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Minnesota Youth in Care: Voices of Wisdom

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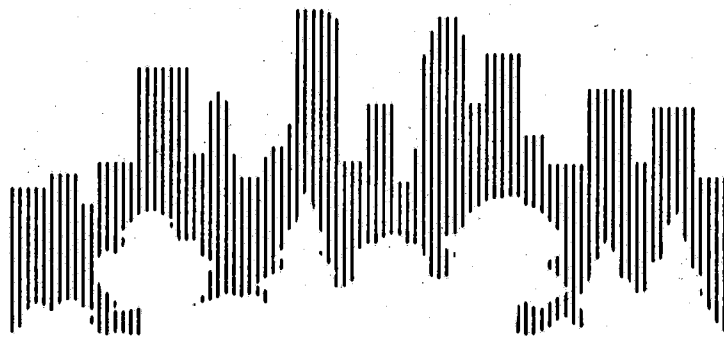
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**MASTERS IN SOCIAL WORK
THESIS**

Michelle L. Chalmers

**Minnesota Youth in Care:
Voices of Wisdom**

1994

Minnesota Youth in Care:

Voices of Wisdom

***Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
of the Master of Social Work Degree at Augsburg College.***

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May 22, 1994**

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

Research Study

Minnesota Youth in Care: Voices of Wisdom

Michelle Lee Chalmers

April 22, 1994

Adolescents currently make up the largest proportion of young people entering substitute care in the state of Minnesota. In this exploratory project, eleven young adults with a history of out of home placement in two Minnesota counties were interviewed. Participants shared their perceptions on the degree of influence they feel they had when decisions regarding their placements were made. They provided "advice" for youth currently entering the system and for practitioners working with adolescents in care. A review of the literature exploring the relationship between empowerment theories and youth participation in service provision provides a foundation for the study. Literature on psychosocial development in adolescence is reviewed and related to potential developmental benefits available to young people from care when they are provided with a wider range of opportunities for active participation in decisions about their care.

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Section I

Introduction

Each year in the United States more than 750,000 juveniles enter some type of substitute care such as foster homes, group homes, shelter or correctional facilities. At any one time there are more than 90,000 young people living in placement outside their natural or adoptive families (Ginsberg, 1992, p. 56). These children, from newborn to eighteen years of age, spend as brief a time as overnight or as long as their entire youth under the care of someone other than their parent(s). In 1985 in Minnesota 5,839 youth entered care. By 1990 the number of individual children entering substitute care had increased to 8,920. It is estimated that the number of youth entering care will increase by 6 percent each year through 1995 (Hulbert, 1992). In Minnesota "the largest proportion of children entering care are adolescents aged thirteen to seventeen." They make up "on average almost 47 percent of children entering care" (Wattenberg, 1992, p.13). Minnesota adolescents in or from care are the focus of the present study.

A wide range of reasons can be offered to explain the increasing numbers of youth in care, both in the United States and in Minnesota. While primary reasons are recorded in individual youths' files for why they are placed, most often no one reason is sufficient to explain the placement of youth into care. Rather, complex family dynamics born of numerous challenges in living frequently create chaos that results in one or all of the children being placed into substitute care.

Some youth find themselves in placement due in part to physical, emotional or sexual abuse from their primary caretakers. These abuses frequently occur in conjunction with parental mental illness or chemical dependency. Poverty is a frequent variable in the lives of children in care. Some youth are placed in substitute care due to the family's difficulties managing the

child's emotional or behavioral problems. Others exhibit delinquent behavior that leads to their placement in correctional facilities or foster care. Most often placement results from a combination of one or more of the above mentioned reasons.

Regardless of the reason for placement, youth in care have opportunities and challenges unique from those experienced by the general population of young people. Their time in care grants them membership into a subculture that exists often without notice or recognition from mainstream school or social environments. If young people had an opportunity to reflect on their experiences in care, discussion would likely yield a wide range of stories reflecting a great diversity of experience. Some might recognize the positive influence and support they received from a wide array of adults connected with their circumstances in care. Others might note their appreciation for the intense and enduring friendships built with peers they met while in care. Perhaps these same young people might also talk about feelings of isolation from others living in "the real world" (being out of placement is often referred to by youth from care as "the outs"). No doubt they would tell stories of multiple placements and the process of adjustment to new people and facilities.

Events in the life of a young person that precipitate placement are painful components of their overall life experience. Many adolescents living in substitute care find that the system often lacks opportunities for them to appropriately articulate their life experiences. There are few formal outlets for youth in care to give feedback to the system or to problem solve in ways that encourage their own developmental growth.

The current study is intended to be a first step towards recognizing the essential role that participation of youth in care can play when individual and systemic decisions are made about provision of substitute care. Minimal

recognition has been made within the child welfare system that adolescents, as primary clients, could offer feedback leading to improvements in service provision. Very little of the research on substitute care has actively sought out the voices of youth in or from care (McFadden, 1989; Gil & Bogart, 1982; Bush & Gordon, 1982). Apart from informal conversations with adolescent clients, practitioners have little access to systematically gathered information on young people's perceptions of their own influence on placement decisions, or on young people's visions for the future of substitute care.

Substitute care in foster homes, group homes, residential treatment programs, emergency shelters and other child care facilities has provided countless young people with necessary support and guidance that for various reasons could not be or was not provided within their families. While it is important to continually recognize and affirm the need for a system of substitute care, it is both naive and dangerous for practitioner to shut their eyes to the shortcomings in both design and provision of services that exist within the present system.

Adolescents in substitute care face a barrage of challenges by virtue of their status as foster or systems kids. Youth in care are generally encouraged to be well-behaved so as to minimally disrupt the milieu. Often times the dependence and imposed deference to authority inherent in residential settings runs counter to developmental processes that should be encouraged during the adolescent life stage of identity development. This may be particularly true in programs that are more staff intensive, as opposed to family-based foster or group home care.

For many, if not most, feelings of powerlessness and dependence begin to dominate over feelings of control and confidence as they attempt to claim their place in the world (McFadden, 1989). For many, the seemingly endless network

of social workers, foster parents, counselors, probation officers, judges and staff seems to promote behaviors and self perceptions that are inconsistent with the developmental stages of adolescence. Youth voices are often not heard over those of professionals attempting to act in the "best interests" of their young clients

Other challenges faced by adolescents in substitute care include feelings of shame or alienation from the "mainstream" youth community. Similar to, and often concurrent with, youth struggling to develop racial or sexual identity, young people in care need support in building a positive self-perception in the face of societal ignorance of their subculture(s). Over represented in substitute care, youth of color face the challenge of developing healthy identities, both racial and as youth in care (Yancey, 1992). Each day youth in care must make decisions regarding whom they will tell about their living situations. They know that simply sharing that they are a foster child will usually result in probing questions from peers and teachers alike, who want to know details that are often highly personal and painful to young people in care. The constant awareness that one is somehow different from their peers can wear away at the self-esteem of a young person in care if appropriate channels for counteracting that process are not in place and utilized by youth in care.

Research Questions

The present study is viewed as a first step towards involving adolescents from substitute care in the process of identifying their needs related to positive identity and sense of influence on the child care system. The specific questions explored are:

- 1) Do adolescents from care desire any degree of input into placement decisions and/or the day to day operations in placement?**

- 2) Do adolescents from care feel that the system, as it currently operates, offers sufficient opportunity for youth input?**
- 3) What things would adolescents like to say to workers and youth entering care if given the opportunity?**
- 4) What structures or systems do adolescents from care envision as being effective channels through which youth could give input to the system?**
- 5) What are the possible benefits or risks to individual youth in care if formalized channels for their input are developed?**
- 6) What are the possible benefits and risks to the child care system if formalized channels are developed for input from youth in care?**

Implications for practice

The possibility of perceiving adolescents with experience in placement as partners and primary stakeholders in the provision of substitute care for youth opens opportunities for growth for both practitioners and adolescents. If adolescents from care express a desire for some degree of input, either equal to or different from what they currently receive, practitioners may be encouraged to discard or modify the present paradigm of "providing services for" young people. That paradigm may be replaced with a more egalitarian one such as "services in conjunction with" young people in need of substitute care. It is possible that if adolescents from care are granted greater influence in placement decisions, the current demographic patterns regarding placements might begin to blur. This might happen as youth challenge the institutionalized bias that currently influences placement decisions.

Currently youth of color are statistically over-represented in substitute care (Yancey, 1992; Wattenberg, 1992). Children of color comprise about ten percent of all children in Minnesota. Statistics from 1990 (Hulbert, 1992, p.8) on

Minnesota youth entering placement show that children and adolescents of color make up thirty-two percent of placements within the human services system, and thirty-six percent of all correctional placements. From 1986 to 1990, the number of African American children in substitute care increased 183%, Hispanic youth in care increased 92%, placements of American Indian children increased 51%.

Adolescents of all races are considered among the ranks of "difficult to place" in part because of the stereotypic belief that teenagers in the system are likely to be violent or out of control (Hornby & Collins, 1981). In part because of the great proportion of substitute care provided under the umbrella of various secular agencies, gay, lesbian and bi-sexual identified youth also fall under the category of "difficult to place". This is the case even in cities like New York which are generally thought to be progressive (Mallon, 1992). Many states continue to prohibit the licensing of gay and lesbian couples to provide substitute care. Correctional placements and placement in group homes tend to more frequently be ordered for males (Hulbert, 1992. p. 8), while females more generally are placed in family foster care or residential treatment programs.

Practitioners may come to see that despite, or perhaps as a result of, family disruption and individual pain, adolescents are far more capable of making responsible, thoughtful decisions regarding their own care. Beyond the potential for different patterns in placement decisions, there could conceivably be valuable growth on the part of individual adolescents involved in providing feedback to practitioners.

The process of providing feedback to the workers and agencies responsible for one's "care" could impact a number of developmental processes that are important for successfully managing adolescence. Psychosocial development and experiences beneficial to the identity formation process are

likely. Identity development impacts self-esteem and sense of having a degree of control over the events of one's life. Locus of control might be impacted if individual adolescents feel increasingly responsible for outcomes in significant areas of their life. The feelings of belongingness and community that already exist among many segments of the population of youth from care might be channeled into positive experiences of reclaiming power as a group and as individuals. This might occur as youth join together to articulate their experiences in care and see their experiences affirmed by appropriate action within the system.

If adolescents from care articulate ideas for formal channels through which they could provide feedback into the system, new conceptions of the social work principles of "starting where the client is" and client self-determination may arise. While the recognition that adolescents are still "minors" in terms of legal statute is important, it may be possible to develop a wider repertoire of options for adolescents in need of substitute care if young people are encouraged to add their voices into the problem solving process.

There are potential risks in operating the child care system with the expectation that young people will take an active role in determining how service is provided. It could be that despite the requests and intentions of a percentage of adolescents from care, the majority of the population of youth from care do not desire formal channels for input. Further, the expectation that youth take an active role in placement decisions could have detrimental impact on individual adolescents who feel overwhelmed with the enormity of the decision and the often high number of options from which to choose.

If input provided by youth from care should indicate that the services currently provided by the system are not meeting their needs, significant questions are raised for how the system might respond. Ethical dilemmas might

arise for practitioners trying to provide services that will be viewed as helpful by youth, while working within the constraints of the established system.

Section II

Key terms and operational definitions

A number of terms are used when discussing the provision of substitute care for children. For the purpose of this project the following definitions are offered:

1) **Substitute care:** Refers to all places where a young person might be placed to live either by a social worker, probation officer, juvenile court, law enforcement, or at times by their parent(s). Foster homes, group homes, emergency shelter, correctional facilities and programs, residential treatment or extended family often provide substitute care. Much of the literature uses the term "foster care" as a generic term for all substitute care facilities. Throughout this study the term "substitute care" will be used when reference is not being made to a specific type of program. When specificity is needed, programs will be identified by type. Programs will not be identified by name to protect the confidentiality of participants.

2) **Youth from Care:** Any young person who has been, or is currently in substitute care. For the purpose of the current project this term will refer to adolescents who were in care for at least one day when they were between sixteen and twenty-one years of age. All participants were at least eighteen years old at the time of their interview. The length of time in placement is indicated at times when it is relevant to the purposes of this project.

3) **The System:** The general term used to describe the elaborate network of social workers, probation officers, judges, guardians ad litem, foster and group home staff, child care staff and all the facilities and institutions within which these individuals are found. "The system" is used in reference to both the adults

who run placements and social services, as well as the actual programs into which youth are placed to live.

4) **Workers:** The general word used by a great number of youth from care when talking about social workers and probation officers. This term is rarely used to identify the adults working at various child care facilities. They are generally simply called **staff**.

Section III

United States society's changing perception of youth in need of care

The history of the development of substitute care in the United States has been impacted greatly by transformations in the view of society's responsibility to young people who "act out". This transformation of philosophy was reflected in major policy decisions and in the development of significant institutions for the care of juveniles and juvenile delinquents. Three events that illustrate the transformation of United States society's perception of young people are the opening of the New York House of Refuge in 1825; the beginning of Cook County Juvenile Court in 1899; and the development of the Children's Bureau in 1912.

When the New York House of Refuge was opened in 1825, the focus was on young people who committed crimes. The intention of the Society for the Prevention of Pauperism, when it opened the first House of Refuge, was to train and instruct the young offender to insure "his (sic) reformation and future usefulness"(quoted in Bernard, 1992, p. 62-63). Bernard goes on to list three influences that were thought to be the causes of pauperism in children: "weak and criminal parents; the manifold temptations of the streets; and the peculiar weakness of the children's moral nature". The ultimate goal was to prevent young people from growing up into adult paupers who represented a significant drain on the economy. The House of Refuge began the practice of "placing out" in 1828. For over 50,000 young people, placing out meant being sent by train into western states to be 'reformed' through hard work on farms. Many faced extreme abuse and were prohibited from regular communication with their parents (Bernard, 1992, p. 65).

Long time Hull House Resident and member of the Board of State Commissioners of Public Charities in Cook County, Julia Lathrop pushed for the development of a juvenile court in 1886. In her plea, Lathrop introduced the concept of neglected children. In doing so, Lathrop began the process that has resulted in a blurring of the lines between young people who commit crimes and young people in need of protection because of chaotic conditions in their homes. After the Cook County Juvenile Court opened in 1899, many other states followed suit. Denver County Juvenile Court opened in 1903, and Colorado passed the first laws in the country designed to address adults who contribute to the dependency and delinquency of children (Sussman, 1950).

At the First Annual White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children in 1909, Lillian Wald called for the establishment of a national children's bureau. The purpose of the new bureau would be to investigate questions of child welfare, "among all classes of our people," particularly related to "infant mortality, birth rate, orphanages, juvenile courts, desertion, dangerous occupations, accidents and diseases of children..." (cited in Parker & Carpenter, 1981, p. 62). The bureau, first established in 1912, provided the first scientific, methodical study of and data collection on the conditions of children and youth in the United States. Through many of the projects of the Bureau, it became clear that the perceptions held by the Houses of Refuge and the newly established Juvenile Courts often blamed parents for conditions that were outside of their control.

Julia Lathrop, as the Bureau's first Chief, asked "how fatal is bad food, and who is responsible for the quality of food? How far is poverty responsible, and who is responsible for poverty? How far is ignorance to blame, and who is responsible for ignorance?"(Lathrop, 1912). With the establishment of the Children's Bureau, questions of what "caused" young people to behave in ways

that were socially unusual or troublesome began to be addressed through scientific methodology that provided for consideration of a wide range of potential variables that might impact the behaviors of young people. The complexity of influences in terms of family dynamics as well as environmental and economic variables was recognized.

While striving to attain a level of "objectivity" in their research, the staff at the Children's Bureau neglected to gather qualitative data from young people. The projects conducted did not explore what the young people under study had to say about the challenges, joys or pain of their lives. The concept of *parens patriae*, or "parent of the country", influenced the way in which information was gathered about children and families. The courts and organized institutions had great prerogative in determining what was in the best interests of individual children. This was also reflected in the attempt of the Children's Bureau to learn about conditions affecting families so that the government could make decisions about how best to instruct parents on how to improve their parenting. Families and youth themselves do not appear to have been thought of as key players in the development of institutional care for children.

In his address to the first White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children, Booker T. Washington challenged the reliance that the United States was developing on institutions to care for children. In his observations of the extended family network of the Negro (sic) population, Washington stated that his community "...looks upon it as a disgrace for an individual to be permitted to be taken from the community to any kind of institution for dependents" (Washington, 1909). His comments affirmed the need for organized study into the status quo of mainstream child care facilities and the philosophies behind them. Certainly his words were indicative of early

differences about how institutional care should be provided, and under what conditions young people should be placed.

Today the court's role as *parens patriae* varies from the more strict definitions of the past. There is a greater recognition of the wide range of needs inherent in the population of young people in care. As a result not only is there a wide range of types of substitute care but also a range of philosophies that guide each program. Young people are offered opportunities for input and influence to varying degrees from program to program. Service providers, including social workers, probation officers, judges, child care staff, foster parents, and counselors or therapists, vary greatly in their perceptions of appropriate spheres of influence for young people in the system.

Rights and responsibilities of young people

In order to think critically about substitute care as it is currently provided in the United States, it is valuable to understand the process through which the legal concepts of rights and responsibilities have been granted to young people. In his analysis of the rights of young people, Sussman (1977, p. 13) states: "Historically, the young person's special legal status has been justified by protecting him (sic) from the possible results of his (sic) own immaturity. To be sure, children have benefited from legislation which, for example, has kept them from hard labor and economic exploitation. But many laws which purport to protect young people have in practice rendered them subject to arbitrary and excessive authority exercised by parents, custodians and the state."

The concepts of emancipation and age of majority play key roles in what opportunities young people have for input when they are faced with being placed into care. Old enough to have the cognitive abilities to think about their situation and to choose between options, but not old enough to be legally

recognized as an "adult" leaves many adolescents in care without channels to influence key decisions about their lives. After passage of the "Twenty-sixth Amendment to the Constitution in 1971, which gave eighteen year-olds the right to vote in federal elections, most states lowered the age of majority from twenty-one to eighteen"(Sussman, p.15). However, most states do not grant adult rights at eighteen years. Many grant some at eighteen and reserve full recognition with adult rights until individuals reach twenty-one years of age.

States reserve the right to set ages of qualification for a wide range of activities, so that reaching the age of majority does not necessarily grant an individual all the rights of adulthood. Some rights, such as the right to drive a motor vehicle, come before reaching eighteen and represent rites of passage in our society. Activities such as voting, jury duty, buying, possessing and drinking alcoholic beverages, attending school, receiving juvenile court treatment (as opposed to being tried as an adult) all lie under the jurisdiction of individual states (Sussman, p. 16).

Status offenses are crimes that can only be committed by a young person. Typically defined as status offenses are behaviors such as truancy, "incurigibility" (disobedience of reasonable parental rules). While some lawyers and advocates of children's rights question the constitutionality of charging youth with status offenses, the practice has become standard policy within juvenile court and will likely continue into the foreseeable future (Sussman, p. 54). Status offense legislation frequently defines the legal response to youthful offenders and "youth in need of protection" from neglectful or abusive home situations. With responses to behaviors such as running away from home or truancy dictated to a great degree by legal code, the system of institutionalized care for young people has grown without leaving much opportunity for young people's own insight into possible solutions to the crises in their lives.

Substitute care is provided by counties in Minnesota to help meet both correctional and protective needs of young people. It is youth within this system who are the focus of the current study.

Section IV

Substitute care in Minnesota

Substitute care for youth in Minnesota is made up of an extensive network of emergency shelters, family foster homes, group homes, long and short term correctional facilities, residential treatment programs, independent living programs and placement with extended family members.

In 1986 legislation was passed in Minnesota that provided grants to counties for "developing or expanding prevention and family reunification services" (Wattenberg, 1992, p.3). The intent of this permanency planning effort was to provide permanent placements for youth in care. It was a response, made in many areas of the country, to the prevalence of young people "adrift" in the system, bouncing from placement to placement with no clear plan for permanent living arrangements. Hornby & Collins (1981, p. 19) suggest that needs of adolescents in care vary a great deal from the needs of younger children. They state, "...the need is to develop criteria to be used in determining which teenagers truly are in need of transferred custody and which can benefit from other forms of service, including voluntary residential services. Often, if the state could provide shelter, clothing, food, counseling, and educational services for a period of time, then foster care entry would not be necessary". With the ever-increasing emphasis on permanent placements, the question of placement services for adolescents creates significant areas for further research. Useful to discover would be data defining where input from adolescents might have impact on decisions made under the auspices of permanency planning. Perhaps given the opportunity adolescents might request permanent "placement" in independent living programs rather than entry into foster care so close to age of majority.

Minnesota youth in care: Who are they?

In 1990, over 15,000 Minnesota youth spent some period of time in out-of-home care. Almost twenty-six percent of the youth in placement were sixteen years or older. In the same year, 306 youth "aged out" of the system, meaning that they reached their eighteenth birthday while in care (Wattenberg, 1992). Over 1,600 of the young people entering care in 1990 were aged 16 to 18 years.

Youth of color are overrepresented by as much as a 7 to 1 ratio in placement in substitute care in Minnesota. While European American youth represent the greatest proportion of young people in care (67% in 1990), youth of African American and Native American origin have placement rates significantly higher than their proportion in the population as a whole.

In a survey of homeless youth in Minnesota conducted in October, 1991, a correlation appeared between homelessness and placement history. Close to 40% of the homeless youth interviewed reported having lived in a foster home at some point during their youth. More than 30% had spent time in juvenile detention, or other correctional facility. Twenty-two percent had been in residential treatment program(s) (Owen, 1992, cited in Wattenberg, 1992, p. 41).

The study population

A sub-sample of the total population of youth from care in Minnesota made up the sample population for this study. Potential participants were contacted with support from the Evaluation Coordinator of the Minnesota Department of Human Services, Support Emancipation and Living Functionally (SELF) Program. This program was selected to identify potential participants because they provide services to adolescents who have been in out of home care in Minnesota. The Evaluation Coordinator already had a list compiled of SELF participants and alumni who were at least eighteen years of age.

The SELF Program, existing in 85 of the 87 counties in Minnesota, provides independent living and life skills programming for older adolescents in substitute care. Funding for these programs comes from a Title IV-E Federal Grant. Every county in the state is eligible to participate, and counties are encouraged to use their monies to create new programs or to fill needs in existing independent living skills programs. The 1993 SELF Final Report (Wiener, 1993, p. iv.) states, " In Minnesota, life skills training is viewed as a preventive effort which reduces the risk that adolescents who leave substitute care will become homeless or system-dependent adults".

Social workers providing services to youth involved in SELF Programs provided the SELF Evaluator with placement information including reasons for the placements that their clients experienced. Items on the list of reasons for placement are not mutually exclusive, as more than one reason was often cited. Chart 4.1 illustrates the leading reasons for placement of 1993 SELF participants.

Chart 4.1

**Leading reasons for placement
of 1993 SELF participants**
N= 1,712 participants
males=788 females= 924

<u>Primary Reason for Placement</u> <u>(% of total SELF participants)</u>	<u>Males</u> <u>% of 788</u>	<u>Females</u> <u>% of 924</u>
1. Behavior Problems (47%)	50%	44%
2. Parent(s) unable to care for youth (33%)	30%	35%
3. Parent(s) unwilling to care for youth (22%)	18%	26%
4. Delinquency (18%)	26%	
5. Neglect (17%)		20%
6. Physical Abuse (17%)		
7. Sexual Abuse (16%)		24%
8. Substance Abuse	17%	

In 1993 SELF Programs statewide served 1, 732 youth (Wiener, 1993, p. 21). In order to be eligible to participate in a SELF funded program youth must be between sixteen and twenty-one years of age and must have been in at least one out of home placement since their sixteenth birthday. Many of the youth have had multiple placements, or have spent significant time in placement(s). About sixty-two percent of the youth served by SELF in 1993 were in substitute care more than a year. The records of nearly thirty percent indicate a placement history of over three years.

Two hundred and ten youth (35 males, 175 females) involved with SELF Programs in 1993 were teen parents. A total of 178 adolescents were reported as parenting one child each, another 22 had two children each, and 10 had three or more children each (Wiener, 1993, p. 27).

In 1993 approximately thirty percent of youth statewide receiving SELF services were youth of color (Wiener, 1993, p. 22). African American youth made up the greatest proportion of that group (10%) followed by Native American (7%), Asian American (6%), Latino youth (3%). Representation by gender was nearly even between males and females, with females slightly higher.

Upon completion of the SELF program, a high percentage of youth continue to receive some form(s) of public assistance (Wiener, 1993, p. 41). Nearly seventy percent were receiving such aid on the day they left SELF in 1992, with the majority receiving medical assistance. Responses to follow-up surveys from SELF indicate that the percentage of SELF "graduates" receiving one or more forms of public assistance may decrease slightly by the time they have been on their own a year. However, it is difficult to assess the exact degree because the number of responses to surveys a year after completion was less than a third of the total gathered at program completion (N=85 compared to N=324).

Section V

Review of the literature

The literature relevant to this project can be divided into four major categories. The first is a number of studies and papers describing the experience of being in substitute care. Some of these studies interviewed adults who were in care as children to gain a retrospective assessment of their experiences (Rest & Watson, 1984; Van der Waals, 1960; Festinger, 1983). Other studies utilized youth currently in substitute care as key informants to describe the placement experience (Garfat, Craig & Joseph, 1989; Gil & Bogart, 1982; Hornby & Collins, 1981; McFadden, 1992; Wittner, 1981). Rather than using the term "special populations" as is often used to describe youth of color or of minority affectional orientation, "specific populations" will be used in this project to identify subgroups of youth from care who are collectively and individually burdened with additional prejudice and bias. This term will be used because referring to these groups as "special" somehow implies that it is unique to find them among the ranks of youth from care. The general literature on substitute care typically provides demographic data on the racial or cultural background of youth in care, but it is unusual to find literature or studies exploring culturally specific concerns. Hidden within the general demographics of race and gender are those youth who are gay, lesbian or bi-sexual identified. Again, literature providing guidance on working with this population is scarce. Despite the fact that literature discussing experiences of specific populations of adolescents in care is limited, youth of color and gay, lesbian or bi-sexual identified youth are disproportionately represented in care (Baker, 1982; Mallon, 1992). Some literature addresses homeless youth, both those that are in placement as a result of being homeless, and those that become homeless shortly after "aging out" of substitute care (Morrissette & McIntyre, 1989; Raychaba, 1989).

