foster youth's perspectives, which may contribute to adolescents' failure in transitioning effectively into adult life. In addition, this study attempted to identify additional needs that were currently not being met.

It was the hope of these researchers that the study would reveal strengths, weakness, and gaps in current services. It was anticipated that this information could be used to implement changes in the current policies and service programs that affect the independent living program in Riverside County and would ultimately lead to a

higher success rate for adolescents transitioning into adulthood.

Significance of the Project for Social Work

Through research on independent living programs and the outcomes of foster youth satisfaction, social workers and social work practice can strive to expand and fine tune current services offered to foster youth. Without the awareness of what is effective and what is not effective for adolescents, social workers cannot make appropriate changes to these programs. As current policy and procedure become expanded and modified, independent living programs have a greater chance of increasing the number of foster youth who will transition out of the system successfully. In addition, once independent living programs have proven to have a strong success rate through various outcomes studies, it is hopeful that the number of independent living programs offered can increase and include foster youth of younger ages.

The primary research question was: Do independent living program participants feel prepared for adult transition? This study also aimed to identify areas that needed improvement in meeting the needs of foster youth.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The contents of Chapter Two consist of a discussion of the relevant legislature and outcome studies that have affected the growth of Independent Living Programs. In addition, this chapter will include several areas of concern that are currently affecting foster youth transitioning out into the adult world.

Overview of Policy Development of
Independent Living Programs

In 1983, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Office of Human Development Services issued a request for proposals entitled "Study of the Adaptations of Adolescents in Foster Care to Independence and Community Life," which outlined a rationale for researching the topic of independent living and indicated that there was federal recognition for the need to research in this area (Mech, 1994).

In 1986, legislation passed a federal independent living program (P.L. 99-272) through the addition of Section 477 to Title IV-E of the Social Security Act. This program was initiated as a result of concerns from human

service professionals and members of larger society who had recognized that a large number of adolescents who were released from the foster care system were once again returning to the care of the state as adults (Stone, 1987). The Independent Living Program was created to enable welfare agencies to respond to the needs of youth emancipating from foster care and assist them as they prepared for independent living (U.S. DHHS, 1999).

In 1987 the funds were allocated and the program was implemented in all 50 states (CWLA Testimony, 1999). The law provided \$45 million in incentive funding to states under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act to provide services to foster youth aged 16 and older for independent living.

The state and local policies for child welfare services defined their specific services to be delivered and standards to be met (Irvine, 1998). After recognizing that adolescents were having difficulty transitioning out of the foster care system by the age of 18, the Independent Living Program was amended in 1990 and extended foster youth independent living services up to the age of 21, at each state's discretion. This amendment recognized that adolescents in foster care often faced difficulty when making an abrupt transition out of care at

18, and that services were more effective on a longer continuum (CWLA, 1999).

In 1993, the Independent Living Program was once again amended which permanently reauthorized as part of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act [P.L. 103-66] (CWLA Testimony, 1999). Cynthia Fagnoni, the director of Human Services Division of the U.S. General Accounting office, testified at a hearing on foster care independent living, that the act authorized federal funding of 70 million dollars per year for states to develop and implement services to assist youth aged 16 and over to make the transition to independent living from foster care (Federal Document Clearing House, Inc. Congressional Testimony, 1999). The funds were to be distributed to each state by formula and would be matched dollar for dollar over the original amount allocated to the state in 1986 (CWLA Testimony, 1999). The program offered each state a considerable flexibility in designing and delivering services. However, the program did require that each state must have 1) State plan for independent services, 2) individual living plan for each participant in the program, and 3) cooperation and collaboration of service agencies. Interestingly enough, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reported that data from states

suggested that as many as one-third of all the youth eligible for independent living services from 1987-1996 did not receive services (U.S.DSHS, 1999).

In 1999, the Foster Care Independence Act (P.L. 106-169) was enacted. This new legislation was named the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program and was authorized under the Title IV-E section of the Social Security Act. The primary focus of this Act was to reform and expand the previous Independent Living Program law. Under this new legislation, the federal allotment for Title IV-E independent living programs doubled from \$70 million per year to \$140 million per year (Allen et al., 2000). Also this new legislation emphasized a broader scope of "independent living" by eliminating the minimum age of 16 and expanding support services up to the age of 21. Other key provisions of the Act include the following:

- 1) States have flexible funding to provide children who are identified as likely to remain in foster care until age 18 with a plan and services to,
 - a) receive the education, services and training necessary to obtain employment,
 - b) prepare for post-secondary education,
 - c) to be mentored,

- 2) States are now eligible for a minimum of \$500,000, but must provide a 20% match for the amount allocated,
- 3) States must utilize a segment of these funds for older youth who have left foster care, but have not reached the age of 21,
- 4) States may also use up to 30% of the Independent Living Program funds for room and board for youth ages 18 to 21 who have left the foster care system,
- 5) States are given the option to extend Medicaid to youths 18 to 21 who have left foster care, and
- 6) The Act authorized 1.5% of program funds to be set aside for evaluation, technical assistance, performance measurements and data collection (Allen et al., 2000).

Research on Independent Living Programs

Although independent living programs seem to be a fairly new concept in child welfare, several outcome studies have been completed. One study was conducted by Westat (1991), which included former foster care youth participants from eight differing states. Findings from

Westat's study indicated that 2.5 to 4 years after foster youth had left care, 46% of the youth had not finished high school, 51% were unemployed, and almost 40% of the participants were dependent on some form of public assistance. Another study done in San Francisco by Barth (1990), studied former foster care youth who left the system. He studied youths who had been terminated from the system over a longer period of time, 1-10 years. His findings indicated that 38% of the participants had not finished high school, 25% were unemployed, and 47% were receiving public assistance. Yet another study done by Courtney and Piliavin (1998) studied former foster care youth in Wisconsin at twelve to eighteen months after leaving the system. Results from this study indicated that 37% of youths had not finished high school, 39% were unemployed, and 32% of the participants were receiving some form of public assistance.

After reviewing the literature, it appears that foster care youth leaving the system suffer much difficulty in a variety of areas when transitioning into adult life. Some of the most difficult problems they face are poor education, homelessness, and unemployment.

It appears that education is a critical factor involved in an adolescent's success. Jackson (1994)

indicated that among the risk factors facing youth in foster care, low educational achievement has the most adverse effect on long-term adjustment. Many foster youth growing up in the system lag behind their peers academically, often due to multiple changes in placements, which results in disruption in their educational progress. There is an increased likelihood that adolescents who have grown up in the care of protective services will not complete high school by age 18 (Sheehy, Oldham, & Zanghi, 2001). Mech (1994) suggests that possessing less than a high school diploma is a critical, and perhaps an insurmountable barrier for young adults who are working to achieve self-sufficiency. According to Cook, Fleishman, and Grimes (1991), completion of a high school education and participation in higher education may be two of the strongest indicators of future ability to achieve and maintain self-sufficiency after discharge from the custody of Social Services.

According to Sheehy, Oldham, and Zanghi (2001), there is a relationship between education, skill training, job acquisition and income. Many foster care alumni tend to have difficulty finding or sustaining jobs. According to CWLA (1999) securing and maintaining employment is fundamental for foster youth. Many adolescents who are

forced to leave foster care are employed in entry-level employment positions. Sheehy, Oldham, and Zanghi (2001) state that a high school diploma no longer assures stable employment beyond a poverty level wage. Studies by Cook (1991), and Barth (1990) indicate that the median annual income for foster youth is \$10,000 for those who were working full-time.

Another critical issue affecting youth in transition is homelessness. Current housing options for former foster youth are limited by various factors including: cost, willingness of landlords to rent to young tenants, and availability of suitable housing (Sheehy, Oldham, & Zanghi, 2001). A study by the Alliance to End Homelessness surveyed 21 homeless shelter organizations. Of the 1,134 homeless clients, 36.2% had a history of foster care (Roman & Wolfe, 1997). Another study completed by the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless (1991) reported that among the 200 homeless teens interviewed, 45% had been in state custody. According to Cook (1991) as many as 25% of youth leaving foster care suffer homelessness during the year following emancipation.

On a more positive note, Mallon (1998) researched foster youth who had been discharged from the New York City Independent Living Partnership with Green Chimney

Life Skills Program. The results of the study indicated the life skills program increased the ability of youths to be self-reliant at the time of discharge from foster care and further suggested that youths can maintain these positive outcomes at follow-up.

Although the existing body of outcome studies has proven to be helpful in identifying foster youth's ability to transition in adulthood, there seems to be a lack of information regarding foster youth's perceptions in relation to the effectiveness of independent living programs. These researchers believe it is equally important to obtain feedback from foster youth who are currently enrolled in independent living programs in order to examine the strengths and weaknesses of current programs as well as identify further gaps in services.

Through studying the outcomes of foster youth's feedback, researchers are better able to identify the need to provide improved training and resources that will further guide foster youth toward success in the adult world. Thus, this study focused on the research question: Do Riverside County independent living program participants feel prepared for adult transition?

Human Behavior in the Social Environment Theories Guiding Conceptualization

The theoretical base for independent living policy, programming, and evaluation of foster youth seems to be insufficient (Collins, 2001). Much of the previous research has utilized a social learning approach. According to Rutledge (2001), "social learning theory focuses on learning that occurs within a social contact." He believes, that individuals learn by observing the behavior of others and the outcomes of those behaviors. Therefore, based on social learning theory, foster youth can benefit from having role models to guide them toward successful adulthood. If youth have adults in their lives that are invested in educating and guiding them toward independent living, they have a greater chance of developing the appropriate skills that they need to be successful.

Yet another approach that has guided research on this topic is family systems theory. Family systems theory states that the family is a small group of closely interrelated and interdependent individuals who are organized into a single unit. The theory suggests that the interrelationships of family members are so fused together

that a change in any one part of the system ultimately affects the entire system (Friedman, 1981).

Unfortunately, adolescents who are living in the foster care system are likely to have had one or more traumatic disruptions in his/her life. As a result of these types of disruptions or dysfunctions, the adolescent has been taken into custody of Child Protective Services. According to family system theory, this type of disruption and/or dysfunction in the family will impact the homeostasis of a child's life in a negative manner and may cause the child to be dysfunctional as an adult.

In addition, when children do not have contact with their parents or family, often times their staff members in the foster care system serve as their surrogate parents. Many adolescents in the foster care are terminated from the system and detached once again, from people who are their perceived family. This detachment is just another example of a disruption to the adolescent's sense of family balance and may potentially lead to a dysfunctional adult life and impaired success. Further, when an adolescent is terminated and not given adequate resources and training to succeed, this will potentially cause them to fail and most likely to lead to some form of

dysfunction, which may ultimately lead to an individual being a cost to society.

Having reviewed much of the existing body of literature, it appears that a social learning theory approach would best fit the conceptual framework of this study. Independent living programs have a primary purpose to provide role modeling and training for adolescents to ensure a high level of competency and success in transitioning to the adult world. As a result, foster care youth who are participating in an independent living program will be exposed to role models who are willing to demonstrate and discuss issues related to adult life. Furthermore, through the direct observation of these role models, foster care youth will gain valuable insight into how to access resources and initiate adult-related activities with confidence. In addition, these role models can serve as a support network and allow the foster youth the opportunity to make errors in daily life. Further still, foster youth can utilize this opportunity to discuss issues that they deem challenging and can work to identify alternative methods of problem solving.

Summary

Chapter Two discussed the important detailed history of the legislation behind the development of a federally mandated independent living program for foster youth, as well as the current provisions of the 1999 John H. Chafee Foster Care Independent Act (P.L. 106-169). In addition, a review of outcome studies related to transitioning foster care youth was conducted, which revealed a lack of information based on foster youth's perceptions. A review of theories related to foster care youth transitioning into adulthood showed that social learning theory provides the most appropriate conceptual framework for studying the effectiveness of independent living programs for foster youth.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This study used a quantitative and qualitative design method to examine foster youth's perceptions on their ability to move toward adult transition. This chapter further discusses the study's sampling techniques, data collection procedures, protection of human subjects, and the statistical testing utilized for data analysis.

Study Design

The purpose of this research study was to conduct a process evaluation of Riverside County's independent living program and its ability to prepare foster youth for adult transition. A key component of this study was the exploration of perceived preparedness through the eyes of adolescents enrolled in this program.

This study utilized a quantitative research method approach. The Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment (ACLSA) questionnaire was given to all participants for self-administration. In addition, two open-ended qualitative questions were incorporated into the questionnaire to allow for participants to provide additional comments.

It was anticipated that this study's evaluation of foster youth perceptions could provide valuable insight into the legitimate needs of foster youth, recognize strengths and weaknesses of current program training and services, and identify gaps in services that may directly affect the success of adolescents' transitioning into adulthood.

There are several limitations and/or biases related to this study. First, this study cannot be generalized to the larger population of adolescents (aged 18 to 21) participating in other county independent living programs. This study was specifically interested in a small cross section of foster youth aged 18 to 21 and who were enrolled in one Riverside County independent living programs.

Second, the study lacks a comparison group of foster youth aged 18 to 21 who had not participated in Riverside County's independent living program. A comparison group was not identified or researched as a result of difficulty in locating adolescents who had been terminated from the system.

A third limitation of the study involved the researching of participant perceptions. It is important to note that perceptions are subjective in nature and can

vary from person to person and from program to program. Taking this into consideration, studying perceptions of foster youth in Riverside County's independent living program does not enable researchers to generalize the same results to all independent living programs nor to all foster youth perceptions.

A final limitation of the study relates to adolescents' ability to accurately identify training and/or resources that are needed for their success. Foster youth may not have emotional, mental and social maturity to accurately evaluate their needs for the future. In addition, foster youth may be ambivalent about their ability to be successful in the future. As a result of this ambivalence, the adolescent may be disinterested in obtaining additional life skills that may help to ease the transition into adulthood.

Although there are several limitations, this study could serve to increase awareness and guide changes within the Riverside County's independent living program. The research question of this study was: Do Riverside County independent living program participants feel prepared for adult transition? The null hypothesis to be tested in this study was: Riverside County independent living program

participants do not feel sufficiently prepared for adult transition upon termination from the foster care system.

Sampling of Participants

Researchers identified, through convenience sampling, 62 foster youth aged 18 to 21. All participants were emancipated from the foster care system and were enrolled in the Riverside County's independent living program.

It was critical to survey foster youth participating in Riverside County's independent living program because these adolescents have had real life experiences with current program training and services. Furthermore, as consumers of these services, foster youth could provide valuable recommendations that help adolescents make the transition into adulthood with greater success rates.

Data Collection and Instruments

The research study primarily utilized quantitative data, but also incorporated two qualitative measures. This questionnaire included demographic information (such as gender, age, education level, length of time in the program, training and services utilized, race/ethnicity, current living situations, ILSP services utilized). Another quantitative measure that was used in the study was the Ansell-Casey Life Skill Assessment measurement,

which is a three-point Likert-type scale designed to assess perceived level of preparedness in specific areas of independent living skills training. These skills include daily living skills, housing/community resources, money management, self-care, social development, and work/study skills. Finally, the survey included two qualitative (open-ended) questions to allow participants to make additional comments.

The independent variables used in the study were numerous and included: age, gender, ethnicity, grade in school, current living situation, length of time in current living situation (in months), specific types of trainings/workshops attended, and types of supportive services received.