The second body of literature relevant to the current project is that of adolescent development. In order to examine the provision of substitute care for adolescents, it is useful to have an understanding of the psychosocial "tasks" faced by individuals during the adolescent stage of development (Brendtro, Brokenleg & Van Bockern, 1990; Clausen, 1991; Fertman & Chubb, 1992; Konopka, 1973; Ortman, 1988; Nunn & Parish, 1992). Knowing the "typical" challenges that adolescents manage provides a tool by which to measure how well the system of substitute care provides opportunities to nurture adolescents in managing those tasks. In addition to developmental stage theory, a number of articles address specific developmental issues related to adolescents in substitute care (Hutchinson et al., 1992; Land, 1990).

A great deal of the research literature addresses youth empowerment and ways to foster it. These studies have often included use of the Nowicki-Strickland Scale to measure locus of control and/or the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (Nunn, & Parish, 1992; Fertman, & Chubb, 1992; Araki, 1990; Mullender, & Ward, 1991; Nowicki & Strickland, 1973). Studies of how participation is related to empowerment (Zimmerman, 1990; Fertman, & Chubb, 1992) are relevant in that they help to explore whether participation in the process of provision of substitute care could be beneficial to youth. The ever-growing body of literature on the value of independent living skills programming for adolescents, particularly those who "age out" of substitute care, is also of great importance to the present project (Barth, 1986; Euster, Ward, Varner & Euster, 1984; Land, 1990; Maluccio, Krieger & Pine, 1990; Pine & Krieger, 1990; Raychaba, 1989; Wedeven & Mauzerall, 1990; Wiener, Dec., 1993).

The final category is comprised of writings that offer concrete feedback and perspective to practitioners through the eyes of youth from care. The relatively new genre of studies and papers authored or co-authored by either the

Canadian or British Youth in Care Organizations (Garfat, Craig, & Joseph, 1990; Raychaba, 1989; Roeters, K. & Eakin, 1989; National Youth in Care Network, 1990; Minnesota Association of Young People Aware in Care, 1992) make up the majority of the literature of this category. Biographical pieces by youth from care, or adults who were youth in care (Jones, 1990), provide direct, often painful insight into the functioning of the child welfare system. These writings are making profound contributions both in terms of practice and theory relating to the provision of services to youth.

The experience of substitute care

*I want to be good, but good is being simple.
Simple is forgetting,
And I simply can't forget...*

-Performed by JudyBats (1993)

1. Accounts of entering care

In her study interviewing forty-three state wards regarding their experiences in care, Wittner (1981) found that many youth thought it was important to provide explanations for why they were in care. During the course of the conversational interviews, many youth seemed to attempt to "justify" being in placement by offering explanations that normalized their experiences. Many of the accounts given by young people of their initial entry into care minimized the responsibility that either the young people or their families had for the placement. They seemed to feel that it was necessary to defend their families or parents. Few of the accounts indicated a clear understanding on the part of the young person as to why they were in placement. Similarly, Gil and Bogart (1982) found that the young people they questioned had a general lack of

understanding as to why they were in care. They also expressed confusion about the status of their current placement in terms of discharge plans or upcoming changes. Even as adults, individuals who spent time as youth in substitute care may not have a clear understanding of the circumstances regarding their entrance into care (Rest & Watson, 1984).

2. Foster care in retrospect: Adults looking back

Also enumerated by Rest & Watson (1984) are a number of other issues articulated by adults who spent time in substitute care as children. Loss of family or abandonment were frequent feelings expressed during the thirteen interviews conducted. Despite the difficult feelings expressed, participants in Rest & Watson's study challenged the standard assumption that young people in long term foster care will necessarily have "difficulty in adult functioning" due to frequent placement disruptions (also see Festinger, 1983). What seemed to have more impact on adult functioning than the number of placements experienced, were the specifics regarding "when placements occurred, the circumstances connected with the moves, and the nature and duration of the attachments between the child and the caretakers"(Rest & Watson, p. 302). Their study indicated that abilities to form intimate relationships in adulthood are affected by the experience of being in placement.

Adults interviewed also shared their perceptions of being "different" than other children who lived with their natural or adoptive families. In discussion about their skills as adults in forming intimate relationships, one woman said, "There will always be a gap - the knowledge of being a foster child...(it's the difference between being in foster care and being in a real home" (Rest & Watson, p. 301). Adults interviewed by Mandell (1973) about their experiences as children in substitute care discussed their feelings of differentness in terms of

how they were treated as compared to the foster families' biological children (Mandell, Appendix C). Van der Waals (1960, p. 33) found that most of the 160 adults she interviewed about their foster care experience as children in Holland felt that "financial compensation was the main reason that the family had taken them in."

Adults who were placed into care at adolescence described their wish to maintain ongoing contact with their family of origin, and how placement decisions significantly impacted their ability to do so. About twenty-five percent of the adults interviewed in Van der Waals (1960) continued to have generally positive feelings about their experience in care, and maintained close relationship to the foster family.

E.P. Jones (1990) writes with intense clarity and detail of her fourteen year experience as a state ward within the New York foster care system. Contrasting notes from the charting written by staff at her various placements with her own perception of the same events, shows how vastly different reality is perceived by youth as compared to the staff who run the child care system. The book's subtitle, *Living Through Foster Care*, is an appropriate summation of the chaos that was her youth. What is particularly striking about the text is how often Jones' resiliency is reflected as she describes how she managed both the positive and the painful interactions she had with staff, other youth and the system as a whole.

3. Current foster children's perspective

Rice and McFadden (1988) provide encouraging descriptions of the effect of participation by children and youth living in foster care in group sessions designed to provide them a forum to discuss their feelings about foster care. In these sessions youth aged five to twenty provided moving feedback through

word and behavior on a range of issues from life in foster homes to relationships with case managers. The feedback provided by adolescent participants in the group sessions reflected deep frustration and pent up rage regarding their feelings of being treated as if they were different. Many adolescent group members indicated that among the things they would change if given the opportunity would be to have more chances to give their input about placement decisions made on their behalf. They want their opinions and thoughts to count.

In addition to the data on youths' understanding of their placement status, Gil & Bogart (1982, p. 8) found patterns of difference in responses from youth in foster home care versus youth in group home care in San Francisco. Of value is their finding that youth from family foster homes "scored higher than group home children in self-esteem and in those variables {family relationships, safety and security, personal belongings and privacy, for example} associated with higher self-esteem." Festinger (1983) found similar differences among the young adults from care that she interviewed. In response to what they found in their exploratory project, Gil & Bogart (1982, p. 9) stated, "We urge the development of a mechanism through which children's thoughts, feelings, concerns and suggestions might be channeled into the system that is created to serve them and their families."

4. Specific populations in substitute care

Youth in substitute care comprise a sub-culture of American society that remains invisible to almost all except for those youth and adults working or living within the system. As such, they likely face some parallel identity struggles as other disenfranchised groups in America. For youth in care who are members of other devalued communities, the identity struggles are confounded (Yancey, 1992). The difficulty of building and nurturing a confident,

secure identity when one carries the stigma of being a "system's kid" can be overwhelming. Add to that challenge the requirement of nurturing a cultural identity when one's ethnic or cultural community is stigmatized. Similar challenges face gay, lesbian or bi-sexual identified youth striving to challenge the fear and ignorance that they face from peers and all too often from child care staff as well (Mallon, 1992).

The over representation of youth of color in substitute care can be accounted for in numerous ways. The effects of racism entrenched in most social and economic institutions contributes significantly to families of color being over represented amongst the ranks of the poor, homeless, and chemically dependent in our society. These factors are highly correlated with placement of children in substitute care. Additionally, youth of color, specifically African-American, Native American, and Latino are "more likely to be removed from their families than are whites in similar circumstances" (Hogan & Siu, 1988, cited in Yancy, 1992). Institutional racism profoundly affects placement choices when youth of color are removed from their homes. Stovall & Krieger (1990. p. 147) state:

"The ethnic differences of minority teenagers are frequently perceived as emotional disturbances; legitimate psychological difficulties are more likely to be met with restriction or even entrance into the criminal justice system rather than treatment; educational and career goals are often scaled down; cultural values and related goals are frequently misunderstood and maligned; and the critical need of every minority adolescent to discern and cope with the effect of racism is largely overlooked. As a result, minority foster adolescents are often less prepared to lead productive lives than their Caucasian counterparts and remain at greater risk of dependence on government system throughout their lives."

One culturally specific need that youth of color in substitute care have is for purposeful programming designed to contradict the "negative images of African Americans and Latinos perpetuated by the dominant society and unfiltered by optimal parental racial socialization." Yancy (1992, p. 829) states that these negative images play a significant role in the "social maladaptation of

foster adolescents...that is reflective of identity disturbances" perpetuated by the images. At the same time that practitioners strive for models and guidance on culturally specific interventions for youth in care, it is important to acknowledge that youth in the system come from a very wide range of backgrounds and have widely varying histories in terms of adult assistance in developing racial identity.

A specific group of youth of color referred to in the literature are unaccompanied refugee minors. Their placement into substitute care upon arrival in the United States presents a very different challenge to the child care system than United States-raised youth of color (Baker, 1982). Provision of care must carefully balance a recognition that just because a young person has arrived in this country without other family members, it does not mean that he or she is an orphan. Because of this, permanency planning can be a confusing goal. Long term foster care would likely be a more appropriate placement than adoption since it is not appropriate to place for adoption a young person whose family is intending to join them in this country. In addition to the issues that are common to all refugees, Baker (1982) delineates a number of mental health considerations that may be specific to adolescent refugees. For many unaccompanied refugees the entrance into independent living can be difficult. In part this is so because their initial introduction to culture in the United States is often within the system of substitute care, which may encourage a dependency on such services.

Treatment of gay and lesbian youth in placement is an often neglected area in child care practice literature. Even in a city as gay-affirming as New York, gay and lesbian youth are considered to be among the ranks of "hard to place children" (Mallon, 1992). This is partly attributable to the high percentage of child-caring agencies operated or funded by sectarian agencies, whose beliefs about gay and lesbian persons are often intolerant. Society's stigma about dealing openly with young people about issues of sexual orientation and identity

carries into foster homes, group homes and other substitute care facilities where gay and lesbian youth are over represented. Gay, lesbian and bisexual youths' high representation in the system of substitute care is often related to either being kicked out or running away from their homes as a response to the rejection they experience after acknowledging their sexual orientation to parent(s) (Remafedi, 1990). Unfortunately, many of these youth who are placed as a result of being rejected by their families, find much the same rejection and taunting and ignorance on the part of peers and child care "professionals." Suggestions recommended by Mallon (1992) pertain directly to practice within placement facilities. Among other things, he emphasizes staff training and open discussion of questions surrounding sexual orientation.

Although not a mutually exclusive group from the other three discussed above, homeless youth are another specific population served by substitute care. All possible combinations of affectional orientation, race and homeless status exist within the population of youth in care. Among the homeless are European American and youth of color and young people who identify throughout the spectrum of affectional orientations. Gay, lesbian and bi-sexual youth make up a sizable proportion of homeless youth, again partially due to family rejection after "coming out" with their sexual orientation (Remafedi, 1990).

Morrisette & McIntyre (1989) assert that youth who have the experience of homelessness are particularly damaged by multiple placements. They describe a cycle of young people from placement continually being removed from conflictual situations. This occurs either because they run away from placements in which they are not happy, or they are moved to a different placement when conflict in one becomes unmanageable. Thus, these youth become less and less able to manage conflict to solution and closure. Morrisette & McIntyre suggest a program emphasizing positive reframing of youth's

behavior, with a stress on solution-focused rather than problem-focused techniques. The other key to working with homeless youth is the establishment of an external support system of adults who will remain constant regardless of the youth's living situation. Raychaba (1989), from the National Youth in Care Network in Canada, found that youth leaving the child welfare system (in both Canada and the United States) are at greater risk than the average citizen of becoming homeless. Contributing factors he listed included the lack of connection to stable adult or family support, the experience of extended institutional care, and emotional or psychological troubles. Study of homeless youth in Minnesota found similar data (Owen, 1991, cited in Wattenberg, 1992, p.41).

Substitute care and adolescent development

...adolescents are growing, developing persons in a particular age group- not pre-adults, pre-parents, or pre-workers, but human beings participating in the activities of the world around them.

Konopka, 1973, p. 8

All adolescents face developmental tasks or crises in the process of defining identity. Most adolescents address the tasks as a process to be accomplished over time that is often highlighted by the ritual of leaving home. Youth in substitute care usually do not have the luxury of walking towards emancipation at a pace that feels safe to them and that takes into account their unique attributes and abilities. Land (1990, p. 35) states, "The fact that foster adolescents face artificial and often inflexible discharge deadlines, as well as possible developmental delays, places them at particularly high risk for failure."

Adolescence is the time when individuals strive to develop an identity separate from their parent(s). Erickson (Cited in Longres, 1990, p. 512) identified

the psychosocial crisis faced in adolescence as identity vs. identity confusion. Adolescents who are able to develop a sense of who they are apart from their parents acquire, according to Erickson, the strength of fidelity. Fidelity implies that the individual young person has developed "an ability to freely pledge and sustain loyalties to others". Those who cannot sufficiently meet the challenge of this stage may express their incomplete identity development through repudiation, or the "rejection of roles and values that are viewed as alien to oneself". Without the ability to express loyalty to beliefs or individuals, people tend to feel disconnected and the world seems meaningless.

The experience of substitute care, particularly when one has had numerous placements, often leads individual youth to feel a sense of rejection and to question their value as an individual. Many youth in care have minimal contact with their natural parents. This raises questions as to how productive the process of differentiating from them might be. The experience of being placed out of one's home is a physical separation that is often mistaken by youth and families to be akin to actual differentiation (Bowen, 1991). It is dangerous for adolescents in substitute care to assume that lack of contact with their family somehow indicates that they are "grown" or that they have completed the process of developing their identity separate from their families.

One of the many roles held by providers of foster or group is to attempt to serve as suitable parental surrogate as the adolescent attempts to manage identity development. All youth in care face that challenge as individuals and also as a member of the socially misunderstood subculture of youth in care. In addition, for youth of color the process of identity development includes the third component of racial or group identity (Yancey, 1992).

Important in the process of developing a stable identity is the act of reflecting back on one's life history (Yancey, 1992). From that understanding

grows a sense of what may be in the future, and what the individual views as important or worthwhile enough to work towards. For the adolescent in care, the rapid approach of discharge dates may not coincide comfortably with the execution of steps in the process of identity formation. Additionally, for a great number of adolescents in substitute care reflection back upon their life history highlights disappointment and lack of control. If their family of origin was chaotic, as is typically the case for youth in care, individuals may have expectations that they, themselves, will fare no better as they venture out on their own.

Steps outlined by Land (1990) as necessary in supporting adolescents in care in successfully negotiating identity formation include two concepts cited by Erickson (1965, cited in Land, 1990, p. 37) as essential. These two concepts are giving meaning to one's identity "by relating it to a living community and to ongoing history, and by counterpointing the newly won individual identity with some sort of communal solidarity." Depending on the length of their experience with the child welfare system, young people in care may have an incomplete understanding of their history. Assisting youth in care with learning about, and somehow recording their history are concrete steps that practitioners can take to help youth negotiate identity formation. In terms of communal identity, members of the subculture of youth in care have often embraced negative or self-denigrating perceptions of themselves and others in care. Practitioners working together with youth from care could make a much needed contribution through creation of outlets for development of a positive communal identity for adolescents in care. Positive communal identity could be developed through use of interventions that embrace the strengths and resiliencies of adolescents in care. Other developmental areas that Land emphasizes as requiring attention by professionals working with youth in care include; competence; gender

identification and sex roles; planning for a new living environment; and opportunities to obtain emotional refueling.

Consistent with the process of identity formation and gaining a sense of mastery over one's place in the world are the lessons to be gained through training in independent living skills. Preparation of youth in care who will "age out" of the system (discharged from their final placement with the expectation that they will live independently), benefit from having opportunities to learn concrete skills necessary for managing independent living (Maluccio, Krieger & Pine, 1990; Land, 1990; Wedeven & Mauzerall, 1990). In addition to the "hard" skills of budgets, finding an apartment, job hunting, etc.. is the need to assure that youth exiting care have "soft" skills such as communication, problem solving and anger management (Maluccio, Krieger & Pine, 1990). In contrast to what they refer to as the "myth of independent living", Maluccio et al. refer to the combination of hard and soft skills as interdependent living skills.

Wedweven & Mauzerall utilize developmental components from Blos (1979, quoted in Wedeven & Mauzerall, 1990, p.92) to frame guidelines for developmentally sensitive and appropriate independent living programs. Components that must be considered when designing independent living programs include individuation, integration of past trauma, unique history, and sexual identity. Numerous assessment tools are available to measure strengths and areas of need for successful interdependent living (Pine & Krieger, 1990)

In a study of middle class high school freshmen and seniors, Ortman (1988) found that many of the youth tended to credit responsibility to the same source who had control for the situation. They were rarely able to conceive of a time when responsibility and control were shared between more than one person or source. While the study population Ortman used is quite different than the one addressed in this project, the data is useful in terms of providing a reason to

seek out more opportunities where youth from care could feel the connection between responsibility and power. She states, "if adults are willing to model sharing control and taking responsibility, adolescents will have a better opportunity to learn how to do the same. If adults are not willing to share some measure of control, it is difficult to make other people take responsibility" (Ortman, p. 923). This advice is easily applied to the child care system in which adolescent residents are under the constant structure of decisions made and controlled by others. Probably every adolescent who has ever been in care could describe a time that they were expected to take responsibility for results or situations over which they had no control in the first place.

Adolescents who have a positive sense of self-worth and internal locus of control appear better equipped to make appropriate, well thought-out choices when seeking out assistance in dealing with problems (Wintre & Crowley, 1993; Nowicki & Strickland, 1973). At-risk students (often an overlapping population with youth in care) have been found to have statistically significant differences from a control group of students in terms of locus of control and self-concept (Nunn & Parish, 1992). Concrete recommendations for schools attempting to rectify this situation include provision of opportunities for at-risk students to demonstrate competence and to feel the connection between behaviors and outcome (locus of control). Adolescents who demonstrate "Adolescent planful competence", as described by Clausen (1991, p. 8), have an ability to "assess their options and have thought seriously about what possibilities exist". He goes on to state that individuals who have such a sense of the future "are likely to have a fairly clear idea of who they are." Utilizing the California Q-sort, Clausen outlined a composite of traits that indicate planful competence in adolescence. Included in that eclectic list are traits such as: "knowing something about one's intellectual abilities, social skills and emotional responses to others. It entails

recognizing weaknesses that need to be overcome as well as knowing one's interests and strengths and developing them" (p. 8).

Empowerment literature

*...Are we teaching them to read between the lines,
as they fall between the cracks,
or will we
kiss them between the bars?*

*From "Waiting in Vain"
By: Rebecca Rice (1978)*

Youth in care tend to be isolated from peers, often because of embarrassment or reluctance to share details about their family and living situation. Feelings of self-consciousness discourage youth from articulating many of their experiences. The opportunity and process of articulating one's experience in the world is a key component of conscientization. Described by Paulo Freire, (1985, p. 106) conscientization is viewed as a process by which people both individually and collectively gain a "recognition of the world, not as a 'given' world, but as a world dynamically 'in the making'". Freire states that the agent of conscientization must be a subject, a person who "exists *in* and *with* the world" (p. 68 italics in original). What that requires is an ability to view our lives and environment in an objective way. Conscientization is always political, because viewing one's situation objectively must include an understanding of all the influences that play a role in our history, our present and our possible futures. He writes, "... we must take our presence in the world as the focus of our critical analysis. By returning to our previous experiences, we grasp the knowledge of those experiences. The more we can uncover reasons to explain

why we are as we are, the more we can also grasp the reason behind our reality and thus overcome our naive understanding" (Freire, p.101).

In a study of the psychosocial characteristics of institutionalized adolescents, Hutchinson, Tess, Gleckman & Spence (1992) found that many of the assumptions typically made about youth in care tend to be less prevalent in reality than generally believed. The visions held by many of psychologically dysfunctional young people filling our substitute care facilities does not accurately reflect the resiliencies and coping skills demonstrated by many youth in care. They reported that their "sample of institutionalized adolescents...offers a salient example of a group that may share one thing in common (i.e., placement in an institution), and yet exhibit vast intragroup differences in terms of their psychological strengths and weaknesses" (Hutchinson et al, p. 353).

*To Reclaim is to recover and redeem, to
restore value to something that has been devalued.
Brendtro, et al. , 1990*

Drawing from rich Native American cultural values pertaining to the value and dignity of both persons and the earth, Brendtro, Brokenleg & Van Bockern (1990) provide a framework for Reclaiming youth at risk. The spiritual emphasis and texture of the framework is intended to infuse a sense of value and purpose back into the lives of youth who are struggling against the weight of labels and institutions designed to "help" them. They describe characteristics of Reclaiming environments as: 1) Experiencing belonging in a supportive community, rather than being lost in a depersonalized bureaucracy. 2) Meeting one's needs for mastery, rather than enduring inflexible systems designed for the convenience of adults. 3) Involving youth in determining their own future, while recognizing society's need to control harmful behavior. 4) Expecting youth to be

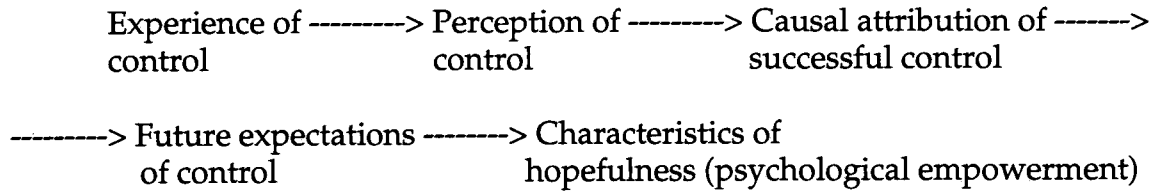
caregivers, not just helpless recipients overly dependent on the care of adults (p.2).

McFadden (1989, p. 2) encourages practitioners working with youth to prepare for a "radical shift in our manner of 'helping'. Rather than doing **for** them, we must instead give them the skills, then quietly step aside so that they can gain power for themselves." In many ways this is an echo of Freire's outline of the process of conscientization. Another example of "re-framing" our understanding of the needs of youth is given by Miller, Eggertson-Tacon, & Quigg (1990). In their analysis of youth's running away behaviors, the authors viewed much running behavior as indicators of other areas of conflict where youth were denied appropriate channels for meaningful input regarding their placement(s).

Practitioners are encouraged not to view running as the central problem, but as "both a solution and a problem for the adolescent" (Miller, et. al, p.288). Running can be viewed as an attempt by youth to have a voice in decisions related to their lives. Perhaps running is often a choice made when youth feel powerless to impact the process in any other way. Understanding the language and meanings of adolescents' communication requires unique sensitivities on the part of practitioners (Konopka, 1965; McFadden, 1992). Youth often exhibit behaviorally their feelings of confidence or hopelessness.

Zimmerman (1990, p. 75) provides a valuable model of "learned hopefulness" that aids practitioners in understanding how genuine participation impacts one's sense of internal control and power. The model, shown in diagram 5.1, is a linear progression showing how people develop a psychological empowerment, or learned hopefulness, after having experiences in which they felt some measure of control.

Diagram 5.1

Causal relationships leading to learned hopefulness

Zimmerman defined learned hopefulness as being one possible outcome of having empowering experiences that help individuals "limit the debilitating effects of problems in living" (p. 71). This model applies well to youth from care and their need to have opportunities for control over aspects of their environment.

Within the genre of group work literature are articles outlining ways in which social action and empowerment can occur within the group support format (Mullender & Ward, 1991; Euster, Ward, Varner & Euster, 1984). This literature emphasizes the need for practitioners to veer away from deficit models when assessing challenges facing clients. It seems essential that youth learn to participate in action that can potentially result in concrete changes. It appears that it is the behavior of participation that fosters internal power and sense of control.

Research does not seem to indicate that providing youth with information about participation necessarily motivates them towards organizing, or towards finding their own places of influence. Studies discussing psychoeducational programming that teaches youth *about* empowerment (Fertman & Chubb, 1992) without encouraging youth to create their own outlets and targets for action seem to indicate minimal impact on locus of control and self-esteem over time. Empowerment seems to be an experiential endeavor.

...in the case of at-risk students, experiences appear to be filtered through a belief system which included a marginal sense of personal empowerment for effecting change, coupled with a devaluing sense of personal competence and deflated confidence (Nunn & Parish, 1992, p. 438).

In their discussion of the psychosocial characteristics of at-risk high school students, Nunn and Parish (1992), made numerous recommendations for practitioners and schools striving to provide opportunities for at risk students to be successful. Many of their recommendations, born out of a study with students in Iowa, emphasized the necessity of having opportunities to experience the relationship between behavior and outcome. Nunn and Parish's data reinforces the importance of program opportunities for at risk youth that help foster a sense of internal power and enhanced self-concept.

Related to Nunn & Parish's findings are Hasenfeld's (1987) warnings to social work practitioners of the need to constantly be aware of the role power plays in the client-worker relationship. Practitioners working with youth in care have ultimate power over the day to day life of the individuals under their care. Honoring the social work goal of client empowerment means that the inherent power imbalance between adult practitioners and youthful clients must be recognized and addressed systematically. Konopka (1973, p. 20) suggested "changes to structure and program are recommended wherever required to facilitate significant input by youth (as a) primary concern for all systems serving youth." Included in her ideas on how to provide opportunity for youth input, Konopka suggests exploration of youth membership on organizational boards, and legitimization of organizations run by youth for youth. Particularly with adolescents, who are almost always in the system involuntarily, it is essential to integrate into practice models an understanding of how locus of control relates to development. Similarly, Mandell (1973, p. 68), cites a void in the rights of

children because "they cannot get much power by themselves because they are under the control of their parents in small, private family units, they are unorganized, and they do not vote. Therefore, they have little say in what resources they want or how they may use them. Judges consider a child's own feelings towards parents or his environmental conditions as relatively unimportant and often irrelevant." Like Bush & Gordon (1982), Mandell calls for a concerted effort to include young people in placement decisions, providing them with an opportunity for informed choice between options.

Youth from care inform us

There is a great deal of wisdom in the words of youth. Their insights and feedback regarding the child care system are invaluable for practitioners. Unfortunately, there are not many established channels through which youth can speak their minds. Some of the youth empowerment literature reports on programs or events designed by practitioners to provide youth with a formal time to speak. Other pieces of literature report youths' own strides towards organizing and being heard within the arena of the child care system.