Age was defined as the age of the adolescent at the time of participation in the study and is a nominal level of measurement with four age groups. Gender was defined as the category of sex that the adolescent most identified with and is a nominal level of measurement. Grade in school was defined as the grade the adolescent was currently completing at the time of the study or the last grade completed and is a continuous level of measurement. Race/ethnicity was defined as what race or ethnic group the adolescent most identified with and is a nominal level

of measurement. Current living situation was defined as where the adolescent was living at the time of the study and is a nominal level of measurement. Length of time in the independent living program was defined as the number of months the adolescent had been enrolled in the program and is defined as a continuous level of measurement. Types of trainings/workshops attended was defined as what trainings and/or workshops the adolescent had participated in while enrolled in the program and is a nominal level of measurement. Examples of such trainings/workshops included: daily living skills, housing/community resources, money management, self-care, social development, and work/study skills. Types of supportive services were defined as the types of services utilized by the adolescent while enrolled in the program and is a nominal level of measurement. Examples of supportive services included: tutoring, bus pass reimbursement, career counseling, college/vocational scholarship reimbursement, and GED certificate incentive.

The dependent variable in the study was operationalized as foster youth's self perception score of life skills as measured by the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment Scale. The Ansell-Casey Life Skill Assessment [ACLSA] (short form version) is a self-reporting

instrument with a three-point Likert-type scale that measures a participant's perceived ability to successfully perform specific life skills. This scale covers specific domain areas such as social development, work and study skills, daily living skills, self-care skills, housing and community resources, and money management.

The ACLSA is separated into two measurement categories, tangible skills and intangible skills. Tangible skills, referred to as hard skills, can be described as skills that "we know or do." Examples of such skills include, money management, transportation, and identifying resources. Intangible skills, referred to as soft skills, are skills that are used for interpersonal relationships and maintaining employment. Examples of such skills include, decision making, problem solving, communication, social skills and time management (Casey Family Program, 2000). The scoring of the ACSLA ranges from 0 to 100, with a higher score indicating a greater level of mastery in life skill ability. Scoring is grouped into three categories, which include a low level of perceived life skill ability, a moderate level of perceived life skill ability, and a high level of perceived life skill ability. Scoring is as follows: 0 through 30 indicates a low level of perceived

preparedness, while 40 through 59 reveals a moderate level of perceived preparedness, and finally 60 through 100 reveals a high level of perceived preparedness.

In order to create a percentage of perceived preparedness mastery score, the responses from each question (1-20) are translated into an equivalent numerical value, where the value of (Not Like Me) is 1, the value of (Somewhat Like Me) is 2, and the value of (Very Much Like Me) is 3. The number of high marks is tallied (a count of the 3's is generated). Once the high values are tallied, this count is divided by the total number of items (questions 1 through 20). An example might be, if there were 10 items with a response of "3" out of 20 items in the questionnaire, the score is the ratio $10/20$ or a percentage of perceived preparedness mastery score of 50% ($10/20 \times 100 = 50\%$). The ACLSA overall mastery score is simply a ratio of all the "3's" endorsed in the ACLSA form to the total number of items answered, multiplied by 100 (ACLSA and Life Skills Guidebook Manual, 2001).

The ACLSA is the only life skill measurement scale that has been developed in the child welfare field of practice with established reliability and validity. The internal-consistency reliability coefficients are in

acceptable ranges (from 0.80 to 0.91), meaning when the instrument was split into two halves, both reliability coefficients measuring the Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment instrument were similar or comparable in scoring (ACLSA and Life Skills Guidebook Manual, 2001).

Three approaches to validity have been explored: content, discriminate and criterion-related. Content validity was established through the comprehensive item-development process, meaning that the items developed in the Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment have, in fact, been proven to be measuring life skill competencies of children and adolescents. Examination of discriminant validity suggests the ACLSA is sensitive enough to portray differences in ability. That is, this life skills assessment tool can differentiate between strong skill assessment and weak skill assessment. In addition, it has been determined that the life skill assessment tool can distinguish and appropriately measure numerous constructs. The criterion validity of the ACLSA reveals positive correlations with the Daniel Memorial Performance Test and the Student Self Concept Scale, which have been established as significantly sound (Casey Family Programs, 2000). According to Casey Family Programs (2000), the Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment tool has proven to be

comparable in its ability to measure criterion validity as the Daniel Memorial Performance Test and the Student Self Concept Scale.

The ACLSA has a user-friendly format, which can be administered by both laypersons and professionals with few difficulties. Furthermore, the ACLSA questionnaire has age appropriate scoring norms to assess for an individual's readiness to live on his or her own. Level I assess for ages 8-10, Level II for ages 11-14, Level III for 15-18, and Level IV for ages 19-21. In addition, an ACLSA short form was developed. This short form is brief, contains only twenty items, is able to discriminate within age groups, has good psychometric qualities, and correlates well with an overall mastery ACLSA score (Casey Family Programs 2000). For the purpose of this study, the ACLSA short form was utilized for convenience and time reasons.

One obvious limitation of the ACLSA is its inability to measure all critical life skills. Unfortunately, the instrument was not designed to assess for all skills needed to live independently but rather to provide indicators of basic life skills acquisition. Due to the scale's inability to provide a comprehensive measurement of life skills, the instrument cannot reliably predict future outcomes of self-sufficiency.

Another weakness identified by the researchers is the lack of information provided regarding the scale's testing for cultural sensitivity.

Procedures

Participants of the study were within the age range of 18 to 21 and were identified by independent living program personnel. Prior to the study, researchers collaborated with Riverside County's independent living program coordinator. Furthermore, the independent living program coordinator indicated that the study should be conducted following a mandatory independent living skills meeting. Researchers and the program coordinator developed a flyer that enlisted voluntary participation from foster youth within the age range of 18 to 21. The flyer also informed the prospective participants that if they attended the mandatory meeting and participated in the survey, they would receive a \$50.00 gift certificate for a major department store.

All eligible participants received a copy of the flyer in the mail and also received a follow up telephone call reminding them of the mandatory meeting and the voluntary study being conducted. Both researchers met with all willing participants in Conference Room A and B at the

Riverside County Social Services Agency. The researchers informed the participants that they were interested in obtaining their opinions about the independent living program in which they are enrolled. Prior to the administering of the instrument, the researchers assured all participants that their responses would be kept confidential and anonymous.

Researchers also informed the adolescents that they could quit the study at any time without consequence or punishment. All participants were advised that if they declined to participate in the study or desired to quit the study at any time, they could put the survey into the provided envelope and hand it to one of the researchers either immediately or at the end of the session. All participants were provided a copy of the survey (which contained an informed consent and debriefing statement), a writing utensil and a manila envelope.

Once the surveys were given, each participant was asked to provide an 'X' mark on the front page of the questionnaire, which indicated an informed consent for the participation in the study. The researchers then explained how to read the survey and provided detailed instructions for filling out the questionnaire. Each participant was given the opportunity to finish the survey in its

entirety. The questionnaire took approximately 25 minutes to complete. Only one researcher from the study remained in the conference room throughout the session because the other researcher had contact with several participants involved in the study. To ensure adolescents' full voluntary participation in the study and to limit participant bias this researcher was not present during the administration of the survey.

Once the questionnaire was completed, the researcher asked each participant to place the survey into the provided manila envelope and seal it. Participants were then instructed to deposit the envelope in the box near the exit of the conference room. All participants were then instructed to read the debriefing statements from each study.

The debriefing statement for this research survey revealed the purpose of the study, which was to identify whether the participants believed that participation in the independent living program was helpful in increasing their level of preparedness for adult transition. Additionally, the researchers revealed that they were interested in understanding the strengths, deficits and gaps in services within the independent living skills program. Participants were informed that their

participation in the study might be helpful in making future changes to policies and procedures affecting the program.

The debriefing statement also offered the participants a telephone number to contact regarding questions, concerns and counseling referrals, which served as a precautionary measure to address any emotional issues that may have arisen as a result of the study.

Once all the participants completed the surveys and read their debriefing statements, the researchers asked the participants if they had any further questions or concerns regarding the of the studies. Once identified questions had been answered, the participants were provided with their \$50.00 gift certificate and thanked for their participation in the studies.

In addition, the researchers mailed out the survey to the remaining foster youth participating in the program. An instruction sheet for completing the survey was enclosed along with an incentive form (see Appendix F). All participants were instructed to read and sign off on the informed consent page prior to completing the survey. Once the participants completed the survey and read the debriefing page, they were instructed to mail back the information in order to receive a \$25.00 incentive.

Protection of Human Subjects

All the participants in the study were of legal age (18 years) and were able to provide their own informed consent for their participation in the study. All participants were informed that they could decline to participate in the study as well as quit the study at any given time without any negative consequence or punishment. Each adolescent participating in the study received an informed consent sheet, which asked them to make an 'X' on the provided box, rather than provide researchers with a signature for their participation. This method was utilized to allow for confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were also assured that all data would be destroyed (shredded) six months after the completion of the study.

In addition, all participants were provided a debriefing statement along with their questionnaire and were also given an opportunity for a question and answer session once all participants had completed their surveys.

Data Analysis

This study was a descriptive and exploratory analysis of perceptions of foster youth's who were participating in Riverside County's Independent Living Skills Program. The

study primarily utilized quantitative measures with the addition of two qualitative questions.

Researchers ran univariate analysis on all study variables to determine the characteristics and the distribution of participants' responses. In addition, descriptive statistics were used to obtain summary information about the distribution, variability, and central tendency of all continuous and categorical variables. Furthermore, several variables were recoded in order to create variables with appropriate levels of measurement for conducting bivariate data analysis.

Bivariate analyses using chi-square test were done to examine the associations between participants' gender, current living situation, year in program attendance, use of each supportive service, and attendance of each life skill seminar.

Additionally, independent t-test was used to test the statistical significance of differences in two group means. Independent t-tests were performed on ACLSA score and length of time in program attendance, living situation, and the use of the ILP supportive service. Independent t-tests were also run on the total number of supportive services utilized and length of time in program attendance, and living situation. Finally, independent

t-tests were run on total number of life skills seminar attended and length of time in program attendance, and living situation.

Furthermore, one-way analysis of variance was used to compare the means of three or more groups. ANOVA was used to examine the association between ACLSA score and educational background, ethnicity, length of time in program attendance, and overall personal beliefs about preparedness. ANOVA was also run on the total number of service utilization to examine its relationship with educational background, ethnicity, and length of time in program attendance. Researchers also conducted ANOVA between the total number of life skill seminar attendance and educational background, ethnicity, and length of time in program attendance.

Two open-ended qualitative questions were content analyzed to identify strengths, deficits, and gaps in program services. Participants' responses were reviewed and grouped into various categories. The content analysis revealed the categories of employment, education, existing services, home and personal management, transportation and administrative staffing and resource expansion. Finally, the major themes of responses were ranked in the order of

each category's importance, as shown in the frequency distribution.

Summary

This study used the convenience sampling method to select study participants' aged 18-21. Chapter Three reviewed the quantitative and qualitative method used to measure foster youth's perceived level of preparedness for adult transition and its relationships with key variables. Researchers utilized the ACLSA questionnaire, which was designed to assess perceived level of preparedness in specific areas of independent living skills training. Other key variables related to the utilization of independent living program services. Both univariate and bivariate analysis methods were used for examining quantitative data. Content analysis was performed to analyze qualitative data.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine foster youth's perceptions on their ability to be successful in adult transition. In order to analyze participants' perceptions, quantitative and qualitative data were collected utilizing the ACLSA survey. The survey contained general demographic information, 20-scaled questions, and two open-ended questions, which allowed participants to provide additional feedback regarding the independent living skills program. Furthermore, univariate and bivariate data analyses were done in order to obtain the study's results.

Presentation of the Findings

Univariate analysis was used to determine the characteristics of demographic data, which included gender, age, education level, ethnicity, number of years in the ILSP program and current living situation (see Table 1).

Of the 59 respondents who completed the survey, 71.2% (n = 42) were female and 28.8% (n = 17) were male (see Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Female	42	71.2
Male	17	28.8
Age		
18 years	26	44.1
19 years	18	30.5
20 years	8	13.6
21 years	7	11.9
Education Level		
12th Grade	12	20.3
College	34	57.6
Vocational/Job Training	3	5.1
Other	10	16.9
Ethnicity		
Hispanic	11	18.6
Non-Hispanic White	23	39.0
African American	10	16.9
Mixed	12	20.3
Other	3	5.1
Years in Program		
1 year or less	32	54.2
Over 1 year	27	45.8
Months in Program		
0-6 months	23	39.0
7-12 months	09	15.3
13-18 months	05	8.5
19-24 months	06	10.2
25 + months	16	27.1
Living Situation		
Living with others	20	33.9
Living on own	39	66.1

The age of respondents were between 18 and 21 years old. The majority of the respondents were between 18

(44.1%) and 19 (30.5%) years of age (see Table 1).

Additionally, the mean age for the respondents was 19.

Twenty percent (20.3%) of the respondents were in 12th grade, 57.6% currently attending college, 5.1% attending a vocational or job training program, and 16.9% responded as other (see Table 1).

The respondents were of a diverse ethnic population, with a majority of respondents being Non-Hispanic White 39.0%. The largest ethnic minority was Hispanic (18.6%) followed by African-Americans (16.9%). A little over twenty percent (20.3%) of the respondents considered themselves Mixed and (5.1%) of the respondents categorized themselves as 'Other' (see Table 1).

The majority of the respondents (54.2%) had been enrolled in the ILSP program for one year or less and 45.8% were in the program for more than a year. In addition, the respondents' length of program participation was also broken down into five categories of months (see Table 1).

Among the respondents, the majority (66.1%) indicated that they were living on their own, while 33.9% reported to be living with others [i.e. those who were living with birth parents, relatives, adoptive parents, or those who were living in group homes] (see Table 1).

A bivariate analysis was performed to determine the relationship between gender and participants' living situation. Among the participants in the ILSP program, 33 females (78.6%) reported to be living independently, while 9 (21.4%) reported to be living dependently. Among the male counterparts, 6 (35.3%) reported to be living on their own, while 11 (64.7%) reported to be living with others. The group difference in living situation varied significantly by gender [Chi-Square = 10.115, df = 1, $p < .001$] (see Table 2).

Table 2. Crosstabulation of Gender by Living Situation

Gender	Current Living Situation	
	Living with Others (Dependent)	Living on Own (Independent)
Female	n = 9 (21.4%)	n = 33 (78.6%)
Male	n = 11 (64.7%)	n = 6 (35.3%)

Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment Perceived Preparedness Score

When perceived preparedness for independent living was measured by the Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment tool (ACLSA), the majority (69.5%) of the respondents perceived themselves as very prepared (with a score

between 60-100) for adult transition. Approximately twenty percent of the respondents perceived themselves as moderately prepared (with a score between 40-59), and 10.2% as not prepared [with a score between 0-39] (see Table 3).

Table 3. Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment Perceived Preparedness Score

	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Not prepared (0-39)	6	10.2
Moderately Prepared (40-59)	12	20.3
Very Prepared (60-100)	41	69.5
Total	59	100.0
Mean ACLSA Score = 67.8		
Median ACLSA Score = 70.0		

A one-way analysis of variance was performed to determine whether the participants' ACLSA scores were related to their educational backgrounds. The ACLSA scores for the ILSP participants varied according to their educational backgrounds. On average, those who were in the 12th grade received a high level of preparedness score (between 60-100) of over 60 (M = 62.92), those who were enrolled in college also received a high level of

preparedness score (between 60-100) of over 70 (M = 71.91), while those who attended vocational/job training programs received a moderate level of preparedness score (between 40-59) of over 58 (M = 58.33). The difference in perceived preparedness scores among the three groups of ILSP participants with varying educational levels was not found to be statistically significant { $F(3,55) = .951, p > .05$ }.

ACLSA scores were found to be related to ethnicity. On average, Hispanic respondents (M = 53.2) and African Americans (M = 59.0) received a moderate level of preparedness score, while Non-Hispanic White counterparts received a high level of preparedness score (M = 75.4). The difference in perceived preparedness scores among the three ethnic groups of ILSP participants was found to be statistically significant { $F(4,54) = 3.715, p < .01$ } (see Table 4).