1. Youth - conducted studies

Reporting on a survey designed, implemented and presented by youth, Garfat, Craig and Joseph (1990) began to shed some light on the degree to which youth can participate in the "adult" domains of research and speaking. In 1985 the First International Child Care Conference was held in Vancouver, British Columbia. A highlight on the program for the conference was a presentation given by three youth from care. The three shared with conference participants about their personal experiences in care, and the results of a survey they conducted of youth in care in Canada. One of many results that occurred after

the original presentation was the formation of a Canadian National Youth in Care Network. The Network continues to meet as a formal organization, and has provided speakers to Canadian Senate Committees and numerous training materials for American youth wanting to develop their own association of youth in care.

The survey reported on at the conference, designed and distributed by youth, yielded a great deal of feedback for practitioners working with youth in substitute care. In the project youth from care in Canada were asked "what is the 'system'; what is good about the 'system' and what is bad about the 'system'; if you could change something in the system, what would you change; how do you see yourself five years from now: what has or will the system do to help?" (Garfat, Craig, Joseph, 1989).

Feedback given was remarkably similar to those given by adults from the above reported studies. Responses to the survey expressed the entire range of opinions and emotions from very positive to hopelessly negative. A description of the system on the positive side, " it gives us an opportunity to work on our problems. It gives us resources for jobs and opportunities for independence. It prepares us for life in the outside world or as the system calls it, the community". Feeling devalued, and powerless, one youth responded, " After being in the system for awhile, one begins to feel like a file number or a statistic. Or in some cases, like an unfeeling piece of baggage" (p. 9). Other poignant responses,

The only good points are that we are fed, clothed and have a place to sleep where god knows how many others have slept before us. The bad point is the feeling that if neither my parents love me or want me, who in the world will?

The biggest problem with the system is public innocence or rather ignorance. Once someone hears that you are a system's kid, they treat you differently. One begins to feel conspicuous as though you have a label on your forehead; "I'm a system's kid, handle with care.

The feedback given by the youth in the above study give a glimpse into what Emily McFadden (1992) refers to as "the inner world" of youth from care. The inner worlds of youth from care reflect a remarkable resilience, bringing insight into the coping mechanisms of how youth manage the traumatic, painful histories so many have experienced. Much of the literature on young people's experience in care indicates that young people have much to say. Study indicates that their feedback and accounts of their experiences seem to be reasonable tools for assessing the status of placement experiences, and do not tend to be "any more or less subjective than those of child welfare professionals" (Bush & Gordon, 1982, p.309).

2. Organized youth speak out!

*To the youth of New York City:
We've been a silent majority, but we have the authority to
speak up loud and clear. It's about time we made up our own minds.
Principals, parents, pastors, politicians:*

*Ask us what we need.
Don't decide and force feed.*

Youth Force Citizen's Committee, 1991

Through their literature, the Youth in Care Networks in Canada and Britain have taken great strides towards providing opportunities for personal empowerment for youth in care. Their writing helps to clarify what one model of "organized" youth might look like. Wisdom and insight are readily apparent in

the handbook written by the Canadian group for youth in other countries wanting to organize (Roeters & Eakin, 1989). The group articulated many of the challenges facing youth in care who wish to formally organize to add their voices as stakeholders in the child care system. The objectives and by-laws created in 1990 by the Canadian group showed extraordinary thought and purposeful management on the part of the youth. They clearly utilize a new paradigm in designing their organization. The group was able to find a wonderful balance between being run exclusively by youth, and the need for some adult support. They articulated their debate on this issue clearly, and offered a helpful path for other groups to follow.

Youth have begun to demonstrate their ability and interest in contributing to the body of knowledge related to service provision to youth. A former youth in care and leader in The Canadian National Youth in Care Network, Brian Raychaba has authored studies illuminating essential issues for practitioners to address. In his 1989 research project "A report on the special needs on youth in/from care of the Child Welfare System", Raychaba began to articulate some of the most essential shortcomings of the child welfare system in Canada. One issue Raychaba (1989) has explored includes the disproportionate representation of youth from care among the homeless populations of both Canada and the United States.

The Fourth Annual WE HAVE THE FORCE New York City Youth Conference on November 23, 1991, is a powerful example of what issues youth feel are important and what possible solutions they envision. The schedule for the day long conference contained forty-one different workshops, some for youth, some for adults who care about them. Workshops on issues from Peace in the Middle East to school effectiveness to police relations to sexuality mirror the wide range of issues that those youth felt were important. A great number of the

workshops were designed to help youth learn strategies for expressing their voices. Protest strategies, public speaking, starting businesses, and outreach are just some of the workshops available. The opening statement for the conference read: "To the youth of New York City:....It's about time we made up our own minds. Principals, parents, pastors, politicians: ask us what we need. Don't decide and then force feed."

In 1989 Minnesota foster care providers held a Youth in Care Conference. The conference offered valuable workshops on independent living skills and self-esteem. This conference was a first step towards helping Minnesota youth in care to feel empowered as a group. It was at the close of the conference that youth in attendance had the opportunity to meet with one of the leaders from the British National Association for Young People in Care. A short time later a number of youth from the Minnesota Youth in Care Conference met again to lay the groundwork for Minnesota Association for Young People Aware in Care (MAYPAC).

In their first newsletter, Independent Youth (Spring, 1992), members of the group wrote to other youth from care to explain the purpose of MAYPAC. They stated: "We empower each other through peer support, and public awareness of the needs and rights of youth who have experienced out-of-home care.....(youth in care have) a feeling of a lack of control over their own lives. Currently 'home' can be intimidating and isolating because of confusion regarding the everyday decisions needed to successfully live independently, and the bureaucracy of the foster care system. There are many inaccurate stereotypes about child welfare services and the youth placed in them, as well as a sense that the young people are 'abnormal'..." (MAYPAC, 1992 p. 2). Also included in the initial newsletter was a list of the Rights of youth in foster care, as provided by the Minnesota Department of Human Services licensing division.

Another potential forum for youth in care to network with one another is through subscription to Foster Care Youth United (Desetta, 1993). The magazine, a publication of Youth Communication in New York, is written by youth from care and is published "about six times a year". It is available for no charge nationally to all youth from care and practitioners who work with them.

Section VI Methodology

Initial permission to conduct this study was received from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Augsburg College and from the Minnesota Department of Human Services. Minor changes were made in accordance with recommendations from the IRB. Final approval from both agencies was received before any contact was made with potential participants.

Methodology decisions for this study included consideration as to how to best involve youth from care in the processes of conceptualizing and conducting the project. The qualitative methods employed throughout were intended to provide opportunities at every stage to encourage and nurture youth's confidence in articulating their experiences in care. Youth were viewed as research partners. They were approached not as subjects to be studied, but rather as keepers of the wisdom from experience as members of a subculture too often disenfranchised from mainstream culture. Consistent with the empowerment paradigm as applied to social work research by Holmes (1992), and Lather's (1986) ideas on research as praxis, current and former youth from care were active participants at every applicable opportunity. They are the experts in articulating their own experience.

Conscientization, as defined by Friere (1985), is a process through which individuals become increasingly aware of their experience in a "de-mystified" way. The process of becoming conscious of one's experience and gaining the objectivity required to articulate that experience, may inspire change behavior on the part of the individual. "...Reflectiveness results not just in a vague and uncommitted awareness but in the exercise of a profoundly transforming action upon the determining reality" (Friere, p. 68). Throughout each stage of this project youth from care were recognized as stakeholders in the functioning of the

child care system. Conscientization and emancipatory research are viewed in the present project simultaneously as a goal for participants and as a guideline for methodology. Following procedures outlined by Lather (1986, p. 266), the methodology of the present project strives to meet the emancipatory research goal of encouraging "self-reflection and deeper understanding on the part of the persons being researched at least as much as it is to generate empirically grounded theoretical knowledge".

The process of defining the research questions was completed with regular input from youth from care. Young adult members of Minnesota Association for Young People Aware in Care (MAYPAC) helped define the important questions to ask and ways to most effectively ask them. Specifically, time was spent at two MAYPAC meetings to discuss drafts of the Likert questions and interview schedule. Their feedback helped to determine whether or not the questions being asked were likely to yield the types of information desired. They offered guidance in terms of setting limits and boundaries around what questions were appropriate to ask, and what questions might be too invasive of the privacy of participants in the project. None of the MAYPAC members who provided guidance in instrument design were eligible to be contacted as potential participants for the study.

Another principle of emancipatory research involves a re-conceptualization of the idea of face validity. "Good research at the non-alienating end of the spectrum...goes back to the subjects with the tentative results, and refines them in light of the subjects' reactions" (Reason & Rowan, 1981, quoted in Lather, 1986, p. 271). At the conclusion of each interview the participant was asked for permission for the researcher to send the first draft of the interview transcript for their approval. All eleven participants gave approval and were sent copies of the first transcript of their interviews. They were asked

to read the text to assure that the transcription was able to capture what they intended to say. Changes made by youth to the transcriptions were edited in and became part of the final edited text.

Sample selection

Through SELF records, a list was generated that broke down each county in Minnesota and the number of SELF participants in the county that met the requirements of the present project. From this list two counties were chosen based on the number of eligible youth in the county. A decision was made not to interview youth in the metro area counties for a number of reasons. Because the project was conducted in conjunction with the SELF Evaluation Coordinator, his need for interviews from counties in greater Minnesota was a high priority in selecting counties. Another factor against interviewing in the metro area were concerns of the likelihood of the author having previous client/staff relationships with potential participants. There was concern that the power dynamics inherent in those relationships might inhibit honest and comfortable discussion around youth's experiences in care.

Because of the decision to exclude SELF graduates from the Twin Cities metro area as possible participants, diversity in terms of race was limited in the sample population. However, the two counties chosen as locations for contacting potential participants both have substantial representation of youth of color, primarily Native American and Hispanic youth. Perhaps also limited by the selection of counties in greater Minnesota was the range in types of placements participating youth have experienced. Counties outside the Twin Cities metro area tend to have less extensive service options available.

Participants from SELF Programs in two Minnesota counties were the sample population for this study. Specific individuals from the two counties

were contacted if they met two criteria: 1) at least eighteen years of age by the time of their interview, and 2) had given prior consent to be contacted by SELF to participate in an in-person interview about their experiences in substitute care. All of the participants were either currently participating in one of the SELF Programs in their county, or they had "graduated" from a SELF Program.

Initial contact was made in the form of letters sent to forty-five youth. A cover letter from the SELF Evaluation Coordinator explained the project and the involvement of the author. Also included was a letter of introduction from the author and a consent form. A high number of the initial consent forms sent out were returned either with a new address posted, or a notation that the youth was no longer at the address SELF had, and had left no forwarding address. The Department of Human Services remailed all consent forms with new addresses that were returned before January 30, 1994. It is probably safe to estimate that as many as fifteen of the initial consent forms did not reach the potential participant. Of the forty-five initial contact letters sent to eligible youth, sixteen signed consents were returned. Three consents arrived after interviews were conducted and two youth who had returned consents could not be reached to schedule an interview.

Once consent forms were returned, participants were contacted by the author with a phone call to schedule interviews according to the dates when the author would be in each respective county. Most participants were contacted by phone again the night before morning interviews, or early in the day when afternoon interviews were scheduled. All eleven of the scheduled interviews were conducted. Every youth who committed to an interview was at the scheduled place at the agreed upon time. This is striking considering American culture's prevalent belief that young people, particularly "systems kids" are unreliable, or undependable.

Researchers considering replication of this study should be aware of one intangible component of methodological concern. The researcher conducting this project is a former youth in care. While interviewing participants it became readily apparent that some degree of inherent trust was granted early on in the process. It is quite likely that the degree of openness and comfort displayed by participants is somehow related to their knowledge of the researcher as “someone who has been there.” It would be foolish to imply that research with the population of youth from care should only be conducted by persons with personal experience within the system. However, it would be equally as foolish to deny the very real impact experience in the system can have in building rapport while interviewing young people from care.

Research design

The data collection for this qualitative project was done through in-depth interviews utilizing an interview schedule (Appendix E). While the main questions were pre-determined, participants were encouraged to share beyond the range of the specific question. Interviews lasted from forty-five minutes to two hours in length. At the beginning of each interview the author explained the purpose of the project, and again shared that the information gathered would be utilized for the present study, and for evaluation purposes within SELF. While consent forms (Appendix C) included knowledge that the interviews would be tape recorded, a brief discussion about the taping process and permission from participants was again obtained.

The interviews were conducted in a number of different locations, as participants were encouraged to pick the location that felt the most comfortable to them. While varying the locations of interviews may have violated tenets of scientific methodology, priority was placed on granting as much control as

possible to the participants. Individual youth made their own decisions about what type of atmosphere felt most comfortable for the interview process.

Three interviews were conducted in small restaurants, at fairly private tables. In these cases the researcher purchased lunch for participants during the interview. One of the participants interviewed in a restaurant brought a younger friend along who ate, but quickly grew impatient and went window shopping. A third interview was conducted in a "public place," namely the food court in a mall that was about two hours from the participant's home. Two interviews were conducted simultaneously in one of the youths' apartments (both lived on their own). Another one was conducted in the apartment of the youth, who was living independently. Two youth were interviewed in their parents' homes, where they were residing at the time of the interview. One was interviewed at his foster home. One participant was interviewed at the home of an adult friend with whom she was staying while awaiting a vacancy in a supervised apartment building.

Instrument design

Open-ended interviews were conducted utilizing an interview schedule (Appendix E) of ten questions and were the foundation of data gathering for the study. Questions addressed a range of topics related to the youth's experiences in care and with the child welfare system. Both the interview schedule and Likert questions (Appendix D), described below, were evaluated by youth from care (MAYPAC members). While a formal pre-test was not conducted, the questions and the specific wording were guided by youth advisors. Despite input from youth on question wording, the wide range of verbal skills amongst the participating youth in this study made it difficult to ask questions in a highly uniform manner. While most of the participants easily understood the concepts

and wording of questions, a number required assistance and re-wording in order to understand what the question was asking.

Participants were asked about times they felt that they had influence on a particular program, worker or the system. Asked to share three pieces of advice for workers, and three pieces of advice for a young person just entering the system, youth had an opportunity to share strategies that they had developed for coping with challenges they faced in the system. Two questions asked youth to share their best and worst placement experiences, and to reflect on what made those experiences particularly positive or negative for them. One question involved the idea of youth from care organizing to make a difference in the system. Participants were asked for ideas about what types of activities or efforts an organized group of youth from care might undertake. Lastly, participants were asked about their plans, wishes and hopes for the future.

In addition to the interview, participants were asked to complete eleven Likert scale questions (Appendix D) aimed at assessing their feelings of being respected and heard within the system of substitute care. A number of Likert questions strove to gain insight as to the degree of alienation or feelings of being "different" youth from care feel in their everyday interactions with peers, teachers and the general public. At the end of the Likert questions, youth were asked to choose from an exhaustive list of options of types of placements in which they have lived. They were also asked to record whether or not they had ever run away from home, and whether or not they had ever run away from a placement.

Ethical issues

A number of ethical issues were inherent within this project by virtue of the fact that young people were the primary participants. In asking adolescents to reflect on their experiences there was risk that emotionally difficult issues

would surface. The author acquainted herself with various support services in the two counties where interviews were conducted in case the need for referral arose during interviews. Also, SELF coordinators from each of the counties were notified in advance that interviews were being conducted, and that they may be called upon for support should issues arise. Aside from emotional risks, this project carried some challenges for maintaining confidentiality.

By choosing to conduct interviews in more rural counties, the difficulties involving confidentiality were enhanced. The potential for participants knowing one another was high. Because many interviews were conducted either in the participant's home or in some public place chosen by the participant, there was frequently a chance that participants would run into someone who knew them while they were involved in the interview process. Issues of confidentiality arise also in the presentation of data.

Limitations of the study

Because the sample size was small, generalizations to the greater population of youth in care are not appropriate. Aside from being a small sample, probably the most limiting of all demographics of the project lies in the fact that there were no youth of color among the participants. Further projects exploring the experiences of youth from care ought to consider sampling techniques that will guarantee representation of the range of racial and cultural groups living in Minnesota. The decision to select participants from counties in greater Minnesota undoubtedly impacted representation of youth of color. As stated earlier, this decision was based in a number of reasons not the least of which was concern that the researcher was likely to know a great number of individuals in the population sample in the Twin Cities metro area.

Females were over represented in the current project, as eight young women and only three young men participated. Not only were there more young women, but there were some important differences between them and the young men who participated. Five of the females and none of the males were living independently at the time of their interview. One of the young women and two of the young men planned to live in some sort of supervised housing, either adult foster care, or supervised independent living program for adults with developmental disabilities. Academically, six of the young women either were in college, or had taken some college courses; none of the males had plans to attend college. One young man was enrolled in an auto repair program at the Vo-tech center.

The fact that participants self-selected no doubt had an influence on the sample population. It may be that self-selection resulted in participants who were more inclined to have feedback to provide to the system than the general population of youth from care. Participants may represent the most confident or outgoing subgroup of youth in care.

Related to the issue of self-selection and possible personality characteristics that might be shared by those youth who chose to participate are the issues of age and developmental level. The participants in this project gave thoughtful feedback about their experiences in the system. It is important to be aware that participants were all at least eighteen years of age. It is likely that attempts to gather the same types of input from younger adolescents currently in care might yield somewhat less sophisticated feedback. For the researcher or practitioner who is sensitive to developmental processes in adolescence, the feedback of younger adolescents would likely be found to contain the same wealth of wisdom as that of their older peers.

Because the participants were originally contacted as a result of their participation in SELF surveys, the fact that they have received financial compensation for their input is important. Participants were paid \$15.00 in addition to the \$50.00 they already were to earn from their participation in SELF. The opportunity to earn money by participating may have additionally influenced which youth who were initially contacted chose to return a consent form. The participants may be particularly financially in need when compared to other SELF graduates.

The methodology decision to allow participants to choose the location where their interview was to be conducted created inconsistencies in interviewing conditions. An interview schedule was followed with all participants and the basic routine of the interviews was consistent. However, on the whole there was little control in terms of where interviews were conducted, whether or not other people were present at the interview, whether or not we ate or drank while talking, and whether the interview was conducted in a public place or in a private home. These decisions were made by the individual participants according to what was most convenient and comfortable for them.

Analysis of data

Taped interviews were transcribed in edited form by the author. Because SELF programs in different counties have different names, all references to specific programs, or placement facilities were edited out of transcribed interviews so that participants could not be identified by their comments. Per their approval, all participants were sent the first draft of the edited transcript of their interview. Included with the draft was a postage paid envelope for them to return the transcript once they had made any changes they deemed appropriate.

Content analysis was used on the edited transcripts to identify trends and patterns among the eleven participants' responses to the interview questions. The fact that the sample was not a random representative sample of all Minnesota youth in care, or even necessarily of all SELF participants, made descriptive statistics the only methodologically sound statistical calculations for use on the data.

Data from Likert question responses were entered into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). A limited number of cross tabulations were calculated from responses to the Likert questions (Appendix H). Only thirteen cross tabulations were calculated in an effort to limit the possibility of identifying trends that occurred merely from chance. Results from cross tabulations will not be reported on in the findings section because of the small sample size and the fact that no relationships were strongly indicated by the calculations. Additionally, it is important to remember that the study was conducted in participants' own environments and not under controlled circumstances. Because of this, any potential relationships identified in the cross tabulations would be greatly limited in their generalizability.

Demographic data on the participants were obtained from the SELF database. This allowed for comparison of the study population with the total SELF population, and with the population of all youth in care in Minnesota.

Section VII

Presentation of the findings

Demographic information on the participants

Individuals agreeing to participate in the current project self-selected by returning a consent form stating that they would like to be contacted for an interview. Potential participants were initially identified out of a population of SELF participants and graduates who assisted the SELF Program by agreeing to complete a series of three evaluative surveys. Surveys are sent by the SELF Evaluator to participants at the time of their completion of a SELF Program, three months after completion, and again after one year. Although the participants in the present project were at different stages in the SELF survey process, all of them agreed on the survey they returned most recently to SELF to be interviewed in person.

All of the eleven participants in the present study filled out SELF surveys at the time of their completion with the SELF Program in which they were involved. All ranked their experience with SELF as 'Excellent' or 'Very Good'. Three month post completion surveys were returned by ten of the participants in the current project, by that time one had changed the rating of his or her experience with SELF to 'Okay'. Six of the participants in the current project had completed their third survey to SELF before the time of our interview. The majority of the demographic information reported on for the sample population was gathered from responses to the first or second SELF survey returned, because so few have reached the end of their first year out of SELF.

Of the eleven participants in this project eight were female, three were male. Five were eighteen, four were nineteen and two were twenty-one years of age. All eleven participants were of European American cultural background. Three out of the eight young women were mothers, two of whom were single

parents. At the time of the interview five of the young women were living independently (one with her boyfriend, and one with her husband). Two of the men and one woman lived with their birth families. One man was residing in a foster home, and one woman was living with a family that had formerly been her foster family. One woman was living with her boyfriend's family.

Four of the participants were in college. An additional one had attended some college, but was taking time off. One was in a Vo-Tech program. Two had completed Graduate Equivalency Diploma (GED), and the remaining three were in high school, at least one in the special education track.

Participants were asked to indicate from an exhaustive list of options which type(s) of substitute care they had been in during their lives. Chart 7.1 shows the self-reported placement history for the study sample:

Chart 7.1

Self-reported placement history

<u>Type of placement</u>	<u># of participants reporting having been in that placement at least once</u>
foster home(s)	7
group home(s)	3
staffed shelter(s)	3
residential treatment	3
juvenile detention	1
family friends	1

Seven participants reported having run away from home at least one time. Three out of the eleven participants reported having run from a placement.

Participants' expectations for the future

To gain a richer understanding of the participants in the current study it is useful to get an overview of what they see for themselves in the future. This may help readers understand the frame of reference out of which responses to interview questions grew. When asked "what does the future hold for you?" participants talked primarily about plans for careers, education and family.

Career plans covered a wide range of wishes and abilities. Three of the women discussed plans to work in human services. They based their wishes on the fact that they have "been there" and believed that they were uniquely qualified to work with youth in the system. One stated that she needed to finish her Masters in Social Work because, "those teen moms need me!" Another discussed how she could show more understanding to clients because of her personal experiences in the system. She shared ideas for what she viewed as urgently needed changes to the system of child protection in her home county.

The first word from one woman's mouth when asked about what her future holds was "hope"! She went on to talk about her achievements in the industrial engineering program in which she is involved. Two participants talked about the preparation they were receiving at Vo-Tech programs to meet their career goals, one in auto mechanics, one in child care. Three more, two men and one woman shared plans to enter the military. The woman, who was months shy of completing her Licensed Practical Nurse degree saw the Air Force as a "break" from school before she returned to begin a program in special imaging. Below, Chart 7.2 shows the breakdown of participant career goals, and lists what each participant planned to do academically to help achieve his or her goal.

Chart 7.2

Career goals and educational plans

<u>Number</u> <u>of participants</u>	<u>Career goal</u>	<u>Number</u> <u>of participants</u>	<u>Education goal/plan</u>
4	Human services	2	Master of Social Work
		1	Community College
		1	No specific plans
1	Industrial engineering	1	Four year College
1	Child Care	1	Vo-Tech
1	Auto Tech.	1	Vo-Tech
1	Licensed Practical Nurse	1	Community College/Air Force
2	Military	2	Reserves
1	Writer	1	Four year College (Ph.D.)

Thoughts about the families they hoped to build were expressed by some of the participants. One young mother expressed great concerns for the future well-being of her son because of what she viewed as increasing violence of young people who just "don't care anymore". She planned on moving out of the smaller town in which she grew up, hoping that a move to a bigger community might be better for her son. Another shared that unlike one of her former boyfriends, she was not afraid that she would "complete the circle" of abuse that she experienced in her home as a child.

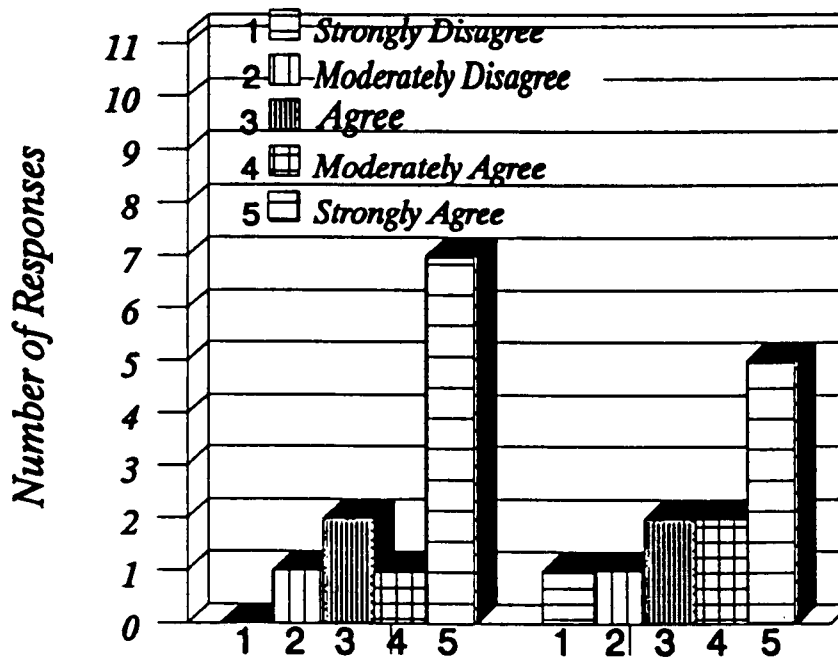
One woman's future plan was intensely personal. She planned to get the six tattoos her ex-husband drew on her removed as another step in healing from their abusive relationship.

Participants were asked to complete eleven Likert scale items in which they rated statements on a five point scale from strongly disagree (#1) to strongly agree (#5). Likert and interview questions are reviewed together in the findings according to the research question they address.

Desire for opportunities to give feedback to the system

One of the two statements that elicited the strongest agreement from participants read, "I think youth in placement have a lot of things they'd like to express about the system" (Q 3). The mean for that Likert question was 4.27, both the mode and median were 5. Participants expressed slightly less strong feelings about having their own ideas about things they would like to change with the system (Q 4) (mean 3.82, mode 5, median 4).

Desire for Input



Q3: Youth Have Things to Express about the System
N=11

Q4: I Have Ideas for the System
N=11

Graph 7.1

Responses to interview question number two ("At what times have you felt like you had an influence on the system?") generally fell into two themes. The first theme were responses that expressed trust in workers to make decisions that were right. In contrast to the participants who seemed generally comfortable leaving decisions up to workers, the second theme of responses show youth who saw themselves as influential and essential to their own placement process.