Table 4. Ethnic Difference in Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment Score

Ethnicity	Average ACLSA Score	Significance Level
Hispanic	53.2 (n = 11)	
Non-Hispanic White	75.4 (n = 23)	
African American	59.0 (n = 10)	$p = .033$

A t-test was run to determine whether participants' ACLSA scores were related to the length of participation in the ILSP program. The average score of perceived preparedness as measured by the ACLSA instrument for the participants who were in the program for one year or less was 65.3, while those who were in the program for over one year, the score was 70.7. The level of perceived preparedness score did not vary significantly according to the length of participation in the ILSP program ($t = -934$, $df = 57$, $p > .05$).

A one-way analysis of variance was also performed to determine whether the ACLSA score was related to the

length of program participation when it was measured in five categories of months. The difference in ACLSA perceived preparedness score among the five groups with varying lengths of stay in the program was not found to be statistically significant $\{F(4,54) = .636, p > .05\}$.

ACLSA score was found to relate to participants' living situation. The ACLSA score for the participants who were living with others was 55.8, while the score for those who were living on their own was 74.0. As seen in Table 5, the difference between independent and dependent living groups in perceived preparedness score was found to be statistically significant $[t = -3.214, df = 57, p < .01]$ (see Table 5).

Table 5. Difference in Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment Score by Living Situation

Living Situation	Average ACLSA Score	Significance Level
Living with others (Dependent Living)	55.8 (n = 20)	
Living on Own (Independent Living)	74.0 (n = 39)	p = .002

The ACLSA score for the participants' who received the ILP newsletter support service was much higher (73.0), than the score for those who did not receive the service (59.1). The group difference was found to be statistically significant ($t = -2.416$, $df = 57$, $p < .05$).

Overall Perceived Preparedness

When the respondents were asked whether they felt they could take care of themselves, overall, 28.8% reported that they could take care of themselves very well. The majority (55.9%) reported that they could take care of themselves somewhat (moderately), while 15.3% reported that they could not take care of themselves at all (see Table 6).

Table 6. Level of Overall Perceived Preparedness

	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Take care of self very well	17	28.8
Take care of self somewhat	33	55.9
Can not take care of self	9	15.3
Total	59	100.0

A one-way analysis of variance was performed to determine whether the participants' ACLSA scores were related to their overall personal beliefs about preparedness (see question 21 in Appendix A). The average

ACLSA preparedness score of the ILSP participants' corresponded positively to their personal beliefs about their overall preparedness. On average, those who personally believed that they were able to take care of themselves "very well" received a high level of preparedness score ($M = 77.4$). Those who personally believed that they were able to take care of themselves "somewhat" also received a high score ($M = 66.4$), while those who did not believe that they were able to take care of themselves received a moderate level of preparedness score ($M = 55.0$). The difference between these three groups and perceived preparedness score was found to be statistically significant ($F(2, 56) = 3.395, p < .05$).

Independent Living Skills Program Supportive Services

According to the respondents, the most utilized ILSP supportive services were ILP Newsletter (62.7%), bus pass (59.3%), shared cost for housing (59.3%), and college and vocational scholarship [54.2%] (see Table 7). Other supportive services such as career counseling, tutoring, clothing for job interviews, and gift certificates for GED and high school graduation were not used by the majority of the ILSP participants.

Table 7. Most Utilized Independent Living Skills Program Supportive Services

	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
ILP Newsletter	37	62.7
Bus Pass	35	59.3
Shared Cost for Housing	35	59.3
College/Voc. Scholarship	32	54.2

The total number of ILSP support services utilized by the program participants varied according to educational background. On average, those who were in the 12th grade utilized nearly two types of services ($M = 1.8$), while those who were enrolled in college ($M = 4.9$), and those who attended vocational/job training programs ($M = 4.3$) utilized over 4 types of services. The difference in service utilization among the three groups of ILSP participants with varying educational levels was found to be statistically significant ($F(3,55) = 4.639, p < .01$).

The extent of supportive services utilization by the ILSP participants also varied among different ethnic groups. On average, Hispanics ($M = 3.5$), and Non-Hispanic Whites ($M = 3.9$) used over 3 types of services, while African Americans utilized over 5 types of services

($M = 5.5$). The difference in service utilization among the three ethnic groups was not found to be statistically significant ($F(4,54) = .882, p > .05$).

Supportive service utilization was related to the respondents' length of time in program attendance. The average number of supportive services utilized by those in the program for one year or less was 2.75, while those in the program over one year averaged 5.59 services. This group difference in service utilization was found to be statistically significant ($t = -4.504, df = 57, p < .001$). Similarly, a one-way analysis of variance revealed that supportive services utilization was related to the participants' length of program participation when it was measured in five categories of months. The difference in service utilization among the five groups of ILSP participants with varying lengths of stay in the program was found to be statistically significant ($F(4,54) = 6.185, p < .01$).

A t-test was run to determine whether supportive service utilization was also related to the participants' living situation. The average number of support services utilized by the participants who were living with others was 3.55, while the number of those who were living on their own was 4.31. The group difference in service

utilization was not found to be statistically significant ($t = -.988, df = 57, p > .05$).

Life Skills Seminars

According to the respondents, the most attended life skills seminars provided by the ILSP program were housing/community resources (45.8%), work and study skills (42.4%), and money management (32.2%) seminars (see Table 8). Other life skills seminars such as social development, self-care, and daily living skills were less likely to be attended.

Table 8. Most Attended Life Skills Seminars

	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Housing/Community Resources	27	45.8
Work & Study Skills	25	42.4
Money Management	19	32.2

A one-way analysis of variance revealed that the total number of life skills seminars attended by the ILSP participants did not vary significantly according to educational background. Those who were in the 12th grade attended over 2 types of seminars ($M = 2.3$). Similarly, those in college ($M = 2.1$), and those who were in

vocational/job training programs ($M = 2.7$) also attended over 2 types of seminars. The difference in seminar attendance among the three groups of ILSP participants in varying educational programs was not found to be statistically significant $\{F(3,55) = .456, p > .05\}$.

The total number of life skills seminar attendance was not significantly related to the participants' ethnicity, either. On average, those who were Hispanic attended nearly 2 types of seminars ($M = 1.9$). Similarly, Non-Hispanic Whites ($M = 1.7$), and African Americans ($M = 2.2$) attended approximately 2 types of seminars. The difference in seminar attendance among the three ethnic groups of ILSP participants was not found to be statistically significant $\{F(4,54) = .536, p > .05\}$.

The average number of life skills seminars attended by those in the program for one year or less was 1.5, while the participants who were in the program over one year averaged 2.7 life skills seminars. A t-test result showed that seminar attendance varied significantly by the length of ILSP participation ($t = -2.068, df = 57, p < .05$). However, when the length of program participation was measured in months, the total number of life skills seminar attendance did not vary significantly. The difference in seminar attendance among the five groups

of ILSP participants with varying lengths of stay in the program was not found to be statistically significant $\{F(4,54) = 1.592, p > .05\}$.

The average number of seminars attended by the participants who were living with others was 2.4, while the number of those who were living on their own was 1.8. A t-test result showed that the group difference in seminar attendance did not vary significantly by living situation ($t = .855, df = 57, p > .05$).

Qualitative Data

Two open-ended questions were added to the ACLSA survey (see questions 22 and 23 in Appendix A) to allow participants to freely answer the following questions: "What more can the Independent Living Skills Program do to help you prepare to live on your own?" and "What more would you like to do to help prepare yourself to live on your own?" The answers to these two questions provided the researchers the opportunity to analyze narrative information that related to strengths as well as deficits and gaps in ILSP program services. Furthermore, these questions assisted the researchers in examining the participants' level of maturity, insight, and personal responsibility in relation to their preparation for future success in the adult world.

Participants' responses to the qualitative question 22 were grouped into various categories. As shown in Table 9, the supportive services needed ranged from administrative staffing (20.3%), existing services (18.6%), expanding resources (11.9%), employment (10.2%), education (8.5%), home and personal management (6.8%), and transportation (5.1%).