Statements such as "I've never had an influence, seriously, never. I didn't feel like I had the power, but there were a lot of other people pulling for me" were illustrative of the first theme. One young woman's statement summarized this theme succinctly, "I was scared because I didn't know anything about the system. I was taking chances in believing that they knew what to do to help me." In all, a total of three participants gave responses that fit into the theme of generally trusting workers to make most decisions.

Three also gave responses that fell under a second theme, one in which youth saw themselves as the driving force behind change in their personal placement status. Participants talked of having to convince or prove to workers why a particular placement decision would be best. Another shared about "sitting down" with her social worker and asking "all right, how do I do this? I don't want to live at the foster home, and I'm not going back home." She went on to describe the task she took on to convince her worker that she was ready to be on her own, "I sat down with my big book and I wrote out budgets and what I'm gonna do with my life...and how I was gonna find daycare...my social worker said 'don't repeat me, but if you move out you have my blessing.'" The same woman stated that earlier during her tenure with the system she felt that she had to run away from home or placements in order to have an influence on decisions.

Beyond decisions regarding placement, three participants felt that they had a big influence in how services to teen mothers in their county were provided. Each of them had great affection for the group they helped develop as an offshoot of their SELF group, and expressed regret that they would have to leave the group. "I'm twenty-one and this is the last year I can go. That's sad. I love this group, I'd go there until I'm thirty I bet. "

Four responses did not fit into either of the two major themes. One response to the question about having an influence on the system came from a young woman who felt that she had a positive influence on a peer while in placement. One young man discussed the question in terms of how his behavior in placement influenced whether or not he was granted privileges. One simply stated that she had never had an influence, and the last was undecided.

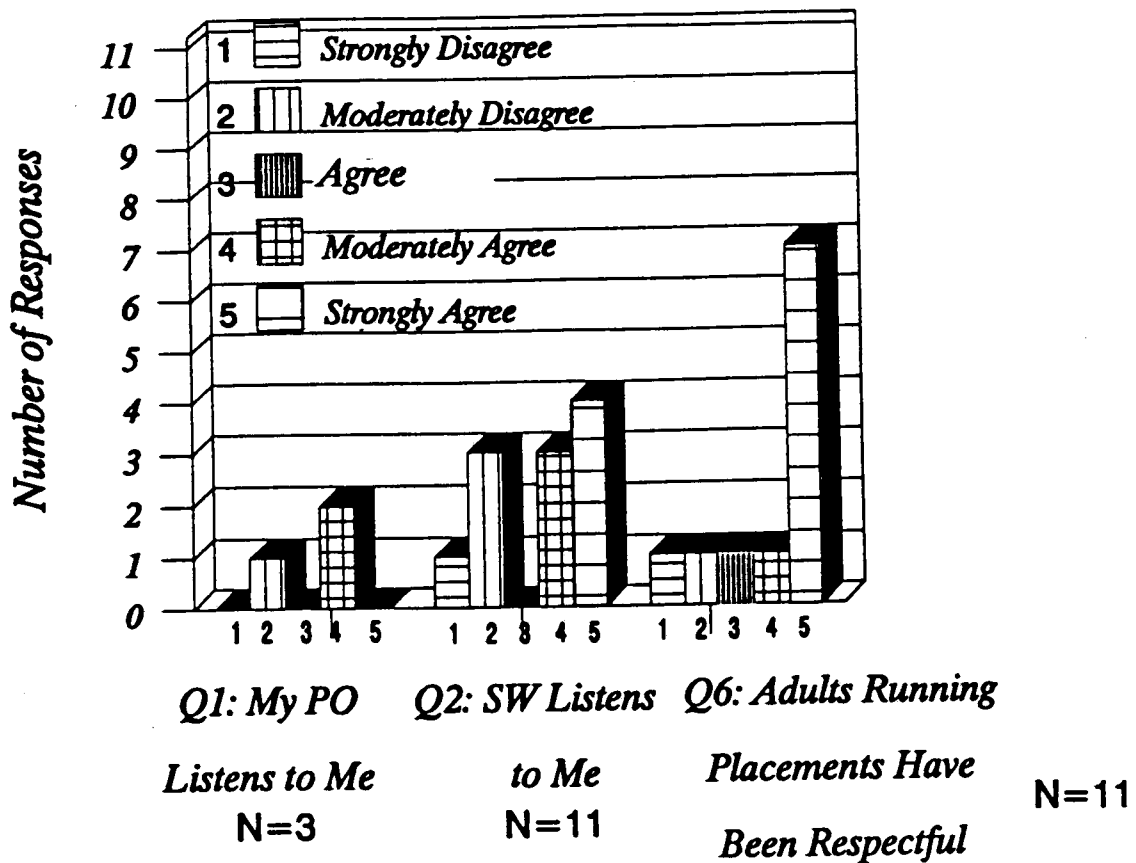
Do participants feel that they have sufficient opportunity for input?

The Likert questions addressing participants' feelings of being heard by workers and respected by the adults who are/were in charge of placements in which they have lived are evaluated together as they give a general sense of participants' perceptions of opportunities for giving input. Only three of the participants had ever had probation officers, so the responses to that item (Q1) are quite limited. The three participants did not seem to have particularly strong feelings one way or the other about whether or not they felt their probation officers listened to them (mean 3.33).

All eleven participants responded to the remaining Likert statement. While there was a range of responses from 1 to 5 for the item "My social worker listens to me," seven of the eleven participants moderately or strongly agreed with the statement (mean 3.55, mode 5, median 4).

Almost unanimously participants expressed feeling that the "adults who were responsible for the placements" in which they lived treated them with respect (Q6). Seven participants strongly agreed, only two gave responses less than agree to the item (mean 4.09, mode 5, median 5).

Feeling Sufficiently Heard by Workers



Graph 7.2

Coinciding with the Likert responses to feeling respected by adults in charge of placements, positive feelings were generally expressed for care providers and adults involved in the system during the interview portion of the

project. Participants often identified the foster parent(s)' ability to "listen" and to "talk about anything with me" as particularly valuable assets for providers of substitute care. Foster parents and individual staff members at treatment programs or group homes were identified, often by name, as people who "understood what (you) had to say." The distribution of people identified as "understanding" is illustrated in chart 7.3.

Chart 7.3

People identified as understanding (# mentioning them)

Therapist (5)	Probation officer (1)
Social Worker (4)	Police (1)
Foster mom (2)	Guardian ad litem (1)
Peers in placement (2)	Group home staff (1)
Lawyer (1)	Shelter staff (1)
SELF leader(s) (1)	Natural parents (1)

When asked to describe how they knew when an adult they worked with in the system "understood" what they had to say, participants' responses were surprisingly consistent with one another. Many mentioned how openly they were welcomed into care providers' homes as a sign that they were cared about and understood.

Social worker or care provider willingness to talk about what the individual youth wanted in terms of placement came up in nearly every interview as indications that the adult "understood" the young person. Three different participants shared times when counselors went out of their way to offer support. All three seemed to believe their counselors' gestures were indicative of "understanding" the situation of the youth. Two counselors were

described as "standing up" for participants when the participant felt that he or she had no other advocates. One young man expressed gratitude for his treatment counselor who went with him on the day he was to testify in court against his father.

Conversely, many participants identified worker or care provider behaviors that hindered the helping relationship. Themes of feeling that the worker could not understand the situation facing the young person were common among responses. Times when adults in the system spoke or acted disrespectfully to participants when they were in need of services remained vividly in the memory of the young adult participants. One talked about feeling that staff in residential treatment and in group homes were trying to "program" her, and spoke with dismay of staff who "were always telling (me) I had to be a certain way...to feel a certain way."

Who should hear about placements?

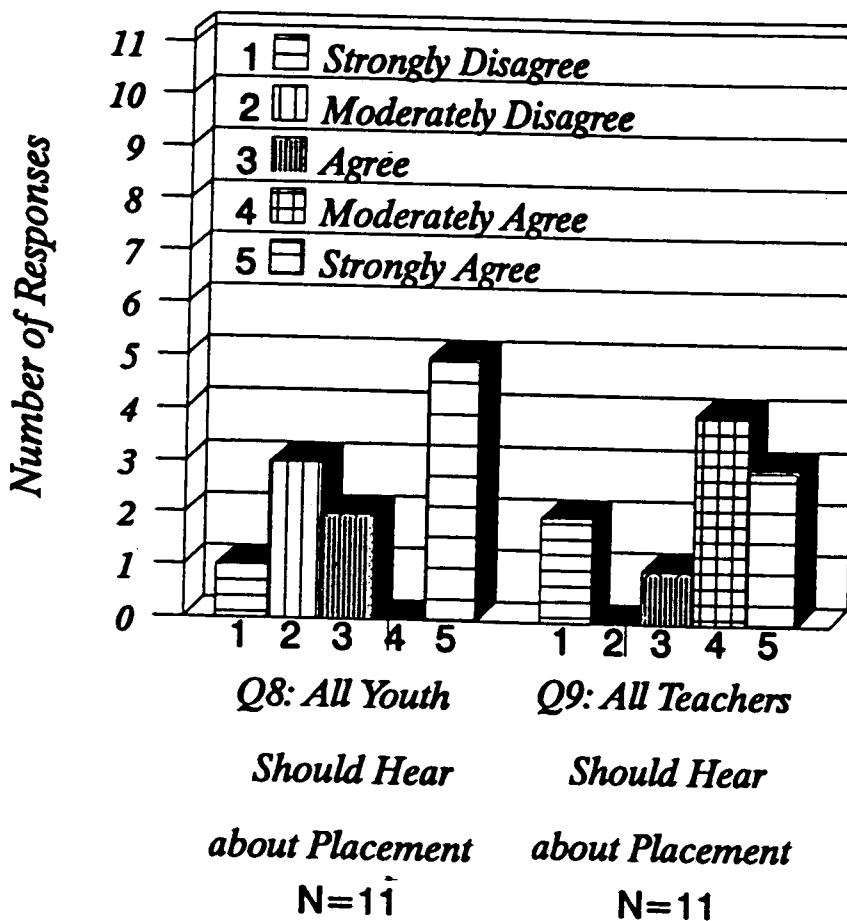
The four Likert items reported on in this section assessed 1) how different participants felt from other youth who have not been in placement and 2) the degree of importance participants placed on sharing information about their experience with non-system youth and with teachers.

I sort of agree and sort of not (with telling kids about foster care). Some kids think it's a joke, I can go live in a foster home and get away from my own family. Other kids in foster care need to know that they're not the only one who's in care. They need to know there are people who will listen. They could get together with other kids for support. Others will know what's going on.

Teachers should know a little. Because it's not easy being in foster care. You're not living with your real family. The teacher should know that the kid is dealing with a whole lot more than a normal kid and might struggle in school.

More than half of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement "I sometimes feel that other youth do not know what my life has been like." (Q 7) (mean 4, mode 5, median 5). Despite the high level of agreement with that statement, participants felt less strongly that "...all youth should have a chance to hear about being in placement (Q 8)." (mean 3.45, mode 5, median 3). Participants seemed to feel slightly more strongly about the importance of providing teachers with "a chance to hear about being in placement (Q 9)." (mean 3.6, mode 4, median 4).

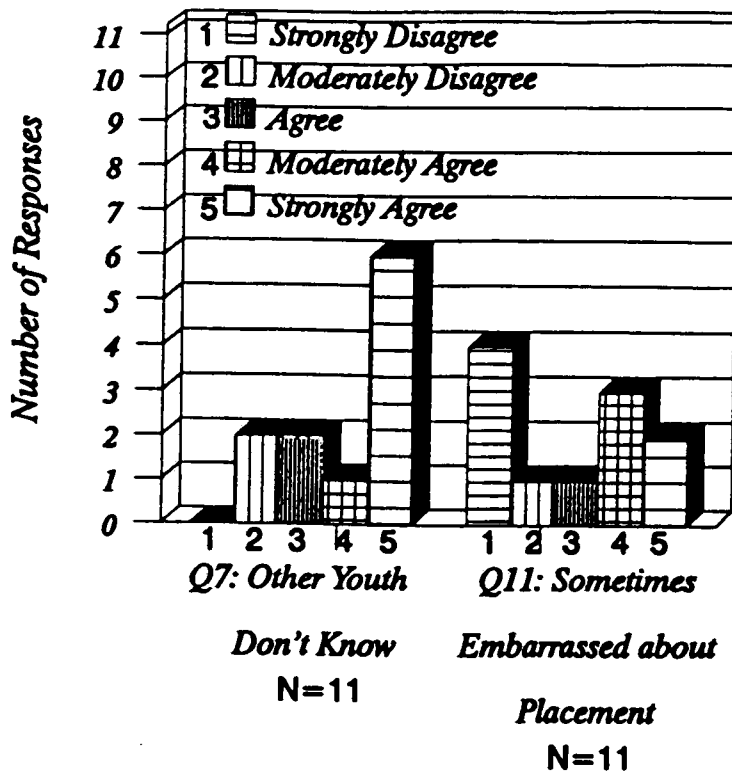
Others Should Hear about Placement



Graph 7.3

While participants indicated that they did not feel that other youth understood what their lives have been like (Q 7), only five youth in the current project moderately or strongly agreed with the statement "I am sometimes embarrassed to let people know that I've been in placement (Q 11)." (mean 2.82, mode 1, median 3).

Feeling Different from Others



Graph 7.4

What would participants say if given the opportunity?

Four interview questions provided opportunities for participants to share what types of things they might want to say to others about their experience in the system. Participants were asked to give three pieces of advice to youth just

entering the system and three pieces of advice to social workers or probation officers about what it is like being in the system. Also included in this section are participants' responses to the interview questions asking them to describe their best and worst placement experiences.

1. Advice for youth entering care

Participants offered a wide range of responses to the question "If you could give three pieces of advice to a young adult who is just entering the system (either getting a probation officer, social worker or going to their first placement) what would you tell them?" Responses fell into four major categories, 1) how to deal with the system and structure of specific programs, 2) relationships with workers, 3) relationship with natural family and 4) friends in placement.

a. Advice about the system

You are getting a second chance. Relax. You are getting out of a situation into hopefully a better situation. Relax.

Most frequently advice to young people entering the system consisted of encouragement to "not fight the system." Many expressed learning during their time in placement that "you got to play their game, otherwise you won't get anywhere. They can tell when you're lying."

Many of the participants shared stories of specific rules and structure that they had experienced during their history of placement. Most often the rules they chose to share about during interviews were ones they did not like, or felt were unfair. Two participants talked about how scary physical restraints are and offered advice on how to behave so one does not get restrained while in placement. Frequently participants expressed their frustration with programs

that expected them to "tell" on other youth who broke rules. "...everywhere I went, except in treatment, they have that if someone's doing something you have to tell on them or you'll get in trouble, too." Three mentioned "group consequences" as a program component that they felt was unfair and was harmful to group dynamics and relationships among residents in the program.

b. *Advice on relationships with workers*

They've just gotta know that somebody along the way will listen. You might not find them right away, but somebody will eventually listen.

In terms of relationships with workers and other adults in the system, participants very much encouraged others entering the system to trust workers and to believe that they are genuinely trying to help. At the same time, they also emphasized the importance of giving input and ideas. "Listen to what your social worker and the other people have to say, and speak what's on your mind. Don't hide anything."

One cautioned youth entering the system with the reality of limited options for placement and how youth need to push themselves to assure that placement works out. "Try to work with their social worker or foster parent or whatever. Because if you can't work together, then it's definitely not gonna work there either. You end up running out of options."

c. *Advice on relationships with family of origin*

...try to keep a strong bond with their family because sooner or later no matter how much you hate your family at one time or another, you need them. Even though you go through bad times, they love you.

Seven of the participants stressed the importance of maintaining a relationship with one's natural family while in placement. They expressed concern for workers who discouraged them from working on their relationship with their families.

d. *Advice about friendships in placement*

Some of the best friends I've ever had were in treatment...Your friends from placement are the ones that will help you through...When you make regular friends, you only have to let them know what you want (them to know about you). When you first meet people, for a long time they put on this big show. Then after you've known them for a long time then all the bad stuff comes out, the real person comes out. When you meet someone in treatment you're usually meeting the real person, they're already there because they have to be. You can't hide. I've never had friends like that ever. Until I got sent away.

Seven participants shared about how valuable they felt their relationships with other youth in placement were. Themes in these responses generally included a perception that friendships formed in placement were more intense and more supportive than friendships developed outside of placement.

2. Advice for probation officers and social workers

Participants were asked to give "three pieces of advice to probation officers/social workers about what it is like to be in the system." Again, their responses clustered into three major categories, 1) workers' interactions with adolescent clients, 2) helping youth manage relationship with natural family, and 3) feedback about placements.

It sucks because you don't have anyone on your side. It's like you're fighting against all these adults who have more say over your life than you. They say 'we're looking out for your best interests', but no one ever asks you. And when they do, you don't get believed because you're automatically this troubled kid. That's how it is. It's like you're looked at like this number or this case. Your parents and social worker have more say than you. No one believes you.

a. Advice on interactions with adolescent clients

Five of the participants stressed the importance of workers playing some sort of therapeutic role with their adolescent clients. This included talking with youth as well as encouraging them to take opportunities for therapy or counseling seriously. One male survivor of incest encouraged workers to "tell them (the kid) it's not all their fault." One young woman cautioned workers to be respectful of the very personal nature of many of the questions asked of young people in the system when she stated, "I think it's disrespectful to ask a bunch of personal questions that they don't need to know." A number of participants shared at different times during their interview how valuable it was to them when workers or care providers helped them to look at their problems in a structured way and to apply problem solving steps in making decisions.

Two participants expressed a desire for workers to make greater efforts to be in regular contact with their clients, and to be sure to visit the places in which they are placing youth. Almost unanimously participants expressed that they felt it was essential for workers to genuinely listen to adolescent clients. Many shared how they had felt "stuck" when they felt that their stories or input were not valued to the same degree their parent(s)' input was in placement decisions.

One young woman cautioned workers about what a difficult, frustrating job she believes they have and encouraged them "have patience. It's not always going to work out...I had a happy social worker because I was a success story."

b. *Advice on helping youth manage relationship with family of origin*

I wish there was a group home for parents...I think my mom needed more help than I did. I zipped through everything. And she's back here still wanting to argue about everything.

Seven expressed a desire that workers or the system would require families or parent(s) to participate in some sort of treatment while the youth is in placement. "Your parents don't have to do anything...I changed so much that when I came home it was still 'we don't trust you...you're gonna do what we say.' I rebelled against that, because I thought I had done so much work in treatment to be the daughter they wanted, and they just kind of blew it off."

"Encourage them to associate with their family. A lot of times they discourage that. I think it's more healthy to have at least some contact." One young man stated that his worker overtly prohibited contact, others noted that workers expressed ambivalence about whether or not the young person saw their family.

One young woman articulated a reality of family dynamics by stating "families don't always work. You know, one of the goals of the system is to get the family back together. The family isn't always there. They can't always get together."

I think if a child believes they should be in a foster home it should at least be tried. If you put them in on a temporary basis you can see how they do in the foster home as compared to home, it gives a lot of insight...they should just listen to kids more.

c. *Advice about placements*

Two additional interview questions encouraged participants to share more in depth about their experiences in placement. In telling about best

and worst placement experiences, participants gave further insight into what experiences in the system were most memorable.

With me they never came and saw the places I was at. My social worker never came, my Guardian ad litem never came. So they never saw the hell I was going through. They didn't believe me when I told them. They sent me halfway across the state. I didn't know anybody.

d. Best placement experiences

Three participants listed their time in residential treatment as their most positive placement experience. Reasons attributed to why treatment was positive included a sense that they would gain something from being there.

Two cited the friendships they were able to build in treatment as being key reasons why treatment was their most positive experience. One young man talked extensively about how friends in treatment helped him to better understand inappropriate behaviors he had displayed towards a number of young women prior to treatment.

Two youth shared stories from foster home placements as being their most positive placement experience. One strongly expressed her belief that her positive experience was unusual:

I feel like I was really lucky. My brother was in foster care, when he found out I was going to foster care he said, 'watch out, they're just gonna screw you over.' I hear stories about other foster parents. I know other foster kids. I know I just got really lucky.

A number had great appreciation for how they were treated in their foster homes. One stated that her foster mom "didn't treat you like you were a foster kid. She treated all of us like we were her own. If she thought there was a problem, she'd give her opinion about it and then say, 'if you don't think I'm

right you can do whatever you want to do'. She gave us the freedom to make our own choices."

e. Worst placement experiences

Most of the placements described by participants as their worst placement experience were in facilities that tend to be the most restrictive when compared with the whole range of places where adolescents are placed. More restrictive placements discussed by participants included juvenile detention, county crisis unit, and an adolescent psychiatric unit at a hospital. Other placements described by one participant each as their worst experience were a group home, a staffed county shelter, and a stay with family friends.

Stories of placements that were particularly negative for participants often seemed to involve actions on the part of staff or expectations of the specific program's structure that felt disrespectful of the youth. Rather than one placement that was his worst experience, one young man shared his thoughts on why getting physically restrained was his worst experience:

...because you would get hurt...people look at you...when the person is getting restrained for the first time it's funny for the other people to see that...I felt embarrassed.

A young woman described the county crisis center as "the strictest place I've ever been." She stated that her "...mom put me there because she couldn't decide if she wanted me to come home or to put me someplace else." Part of her difficulty, she went on to explain, came from not knowing how long she would be there and the uncertainty of the outcome. At least three other participants mentioned not knowing how long they would be in specific places as something that made them uncomfortable.

Three young women described their worst placement experiences as ones in which they felt pushed into emotionally difficult positions. For the one who lived for a month with family friends, the pressure of knowing that those friends were in the middle of the conflict between her and her parents was painful. Another described the emotional challenges she faced at the hospital adolescent psychiatry unit because she believed that the nursing staff "had no feelings" for any of the youth placed there, and that the psychiatrist pushed too hard, too soon.

A third young woman shared her frustration with staff changes in her group home placement and how she "went a month without a counselor." She looked back with frustration and stated, "I just sat there. They didn't give a shit. They kept putzing around. They'd always get down on us and stuff, saying we had to change. I asked them one time what's the point in me doing anything different if I'm just gonna go home and they're gonna be just the same? They yelled at me. They told me I wasn't supposed to worry about that...They wouldn't talk to me about it, they said not to worry about it." Even though the placement she described had occurred at least three years ago, she remembered vividly a time when she felt totally bewildered by the way she was expected to behave while in the group home.

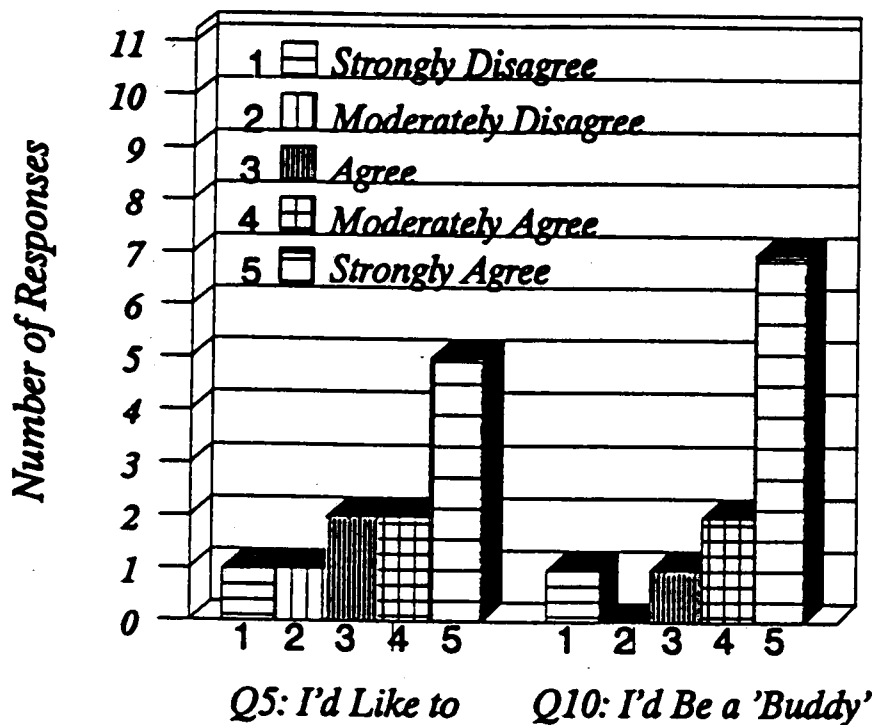
We're driving along in the van and all the sudden he (my counselor) tells me 'I'm quitting'. What am I supposed to say, congratulations?! Then I didn't say anything for awhile...they said I withdrew and couldn't have the (behavior)points. Well, what am I supposed to do? My counselor just told me he was leaving, was I supposed to be all happy?.....After that I said 'screw it'. I quit working. I was shocked. There was nothing more to say. I guess you couldn't be a regular person there, you were supposed to turn into a little robot. I felt like I was being brainwashed. At times.

Participants' ideas of possible channels for input

If they (workers) want to know, I'll tell them, but I'm not gonna tell someone who doesn't care or won't believe me.

Two Likert items gathered data on participants' interest in being active in different types of outreach, either to workers or to other youth in care. Nine of the eleven participants agreed, moderately agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "If given the opportunity, I think I would be interested in being part of a group of youth who speak to social workers/probation officers about my experience with the system." (mean 3.82, mode 5, median 4). Overall, participants were more enthusiastic about the idea of "being a 'buddy' to a younger youth who was just entering placement." (mean 4.27, median 5, mode 5).

Possible Channels for Youth Outreach



Graph 7.5

Speak to Workers

N=11

to Other Youth in Care

N=11

While none of the participants were aware of any groups of youth from care who had organized, when they were asked for their own thoughts about "possible ways of 'educating' social workers and probation officers about (your) feelings as a youth in the system," participants came up with a wide range of visions for what methods might be useful. They were asked what they thought an organized group of youth might look like, and what the group might do. For participants who found the wording of these questions confusing, the following scenario was presented: "If we gathered up twenty people who had been in placement and put them in a room together what kinds of ideas do you think they might come up with, what kinds of activities do you think they might want to do?"

If you picked twenty people at random you would get a lot of confusion and lots of people who didn't care. If you had twenty people who wanted to do it, it just might work...I wouldn't want a support group...they're nice, but you've got twenty people sitting around helping each other when there are 30,000 others out there saying 'help, help!'.

Become a foster parent. If you want an experience, become a foster parent. It may do absolute, ultimate damage to what you think is going on (in foster care). Every kid is so different. Every kid has gone through something different. You laugh a lot, but damn you cry a lot too.