Administrative Staffing

Respondents referred to administrative issues such as the need for increased availability of staff members for personal contact, increased organization, quicker response to phone calls, and speedier processing of paperwork. For example, one ILSP respondent stated, "I think if they had more staff workers it would be better for them all to meet the demand of the ILP group, cause we depend on them. That's all we have." Another respondent reported, "I understand that ILSP has a lot of students, but I will say they lack in organization and personal contact with their students."

Existing Services

The majority of respondents related to the need for increased knowledge about available program services that already exist. Many indicated that they would like more information on accessing workshops and on how to obtain

clothing allowances. Also, they needed help in purchasing computers and obtaining vocational training.

Expanding Resources

Among one of the issues they considered important was foster youth's accessibility to their foster care records. Also, it was expressed that specific resources for pregnant women needed to be developed.

Employment

Many respondents indicated the need for assistance with job placement, including filing out job applications and seeking career counseling.

Education

Similarly, respondents detailed a need for assistance with scholarship information, financial aid, and educational planning.

Home and Personal Management

The participants expressed that they could benefit from workshops focusing on dental care, suitable housing, environmental stressors, cooking techniques, and money management.

Transportation

Finally, foster youth in this study identified transportation as an important category for program improvement. The respondents reported a desire to learn

how to buy a car, how to obtain financial assistance for purchasing a vehicle and making the resulting car payments.

Table 9. Services Needed from Independent Living Skills Program

Services Needed	n	Percent
Administrative Staffing	12	20.3
Existing Services	11	18.6
Expanding Resources	7	11.9
Employment	6	10.2
Education	5	8.5
Home and Personal Management	4	6.8
Transportation	3	5.1

Participants' responses to the qualitative question 23 were grouped into five categories. As seen in Table 10, categories of self-improvement extended from home and personal management (55.9%), employment (30.5%), education (16.9%), transportation (3.4%), and other (3.4%).

Home and Personal Management

Over one half of the respondents reported that they could work harder on personal issues such as saving more money, looking for stable housing, procrastinating less, being more patient, and participating in the use of

transitional housing. In the words of one foster youth, "I could practice how to save money at my parents' house."

Employment

ILSP respondents also mentioned the need for self-improvement within the category of employment. Responses indicated that foster youth would benefit from seeking employment at an earlier age, increasing employment wages, and utilizing career counseling options.

Education

Respondents also revealed that they could better focus on staying in school, financing their education, and enrolling in college.

Transportation and 'Other'

As a means of self-improvement, a few respondents indicated that they could be working on saving money for a car, not getting pregnant, and establishing a credit history. One respondent thought that it was important to "stay in God's will."

Table 10. Categories for Participant Self-Improvement

Categories for Self-Improvement	n	Percent
Home and Personal Management	33	55.9
Employment	18	30.5
Education	10	16.9
Transportation	2	3.4
Other	2	3.4

Summary

Both univariate and bivariate data analysis were performed in order to obtain the study's statistical results. Researchers utilized frequency distribution, cross-tabulation, t-test, and analysis of variance (ANOVA) to examine relationships between demographic variables, foster youth's perceived level of preparedness, and ILSP program variables. Data analyses' results were reported within four categories of interest, which included: perceived preparedness (ACLSA and overall measurements), independent living skills program supportive services, life skills seminars, and qualitative data.

On the whole, the analysis of the ACLSA scores showed that the majority of the respondents felt that they were relatively highly prepared for adult transition. . . . Similarly, the analysis of the respondents' overall

personal beliefs revealed that a large portion of foster youth felt moderately well prepared for adult transition. Supportive service utilization rates appeared to be higher among the ILSP participants who were attending college, African American, enrolled in the program over one year, or living independently than among their counterparts. Additionally, study results suggested that life skill seminar attendance was higher among ILSP participants who were attending vocational/job training programs, African American, enrolled in the program over one year, or living dependently than among their counterparts.

Also, qualitative data analysis suggested that participants believed there was a need for Riverside County's Independent Living Program to increase administrative staffing and existing services and to expand the number of available resources. Finally, participants indicated some areas of self-improvement, which included home and personal management, employment, and education.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

In the following chapter, researchers will examine and discuss the study's significant findings and implications. In addition, the researchers will identify this study's limitations, review its implications for the field of social work practice, and identify other significant areas for further research exploration.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to specifically examine the effectiveness of Riverside County's Independent Living Skills Program based on foster youth's perceptions. The study also aimed to identify strengths, as well as the deficits and gaps in services and resources. Furthermore, researchers were interested in obtaining additional feedback from the foster youth in order to enhance the program and its services.

The study population was primarily made up of female participants (n = 42) and some male youth (n = 17).

The ages of the participants ranged from eighteen to twenty-one years. The majority of the participants were under the age of twenty.

The majority of study participants reported to be attending some form of formal education, which included high school and college. The remainder of the participants indicated to be attending a vocational/job training program or 'other' general types of training.

The participants within the study were ethnically diverse, with the largest number being Non-Hispanic White, followed by Hispanic and African American, and a small minority indicating that they were Mixed or of 'Other' heritage.

A little over half of the participants reported to be in the program for one year or less, while the remainder indicated to be enrolled in the program for over one year.

In addition, over half of the study participants reported to be living independently, while approximately a third disclosed that they were living dependently (with other caretakers). Among the total participants who were living independently, the majority were females, while males were more likely to be living dependently.

Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment Perceived Preparedness Score

When reviewing the study's results, researchers found that 10.2% of the participants fell within the low range (0-39%) of the ACLSA perceived preparedness survey, which

indicated that the participants felt they were not prepared for adult transition. Approximately twenty percent (20.3%) of the participants scored within the moderate level (40-59%) on the ACLSA instrument, while the majority (69.5%) attained a high score (60-100%). These results indicate that most participants perceived themselves as highly prepared for adulthood transition.

According to these findings, the researchers' primary hypothesis that foster youth do not feel prepared for adult transition cannot be supported. Research findings indicate that foster youth participants do feel relatively confident about their capacity to take on adult responsibilities and care for themselves.

When reviewing the connection between ACLSA score and education level researchers noticed that the participants who were working on their formal education seemed to achieve a higher perception score on the ACLSA survey. These findings seem to suggest that there may be connection between education and an individual's feeling of perceived preparedness for adult transition. However, further research would need to be conducted in order to generalize this finding to a larger population:

Additionally, researchers found that Non-Hispanic White participants scored high on the their level of

perceived preparedness, while the participants who were African-American and Hispanic only received a moderate level of perceived preparedness score. Statistical testing results suggest that there is a significant relationship between ACLSA score and race. Future research may need to examine the way in which race affects minorities' perceived preparedness score.

One study finding that was not anticipated by the researchers was the significant difference in the ACLSA score in relation to the number of months the participants were enrolled in the program. What researchers found was that the participants' ACLSA scores all fell within the low end of the "very prepared" category. Meaning, that all study participants' perceived themselves as "very prepared" for adult transition. However, what was interesting about this finding was that participants who were in the program between 0-6 months scored higher on the ACLSA than participants who were enrolled in the program between 7 to 18 months. This finding may suggest that there are changes in perceptions among the participants at different stages of program attendance. Researchers believe that future research on this finding may lead to insight about the needs of foster youth at various stages of their participation in the foster care

system. Furthermore, understanding the diverse needs of foster youth during this intermediary stage may allow program administrators to design and expand services that will help to address the specific needs and issues related to these young adults.

As stated earlier, researchers found that female participants appeared to be living on their own more often than their male counterparts. Also, those participants who were living independently scored higher in perceived preparedness than those living dependently. This finding might suggest that participants who are living independently may feel more prepared and confident about adult transition because they are presently taking on more adult responsibilities. By taking on adult responsibilities, foster youth in independent living situations seem to feel more competent and score higher on the ACLSA instrument.