As indicated by the quote above, participants seemed to be confident that workers did not know what the experience of being in care was like. One young woman offered a whole format for an exit interview that workers could conduct with adolescent clients as their helping relationship ends. An interview such as she described might help workers hear more detail about adolescent clients' experiences in care. "Before they're done with their client, ask them questions about how they can improve things. That's the best way because it's fresh in the child's head. They'll have the feelings right there in their head....The questions on the exit interview would be:

- *As I dealt with you as a client, what helped?
- *What did not help?
- *How have I helped you in getting on with your life?
- *Do you feel that social workers are a good help for you?
- *Do you think the system is run fairly?
- *Do you think we're too forceful or strict in ways that we shouldn't have been?"

Two young women suggested large group forums through which youth in care could address workers. "They should have a board of youth from every walk of life, young and old who have been through it (placement). And have a big seminar somewhere. Have them (workers) sit and listen. It should be mandatory that they be there to keep their social work job or whatever. Listen to them , actually listen to the stories. They would maybe say 'wow, half these people are saying the same thing'. They might get it. That might help."

The participant with Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) shared extensively about her efforts to educate others about TBI. Some of the things she had done in that effort included writing about her life and reading it in her support group and over the local radio station. She thought similar techniques might be useful in educating about what it is like to be in the system.

One participant had a more cynical response than the others. She stated her belief that it would be very difficult to educate workers about what it is like to be in the system without the worker having had a similar experience. "How can you sit and tell some kid to straighten out their life and not do this if you've never done it yourself. It probably looks easier. They say 'why can't you just go home?' There's more to it than just that. I still can't explain some of what I did." Another woman recognized that many people believe that workers need to have

been in placement as youth to understand how it feels. She disagreed with that belief and stated that a worker who has been through the system would be "more knowledgeable, not necessarily a better social worker."

One male and one female participant spoke of groups in which they were already involved and how those groups might be able to impact workers. One example was a sexual abuse group in treatment where youth were offered a chance to support each other, and to "help understand what went on in our life." A male participant stated that group might want to talk with "probation officers and lawyers" to get them to help "put a stop to the abuse." The woman cited how the youth members of her SELF group influenced how the leader ran the group. She told of how the youth helped him get organized and structure the program in a way that was interesting and that offered experiential opportunities for learning. All three of the young mothers cited their teen mom's group through SELF as their greatest success in organizing to influence a program.

Section VIII

Discussion and Implications

Significance of emancipatory research

Methodological decisions for the current project were guided by principles of emancipatory research. While it is difficult to determine exactly why the process went as smoothly as it did, there are valuable insights to be gleaned from processes that occurred during this project. All eleven participants who were scheduled for interviews were interviewed at the place and time originally agreed upon. For some a significant amount of effort was required to be at the interview, either driving some distance or making sometimes complicated arrangements to meet at a location without knowing what the researcher looked like. Most of the interviews were scheduled more than a week in advance, so participants had to have considerable commitment to record the time and place so that they would remember once the date arrived.

At the close of their interview all of the participants agreed to read the first draft of the transcription of their interview, to edit it, and to return their changes to the author. Seven of the eleven participants returned initialed drafts. Four approved their transcript as it was. Three made rather minor corrections, clarifying points they shared in the interview. One of those who edited the text changed it to assure that credit for a quote she shared during the interview was given to the man who originally said it. She stated, "I wish I could claim this quote...I just happen to think that it is a great attitude, and think it's a great quote!" The quote in question read: "There are things that I do well, and other things that I don't do well....yet".

The process of reading the interview appears to have been very positive for the participants. As hoped, the editing/review stage of the research provided

a valuable component for the participants both in terms of recording their history and in providing affirmation that they had done a great deal of work to "make it". One young woman requested, "If at all possible, could I get another copy of your 'finished' interview? I would like to keep it, kind of as a reminder of yes, I have made progress." Another brought the value of emancipatory research into brilliant light in her note at the end of the edited transcript she returned.

I read over the transcript and cried, I can never read anything about my life and not cry. But I did end up laughing towards the end. I had a good time, I hope I was of help to you. Just wanted to let you know my life is going much better now. I'm picking up the pieces and starting over again but I guess you can never get enough learning experiences in life! Hope everything goes good for you!

Relevance of findings to research questions

While ten out of eleven participants agreed or strongly agreed that youth in care have a lot they would like to express, less strong responses were given when participants were asked about their own ideas for change. It appears that many participants were reluctant to give themselves credit for having ideas, as quite a few valuable pieces of feedback were shared during interviews. Among the creative and important insights provided by participants were a number of ideas for possible channels that could be created to provide opportunities to youth to share about their experiences with the system.

Nine agreed or strongly agreed that other youth do not know what their lives have been like, yet participants were somewhat ambivalent about the value of providing "all youth" with a chance to learn about placement. A number of participants cautioned that the process of sharing stories about placement might glamorize the experience for youth who otherwise would have no interest or need to know about the system. Participants felt more strongly about the value of providing teachers with a general understanding of the placement experience.

This appeared to be more important to them because of the support teachers can offer in school to youth who are in placement.

Participants in the current study seemed to have had more positive experiences in placement than respondents in either Mandell (1973) or Van der Waals' (1960) studies. Overall, participants stated that they felt respected by the adults in charge of the placements in which they lived. Unlike participants in both of the other studies, none of the current participants stated feeling that financial compensation was a reason that care providers opened their homes to young people in need. Rather, it appeared that many of the youth had positive experiences and relationships with at least some of the adults who provided them with substitute care. While participants in Mandell, Van der Waal, and the current study were all voluntary it is quite likely that participants in the current study might have been more likely than the those in the other two studies to have positive feelings about their experiences in care. This might be the case due to the method of sampling utilized in the current study. Because all potential participants have had some sort of supportive services through SELF during and/or after their time in substitute care, it is possible that their feelings of satisfaction might have been impacted by that program rather than (or in addition to) their placement experience. The relationships that many of the participants built with care providers or staff within placements remained an important part of the memories of many participants.

Despite nearly unanimous feelings of having been treated with respect while in placement, participants seem to have a great deal of feedback they would like to provide to the system. Feedback was similar from one participant to the next, as evidenced by the ease with which interview responses could be categorized in the findings. The balanced nature of responses indicated an ability on the part of participants to reflect on their experiences along a

continuum that covered a range of emotions and thoughts. They did not seem to view their experiences with the system as all good or all bad, and often were able to speak to many sides of any argument. This is very much in keeping with Bush & Gordon's (1982) findings that input from youth regarding their own placement is often as balanced and thoughtful as input from workers involved.

A balance in perception was also reflected in the wide range of comments offered by participants regarding their relationships with workers during the time placement decisions were being made. Within interviews participants often made distinctions between their experiences with individual workers and their experiences with the system as a whole. Often these comments indicated a frustration that participants had in terms of frequently feeling that their opinions and perceptions were not valued (or not believed) in placement decisions. Sometimes the perception of not being trusted was attributed to individual workers, sometimes participants attributed the failure of workers to believe them as being inherent in the system.

Findings that young people in care (Gil & Bogart, 1982) and adults reflecting back on care (Rest & Watson, 1984) often have a lack of understanding about why they are in placement and/or of upcoming changes in placement status, were seen also in the current study. Participants specifically mentioned that some of their worst placements were ones in which they had no information on how long they would be placed or where they were going once discharged.

Other explanations for why specific placements were the worst ranged from the two who mentioned the possibility of physical restraint, to two who had been in the same foster home and emphatically stated that the food there was by far their worst experience in placement. They illustrated this with vivid visual descriptions of their foster dad's cooking, including one meal in which he mistakenly used cucumbers in a recipe thinking they were zucchini.

Interestingly, all three of the young men moderately or strongly agreed with the statement "I am sometimes embarrassed to let people know that I've been in placement." Only two out of the eight young women had ratings as high. It is difficult with such a small sample to even speculate why the disparity existed among male and female participants. This was a surprising finding that opens a number of possibilities for further research in how gender and development theories might impact adjustment to placement. Because the participants in this study were all European American (and lived in more rural areas of the state), it is essential to recognize the need for further studies that include a range of cultural backgrounds within the sample in order to gain insights that might be reflective of the general population of youth in care.

While Rest & Watson (1984) found that adults who had experienced substitute care as youth had impaired abilities to form intimate relationships, many of the young adults in the current study seemed to place a high value on building intimate relationships with supportive others. Obviously, believing that relationships are important and having the ability to participate in mutually beneficial and healthy connections with others do not necessarily go together. If anything, participants in the current study seemed cautious about what types of people they were going to "let into" their lives in an intimate way. At the same time they spoke with passion about the value of the close friendships they built in placement and the gratitude they had for caretakers with whom they could "talk about anything." "They weren't trained to be nice to you. They weren't there to psychoanalyze every move you made. They were real people...if you screwed up it was OK..."

One, in talking about how well she "fit in" with her foster family, whom she refers to simply as her 'family', told a story of her first dinner within the home and how she instinctively knew the family norm of flipping whipped

cream off her pie onto the person next to her at the table. The same woman expressed respect for how the foster family handled her difficult situation. "They didn't talk disrespectfully about my situation, they didn't shoot it down. They said, 'Here's the problem, what are we going to do about it? Here are your options.'"

Much like the adult participants in Rest & Watson's (1984) study, the young adults from care in the current project expressed strong feelings about the importance of maintaining relationships with their families of origin. While they felt strongly about attempting to maintain relationships with families, many also expressed a realistic understanding of the ways in which their on-going relationships with their families of origin may be limited. "Try working out problems with your family...Don't quit on your family. They'll always be your family. If there's even a chance that they want to try to have a relationship you need to try. At least establish a relationship, even though they're not healthy themselves." Participants in both Rest & Watson (1984) and the current study identified that their abilities to maintain on-going relationships with their families were dictated to a great degree by placement decisions. Many of the participants therefore stated that they would have liked to have more input into placement decisions.

Although none of the participants used the professional jargon of the systems perspective, they all seemed to recognize that their placement was a result of family dynamics and not simply because of their own behavior. "A lot of social workers will just talk to the parents, and the parents will say 'this is a problem with my son or daughter'. They never hear really the full problem with the parents, too...What if the parent's the problem? They (the kid) are just stuck there, they can't get out. Obviously they're gonna rebel, and then they'll get

stuck somewhere they don't belong like detention or a work farm, or a group home..."

Calls have been made from researchers and practitioners for the development of "a mechanism through which childrens' thoughts, feelings, concerns and suggestions might be channeled into the system that is created to serve them and their families" (Gil & Bogart, 1984, p. 9; Also see Mandell, 1973; Konopka, 1973; Brendtro, et. al, 1990). Literature on empowerment supports the development of such a mechanism. The experience of being in care leads many young people to feel that decisions are for the most part outside of their control. Providing opportunities for young people to hold active, legitimate roles in the decision making network for provision of substitute care might increase levels of what Zimmerman (1990, p. 75) referred to as "learned hopefulness."

The concept, directly related to theories of locus of control, states that the experience of having control of a situation leads persons to perceive their own ability to control aspects of their environment. This perception leads them, eventually, to have an expectation that they can have control in the future, thus fostering a sense of hopefulness. When people feel that they are denied opportunities for control many will find areas where they can feel a sense of control. These choices are often self-destructive. An example shared during interviews shows how the experience of being heard may relate to feelings of control. One participant shared the story of police who picked her up when she was on run from her home. "They (the police) said 'you know, everyone has problems in their family...' I told them that they didn't know what went on in that home. I told the police that I wanted to go to shelter, I didn't want to go back there. They said 'no'." The participant reported that the day after her interaction with the police she overdosed on some sort of pills while at school. Obviously her choice to overdose can not be blamed on the police or anyone else.

The important point is how vividly she remembered the experience of not feeling heard.

Learned hopefulness was seen in the responses of many participants who felt that they had a say in significant decisions about their own placements. These young people were able to articulate their experience of being in placement without attributing all control to other people. They maintained the belief, confirmed through experience, that they could make a difference in the outcomes of placement decisions.

Participants in the current project expressed desire and ideas for channels that they could use to give feedback to the system. They suggested a wide range of possible networks or forums for opportunities to provide education to both workers and community members, mainly teachers. The ideas that participants in the current project identified were interestingly similar to suggestions that have been made in the research and practice literature. Rice & McFadden (1988) reported on the positive impact that participation in focus groups to discuss experiences in care had on young people. The young people in the current project offered suggestions such as utilizing SELF group discussions and community forums as opportunities for youth from care to share their stories with workers and community.

The literature provided by Youth in Care Networks in Canada and Britain offer successful models of how youth from care in this country might want to organize. Practitioners could provide a valuable service for adolescent clients by guiding them towards models that already exist for organizations for youth in care. This would require a willingness on the part of practitioners to recognize and strive to more equally balance the power relationship that exists when working with child or adolescent clients (Hasenfeld, 1987).

Erickson's (1965, in Land, 1990) statement on the need of adolescents to have a historical context within which to develop an individual identity is an essential component of many responses to interview questions. The process of responding to questions and editing the transcribed interviews provided participants with opportunities to see important parts of their life history in print. In articulating their experiences, participants identified valuable life skills and wisdom that they have, in part attributable to their experiences in the system. If effectively tapped by independent living programs, individual histories and experience could be utilized to illuminate the concept of interdependent living skills. Leadership and participation in service provision could provide adolescents with concrete experiences in control and shared responsibility, a need identified by Ortman (1988).

Risks and benefits of providing greater opportunities for youth in care to give input

Many individual youth who participated in the current project seemed to have experienced some degree of emotional benefit from their participation. Based on the comments participants returned with their edited transcripts, some of the benefit was in seeing their "story" in print. For some it appeared to provide a historical account of their progress. They expressed pride in reading how they had grown from their difficult experiences. Feelings of pride and surprise that someone wanted to hear their story were evident during almost all of the interviews. Perhaps that was one of the reasons 100% of the scheduled interviews were completed. They responded maturely and responsibly when approached as individuals who held valuable and important information.

No doubt some of the participants experienced emotional pain during and after the interview. Discussing personal and emotional issues such as family

disharmony and placement often raise difficult feelings. Youth were encouraged to express their feelings during the interviews, one openly wept, others raised their voices in anger as they shared stories. By the end of each interview session emotions were calm and care was taken to bring appropriate closure to the process. None of the participants were referred for further support to deal with issues that might have arisen during the interview.

It is likely that there are a great number of individual youth in care who have no desire to become active players in the decision-making process. There is comfort to be had in allowing adults to make the decisions and to take the responsibility for placements. Any significant change in the paradigm on how services are provided to adolescents in care might place a degree of stress on individual young people who are often already mired in feelings and events that feel overwhelming.

Benefits to the general population of youth in care come in terms of empowerment through the process of having a forum to share their voice. The child welfare system may begin to be perceived by youth less as an all-powerful director of people's lives and more as a channel for assistance in finding solutions to difficult family situations. Improvements in service provision affect all youth in care. Taking leadership roles in the provision of child welfare services would provide the community of youth from care a positive visibility that they do not currently enjoy. Based on anecdotal evidence from practice and the insights shared by participants in the current project, it is easy to see the potential for the experiences of youth in care to be valued parts of practice methodology.

The child care system stands to benefit by adding youth in care to the stakeholders in service provision. If formal channels were available for youth in care to provide their feedback to the child care system, workers at all levels in the system would be held to a higher level of accountability. Both a benefit and

challenge for the child care system as a whole would be the expectation that practitioners and the system respond to the feedback provided by youth. Youth in care would have a vehicle by which to report care providers who are not meeting standards of safe and respectful substitute care for youth. Workers could more quickly learn about abusive or inappropriate placements. Conversely, care providers who stand out because of exceptional work could be formally recognized by youth. Workers responsible for placement decisions could make them from a more fully informed position if youth were listened to as primary stakeholders.

Implications for practice

Placement histories provided by participants in the current study indicated a high use of institutional placements for youth who were in need of placement due to law violations as well as for those who were in need because of family disruption. Only one participant reported having lived with friends of the family as an alternative to placement before going to a foster home. None reported having stayed with extended family for any length of time during family crises. As speculated in Hornby & Collins (1981) it is possible that given the opportunity, youth in need of care may be able to generate options for placement that may lie less formally within the child care system. It is particularly important for adolescents to have a range of options for placement available for them as they approach emancipation. As expressed by a number of participants in the current study, systemic support for their efforts towards independent living may have been sufficient to prevent a number of difficult and perhaps unnecessary placements.

Participation in the channels of decision-making within the child care system would likely encourage adolescent clients' progress in facing age

appropriate developmental tasks. Youth who "age out" of a system in which they felt influential may have a more secure sense of internal locus of control and thus increased feelings of empowerment.

Perhaps the most encompassing implication for practice is the change in paradigm for provision of substitute care for adolescents that is indicated by this study. A view that includes consideration for developmental growth of youth within the process of decision-making about their care could inspire creative ideas for practice in the field.

Further questions for study

This exploratory project identified many questions that might be pursued by further research with youth from care. Conducting a similar project with a random sample more representative of all Minnesota youth in care would be valuable for a number of reasons. A random sample would have representation of people of color, the lack of which was perhaps the biggest limitation of the current project. It is difficult to know exactly why no youth of color participated in the current study. The SELF Program as a whole has representation of youth of color nearly equal to their presence in substitute care. Both counties in which interviews were conducted have populations of color, particularly Hispanic and Native American, large enough that one would have expected some representation in the final sample population.

With a random sample of youth from care from throughout the state, a number of valuable questions could be asked. Young people's interest in participating in the decision-making process in the child care system might vary by race, socio-economic class, or by services provided in the county in which they reside. An essential question to assess is the degree to which the self-selection component of the current project influenced the types of participants. It

might be that enthusiasm for having opportunities for input decreases if assessed among the entire population of Minnesota youth in care. Also, having participants from throughout the state would provide responses from a youth who had experienced a wide range of programs, in both rural and more urban areas.

The concept of being treated with respect was brought up frequently by the participants in this project. Further exploration of what youth in care mean when they refer to workers treating them with respect would take the findings of the current project one step closer to being useful to practice. Perhaps youth in care might help develop a training component for practitioners and/or policy makers.

Research with social workers, probation officers, care providers and judges from juvenile courts in the state is necessary for a number of reasons. First, it is essential to assess the perceptions and willingness of the power holders in child welfare to view adolescents in the system as stakeholders and partners in service provision. Before any change in paradigm could occur, the myths that workers hold about the young people they work with need to be verbalized and addressed. Research with workers could be designed to gain a better idea of the myths and beliefs that workers hold about adolescents in the system, as well as the role workers believe youth can/should appropriately hold in service provision decisions. To some degree this might require an assessment of how willing workers are to "share the power".

Research is necessary to identify methods that might encourage youth from care to organize in some way to add their voice to the system. Young people probably need to be the ones to design and implement a potential network. Regardless of who initiates the organizing process, youth will need to

be the key players in identifying what might help youth feel motivated and capable of impacting the system.

Conclusion

Through sharing their own stories, the participants in this study gave voice to the thousands of youth who spend some portion of their lives in substitute care. Although no two experiences in care are the same, there is remarkable consistency in the way youth viewed their experiences with the system. Across the board, participants expressed both feelings of gratitude and feelings of resentment towards the child welfare system. These mixed feelings indicate a belief on the part of youth from care that some things about the system could be different. They spoke with deep passion of the friendships they built while in placement. Perhaps this subculture of youth from care could be tapped to share from their experience what was helpful and what was not about their time with the system.

Among the issues most frequently articulated by the youth in this study were a desire to have channels through which they can share their experiences with workers. They stated simply and eloquently that they want their perception of reality to count. They want a chance to speak. Participants vividly remembered those times when they felt disrespected by individual workers, care providers or the system.

Almost unanimously participants emphasized their desire to have worker and system support for maintaining contact with their families of origin while they are in placement. They want help for their families, and a recognition that crises in families are never due simply to the behavior of one person. Without formal education in systems theory, many participants clearly identified the systems dynamics and tensions in their own lives and families.

Extending the rights and responsibilities of client participation to adolescents facing out of home placement can have significant impact both on individual youths' development and on service provision. Practitioners can provide empowering, identity-enhancing experiences for adolescents in care by systematically including the voices of youth in the decisions that are made regarding substitute care.

Perhaps the most fitting close to a project seeking to give voice to youth would be to end with an insight made by a former youth in care. While planning a presentation to practitioners about her experiences in the system, this fifteen year old woman shared the following song lyrics as "the perfect" expression of what it feels like to be in the system:

*I try, oh my god, do I try
I try all the time in this institution.*

*I pray, oh my god, do I pray
Oh my god, do I pray
I pray for a revolution.*

*I cry sometimes when I'm
lying in bed
just to get it all out,
what's in my head.
And I start feeling
a little peculiar.*

*I wake in the morning
and I step outside,
I take a deep breath
and I get real high.*

*And I scream from the
top of my lungs
What's going on?!
What's going on?!*

*- Linda Perry, (1993)"What's up".
performed by 4 Non Blondes.*

Appendices

Wednesday, January 5, 1993

Pat Doe
xxx E. Lake Drive, Apt. 14
Short Lake, MN 51799

Dear Mr/Ms. Doe:

Thank you very much for your ongoing participation in the SELF Program surveys. On your most recent survey, you checked that you were (or might be) willing to be interviewed. We are now in the process of arranging interviews. If you are interviewed, you will receive a special \$15 payment besides the payments you are receiving for the written surveys.

I am being helped with the interviews by Michelle Chalmers, a volunteer professional who has special experience in working with youth. She is doing her own research about youth who have been in foster care. If you choose to be interviewed, you will be helping the SELF Program and also contributing to the knowledge of other workers and teachers in social services.

Whether or not you choose to be interviewed, you will continue to receive the written surveys. If you do choose to be interviewed by Michelle, please read the enclosed forms, sign the consent form, and mail it to Michelle in the enclosed envelope.

Good luck to you for your independent living. If you have any questions, please call me at (612) 296-5983.

Sincerely,

Paul Wiener
SELF Program Evaluation Coordinator
Minnesota Department of Human Services
444 Lafayette Road
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155-3832

Enclosures

Dear SELF "graduate",

I am a graduate student, working on my thesis, in Social Work at Augsburg College in Minneapolis. I am writing to ask for your agreement to meet with me in order to share your thoughts about your experience(s) with placements in Minnesota. I am interested in interviewing youth who have been in out of home placement either in foster homes, group homes, shelter, residential treatment programs, corrections programs and/or independent living programs.

I hope that by interviewing people such as yourself, and getting your input on the system I can write a thesis that might contain some helpful insights for service providers (social workers, probation officers, residential staff, foster parents).

Paul Wiener, from the SELF Program, has sent you this initial mailing. I will not know your name or anything about you unless/ until you return the enclosed consent form in the envelope provided. Mr. Wiener has agreed to allow me the opportunity to conduct some of the interviews he was planning to do in his on-going evaluation of the SELF Program. You have already expressed your interest in being interviewed by checking off the interview section in one of the surveys you returned to the SELF Program. Because the questions he wants to ask you are very similar to the ones I would like to ask for my thesis, he has agreed to allow your interview with me to also serve as a SELF evaluation.

I have a great deal of experience working with, and learning from, youth in care. I have been a staff in a residential program, done aftercare for a corrections program, and currently work with teenagers and their families in their homes and schools. In part because of my work and status as a former foster child, I think you will find me to be a good listener who has a great respect for the courage it takes for you to tell your story.

Please read over the enclosed consent form, and contact me (with a collect call if necessary) with any questions you might have. Your decision whether or not to participate in this project is completely voluntary, there is no requirement or expectation that you will choose to do so.

I am looking forward to having a chance to meet with you for an interview, and to hear the wisdom and insight you have gained in your time associated with "the system".

Thank you for your time,

Michelle Chalmers
3424 So. 45th Ave.
Minneapolis, MN 55406
(612) 722-7692

Minnesota Youth in Care:
Voices of Wisdom

You are invited to be in a research study of youth in Minnesota who are or have been in out of home placement. You were selected as a possible participant because of your willingness to be interviewed about your experiences in the SELF (independent living skills) program. I ask that you read this form and contact me at home (612) 722-7692 (a collect call is fine) if you have any questions. If you agree to participate in the study, please sign and return this form in the enclosed envelope. Once I receive your signed consent, I will contact you to set up a time to meet.

This study is being conducted by Michelle Chalmers, a graduate student at Augsburg College in Minneapolis, and The Minnesota Department of Human Services, SELF Program.

Background information:

This project actually has two purposes. The first is to be another chance for you to give input about your experiences with SELF. You expressed a willingness to be interviewed in the last survey you returned. The second purpose is to provide me with information for my Masters in Social Work thesis on youth in/from care in Minnesota. I hope to talk with a number of individuals like you to learn about your experience in "the system", and to hear your suggestions for how youth might have more input into how the system operates.

Procedures:

If you agree to be part of this project, I would ask you to do the following things. First, to return this consent form in the envelope provided. I will contact you once I receive the consent to set up a time that I could come to your area of the state to meet with you for an interview. Then I would request that you meet with me at the arranged time for an interview that will last from thirty minutes to two hours. I plan to tape record the interviews so that I can be sure to remember all the valuable things you may share. I may contact you in the week(s) after the interview to see if there are things you thought of later that you wanted to tell me, and to make sure that you are feeling alright after having talked with me.

Risks and benefits of being in the study:

This project has some potential emotional risks to you. I realize that discussing your experience with "the system" may bring up feelings or experiences that are not positive for you. It may be difficult to share some of the information with me, a stranger. Know that the purpose of this study is to get your input about the system, it is not designed to encourage you to tell specific details of your personal experience, although you are welcome to share whatever you feel comfortable sharing. You may choose not to discuss any topic(s) that feel uncomfortable, and may move on to another topic without necessarily dropping out of the study. You will receive payment of \$15.00 from the SELF Program for your participation in this project. Your participation will benefit youth currently in care in Minnesota, as well as those who will enter care in the future. It is my hope that the feedback gathered through this project will have a positive impact on care providers, social workers and probation officers who work with youth in care. I also believe that there may be emotional benefits to you through your participation in sharing what you know about "the system". You are, afterall, the expert.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. The report published by SELF will not include information that could link your feedback to you as a participant. Paul Wiener from the SELF Program will have copies of all interviews conducted. Those interviews may become part of your permanent file at SELF. My thesis will also include protection of your confidentiality. I will not specify in my thesis which counties I interviewed in, instead

the thesis will refer to western, central and northern Minnesota to describe the locations of the participants. Your name will not appear with any information about you, as I will assign numbers instead of names to all written information. All interview tapes will be stored in a locked box at my home. The tape of your interview will be typed onto paper, and then the tape will be destroyed. I will destroy all the tapes by June 1, 1994. Your name will not appear on the written version of your interview.

Your decision whether or not to participate in this project will not affect your current or future relationship with the SELF Program, Augsburg College, or Minnesota Department of Human Service. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships. You will receive the \$15.00 after your interview is completed.

Contacts and questions:

The researchers conducting this study are Michelle Chalmers and Paul Wiener. Please feel free to contact Michelle with any questions you may have (612) 722-7692. Collect phone calls will be accepted. Maria Brown at Augsburg College (612) 330-1771 is Michelle's thesis advisor. She may be contacted if you have additional needs that Michelle and/or Paul are not able to meet.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of consent:

I have read, or had read to me, the above information. I have asked any questions I have, and have received answers. I give permission for the typed version of my interview to be used by both the SELF Program and by Michelle Chalmers for her thesis on Minnesota youth in/from care. I consent to participate in the project.

Signature _____ Date _____
Address _____ Phone (____) _____
Signature of Researcher _____ Date _____

Minnesota Youth in Care: Voices of Wisdom

The following questions are to help us understand your thoughts about the system a little bit better. Please rate your agreement with each of the following statements on a scale from 1 to 5. 1 indicates strongly disagree- -5 indicates that you strongly agree with the statement.

	Strongly disagree.....	Agree.....	Strongly agree	does not apply		
	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. My probation officer listens to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. My social worker listens to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. I think youth in placement have a lot of things they'd like to express about the system.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. I have ideas about things I'd like to change with the system.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. If given the opportunity, I think I would be interested in being part of a group of youth who speak to social workers/probation officers about my experience with the system.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. The adults who are responsible for the places I live/have lived while in placement have treated me with respect.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. I sometimes feel that other youth do not know what my life has been like.	1	2	3	4	5	6

please turn page over to complete questions --->

Strongly disagree.....Agree.....Strongly agree Does not apply
 1 2 3 4 5 6

8. I think that all youth should have a chance to hear about being in placement.

1 2 3 4 5 6

9. I think that all teachers should have a chance to hear about being in placement.

1 2 3 4 5 6

10. I would be interested in being a "buddy" to a younger youth who was just entering placement.

1 2 3 4 5 6

11. I am sometimes embarrassed to let people know that I've been in placement.

1 2 3 4 5 6

What types of placement(s) have you had? Please check all of the choices that apply.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> foster home(s) | <input type="checkbox"/> juvenile detention |
| <input type="checkbox"/> group home(s) | <input type="checkbox"/> corrections program (ie..St. Croix Camp, Woodland Hills, Totem Town, etc..) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> shelter | <input type="checkbox"/> residential treatment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> family members | <input type="checkbox"/> other, please explain |

-
- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I have run from home | <input type="checkbox"/> I have run from placement(s) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I have remained at home when expected to do so | <input type="checkbox"/> I have stayed in my placement(s) |

ID # _____

Consent to include the following interview transcripts was obtained by the researcher just prior to publishing. Because concern for participant confidentiality and control over their stories was key throughout this project, the researcher and the Institutional Review Board decided that specific consent must be received from participants before their interviews were included. The additional precaution of sending out a consent form specifically seeking permission to print the interview was taken due to the fact that earlier consent received from participants did not explicitly state that the interviews would be included in the final published text.

It is difficult to assess the wide range of reasons consent forms were not received back from all eleven participants. While it might be that some did not want their interviews published, it is also quite likely that some participants did not receive the consent form which was mailed out with a copy of their interview in May. On the whole, the population of youth from care tend to move relatively frequently, and some may not still have been at the address at which they lived at the time of their interview.

Appendix F contains only the transcripts for which consent to publish was received from the participant. Also in this appendix is the consent form that was sent to participants regarding the publishing of their interview.

May 16, 1994

Dear study participant;

No doubt you thought you were finished with me, as quite a bit of time has gone by since you took the time to interview with me about your experiences with out of home placement and with the system. My writing is finally coming to an end, and I am very excited about the thesis I have written based on the interviews I had with SELF graduates from around the state.

A number of participants requested that I send a copy of the final transcription of the interview we had. I decided to go ahead and send one to all of you. If you returned revisions to me, you should find them edited into the final text. If you did not return revisions, this will be your second copy of the same thing. I hope you find reading your interview to be interesting; I certainly have. The copy you receive today is for you to keep, don't send it back to me unless you have additional revisions you would like me to make on it.

In the process of writing my thesis I came to realize that the interview transcriptions were incredibly rich sources of information and learning to people who work with youth in care (and probably for youth in care, too). I am writing to you seeking your consent to include the full text of your interview (exactly what you have received) in the appendix (the very last section) of my thesis. I realize that I did not ask you for permission to do this in our initial agreement, so I am doing so now in the hopes that at least some of you might be willing to have your interview included.

I am well aware that you may not want your interview printed in my thesis, as it contains personal stories that you may not want available to the "general public". Please do not consent if you have any hesitancy, as it is very important to me that you retain control of your own story and that you decide how broadly you want it shared.

Once my thesis is bound (like a book) it will be stored in the Augsburg College Library and will be available to anyone who wants to check it out. It will also be available to anyone throughout the country who might want to contact Augsburg to have a copy sent to them for use in their own research. I also intend to give copies of the bound thesis to each of the readers on my thesis committee, which means that a number of human service agencies will have copies on their bookshelves. Your confidentiality has been maintained throughout the thesis as well as within your interview, although there is always a chance that someone

might be able to recognize your story and be able to identify you as the participant.

Recognizing that there are risks to you in having your personal story "out there" for anyone who wants to read it, **I will not include your interview without your written consent on the space provided below.** I plan to take my thesis to the printer on June 6, 1994. I will only include transcripts that I have received written consent by that time to include. Please feel free to contact me at home {collect is fine (612) 722-7692} if you have questions.

Once again, thank you for your time. I have really enjoyed crossing paths with you!!

Michelle L. Chalmers

----- Cut this off and return just the bottom portion -----

Statement of Consent

I agree to allow the transcription of my interview conducted with Michelle Chalmers to be published within the Appendix of her thesis, Minnesota Youth in Care: Voices of Wisdom. In giving consent I acknowledge that I am aware that once my interview is published it becomes publicly available to anyone who requests a copy of the thesis. I have read the final draft of the interview and consent to its full text being included in the thesis. I am aware that my name or other identifying information will not be included anywhere in the text of the thesis or within the Appendices.

Participant's Name _____ Date _____

Please return this bottom section to Michelle Chalmers, Intensive Supervision Program, 919 Lafond, St. Paul, MN 55104 BEFORE June 5, 1994

Minnesota Youth in Care

Interview conducted 2/24/94
Participant # 106
Interviewed at restaurant (2 hrs. from her hometown)

mlc: When you think about your experience with the system, who have been people that you feel understood what you had to say? How did you know they understood?

106: *Foster parents, definitely. They were really exceptional people, they really welcomed me into their home. At first I was in their house for about two days, and then I got sent back home on a trial basis. Then I was at friend's of the family's house for a month after that. The whole time they asked me to do stuff with them. It was around the holidays. They were really neat people. I just recently moved out. Now that I'm in school, I just didn't want the 40 mile drive each way. Plus, it's getting to be time to get out there and show I can do it.*

Well, they didn't talk disrespectfully about my situation, they didn't shoot it down. They said, here's the problem, what are we going to do about it? Here are your options. Very straightforward. No badmouthing me....the badmouthing of my parents came later (laughter), that's another story.

The first night I got there, I just fit in. We had pie with whipped cream...so what do you do with the whipped cream? You take a scoop of it and flip it on the person next to you! I fit right in. They're weird people, very laid back. They have three natural kids, they've always had at least two foster kids. We've had up to eleven people at times, including the foster parents and all the kids. I was the oldest all the time.

I call my foster parents, mom and dad. When I introduce other kids there, I call them my sister or brother. Like I said, they informally adopted me!

mlc: At what times have you felt like you had an influence on the system?

106: *Never. Seriously, never. I didn't feel like I had the power. But there were a lot of other people pulling for me. My social worker, definitely. There was another guy who was indirectly involved. He didn't know me, but he sat down with me and was another one who said "these are your options". I spoke with my guardian ad litem once, maybe.*

Our family has a history ever since our move to (town). My dad's a cop, so he's in the system. He is the system. He knows all the people. All the people knew our family, and what was going on. I had to go to the psychologist, because he was trying to say that I was the one with the problem. Number one, he wanted me admitted into (psych. hospital) for a twenty-one day psych. evaluation. I don't fit into that kind of place. He wanted me to go down to the job corps...I'm not job corps material! He wanted me institutionalized. That's how they (workers) knew something was going on. I just said, "I'm not going back, I won't go back". They asked why, and I told them.

The hardest part was sitting on this side of the courtroom, and your dad is on the other side. Something's wrong there. The image of a family. And the image...it just wasn't there. It wasn't working. We went to two different family counselors. One said "(name) you failed your father, (name) you failed your daughter." I made a decision for me. I wasn't surviving that situation, and I did something about it. I'm definitely a better person for it.

mlc: You look like you kind of feel bad about it, though.

106: *Well, it's just hard. I haven't spoken to him.... Well, I did say one word to him at my brother's wedding. I said "hi". That was a year ago. There's just been no contact at all. It's been such a hassle with school. An incredible hassle. They want me to go to my social worker to write that I don't have contact with my dad. I'm nineteen, I don't have contact with my social worker anymore! My social worker wouldn't even know if I had contact with my father. I don't see myself contacting him anytime soon.*

mlc: If you could give three pieces of advice to a young adult who is just entering the system (either getting a probation officer, social worker or going to their first placement), what would you tell them?

106: *You are getting a second chance. Relax. You are getting out of a situation into hopefully a better situation. Relax. I was in an emergency care foster home for two or three weeks, and people were running from there... just relax. I was in the staffed shelter for four hours, and people would run from there. I just didn't understand that, these people were trying to help them. The shelter said I was cake. They said I was so easy.*

Take a look at yourself, and see how can you benefit from this, how can you grow, what can you learn.

Don't be afraid to get attached. I was in the foster home for three years, two of which I was fostering, one I wasn't. We had kids come in and out, in and out who were so cold. I can understand that. Maybe I'd take that (advice back). I guess the kids are moving so fast, it's kind of a protection to not get attached. When you're so closed, and so into yourself that you can't ask for help... I guess I can get along with just about everybody. There are few people that I can't find something about them to like.

mlc: Did any of the kids let you in in a different way than they let the foster parents?

106: *Oh, yeah, I was "one of them". There was one gal who decided I wasn't one of them. She thought I was in cahoots with the foster parents, the whole world was against her. We had such sad cases coming in, they were just terrible. You'd say the name of the family in public and people would (gasp). The poor kids. Kids can't do anything about it, they're too young. This is what they're learning. We had a brother and a sister, first together and then at different times. They were declared "hopeless". That's sad. They sent them back to the grandmother. They had both been through treatment. Then they decided to put them back into that environment, which just rots... it just rots.*

I feel like I was really lucky. My brother was in foster care, when he found out I was going to foster care he said, "watch out, they're just gonna screw you over". I hear about stories about other foster parents. I know other foster kids. I know I just got really lucky. There are people out there who just do it for the money. Some people just don't give a damn. I got lucky. The horror stories I hear. They make me appreciate even more what I had. A lot who came in just didn't appreciate it.

There were two things to be in that house. You needed to appreciate it, and you needed to be truthful. How hard is that? I understand that truthful can be hard, very hard. I went through that phase. I grew out of it, I survived.

mlc: You are a survivor, but you have more than survived. Sometimes survival implies a bare minimum. What I'm seeing here now is not a bare minimum. You're flourishing. You are not someone who's scraping by.

mlc: Tell about your best placement experience, either one specific event that was really positive, or a placement that was very positive for you. What do you think made this event or placement positive?

106: *The people at my foster home. What was already there. They weren't trained to be nice to you. They weren't there to psychoanalyze every move you made. They were real people. They were really accepting. If you screwed up, it's OK. We're not gonna beat you. Except for your hourly beating in the basement....they would say that just joking around (laughter). It wasn't "here's a place to sleep". It was "how's it going? Let's go do something".*

I was a very happy child, I must have had a really good mother. It's hard to understand. I'm very different than my brother, we see the world totally different. I'm an optimist. He's totally paranoid, thinks the world is out to get him. He had more of a chance to understand more of what went on in the house, he was older. He's incredibly intelligent. He just uses it for, in my opinion, the wrong things. He's brilliant. Just brilliant.

I had a lot of natural brilliance at one time. Now I'm really struggling. It used to be easy. Study, what's study? I haven't kept up, because I never had to work at it. So, I have no study habits, I'm trying to develop them. You really don't have to be smart for engineering, you just have to be determined.

It's weird. As I was growing out of the phase of lying and stuff (eleven years old) that was the time I started realizing something was wrong with what I'm going through and experiencing at home.

mlc: Tell about the worst placement experience you have had. It can be either a specific event or a placement that was a particularly bad experience for you. What do you think made this event or placement negative?

106: *A friend of our family's. With the first family, they found out I was in shelter. They called the shelter, and told them that I didn't belong there, that they would take me. I stayed there three months. My dad didn't pay a penny. The people weren't enormously wealthy, they were just good people. They knew me, and the family situation. They thought we could just work it out. That put them right in the middle of it. Which side are you gonna take? They got it from both me and my dad. The guy I was staying with was a dispatcher for the police department, so he knew everyone, too. They called this guy (the one I talked about earlier, from {organization name}). It was clear the situation wasn't getting any better, it was getting worse and something had to be done. So they called this guy, and that's when we started getting into the court process and stuff. From there it's pretty much a blur. I was surprised how fast it went. There were a few hoops to jump through, like going to a psychiatrist to make sure I wasn't crazy.*

I think my dad's wife (the step bitch) is a big part of the problem. If she was dead, or would just die or something, I think I could talk to him. I'm really against hating people, but I can honestly say I hate her. I was eight when they got married. You don't tell an eight year old "there are two people in the world you trust, and you're not one of them". You just don't say that to an eight year old. I don't care what they've done. She's thirteen years older than I am. I think she was twenty-one when they got married. I was an eight year old who was more mentally stable than she was at twenty-one. The way I see their relationship is she is daddy's little girl. She didn't take my place...that place was never really there.

I'm not saying it was always bad, because it wasn't. It just didn't work out. I thought it was me. I mean she said that stuff to an eight year old, that's when I stopped trying. Why bother? That's when I started lying and stealing. I don't feel good about it, but it will never get to a spot where she could sit across from me and talk. There's just too many hurt feelings.

mlc: If you could give three pieces of advice to probation officers / social workers about what it is like to be in the system what would you say?

106: *Have patience. It's not always going to work out. I had a happy social worker, because I was a success story. I was the easiest kid in the world.*

It's hard because I didn't have a lot of exposure to the system. Most of it was from other kids and my brother.

Families don't always work. You know, that is one of the goals of the system is to get the family back together. The family isn't always there. They can't always get together. You know that Chicago story about the nineteen kids? That's exactly what's going on in (town). Like with those two kids I talked about earlier who went back to their grandma. It's going on with them, and their seven brothers and sisters from three different fathers. The family doesn't always belong back together.

mlc: That stuff really gets to you, doesn't it? You were talking about people who are closed down and don't feel anything. You're practicing what you preach, you aren't closed down. You do feel things.

106: *I get too involved, I really do. I get stressed about it. It's not necessarily something I can't do something about. How much can you do? There's so much there to do, you can't do that all yourself. It took me awhile to figure that out. I was seriously considering being a social worker. "Hey, I've lived through this, it will be cake!" I used to read a lot of books about disabled kids, not necessarily foster kids. And a lot about dysfunctional families. I was in this group in high school. About twenty girls who would meet once a week to talk about how things were going. They were all from dysfunctional families. It was nice cause you're not alone.*

mlc: So what made you decide to do engineering, that's a big jump?

106: *The way they think. It's so different. It's just great. It's a different kind of involvement, than emotional. It's innovative. It's designing, you're building something, you're not breaking it down.*

mlc: What do you think are possible ways of "educating" social workers and probation officers about your feelings as a youth in the system?

106: *Become a foster parent. If you want an experience, become a foster parent. It may do absolute, ultimate damage to what you think is going on. Every kid is so different. Every kid has gone through something different. You laugh a lot, but damn you cry a lot, too. Foster parents and kids, too. We had this one kid, his dad beats him, his mom doesn't want him. He's eight years old. What does he have? Then he comes to this nice, wonderful home. He doesn't know what to do with it. He's never seen this before, he doesn't think this is normal. That's sad.*

My dad and his wife just had a kid, she's two or three. I had to have had five years with my mom with someone who really cared about me, or I there's no way in hell I would

have known there was anything any different. Whereas their new child will never know that there's anything different until she's old and gray. I will say with a new kid, I guess I feel jealous because they're starting new without me. They're deliberately not letting me in. Like at my brother's wedding, they told my brother that if I was going to be there they weren't going to bring her. That's shitty. I don't get it.

Before all the court stuff happened, I had the opportunity to sit down with them. Dad right there, his wife there and a mediator. I got to tell them exactly what I felt. If he heard me it was most likely taken wrong. I won't say he can't grow, but I will say I do grow. I can say we have had this problem, let's work on it. With him, it's set in stone. This has happened, there's nothing you can do about it. Don't you dare try.

It is very sad to think, when I get married who's gonna walk me down the aisle? When I have kids, who's their grandfather? Who's gonna spoil them? Probably not my biological dad. I had spent about a year with my foster parents when I told them that they had been more parents than my parents had ever been. In one year they had been more parents to me. I find that sad. It's too bad. 'Cause he has a great kid, and damn it, he doesn't know it!!

mlc: Have you ever worked together with other youth in/from care to try to influence a particular program or worker? What was that experience like for you?

106: *No, but I've had the opportunity to watch other social workers, and I had a great social worker. One particular worker with one particular kid at our house. He would meet with them at our house (foster home) because he knew if he went to their house he would see that it was not suitable for living in. She was the only child that was out. The worker had only been there once. This woman is on welfare...that's something that I'd like to do, reform the welfare system. I wrote a paper on that. Anyhow, this woman left a freezer unplugged for months because it was broken, but she left it full of food.*

I heard about this stuff in the foster home. That woman went to our church. As much as I like my foster parents, there were things I didn't agree with. They talked. After kids left, they talked about them behind their backs. When I left, I wondered, "gee, I wonder what they're saying about me?" They're nice people, but there are things I don't like.

I saw that one worker who just didn't give a damn

mlc: Are you aware of any groups of youth in/from care who have organized? If so, which groups? If not, what do you think an organized group of youth might look like? What might they do?

106: *I know of none. Of the twenty girls I used to have group with, I haven't seen them. Only a couple of them were in foster care. I dated a guy one time who was in foster care. It was an experience. He was very gentlemanly, very worldly, very sneaky, very sly....but he was such a gentleman about it. It took me two months to figure it out.. He was dating one of the other cheerleaders at the same time.*

mlc: Using your creative abilities to think about this, what do you think a group of organized youth might look like? If I were to put you in a room of twenty other people who'd been in placement, what do you think you might come up with? What kind of things you'd want to do as a group?

106: *Older. I guess I never thought of myself as a typical placement kid. If you took twenty people at random, you would get a lot of confusion and lots of people who didn't*

care. If you had twenty people who wanted to do it, it just might work. They'd come up with lots of ideas. Personally, I wouldn't want a support group thing, but helping others, I could go for that. Support groups are nice, but you've got twenty people sitting around helping each other when there are 30,000 others out there saying "help, help".

They need a feeling that they're not alone. When I was a senior in high school I was part of a group who went into the elementary schools and told them not to drink or smoke... Kids are really smart. You need to start early. One of the kids asked, "why does Curious George smoke?" There was one question on the survey that talked about telling kids about placement. I wouldn't encourage it. I say that families don't always work, but I think lots of times they can. I suppose if it was presented in such a way that says there is help out there, but be sure you need it.

Like with my situation, I wasn't physically beat. But I was in a situation that I wasn't surviving. It's hard to say.

mlc: What does the future hold for you?

106: *Hope. A lot of goals to work towards. I'm going to do well. One of my main motivations is that my dad said I couldn't do it. I'm in industrial engineering. I have friends who started out at \$40,000. I haven't quite figured it out. As a woman, I'd probably make less, but on the other hand, there aren't very many women in the field.*

There's discrimination, but there's also the opposite. There's discrimination race, sex, religion. But if you're saying we need to fill a quota, what's that? Don't get me started. I never was a typical female, but I like it.

mlc: What's your family going to look like? Are you going to have one?

106: *I had one boyfriend who I was really serious with, he was from a really disruptive family. He was afraid of completing the circle. I don't have that worry, because I think I'm different enough. I'm not afraid that I'm gonna do the same thing my dad did. It's life you just keep plugging at it.*

mlc: What's the SELF stuff you're involved with?

106: *Absolutely nothing. My social worker applied for a grant for \$500 for car insurance when I turned eighteen. I didn't know about the program beforehand, I didn't know about the program afterward. What exactly do they do? I got the money for my insurance. I don't know what they do. I understand they send out surveys. I'm looking at the survey thinking it doesn't apply to me. I wrote a personal letter to (SELF) explaining that I didn't know about the program.*

TAPE RAN OUT AT THIS POINT...FINAL QUOTE CAME FROM INTERVIEWER NOTES AS THE INTERVIEW CLOSED.

A friend of mine, a man I worked for, shared a quote with me that I think is really neat. He said that someone asked him one time "What do you not do well" He told them "nothing...there are things I do well, and things I don't do well yet".

Minnesota Youth in Care

Interview conducted 2/26/94
Participant # 121
Interviewed at foster home

mlc: When you think about your experience with the system, who have been people that you feel understood what you had to say? How did you know they understood?

121: *My lawyers, probation officer. That's it. Anytime I asked them to do something, they helped me out and did it. Well, they asked me if they wanted me to be here, or to detention. At one point I lived with my aunt and uncle. I screwed up at my aunt and uncle's so I ended up back at the detention center anyhow. Just not that time.*

mlc: At what times have you felt like you had an influence on the system?

121: *Yeah. When I wanted to have contact with my mom. the court said no. I kept fighting. I guess my mom talked to my lawyer, so it's all changed now. I told my lawyer and I told him I didn't like the system. I told my social worker the same thing, that I didn't like what was going on. What they're doing is trying to keep me away from my mom as long as they can. I said, "look I'm eighteen, I have the right to see my mom".*

When I was younger than eighteen they wouldn't let me have contact with either of my parents. I've visited a couple of times now. I was fourteen when I went to the treatment center, I haven't lived at home since.

mlc: If you could give three pieces of advice to a young adult who is just entering the system (either getting a probation officer, social worker or going to their first placement), what would you tell them?

121: *Don't get in trouble. They don't need to go through the stuff I went through. Just stay clear and get yourself out. I got into conflicts with other kids. When I was in the group home, I just got sick of being there, I was just waiting to get out.*

Stay clean. Don't use, don't do crimes. Stay away from trouble. Go along with the rules. Don't put up a fight or a struggle, it just makes you fall behind.

mlc: Tell about your best placement experience, either one specific event that was really positive, or a placement that was very positive for you. What do you think made this event or placement positive?

121: *Residential at _____. I had a therapist that helped me out a lot. I had a lot of friends down there. My therapist talked me through it, asked me lots of questions. When I had to go to court for my dad, she went with me and helped me through it. She understood what I was going through. I trusted her. She still sends me Christmas cards. I sometimes still call her.*

mlc: Tell about the worst placement experience you have had. It can be either a specific event or a placement that was a particularly bad experience for you. What do you think made this event or placement negative?

121: *Juvenile Center. I just didn't like being locked up for two months. You have to ask for everything, pop, or to walk the hallway. It made me feel crazy. Made me feel worse*

cause I didn't like being locked up. Half the guys there I didn't get along with, staff and that. I didn't like to be told things I didn't like. If I did something wrong, they made me go to bed early. They locked us in rooms at night. I hated that. It was the worst place.

I was there three times. Until I went for treatment. I just kept falling apart, doing stuff wrong. I felt so bad going back. I put up a struggle, I didn't want to go back. When I had court, they told me I was gonna go to (treatment center). I told them if they sent me there I was gonna run. They said I'd get myself in worse trouble. This one cop, when I said I was gonna run put (hand)cuffs on me, they put them on so tight that it hurt. What a joke. I had a bunch of red marks on my hands. They left the cuffs on all the way to (city name, about two hour drive).

At times I wanted to run from (treatment center), but I didn't really have a choice, I didn't have nowhere to go. (treatment center was approx. 8 hours from home).

mlc: If you could give three pieces of advice to probation officers / social workers about what it is like to be in the system what would you say?

121: *Try to help the kid out as much as you can. Talk to them, help them understand the problem they're going through.*

Tell them it's not their fault. Sometimes they get all the blame for whatever happened. Whoever else did it should get some of the blame, too. Parents or whatever should get blame, too. At the time I felt like I got all the blame, but it was my dad who was in on it. He went to Stillwater for awhile, then he got out. He died recently, in October. He had a heart attack. My grandpa died in June, 1983, renal disease. I'm healthy, I don't get sick too often.

mlc: So were you involved with some criminal stuff with your dad?

121: *Yeah. Afterwards I got into trouble with my brothers and sisters. One time we got a call at home, the juvenile officers wanted to talk to me. My parents went with me to the police station. They said they had evidence that I did something. I told them "I didn't do nothing". Anyhow, they said I was under arrest, and took me downstairs and booked me. Put me in the juvenile cell for awhile. They told me they had proof, so I had to tell them. I told them, "I'm not staying here, I'm going home". I wanted to go home so bad. They took me and put me in the juvenile cell. Took everything, my watch and stuff.*

mlc: So, had you done whatever it was they said you'd done?

121: *Yeah. Afterwards they gave me most of my stuff back. I sat there for about four hours, then they took me to (different town). They searched me everywhere. My pockets....*

My dad used to hit me all the time. At home there was a lot of physical abuse. One time the principal came and got me, there were cops there and they checked my back for marks. There weren't any there that time. I guess someone had turned him in for abuse or something. My dad had a four inch board he used to use on us. It was like a board with a handle on it. I think they came and took the stick from my dad or something. He had an extra one. I used to want to stand up to him and fight back. I couldn't. I was too scared of him at the time.

Now my dad ain't around. Before he died this whole conflict never got resolved or anything. My grandpa, he never did anything to me. He treated me like his own son.

Chopped wood with him and stuff. None of my other relatives ever did anything Well, my uncle was in on it too.

He was in Stillwater for the abuse. That's why I had to go to trial. There were five counts on him: mine, my brother and sister, my cousin and my friend. He did two years for the abuse, sexual abuse and that. He admitted two counts, the other charges were dropped. So, I didn't have to testify. That scared the crap out of me. When I was down in treatment, the District Attorney told me I had two choices: either I testify against my dad and he does time, or I don't testify and he walks away. Afterwards he called and said he was sending a subpoena. I told him I wasn't coming up. He said he'd send a sheriff down to get me.