In reviewing participants' ACLSA scores and use of supportive services, researchers noticed that those participants who scored high in perceived preparedness were more likely to receive the ILP newsletter supportive service. It seems that when foster youth are aware of supportive services, life skills seminars, and community services offered they might be more likely to utilize

these resources. As a result of using these resources participants may have an increased feeling of competence in relation to their skills for adult transition.

Overall Perceived Preparedness

Researchers discovered that the participants' ACLSA scores positively corresponded with their overall personal beliefs about preparedness for adult transition. Given the fact that the participants received a moderately high score on the ACLSA instrument on average, as well as reported a moderate level of overall belief about their preparedness, reveals a consistent finding. This positive association indicates that study participants provided reliable responses in a consistent manner when the level of preparedness was measured in terms of ACLSA scores and overall beliefs.

Independent Living Skills Program Supportive Services

When reviewing the total number of support services utilized by participants and their education level, researchers noticed that foster youth who were in college or were attending a vocational/job training program had utilized a substantially higher number of services. This finding may allude to a connection between higher levels of education and higher service utilization rates. It is

certainly possible that foster youth who are driven to obtain a higher level of education may have learned the value of increased motivation, assertiveness and communication skills, which may ultimately affect their behaviors to seek out and request supportive services. By the same token, those who search for and utilize supportive services are more likely to enhance their lives through formal education.

Life Skills Seminars

Among the most attended seminars were the housing and community resources seminar, work and study skills seminar, and money management seminar. Data analysis showed no significant relationships between life skills seminar attendance and independent variables such as education, ethnicity, length of time in the program, and living situation.

Qualitative Data

In addition to obtaining quantitative data, foster youth participants were also asked two open-ended qualitative questions. Initially participants were asked, "What more can the Independent Living Skills Program do to help you prepare to live on your own?" Researchers found that participants' responses had several specific themes, which included, employment, education, home and personal

management, transportation and 'other'. The majority of participants reported a need for increased administrative staff. By increasing staff members, it is likely that the ILSP program will be able to meet other critical needs of the participants, such as an increase of awareness about existing services, as well as the expansion of offered resources. In addition, increasing staffing may also enable the program to offer additional guidance to foster youth in such areas as home and personal management, employment and education.

The second open-ended question asked to the participants was "What more could you do to help prepare yourself to live on your own?" In addition, there was a second part to this question, which asked, "In the past, what could you have done differently to better prepare yourself for emancipation?" The participants' responses were categorized within five groups, which included employment, education, home and personal management, transportation and 'other'. Over 55% of the participants reported that they could have obtained further information regarding home and personal management. Additionally, participants reported that they could have worked on improving their employment skills.

These findings suggest that a portion of foster youth participants seem to be mature enough to look back in their lives and take responsibility for their previous decisions. Furthermore, it appears that these same youth have now developed the awareness about the need to identify and enhance their life skills.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the ACLSA was not designed to assess for all skills needed to live independently. Due to the scale's inability to provide a comprehensive measurement of all life skills, the instrument cannot reliably predict future outcomes of self-sufficiency. With this being said, researchers are therefore unable to make a reliable prediction about whether these foster youth will be successful during their adult transition and in their future adult life.

Another limitation is the study's small sample size. Due to the small number of study participants in one Independent Living Skills Program, the researchers are unable to generalize their findings to a larger population of foster youth participating in other Independent Living Skills Program.

Furthermore, the study had no comparison group, which therefore limits the researchers' ability to evaluate whether the program was more beneficial to its participants when compared to non-participants or to participants of other Independent Living Skills Program.

This study utilized a convenience sample of ILSP participants from Riverside County's Independent Living Skills program. Therefore, this study's findings can only be useful to Riverside County's ILSP program, and cannot be generalized to any other Independent Living Skills Programs with differing programmatic and organizational characteristics.

One last possible limitation was whether or not the study utilized a representative sample of emancipated foster youth. Due to the use of convenience sampling method, it is uncertain if the study included a fair representation of each group of gender, ethnicity, education level, and age of all enrollees of the Riverside County Program. To the extent that the non-participants were significantly different from the study participants, this study's generalizability within the Riverside Program is limited.

Recommendations for Social Work
Practice, Policy and Research

Despite the above-mentioned limitations, this study's findings revealed that foster youth participants do feel moderately well prepared for adult transition.

According to our findings, Hispanic and African American foster youth were scoring lower in their perceived abilities to be successful in adult transition. Riverside County's Independent Living Skills program may need to make increased efforts to support participants who are of Hispanic and African American heritage to increase their perceived preparedness scores which are significantly lower than other ethnic groups' scores.

Next, two study findings suggested that foster youth's participation in education programs is positively related to their perceptions of preparedness for adult life. Riverside County's ILSP program may want to focus on increasing the number of supportive services and life skill seminars that address the importance of foster youth's education for successful adult transition.

Yet, another study finding revealed that female participants were more likely to live independently as compared to their male counterparts. Further research needs to be conducted in relation to gender and living

situation among foster youth enrolled in Riverside County's Independent Living Skills program. It is hoped that, with further research, Riverside County can ascertain the special needs of male foster youth in regards to their living situation. Once researchers have identified these needs, social workers could then work on helping male foster youth to be placed in independent living situations.

Also, study findings indicated that the longer participants were enrolled in the program, the more likely they were to show a higher perceived preparedness score (on the ACLSA instrument). Additionally, these same participants were more likely to attend an increased number of life skill seminars and utilize a greater number of supportive services. Consequently, Riverside County's ILSP Program may want to hire additional social workers to enroll foster youth into the program at an earlier age in an effort to increase the likelihood of participant success toward adult transition.

One last finding suggested that the majority of program participants identified a need to increase ILSP administrative staff. Riverside County's Independent Living Skills Program may decide to increase their

staffing and expand their resources in order to better meet the specific needs of their foster youth.

Conclusion

The overall findings from this research study suggest that foster youth do feel relatively well prepared for adult transition. Riverside County's Independent Living Skills Program may benefit from changes in several areas. Future planning and research may want to focus upon the needs of minority participants and the importance of furthering education for enhancing the sense of preparedness for independent living. The Riverside County Independent Living Skills Program may also facilitate more independent living arrangements for foster youth's, particularly among male participants, to enhance their perceptions of preparedness for adult transition. Foster youth's earlier enrollment in the ILSP program and increased administrative support also appear to be important areas for making programmatic improvement.

APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE

Independent Living Skills Program Survey*

Instruction: These questions will ask you about what you know and what you can do. There are no right and wrong answers. Try to answer all questions.

I am: Female
Male

Current Age: 18 20
19 21

Grade in School: 12th grade Trade School
In college Other

What is your race/ethnicity? Please mark all that apply to you.

Hispanic Asian
N Non-Hispanic White Pacific Islander
Black, African American Chinese
Other Japanese

Length of time in the Independent Living Program: _____ month(s) _____ year(s)

Mark the answer that best describes your living situation. I currently live:

With my birth parents (biological parents)
With my birth (biological) mother or father
With my adoptive parent(s)
With my relatives (not foster care)
With relatives who are also my foster parents
In a group home
In a residential facility
With a friend's family (not foster care)
On my own
Other

Please mark all the services that you have received from the Independent Living Program:

Bus pass	College & Vocational Scholarship
Career Counseling	Behind the wheel Driving Training
Tutoring	\$35.00 Gift Certificate for getting a GED
First time union Dues	\$50.00 Gift Certificate for High School Graduation
ILP Newsletter	Senior Expense Package
Resource package	Clothing for job interviews
Uniforms/Tools	Shared cost for housing/apartment
Exit Package	Shared cost for utilities
Other (please specify)	_____

Please mark all the workshop(s)/ seminar(s)/ classes that you have attended:

- Daily Living Skills (*nutrition, menu planning, grocery shopping, meal preparation, kitchen clean up, food storage, home management and home safety*)
- Housing & Community Resources (*housing, transportation and community resources*)
- Money Management (*beliefs about money, savings, income tax, banking and credit, budgeting/spending plan and consumer skills*)
- Self-Care (*hygiene, health, alcohol, drugs & tobacco and sexuality*)
- Social Development (*self-esteem, cultural awareness, communication, conflict resolution, goal setting, personal relationships and commitments*)
- Work & Study Skills (*career planning, job hunting, employment, decision making and study skills*)

	Not like me	Somewhat like me	Very much like me
1. I ask question to make sure I understand something that someone has said.	1	2	3
2. I can explain the education or training needed for my career options	1	2	3
3. I can name three ways to find out about job openings.	1	2	3
4. I can explain why good job references are important.	1	2	3
5. I think about how my choices now affect my future a year or more from now.	1	2	3
6. I get help if my feeling bother me	1	2	3
7. I deal with anger without using violence	1	2	3
8. I know how to wash my clothes according to the label (<i>for ex. hand wash, dry clean, & cold water</i>)	1	2	3
9. I fix meals for myself on my own.	1	2	3
10. I follow the basic fire prevention and safety rules where I live.	1	2	3

	Not like me	Somewhat like me	Very much like me
11. I can contact places around where I live to get information on sex and pregnancy.	1	2	3
12. I can explain how to establish and maintain a good credit rating.	1	2	3
13. I can name two ways to save money on things I buy	1	2	3
14. I talk over problems with a friend	1	2	3
15. I talk with an adult I feel close to	1	2	3
16. I am polite to others	1	2	3
17. I respect other people's ways of looking at things, their lifestyle, their their attitudes.	1	2	3
18. I look over my work for mistakes	1	2	3
19. I prepare for exams and presentations	1	2	3
20. I use the library, newspaper, computer, internet, or other resources to get information	1	2	3

21. At this time do you believe that you can take care of yourself with little assistance from the Independent Living Skills Program ?

- Very much
- Somewhat
- Very little

22. What more can the Independence Living Skills Program do to help you prepare to live on your own ?

23. What more would you like to do to help prepare yourself to live on your own? In the past, what could you have done differently to better prepare yourself for emancipation? (Example: *attend more Independent Living Program workshops, take college preparatory classes, go to ROP classes, etc...*)

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

STUDY OF INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS PROGRAM
PARTICIPANT'S PERCEPTIONS
INFORMED CONSENT

The research study in which you are about to participate is designed to investigate Independent Living Program participant's perceptions. This study will be conducted by Kristin Anthony-Mahler and Robin Patrice McCall, under supervision of Dr. Sondra Doe, Assistant Professor in the Department of Social Work. The Department of Social Work Sub-Committee of Institutional Review Board, California State University, San Bernardino, has approved this study. The University requires that you give your consent before participating in this study.

In this study you will be asked to respond to 23 questions about your skill level in various areas of daily living. It will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. All of your responses will be held in the strictest of confidence by the researchers. Your name will not be reported with your responses. The results of the study will be recorded in group form only. You may receive the group results of this study upon completion in the summer quarter of 2002.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time during this study without penalty. When you complete the task, you will receive a debriefing statement describing the study in more detail. In order to ensure the validity of the study, we ask you not to discuss this study with other adolescents.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact Kristin Anthony-Mahler, Robin Patrice McCall, or Sondra doe at (909) 880-5497.

By placing an 'X' mark in the box below, I acknowledge that I have been informed of and that I understand the nature and purpose of this study, and I freely consent to participate. I also acknowledge that I am 18 years of age.

Please place an 'X' mark here

Today's Date: _____

APPENDIX C
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

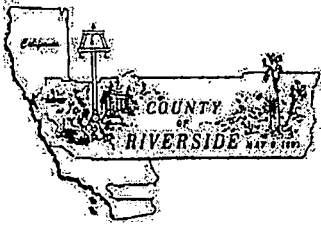
STUDY OF INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS PROGRAM
PARTICIPANT'S PERCEPTIONS
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

The research study that you have just completed was conducted by Kristin Anthony-Mahler and Robin Patrice McCall and was designed to evaluate Riverside County's Independence Living Skills Program and its ability to prepare foster youth for successful adult transition. Skills for preparedness were assessed in two categories, hard skills and soft skills. Examples of hard skills include, understanding money management, knowledge of transportation resources, and ability to use resources for leisure, recreation and employment. Examples of soft skills include, decision-making, problem solving, communication, time-management and social skills. We are particularly interested in identifying whether adolescents in this program perceived themselves as prepared for successful adult transition.

Thank you for your participation and for not discussing the contents of the questionnaire with other adolescents. If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please feel free to contact Dr. Sondra Doe at (909) 880-5497. Group results from the study can be obtained at Pfau Library at California State University San Bernardino at the end of the summer quarter. In addition, if any emotional issues arise as a result of this study, please contact Riverside County Central Assessment Team (C.A.T) at (800) 706-7500 for a counseling referral.

APPENDIX D
AGENCY LETTER

Department of Public Social Services



Dennis J. Boyle, Director

REFER REPLY TO:

- Administrative Office
4060 County Center Drive
Riverside, CA 92503
- Eligibility Administrative Servs.
3950 Reynolds Road
Riverside, CA 92503
- Staff Development Training Ctr.
22690 Cecelus Ave., Ste. 100
Moreno Valley, CA 92553
- DPSS Mod-Cal Unit
Riverside County
Regional Medical Center
26520 Cecelus Avenue
Moreno Valley, CA 92556
- 1605 Service Street
Riverside, CA 92507
- 1020 Iowa Avenue
Riverside, CA 92507
- 3021 Franklin Avenue
Riverside, CA 92507
- Adoption Services
10281 Kidd Street
Riverside, CA 92503
- Arlington Office
10281 Kidd Street
Riverside, CA 92503
- 4260 Tequesquite Avenue
Riverside, CA 92501
- 23119 Cottonwood Ave.,
Building C, 2nd Floor
Moreno Valley, CA 92553
- 1151 North A Street
Perris, CA 92571
- 2955 N. Perris Blvd., Ste. B
Perris, CA 92571
- 575 Cheney Street
Evanore, CA 92530
- 1075 N. State Street
Hemet, CA 92543
- 43264 Business Park Drive
Building B Suite B-1
Temecula, CA 92590
- 508 S. Buena Vista
Corona, CA 91720
- 8178 Hamner Avenue
Norco, CA 91760
- 47950 Arriba Street
Indio, CA 92201
- 66615 Perez Rd. Unit 9A
Cathedral City, CA 92234
- 71-777 San Jacinto Drive
Rancho Mirage, CA 92234
- 161 West Ramsey
Banning, CA 92220
- 4225 West Hobson Way
Blythe, CA 92225

Cal State University San Bernardino
Department of Social Work
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, Ca. 92407-2397

Dear Sirs:

This Letter serves as notification to the Department of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino, that Robin McCall / Kristina May MSW has obtained consent from Riverside Department of Public Social Services, to conduct the research project entitled "Explorative Study of Riverside County's 'Low Income' Living Skills Program".

If you have questions regarding this letter of consent, you may contact:

James F. Medina MSW / SST II at 909 358-3466
Name/Title Phone Number

Sincerely,

[Signature]
Signature

11-17-01
Date

Dennis J. Boyle
Name (printed)

Deputy Director
Title/Position at DPSS

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ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE

This was a two-person project where authors collaborated throughout. However, for each phase of the project, both authors worked collaboratively. These responsibilities were assigned in the manner listed below.

1. Data Collection:

Team Effort: Kristin Anthony-Mahler, and
Robin McCall

2. Data Entry and Analysis:

Team Effort: Kristin Anthony-Mahler, and
Robin McCall

3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:

a. Introduction and Literature

Team Effort: Kristin Anthony-Mahler, and
Robin McCall

b. Methods

Team Effort: Kristin Anthony-Mahler, and
Robin McCall

c. Results

Team Effort: Kristin Anthony-Mahler, and
Robin McCall

d. Discussion

Team Effort: Kristin Anthony-Mahler, and
Robin McCall