I said I'd just go up with my counselor from treatment. I was fourteen or fifteen. I got up there, and was trying to calm down. I sat in the judge's chambers all morning, wondering what I would have to do. Then I didn't have to testify. I was relieved. I was scared. It was running through my mind, "geez, I don't want to do this". I was afraid my dad would get up and hit me, or that he'd try to get back at me somehow. I couldn't stand it.

Third piece of advice. Try to tell them it's OK to feel what you're feeling. Try to help them go through their problem step by step. That made it easier for me.

mlc: What do you think are possible ways of "educating" social workers and probation officers about your feelings as a youth in the system?

121: *Just come up and tell them. If you need help, you can have someone go with you to support you while you do it.*

mlc: Have you ever worked together with other youth in care to try to influence a particular program or worker? What was that experience like for you?

121: *When we had this abuse group, everyone helped each other out. Helped each other understand what went on in our life. It was for sexual abuse offenders.*

mlc: Are you aware of any groups of youth in/from care who have organized? If so, which groups?

121: *Not off hand.*

mlc: what do you think an organized group of youth might look like? If I were to put ten people who've been in placement in a room together what do you think they might decide they want to do?

121: *They'd talk about certain topics. They'd want to put a stop to the abuse. Talk to probation officers and lawyers about it.*

mlc: What does the future hold for you?

121: *Move to (city) and go to vo-tech. Or work at (place in city). Or go to vo-tech and get more training in mechanics. I'm taking a small engine class now. I have one tough mess of a Ford out there.... I had an auto mechanics class, we worked on cars and stuff.*

Minnesota Youth in Care

Interview conducted 2/6/94
Respondent # 322
Interviewed at parents' home

mlc: When you think about your experience with the system, who have been people that you feel understood what you had to say? How did you know they understood?

322: *The only person that I really got along with was my one treatment counselor at (program). After I was in the halfway house I got in trouble. Well, I had this one counselor, I didn't like her. I thought she was kinda a hag. She was a CD counselor, but she wasn't an alcoholic or on drugs or anything. She had just gone to college, and she thought she knew all this stuff. She didn't know, I mean you can't know unless you've been through it.. I really didn't like her. They were always telling me that I had to be a certain way. I had this one counselor that used to tell us that if she thought we were supposed to feel this way....I had this one counselor in the group home, say if something happened and she thought you should feel a certain way, she'd argue with you. If that was me I'd be feeling this way.*

mlc: Like there was something wrong with you if you weren't feeling that way?

322: *Yeah, like we were lying. I feel like I was being programmed or something, Well anyway, I got kicked out of the halfway house, well I didn't really get kicked out, but I broke a window. I think I got one stitch or something, but they all freaked out about it. They made me go to the mental health unit at (treatment program). And they told them I was suicidal. I wasn't.*

mlc: So how come you broke the window? Were you just mad?

322: *Yeah. At her. I just told her I didn't want to be there anymore because they weren't helping me. And she argued with me. Everything she knew, she knew out of a book..*

mlc: So you didn't have a lot of respect for her?

322: *Well no. She wasn't very nice to us. She'd always tell us "well I'm co-dependent". So. You know. "I've been in college this long"...well she didn't learn anything. You can't know anything unless you've been through it. So anyway, they sent me there and they kept asking me questions and stuff. Finally my social worker guy there said that I wasn't gonna kill myself. Maybe someone else (Laughter..) And he believed me. We had this meeting with the halfway house and my parents came. And then my treatment counselor came, and he was like the only one who stuck up for me. In (town) hospital they have the treatment unit that's on the tenth floor, and then they have that mental health unit. I was down on the mental health unit, and he knew that, so he came down. And he was the only one who stuck up for me, and he got into this argument with my mother. And my mom got mad, and she got mad at my dad because my dad wouldn't say anything. I don't know if he had anything to say...I don't know, my dad never said much.*

mlc: What was the argument between your treatment counselor and your mom about?

322: *She was talking about me like I wasn't there. They were just having this little meeting, and I got pissed off. I think I confronted her on something, and she got all bent out of shape. If you tell her anything, she thinks you're persecuting her. I don't know if you know people like that. I don't know, she's kinda fanatical, if that's the word for it. Well, anyway he stuck up for me, he agreed with me, and got into an argument with my*

mom. My mom got up and left..well, either my mom did or my dad did, I don't remember. It didn't accomplish anything. Except that the halfway house agreed to take me back. So I went back there.

mlc: Where you didn't really want to be anyway.

322: I hated it there. It sucks because they had this fining system. If you get in trouble for something at the end of the week you have to pay your fines. They have this thing called the "house mess" that if someone left their junk laying out for more than fifteen minutes you had to call a house mess. If no one would claim it, everyone would get a fine. OK, if you took the last couple pieces of something, you had to put it on a smaller plate. We swear that the staff used to come do it, and we'd get blamed for it all the time. We'd always get all these house messes, and one time this girl said "well maybe the staff did it". So then we got yelled at by this staff for blaming other staff. One time we got a fine for someone's pubic hair on the bathroom wall. I just hated it. Cause if you got four fines you'd get put on restriction. And I think I only got put on it once, and two of mine were house messes.

They had this thing where they were always telling us we were male dependent. That was just cause I hung out with the guys. there weren't hardly ever any girls in there. See, I had to bring my stuff up from treatment, and I looked at it, and they had wrote in there that I might be male dependent. Ever since I was little, I always hung out with guys and stuff. I just thought they made better friends. I don't know, they weren't always worried about their stupid makeup. I just got along with them better.

mlc: So even if they were wrong, did you understand what they were talking about in terms of the dependency stuff?

322: Well, yeah. But I wasn't male dependent, I just hung out with the guys., I just think they make really good friends. I hung out with the girls, too. I hung out with everyone. They didn't even like me hanging out with the adult females. There were times when there was like only one other teenager.

mlc: What was the problem with hanging out with the adults? Was it that you weren't getting to know peers?

322: Well half the time there wasn't anyone there. OK, there was this one guy came in like two days before I did, so we went through all treatment together. And there were times when we'd be the only two there and then we'd get all these people coming in for a two week evaluation. Most the time the teenagers wouldn't stay. They'd go home or get sent somewhere else. So we'd be sitting there doing our treatment with all these people who were just screwing around. I was trying really hard to get out of there, you know. You got to do a lot of shit in treatment. That was the only place I completed, because I liked it there. I didn't mind it.

mlc: Are you sober now?

522: Well, I don't know. I drink a beer every once in awhile. I don't know. I kinda grew out of it I guess. My mom thought I was doing all these drugs, and I wasn't. The most serious drug I'd done when I went to treatment was pot. They were always arguing with me, I don't know what my mom told them. I think most of the harder drugs that I've done I didn't do until after I had my kid. And that was two years after I was in treatment. I don't think you could name one person who hasn't done pot....OK, well, some people, you know what I mean (Laughter) My parents did it when I was little. I don't know, I

think she just thought I was doing all these drugs. See, I used to stay out, and not ever come home. I didn't like it here when she was here.

mlc: Oh, is this where your family lives?

322: *Yeah, I live with them again. I don't know, I think it just irritated her. She wanted to know what I was doing. I mean, the whole time we were growing up, until I was like fourteen she didn't give a shit what I did. When she was home, she was sleeping or drunk. So we grew up ourselves, we took care of ourselves. I have an older brother and a younger brother. My younger brother never would have passed kindergarten if I hadn't done his homework for him.. Every week he'd get those letters and you had to pick out things that matched the letters. I'd do it for him. I don't know, she was never around. We used to live out in the country, we didn't have a phone or anything. The year I was fourteen, we lived down there (pointing out the window) she got a wild hare or something, she got a job, and quit hanging out at the bar. I was fourteen and my brother was sixteen and my mom thought we should have all these rules all of the sudden. I don't know what she expected. My brother did worse stuff than I did, but he never got in trouble, because her big thing was oh, as soon as he turns eighteen he's out. But, no, I was a girl.*

mlc: What did she think you were gonna do? (laughter). So you felt like he had more freedom?

322: *The only thing with him was that he would come home at night. But he was out doing the same if not worse than I was. I wasn't doing any worse than he was, except I didn't come home. She used to think that I didn't come home for weeks at a time, but I used to come home when she was at work.. I'd come home when she wasn't there because she was such a....I didn't get along with her.*

mlc: How old was your younger brother then?

322: *He was probably about eleven. Her big thing was that she was obsessive over me, because when she was a teenager her mom told her she didn't care what she did. She went a little overboard with me. It just pissed me off because my brother never got in any trouble, and I got sent away. I used to go there and they'd ask me what I was there for, and I'd tell them "oh, my parents put me here". Other kids wondered why I was there...they were court ordered, and here I was. Everywhere I'd go it used to irritate me because everyone would ask me, "Who's your probation officer?" I was never on probation. I never got in trouble. I just got sent away by my mother. She used to call the cops on me. Because I'd go out and stay out all night. The cops used to give me shit, they thought my mom was (weird) they didn't like coming to get me, because of all the paperwork.. They used to just bitch at me "why don't you just go home at night?" I wasn't running away, I was just out...getting high, or whatever. When I was younger I used to say "oh, I'd never do that" (drugs).*

I don't know, I think my mom thought I was like her when she was my age. She used to accuse me of having sex before I did. It pissed me off. She thought I was out screwing around with people. She used to dig through my room all the time. I don't know if she didn't think I would notice someone had been digging in my room. Even if stuff was put back where it was, I could still tell. I used to put stuff in my room just because I knew she would find it. You know nothing I would intentionally have just to have. Like one time I put a knife in there. Just cause I knew she was looking for something. You know, half the stuff she told people in treatment was probably my own fault.

mlc: So in order to catch her, you did stuff that made it look like you had a problem?

322: *No, I didn't do it to catch her. I did it cause I knew she'd flip out about it.*

mlc: Did you expect to get put in treatment over it?

322: *I got put in treatment after I came back from the group home. I ran away three times from the group home. That place was horrid. I bet it's changed since I was there, but when I was there we had all these rules like we couldn't wear eyeliner. I don't know, I was doing really good for awhile because I had this one counselor, but he quit to become a probation officer. So for a whole month I didn't have a one-to-one or whatever you call it. They were deciding who would be my new counselor. One spent time with me because she was pretty sure she was gonna become my new counselor. I just kind of sat.*

I flunked a couple classes in ninth grade because I went to this school in _____ and I skipped all the time. It took me a whole quarter and a half to get kicked out. I didn't like school. I mean, I liked it in grade school but I got sick of it. I think seventh grade was the last time I liked school. After that everything got repetitious. I don't know. I suppose I had better things to do.

mlc: And here you are now, back in school voluntarily.

322: *I don't know, I went to a small school and they were kind of prejudiced, I think. I don't know, they just kind of assumed that I was a trouble maker or something. The school was 7th through 12th, and it's kind of hard to go to school with older people. Me and the people I used to hang out with used to act up, you know then they'd leave you alone. I used to get in trouble all the time for swearing. Some teachers..you wouldn't even know them and you'd get in their class and they'd just kind of be rude. If they're gonna be that way to me, I'll be that way back. If I like the teacher I wouldn't. I used to get blamed for stuff when I wasn't even there. If like one of my friends did something, they would automatically assume it was all of us. Half the time I wasn't even there. I was either at home or out. Then when I went to the group home, I didn't miss one single day of school while I was in there. I made the honor roll and I did really good, because I wanted to go home. But then I didn't have one single family counseling thing, they said we were gonna do all this shit, but we never did any of it...half of it. I just sat there doing all this stupid stuff. I think I went there like in February, and then it was almost summer and I wanted to be home by the time school started, and they told me I probably would. Well then I sat there a whole month without my counselor, so then they told me I had to stay there longer. I didn't want to be there any longer. I hated it there.*

mlc: when you said that there weren't any family sessions, was that because your family wouldn't come, or was it because it just didn't get organized?

322: *No, we just never did anything. I just sat there. They didn't give a shit. They kept putzing around. They'd always get down on us and stuff, saying we had to change. I asked them one time what's the point in me doing anything different if I'm just gonna go home and they're gonna be just the same? They yelled at me. They told me I wasn't supposed to worry about that. I was the one who was supposed to change, I wasn't supposed to worry about my family. What's the point? Go home and she'll be the same way she always has been my whole life. They wouldn't talk to me about it, they said not to worry about it.*

mlc: Did you worry about it anyway?

322: *Well, it's not that I worried. It's just the fact that why should I have to be here doing all this bullshit, when I'm gonna go home and it's gonna be just the same as it was before? I didn't want to be there. No one would understand that the whole reason I wasn't home was that I didn't like her.*

mlc: That it was a relationship thing with you two. It wasn't necessarily that you were broken. Or wrong with you.

322: *Yeah, that it was all behavior. I'll admit that I did a lot. But, the majority of the people my age were doing that, too. A lot of it I grew out of. I mean I'm not saying that everyone when they're a teenager drinks, and screws off or whatever, but the majority of teenagers do. They just thought I'd go in there and they'd change me and I'd come out and be a robot or whatever. Well, no. A lot of it I just had to grow out of myself. Everything was behavioral to them.*

mlc: Did you ever try to talk about the feelings that were below all that?

322: *I used to, I tried at first. If I said something to one counselor, they'd all get together and I'd end up saying something I didn't even say. Then one time my mom came and took me to breakfast, and that counselor I was telling you about who became a social worker (that I didn't like) she was harassing me about what me and my mom talked about. She wanted to know exactly what we talked about. Then she called up my mom and said "Well, did you guys talk about this?" She was so mean to us. She called up my mom and said "what did you guys talk about?...did you talk about this?" My mom got mad and told her what we talked about was none of her business. I wouldn't really tell her anything, because I didn't think it was any of her business. We just went out to eat because I had to do something at school and they wanted her to pick me up. It was their idea. She used to do it to girls all the time. I don't think she liked (her job). I think I had been there for about a month...in the first month you couldn't have any visitors or phone calls. My mom sent me flowers on Valentine's Day. She came and told me that she didn't see why I got flowers because I didn't deserve them. She told me that!*

She didn't think I deserved them because of the way I acted. For one I didn't tell her (mom) to send them to me, and for two, she used to send me all kinds of shit. She'd send me away and then she'd feel bad. And then my brother got jealous of me, because I got sent away. He didn't know shit about being sent away. It's not fun. At all. I mean I know kids say "oh, I wish they'd just send me away". Well, it's not fun. Once in a while it is, I mean I met a few friends, but it's not fun at all. Even if it's really shitty at home....it's like they just came and took you. It's just not fun. I'm not saying it's supposed to be fun, but I think he (brother) got jealous because all my relatives felt sorry for me. It caused a lot of problems in my family because my aunt didn't think my mom should send me away. My grandma used to get mad at my mom.

mlc: So there was some family conflict over it? Could you have gone and lived with one of those guys, do you think?

322: *I just wanted to be away from my mom. I spent most of my time at friends' houses. I probably wouldn't have wanted to go to one of their houses. I probably just wanted to be left alone. Maybe if she had been a little nicer to me, maybe I would have come home, but she wasn't. She was such a hypocrite. I know she went out and did stuff when she was a teenager, but then she thought that we shouldn't do anything at all. I'm not saying you should tell your kids the way you go out and party. But I'm gonna have a hard time telling my kid you can't do that. Who am I to say, I mean I was a teenager once.*

mlc: Have you learned some things from it that maybe you would want to tell your kid?

322: *Well yeah, I mean I learned a lot. I'm not gonna lie to him, I'm gonna tell him how it really is. She was always so worried that I was gonna be kidnapped or killed or something stupid like that. Jesus Christ, I took care of myself since I was little. I wasn't stupid. I know how to take care of myself. We learned that when we were little.*

mlc: Moms still worry about that kind of stuff.

322: *Still, but no one ever treated me like a person. I was just an object. She didn't own me.*

mlc: Even in placement? Were you treated like an object?

322: *Yeah. I think it might have changed since then. But, when I was in placement it was totally behavior. I think she thought the first time she sent me away that I was gonna be this perfect little kid. I already was who I was for fourteen years, I don't think that I was gonna come back and change.*

mlc: This treatment counselor at (center). How was he different?

322: *I don't know, he was just nice to us. He stuck up for us. No one would ever listen to me about my mom. She'd tell me one thing, and then she'd go in there and tell them all this shit. I never knew what she was telling them. When they'd come ask me, then what she said was true, and what I said wasn't. It didn't mean shit what I said. Just what everyone else said. I just gave up. And started running away. It got me out of the group home. I ran away once and they took me back. Then me and my roommate ran away a second time. She went to the crisis center, and I went back. I stayed for like two days and then I left again. My mom was freaking out because I didn't talk to her the whole time I was gone.*

mlc: How long were you gone?

322: *The first time we were only gone overnight. The second time we got busted right away. The third time I was gone for two days. They just told me to come get my stuff. Well, she called up a friend of mine and asked her if she'd talked to me, and my friend said "no". My mom said "if you see her, just tell her she can come home". My other friend called me at a friend's house, so I just called her. Workers didn't really have any say in it, because she had placed me. She still had custody.*

When I went to treatment. They lied to her, my social worker did. She wanted me to go to treatment, but she wouldn't be able to pay for it. They told her that the only way I could go was if she gave custody to the county. We went to court and everything, and they got custody. Then after it all happened she was talking to the family doctor and he told her they lied to her. That I could have gone and she could have kept custody of me. She got custody back...after I went to the halfway house I ran twice. Then my social worker asked "what do you want to do?" I told her I want wanted to go home. So she just let me go. They kept sending me all this shit. Saying that I had to do all this stuff.

OK, part of the reason I ran from the Halfway House..I was talking with this friend there and we were talking about when we were little. And I was telling her about this one time me and some other kids and my brother were doing this shit. I don't think we even knew what we were doing, but we were looking at all these dirty magazines and it was just something we did as kids. It happened one time, and I don't even think we knew what we

were doing. The counselors found out and they called the county. The county found out and said that my brother sexually molested me. He hadn't. It was just something we had done because we had seen all these dirty magazines. Which I think they shouldn't even have because when you see them when you're a little kid..... I think it kind of warps you. I'm not talking about Playboy...pornography.

mlc: So the county called and said that your brother had done this...

322: Yeah, they twisted around a bunch of the stuff I said. This private investigator guy came over to the house. He interviewed my brother and my mom first. He kept trying to make him admit that he did. He hadn't done anything. I felt bad, because he was getting into trouble. Then they wanted to talk to me alone. They wouldn't let my mother be in there with me, but they would with my brother. My mom wanted to be in there. They were trying to intimidate me. I wouldn't answer any of their questions. I told them it was all a lie. They were gonna make it so my brother couldn't live there.

mlc: How old were you two when they were investigating?

322: I was fifteen, he was seventeen. See they were trying to make me say that when it happened that my brother was over eleven, cause then he could get in trouble for it or something. We were all kids, and I think we were all under eleven.

mlc: I don't know what the law says specifically. If you were two years apart, it's not like he was ten years older than you.....

322: It was me and him and two other kids, I don't think that we ever did anything sexual. I think the county thought that he really did something. But they totally twisted around everything I said. I was really mad. I thought I was gonna get my brother into trouble. My mom was all freaking out, but it all kind of blew over.

And then they sent me all these things saying I had to go do this stuff. My mom told me not to sign it. They said I had to go to AA so many times a week, and I had to go to aftercare. They finally gave up and just gave my mom custody back. When it comes down to anyone using anything or quitting, I mean you aren't gonna quit unless you want to. It was kind of stupid of them at the time saying I had to go to AA. What good is AA gonna do me if you make me go? It's stupid. I think that was the last time I got sent away. Well I went to the crisis center a few times. It was stupid.

mlc: Stupid? Was it useful?

322: Yeah it was stupid when I didn't go willingly.

mlc: Did you not need to be there or did you just not want to be there? Lots of times when people go to the crisis center they don't go willingly.

322: They bring you there if you run away and stuff. They put me in detox once, said I was drunk and I wasn't. I was high, but I hadn't been drinking, but I wasn't gonna tell them.

mlc: What's detox like in _____ County?

322: You just kind of sit there for three days. Just a few drunks. Adults and kids together. They make you wear these ugly pajamas. They have this lady come down and do an assessment or whatever.

mlc: Is it scary?

322: *Not if you've been there a few times. I've been there three times, but the second time I didn't stay, I left. I called my mom and told her I wasn't staying. Then I told the guy behind the counter "I'm leaving now" he said "oh, no you're not". He didn't do anything. He was stuck behind the desk...he was big and fat and back there eating. You just walk out the door.*

mlc: Have there been times have you felt like you had an influence on the system?

322: *I don't know that it was just me, but I know the group home has changed a lot since I've been there. Almost everyone I was in the group home with like within a week after they got out of there they were back to the way they were before. I know after I'd been gone for awhile they changed some of the rules, like you could wear eyeliner.*

mlc: Was there ever any changes when you were there...maybe you thought this rule doesn't seem fair...did you ever feel like you had an influence on your experience there?

322: *No, because nothing really changed while I was in any of those places.*

mlc: If you could give three pieces of advice to a young adult who is just entering the system (either getting a probation officer, social worker or going to their first placement), what would you tell them?

322: *You got to play their game, otherwise you won't get anywhere. They can tell when you're lying. That's what I did to get through treatment. I just did everything that they told me to do. Well, I wasn't really lying. I told them what they wanted to hear, but I had no intentions of staying sober I don't think. For a while I did, but in my mind I knew I probably wouldn't. It's easy to be like that when you're there. It's secure, and there's all these other people there saying that they're sober. It's not real life. There you don't have to worry about anything. I could have stayed there forever, I suppose. I liked it there.*

I had a lot of close friends in treatment. I got along with everyone, I hung out with everyone. I got along with my counselors. I don't try to judge people or anything, I either like people or don't like them by how they are to me. It doesn't matter if they're male or female. Part of the reason I get along with guys better is that when it comes to girls, you always feel like you have to compete. We're brought up that way. Girls always have that ...there's always that competition and girls can get pretty nasty. I have. I don't like playing games.

Another thing I don't like is that, everywhere I went except in treatment, they have that if someone's doing something you have to tell on them or you'll get in trouble too. I hate that because I don't like telling on people. That causes friction, too. I got told on all the time by my roommate. Every time I got in trouble it was something my roommate told. She told on me one time for something I didn't even tell her, my brother told her! I got a home pass and got drunk and my brother found out about it. I didn't tell nobody. I did tell this one girl, ____, because we grew up together. My brother told my roommate and she told on me and I got into shit loads of trouble. I got pissed off, and they're like "you shouldn't have told her". And I was like, I DIDN'T tell her. I was really pissed at my brother for a long time. He said "she said she wouldn't tell". She's been telling on me since I got there. I think she's trying to get brownie points to get out. Anything I did she'd go and tell on me.

mlc: What don't you like about that system, of telling on people?

322: *Because it puts you into that position of telling on people. It causes friction. I get into enough trouble on my own I don't need people getting me into more. I just don't think it's fair. How can you trust someone if they're gonna run and tell on you? Even if it's not positive.*

mlc: Trust is important.

322: *Yeah, especially when you're a kid. I never told on anyone, ever. Well someone did do something really bad one time and I did go tell, because she probably would of died. But stupid stuff like smoking or swearing. I mean this one time a girl did something stupid with her hair spray, she drank it or something. I went and told because I was scared she was gonna die or something. They had to call the ambulance, and she had her stomach pumped. She wasn't mad at me for telling.*

mlc: So you know the difference between something that's a crisis and something that's a bad choice.

322: *My roommate just thought if she told on me all the time that she'd be this good person, that she'd get all these brownie points. After she got out and was already home, she used to go tell on people who were still in there.*

mlc: What else would you tell people just going into the system, besides play the game. Is there anything else that you've learned?

322: *Some of the best friends I've ever had were in placement.*

mlc: What makes them different than friends you might meet on the job or at school?

322: *Well friends that I have in college are the friends that I have in college, that I hang out with. Then I have the friends that I go out with. When you become friends with someone in placement, you live with them, you know everything about them.. And you have to share shit that you wouldn't want to ever tell anybody. Your real friends are the ones who didn't make fun of you. They're just closer....you live with them....people in treatment kinda became my family. I'm still friends with my roommate from the halfway house, she goes to college, too.*

Even though I don't talk to most of the friends I had in placement, I mean it's still there. I was still friends with them at the time. If I run into any of them now, that friendship that we had would always be there. Some of the best friends I ever had. Even if it was just like for a month, it meant more than like someone I went to school with. We had a really hard time at that halfway house because it was in a small town. A lot of kids wouldn't talk to us, or they'd give us crap. We kinda had to hang out together, cause no one would really be nice to us. There was this one girl in my grade who I was friends with.

mlc: Did anyone ever bring friends over?

322: *No one ever did...I suppose you could have. It was like, "geez, you guys should feel sorry for us, this really sucks". I mean you are fourteen or fifteen and living a good two hours away from where I was from. You've got this whole town that just thinks..... I think they thought it was funny that we couldn't do all this stuff. We couldn't have boyfriends.*

mlc: Did people ask you questions about why you were there?

322: *Some did. I guess I didn't care what people thought of us. My dad kinda raised us not to be proud. His point was that he's not so proud that he couldn't go outside if he hasn't taken a shower. You know, there are a lot of things that people worry about When I was young I used to worry all the time what people thought, but I don't really care anymore. It doesn't matter anyway, it's not their life. There ain't nothing I can do to change the way people think about me. I've been through so much ...I have more important things to worry about than what people are thinking about me. Like if I have enough gas in the car. People are gonna think whatever they want to think regardless of what they know. The people who are talking about me have no life. They have nothing better to do than sit around and talk about me.*

Your friends from placement are the ones that will help you through. I don't care what anybody says, all the friends I ever had when I was sent away, I loved them all. I lived with them. There you didn't have to worrywhen you're sent away and you become friends with someone it doesn't matter what you look like, or what you've been through. You are there in that placement for some reason. When you make regular friends, you only have to let them know what you want. When you first meet people for a long time they put on this big show. Then after you've known them for a long time then all the bad stuff comes out...the real person comes out. When you meet someone in treatment you're usually meeting the real person, they're already there, because they have to be. You can't hide. I've never had friends like that ever, until I got sent away.

mlc: Does it make you want to do your friendships on the outs in a different way?

322: *No, because I've got to look out for myself. Nowadays a lot of people are out for themselves. I still hang out with friends I've had for a long time. To me, a friend is someone who will be there regardless of whether you're getting along or not. Someone who will put up with you. One of the hardest things in the world to do is to have a friend. A real friend. You go through hell with friends sometimes.*

That was one thing that was hard about being sent away. Some of them that had been there a long time got that attitude that they were better than you. I don't think I'm any better than anyone else, and I don't think anyone is better than me. I don't sit down and worry, OK, this person has all these faults, I have to be better than them. I just am who I am. I can tell right away when people have that attitude. It just really irritates me.

My older brother has done this since I was little. I mean, if that's what you have to do to make yourself feel good, then go ahead. I let my brother get away with more than most anyone else.

Gap to Switch Tapes.

322: *I don't treat my son the same way my parents treat him. It's like they think they're saints now, ever since she went to college. All she is a damn hypocrite, she thinks that if people go out they're bad.*

When they're home they just do it (parenting) ..she runs around behind him doing everything before I can do it. So I don't do it. Then when she's all tired and gets mad and bitches at me because she does everything. Well she does everything because she runs around doing it. If she's gonna do it, fine I 'm not gonna argue with her. But when she's tired and crabby she says "oh, I have to do all this". No one's forcing her, she does

it all on her own. If she didn't do it, I'd do it fine. I used to try to do it, but she'd just run and be over there first. You should spend the day with her as your mother. She doesn't act that way around other people, she puts on a show. If you give her any kind of criticism at all she gets on this big kick, "oh, you hate me". I gave up trying to tell her things a long time ago.She's just rude to people if she thinks they're being rude to her. She does it in public, too. I'm standing right there, they're really not being rude to her. It's embarrassing when you're in a store, and she's being all rude to people.

Part of the reason I live here is that they pay for everything. It's kind of payback for all the shit they put me through when I was growing up. They owe me. She was really nasty to us when we were growing up. When she quit drinking she thought we were supposed to forget it. Then all the sudden she quit drinking and wanted us to stay home and be this little family. Did she think I was gonna tell her I loved her?? I didn't.

mlc: You know, it's possible to forgive and remember. I know you said it doesn't matter anymore, but it really does matter.

322: *It doesn't matter because she doesn't have any say in my life anymore. Once I turned eighteen, I'm in charge of my own life and I'm capable. I know a lot of people who blame all their problems on their parents, my brother does it all the time. Yeah, so they were shitty, but I'm not a kid anymore. When she's nasty to me, I just look at her "ah, shut up". When you're a kid there's that power there, it's not like that so much anymore but when I was little if you talked back you'd get hit. You knew who was in charge. I hated her for a really long time, when she sent me away I really hated her.*

mlc: Even in treatment, where you liked it, you still hated her?

322: *I don't hate her as much as I used to. The only reason I have any love for her, really is that she gave birth to me. When I was little my dad took care of me. He took care of me until I was like three, I think I bonded with him or something. Then when my little brother was born, he went over the road. And I bawled, because I wanted my daddy. I think she was probably hurt. My whole life they've always kind of treated me....they don't give me the benefit of the doubt. They always come to me first when something happens.*

mlc: You've already told me about the best one, so tell me about the worst placement experience you have had. It can be either a specific event or a placement that was a particularly bad experience for you. What do you think made this event or placement negative?

322: *It was probably the group home. I was only fourteen, but I was pretty mouthy. After I was there a while I really did try, but then when they told me not to worry about my family. And I had no counselor for a month. Another thing that irritated me was that we had group every night. We all had these checklists of five points, everyone had different ones. On my sheet I had it on there that I couldn't withdraw, or whatever you call it. Well if I get really mad, I get quiet. Otherwise I'd probably go off. So, we're driving along in the van and all the sudden he (counselor) tells me "I'm quitting". What am I supposed to say, congratulations. Then I didn't say anything for awhile. Then in group they took that point away from me. That pissed me off. They said I withdrew and I couldn't have the points. Well, what am I supposed to do? My counselor just told me he was leaving, was I supposed to be all happy? He didn't really say much of anything. I didn't talk to him much after that. I was mad, he was my counselor. I didn't like any of the other counselors there. After that, I said screw it. I quit working. I was shocked.*

There was nothing to say. I guess you couldn't be a regular person there, you were supposed to turn into a little robot. I felt like I was being brainwashed. At times.

A lot of people have this attitude that kids are just mindless little things. I never got treated like a person. It's like people become an adult and they forget that they ever were a teenager. No matter if you grew up in the 20's, 30's or 90's everyone was a teenager.

mlc: That leads right into my next question.. If you could give three pieces of advice to probation officers / social workers about what it is like to be in the system what would you say?

322: *It sucks because you don't have anyone on your side. It's like you're fighting against all these adults who have more say over your life than you. They say "we're looking out for your best interests", but no one ever asks you. And when you do, you don't get believed because you're automatically this troubled kid. That's how it is. It's like you're looked at like this number or this case. Your parents and social worker have more say than you. No one believes you. My mom would say something to me and then something different to them. And it would get me in trouble.*

mlc: No wonder you were mad enough to put your fist through a window.

When you're a teenager fourteen or fifteen, that's like the worst year, that time when you're just crabby from hell.The ones that were nice to me I never mouthed off unless I was having a really bad day. I'm not like that now, but when you're a teenager it didn't really matter what you did to me. When I was a teenager it didn't really matter....you don't really see the future at all cause you don't have to worry about that, your parents do. Everyone else does. When you're a kid you worry about today. I didn't even think about tomorrow. When I was a kid there wasn't anything they could really do to hurt me anymorewhat could they have done?

mlc: So when does that orientation change to be able to think about the future a little bit? Do you think about the future now?

322: *Yeah. I sometimes wish I was a kid again.. In a way I don't, cause I had a really hard time to survive. The problems I had than weren't as bad as I have now. When I was a kid I didn't have to worry about the stuff I do now. Even when she sent me away and all that, they still did everything for me. I never had to worry, I just knew she would. It still happens now sometimes with my kid. I know she'll do it.*

mlc: Are you grateful for that?

322: *Well not really, no. 'Cause I don't ask, she just does it. And when she gets mad she bitches at me about it. I don't know one person who wouldn't like someone to come in and do something for them. It's easier to just let someone do it. Why argue with someone who's doing something you don't really want to do, but you would do if you needed to.*

mlc: What do you think are possible ways of "educating" social workers and probation officers about your feelings as a youth in the system?

322: *I don't see how they can forget that...don't they remember being a teenager. Don't they remember going through puberty.*

mlc: Do you think teenagers in the system are any different than other teenagers?

322: *No, they just get in trouble more. Basically no.*

mlc: Do you think many P.O.s and social workers were in the system as kids? I was thinking about your comments about that CD counselor who you didn't think could understand.

322: *A few. Most of them haven't been. There are certain things you just can't know, unless you've experienced it. How can you sit and tell some kid to straighten out their life and not do this if you've never done it yourself. It probably looks easier. They say "why can't you just go home?" There's more to it than just that. I still can't explain some of what I did.*

mlc: You talk about asking workers if they remember what it was like to be a teenager, who should ask them? Can you think of ways that they could be asked?

322: *The ones that really want to help the kids are nicer.... it would be hard because not everyone has the same opinion.*

mlc: Do you think it's worthwhile to let workers know?

322: *Yeah, but there will still be the ones that it's not gonna matter. They have their opinion. If they've had that opinion for years they're not gonna change. If they want to know I'll tell them, but I'm not gonna tell someone who doesn't care or won't believe me. There are even some cops....when I was sixteen one told me that the day I turned eighteen. I've never been in jail yet. I would never go do something stupid enough to go to jail. They put your name in the paper, that would be enough to stop me. It's kind of different because I have a kid, I wouldn't want my kid going to school and hearing kids say "your mom....." I think it's even more embarrassing for moms than for dads, cause a lot of guys go to jail. When you think of your mom, I don't think that looks good. I don't want people teasing my kid.*

Growing up I always hung out with older people. We hung out with people's brothers. (Access to alcohol?) We didn't need them around to get alcohol. It's not that hard. We used to ask people we didn't know. We'd hang out outside this liquor store...I asked this Mexican one time to buy for us. I was kind of kidding, but he said yes. I didn't really like hanging out with too many people in my grade.

Long conversation about gossip and growing out of it.

mlc: Have you ever worked together with other youth in/from care to try to influence a particular program or worker?

322: *Well me and this other guy I was in treatment with....there was a bunch of kids in there too, but they were screwing off. There was this other girl in there who was reading her autobiography and there was a bunch of stuff in there. Shit that happened to her when she was little. (molested by a baby-sitter) This one guy was making fun of her. Me and this other guy got really irritated because we were the only two there left who hadn't graduated and we were trying to really work our program. And all these other people kept coming and screwing around. I didn't really want to share my stuff with those people. We said something to this one lady, and we got to say something to them in group. I didn't want to sit there and share my stuff with them after they blasted that girl. I said something to them in group to stop. She started crying. (she was really young, I think she was thirteen) It wasn't fair to us. These kids would come in for their two week*

evaluations and then they'd leave, they didn't care. You were in there and supposed to be doing all this work. They straightened out. Staff agreed with us. We wanted to be in a group by ourselves. It wasn't the fact that I'd get hurt, it was more that why should I have to sit and talk about this stuff if they're just gonna goof off?

mlc: Are you aware of any groups of youth in/from care who have organized?

322: *That's how that _____ program started. I go to the teen parent group. When it first started I wasn't eligible because you had to be in out of home placement after the age of sixteen. All my placements were before that. Then I was in the crisis center for like a week when I was seventeen. I've never been to the other group, but my group gets together once a week.*

mlc: How is the teen parent group different than the other one? How come they don't all meet together?

322: *We have kids, and they don't. I've been going almost every week for two years. I have lots of friends that go. We go shopping and stuff. Last year we went to Valley Fair with the other group. Every time you go you get incentive points, like at Wal-Mart. Sometimes we do stuff...last year we did this worksheet on co-dependency. We had to quit part way through because all these girls got into a fight. One of them was in the middle of a divorce.*

Son entered with grandparents.....lots of talk about rides and play dough. (322's mother in and out of room during remainder of interview.)

mlc: What does the future hold for you?

322: *About fifty years of college...I want to get my Ph.D. Probably in English. I want to be a writer, here's not really a degree in writing. Nowadays you need more than four years of school for lots of fields.*

I'm working on two research papers for English, and one on my health. I think I was a little more healthy before I went through that pregnancy. Did you talk to doctors. They say being pregnant is hard on your body when you're still growing. The birth itself wasn't as bad as the whole nine months. The birth was what I call a "near death experience".

He was sick when he was a baby...allergic to his formula.

mlc: So you'll get a Ph.D. in English, that's school. You gonna keep living in _____?

322: *No, when I graduate I'm gonna move to (city name). There are too many trouble makers here. It's gotten bad here...this new generation thinks they're rappers and in gangs. When I was a kid the worse thing we could do was wear a Metallica t-shirt. I don't want my son to grow up here.*

mlc: Anything else you think I should know as I'm writing....

322: *Kids have a hard enough time getting through adolescence. I don't know, I don't want to say that they need more people on their side, because it shouldn't get down to sides, but it does. I felt like a lot of time I was being looked at like an object.*

mlc: I heard a teenager at a conference on time, she must have been eighteen, say to a room full of social workers "it may be your Case plan, but it's my life".

322: *Yeah. To a lot of people it's just their job. Well I'm gonna be who I am, you can't change me. I'll change my self when I want to. Lots of times when kids get in trouble their lives are really shitty. There's more to it than just behavior. A lot of people have misconceptions about teenagers and about placements. My brother thought it was neat, I got to go shopping and do all this fun stuff. Yeah, they did take me shopping and I got all new clothes, and I got an allowance every week.. I mean I would have given that all up if I could have come back home.It's like they take you away from everyone.*

mlc: Did you feel lonely sometimes when you were in placement?

322: *I felt like they had taken over my life. That was probably the hardest thing about it. Even if you didn't want to live at home or whatever, it's where you grew up. It's the only family you have. You can't pick your family. Yeah, it was my life. I was too, young, I was only fourteen when I got sent away. One of my friends was sent to a group home when she was twelve..*

mlc: Are a lot of your friends now people who have been in placement, even if it wasn't with you?

322: *Yeah, the majority of them have been in placement. Foster homes, group homes. The majority of girls I grew up with have kids now, even the ones who made fun of me.*

mlc: so if you had it to over would you have had a kid at sixteen?

322: *I don't know, I guess I don't worry about doing it over. If it wasn't meant to be, it wouldn't have happened. Some times I think it's kind of mean to have kids now, the way things are going. The world is rotten compared to when I was little. They've kind of started to do things now, like how violent TV. is. I'd probably want to change everything. For me personally, I guess it doesn't bother me...it bothers me when I think about my son. I think that's pretty sad to say that I really don't have much feelings anymore. Like how mean people are, it's kind of sad to hear myself say that it doesn't bother me anymore. I look out for myself and my son. Things have gotten so bad. Our whole society has become sort of passive about things that are going on.*

mlc: So is that the way you want to be, passive?

322: *I don't want to because I don't want him to grow up that way. I can't be something that I'm not.*

mlc: What you are, though, is really, really bright and really articulate. And really aware of things that maybe you could make a difference about.

322: *Yeah, but it almost comes down to I've gotten used to how things are. I'm not sure if I want to make a change. I mean for him I do. If we keep letting all the new generations be like that, geez, what are things going to be like when I'm old. Now we're kinda paying for the way people lived...the environment...they did all the fun and all the damage.*

mlc: It almost sounds like you're saying some of those things about teenagers that you don't want to hear other people say about teenagers.

322: Yeah, but it wasn't that bad then. I think it's getting worse. Unless someone does something. They say that by the time a person is eighteen they've seen something like 8,000 murders on TV. Kids are running around shooting each other, they don't care. Well it's not that they don't care, maybe no one ever taught them to.My son gets all weird when he sees that stuff on TV.say a man is beating on his wife, he'll ask me what they're doing. Mostly he just watches Barney. When I think about him, I don't want him to see all that. Little kids shouldn't see that stuff, they're pretty impressionable.

mlc: It sounds like you are a pretty good mom. That you know all this stuff, if you can keep doing what you know.

Minnesota Youth in Care

Interview Conducted 2/4/94
Participant # 312

Interview conducted at 312's apartment was a joint interview, however consent for publication was received only from #312. The responses from the second participant present have been deleted from the text.

mlc: When you think about your experience with the system, who have been people that you feel understood what you had to say? How did you know they understood?

312: *My foster parents were pretty good....I spent about a year when I was sixteen.....They listened when I talked. One time I was supposed to get grounded, actually I was grounded, and I left. But, I had a really good reason. They listened and let me tell my reasons. My parents never did that. Now that I'm a parent, I know why, but (laughter...). I had (my son) there with me, that's why I went to a foster home, because it was really hard with him at home. I had him when I was sixteen. My mom was too much help, she was always there and she always wanted to be there, you know? My foster parents were really good they didn't step in, they didn't do anything...if I asked them to baby-sit, they'd baby-sit. Or if I fell asleep on the couch, they'd keep an eye on him. Other than that it wasn't "do this, do that"....*

mlc: They let you parent him, you mean? And were supportive if you needed it?

312: *Exactly.*

mlc: How did your mom feel about that? Did she feel like she was missing out?

312: *Oh, she was irritated. She still once in a while will bring it up, throw it in my face.*

mlc: That was just a year, right?

312: *Yeah, then I moved out on my own. He was six months old when I moved in. I saw my mom a lot...we just had a hard time adjusting. All my little brothers were just little, I think my youngest one was six. It was hard for her to not try to parent me. I was barely sixteen. At the time I thought I was so grown up...don't you dare tell me I can't do this, I'm an adult now.*

mlc: Has it been hard?

312: *No. Not really, it was really good. But four, four is not a good age. Five's a little better. But I had good kids. He got a new personality when he turned four.*

mlc: It looks like you really do the parenting stuff well.

312: *I try. That's the group I go to with SELF. A parenting group.*

mlc: How many people are involved with that?

312: *I believe there are about six girls. We just call it "Teen moms' group". We started out in the SELF group a years ago, then they realized there was a need for a teen parent's group. So we branched off.*

mlc: Do any of the dads go?

312: *No, it's just the moms.*

mlc: How has that been helpful?

312: *Oh, it's been great. It's so good. It's really nice, because they actually know where you are coming from.. Now I'm twenty-one, so I'm not actually in it but I'm a mentor. I can see it when the girls come in. I've been seeing it for awhile, when you first come in you think you know everything. But, you don't. Then you realize it's OK. But you've spent so much time trying to prove to everyone that I know it, and I can do it. Then finally you find out that you don't know it all. And it's OK to not know what to do with them.. That's a really hard thing, you know, cause everyone is telling you "you can't do it, you can't do it, you can't do it".*

mlc: Do you think it's easier for young women who are new parents to hear feedback from other young women?

312: *Yeah, definitely. I just did a paper for college on teen parent support groups. One of the girls I interviewed said she finds it a lot easier because she always felt like her parents were always telling her what to do, instead of suggesting things. And when it comes from us she can take it as a suggestion, rather than as we're saying "you're not a good parent, you're not doing it right, you need to do it this way". It's easier now, because she can take it from us...we say "try it this way, we tried it this way.*

mlc: Wow. That says a lot about the teen moms' group.

312: *It's really good. We do crafts, too. That's nice too. It's nice to get out, because I don't get away from my kids real often. It's nice to get out and not have to be sitting in class or at work. I can just relax.*

mlc: so you don't bring the kids?

312: *Not unless we have to. If we can't find baby-sitters then we bring them. Most of the time we find baby-sitters.*

Discussed craft project that was on living room shelf.....

312: *We made angels for Christmas. I must have put mine away. I made thirteen of them on my own. It was great, I made them for my kids' teachers. With the little one being deaf, he has teachers coming in. Between the two of them, they had thirteen teachers. That's a lot of money for kids' teachers presents, so I made them.*

mlc: I bet they loved them.

312: *Yeah. Especially (son's name) teachers, because he helped make them.*

mlc: Were there adults who helped in the SELF group you were in and after it split off into parenting that you thought were pretty reasonable people? That were helpful to you.

312: *I pretty much liked them all. I liked (name). She was the very first one. And I really like (name), she's doing it now. The others I don't really remember ...turnover, and the ones who are interning. They're only there for a couple months, then they're gone.*

mlc: Have there been times have you felt like you had an influence on the system?

312: *I had to fight my way out of the foster home. I was only seventeen, and I felt like I was quite mature enough to live on my own. My mother completely disagreed with me. My foster mom, I believe, agreed with me, and my social worker agreed with me. I sat down with my social worker and said "all right, how do I do this? I don't want to live at the foster home, and I'm not going back home." My foster mom called my social worker and said "what are we gonna do?" My social worker said that Minnesota doesn't have an emancipation law, but have her sit down...I sat down with my big book and I wrote out budgets, and what I'm gonna do with my life...and how I was gonna find day care. I gave it to my foster mom and she showed it to my social worker. Then I went in and we had a meeting with my social worker, she said, "don't repeat me, but if you move out you have my blessing, and I don't think your mom is going to do anything about it, because I will talk to her, and I will show her this book." I'll tell her that it would be pretty hard for her to get you back home for six or eight months.*

mlc: So she was really supportive?

312: *It took her awhile. At first she wouldn't listen, it was awful. I think I had to run away three times from my mom's to get into a foster home. I wanted to go to a foster home. My husband, that's (son's) father. We just went and moved in with him three times. My mom came and got us, and made us go home. And we do it again and again. Finally she got the social worker involved, because we kept doing it. The social worker said OK.. When (son) was a baby, my dad was just irate. I wasn't allowed to see him, (boyfriend) I wasn't allowed to bring (son) over there. My mom would bring me over there once a week for two hours and not tell my dad. I was just like, no this is his son, you don't have any right to do this. So, I wanted to go to a foster home. It got more lenient, needless to say.*

mlc: When did you guys get married?

312: *September of '91.*

mlc: It looks like your dad has mellowed out.

312: *He didn't have much choice. I married him. He even likes him now. He just didn't like the idea.....*

mlc: If you could give three pieces of advice to a young adult who is just entering the system (either getting a probation officer, social worker or going to their first placement), what would you tell them?

312: *Work with it, probably. That would be one. This friend of mine, she went into the foster home where we went. She was just rotten. She could have been out of there months before, but she was just horrible. She used to run away every once in a while and she'd never make it back for curfew. I mean she was rotten, therefore she was always grounded. And us, we were always going out, and there she sat on the couch. Her life could have been simple, just simple. I guess she didn't want it that way. She's grown up a lot. It's a lot easier to go with it, than against it.*

mlc: When you made that decision that you wanted to live independently, you weren't going with the system then, were you? You had to "fight your way out of the foster home". Might there be some advice in there? How did you make that decision?

312: *Actually, I just wanted to move in with him. They said no. They said your options are foster home, go home...I believe those were my only options. I said I'd rather go to a foster home.*

mlc: When you decided you wanted to live on your own, you decided you knew best what you needed.

312: *Yeah. But I was still working with it in a way...I didn't just run. I didn't just say see ya, I'm moving out. Actually, it was working with them. I told them what I wanted and they told me what I needed to do.*

mlc: You were really creative in working with it.

mlc: Tell about your best placement experience, either one specific event that was really positive, or a placement that was very positive for you. What do you think made this event or placement positive?

312: *Well, I was only in one foster home. It really was good. I guess for me it would be harder for a child who just ran the house, and did what they pleased. Cause, I just got to go out one night on weekdays, and one night on weekends. My house was really strict. When I got there I got to go out two nights during the week, both nights on the weekend. I could even choose my own nights on the week nights! It was like, whoa, heaven! My curfew was midnight instead of 10:00. It was really nice. We had responsibilities, but we got an allowance. I didn't even get an allowance, come to think of it.*

mlc: Did you feel that the responsibilities you had were fair?

312: *Yeah. Except, their son got \$10.00 more a week than we did, and he didn't do anything. Oh, I take that back, he did take his week with the dishes. But we vacuumed, we dusted, we did all that stuff. He got \$20.00 allowance, we got \$10.00. I didn't think that was cool.*

mlc: How did you handle that?

312: *Never said anything. Talked about it behind their back.*

mlc: Was that helpful? (laughter...)

312: *Nope. Not at all. I wish I had said something. I don't know if it would have made much difference. We did talk to them about things. There was this one girl who got put there, she was younger than us. She didn't feel the need to take a shower. We finally went to our foster mom and said, "she stinks". She said, "well, you girls need to suggest she takes a shower." We said that it wasn't our place. And she said "yes it is your place, because it's you she's trying to keep up with. She's afraid to take a shower cause she might miss something." That was probably what it was. There were four of us girls in there, all we did was sit outside, and...oh, we were allowed to smoke there, too. That made life much less miserable. It was so ridiculous with my mom, because I was gonna do it anyway. I used to have to walk half a mile to get somewhere where she couldn't see me. Out there we could sit on the porch and smoke.*

mlc: Were there other ways that you felt you were treated differently than their son? Were the lines clear to you between you guys and their kids?

312: *No, because they weren't really loving people. I mean you knew that they cared...they cared about you. I still stop by sometimes and say "what are you doin'?" They weren't loving with their son, either. He got exceptions, but I understand them because he was in sports and stuff like that where they stayed out later. So he got to stay out later than the midnight. She said, "if you need an exception come ask us, and we'll let you know if that's acceptable or not". They were pretty fair.*

mlc: Tell about the worst placement experience you have had. Can you think of a specific event that was negative? What do you think made this event or placement negative?

312: *Yeah, I can. Their choice of food. Our foster father did all the cooking...he'd watch the things on TV. and then he'd cook them. One time I was out, and I came home and she (a friend who was over #501) brought me into her room and pulled this baggie out from under her pillow. Look.....this was supper. I said, "what is it?!" It was like hamburger and eggs, and it was red....*

Went on to tell cooking "horror stories" about foster dad confusing cucumber for a zucchini.

312: *We used to buy Captain Crunch and white bread and hide it under our beds. They'd catch us, and we'd get in trouble.*

mlc: Were they wanting you to eat healthy?

312: *I don't know. One time he bought this cereal, and we liked it...we ate it. It was granola or something, we ate it. He came home with sixteen boxes of it the next time he went to the grocery store. We were just like...(scream!!). I think we ate macaroni and cheese for a month straight...there was nothing else we liked there, but they wouldn't listen to us, so we made it.*

mlc: Did they ever give you a chance to do the cooking?

312: *Yeah, we could cook if we wanted, but we had to cook with what was in the fridge. That wouldn't go very far. I know she (referring to other participant) complained to her social worker many times.*

mlc: You had to hide it?

312: *She got caught with it. They took it all away. I don't know what they did with it. The food was so bad one time that he got up to answer the door, and my foster mom said "quick, the garbage disposal."*

312's brother was baby-sitting, he came into the living room to report that one of the kids needed a diaper changed.

mlc: If you could give three pieces of advice to probation officers / social workers about what it is like to be in the system what would you say?

312: *Listen. You have to listen to the person.*

312: *Here's one advice....Your parents didn't have to have anything. They didn't have to have any treatments, or any visits or anything, did they?*

312: *But were they required? Once you got put into the system, were your parents required to get counseling? I think the parents should be. A lot of the time it's not the kids, it has a lot to do with the parents, I think. . I think the parents should at least be evaluated...granted, sometimes it is just the kid. But, the parents should at least be evaluated. And go through the same types of questionnaires....maybe the parents' values are just "whacked" and the kid is like, "no way!"*

mlc: What do you think a worker would say if you suggested that to your worker?

312: *I'm thinking, too...the parents that just don't care. They let their kid run wild, and all the sudden decide "I don't want to deal with you". Especially those ones, the parent should have counseling on how to parent...your child can't run free. What's gonna happen after the kid gets back from foster care? They're just gonna go right back.*

----- Gap to talk with other participant and the two dialogued together -----

mlc: Any more advice for P.O.s? You guys are just absolutely amazing. You know so much. It is so cool that you're letting me sit here and yap with you. This just blows me away.

312: *We've been doing this a long time. I've been in SELF since the year it started...1990. We weren't in independent living skills very long. We very quickly broke off into teen parent's group....*

mlc: How come you guys broke off into that group?

312: *When it first started, we were younger, we were more immature and we could handle it. As we got older, the kids coming in were fifteen, sixteen ...we were getting older, we had kids. What they needed to learn didn't apply to us, and what we needed to learn did not apply to them.*

mlc: Were you guys a little more serious? Did it seem more urgent for you to get those skills? What kinds of skills were you wanting at eighteen, nineteen that those fifteen and sixteen year olds weren't needing?

312: *Parenting. What do we do for discipline? What do we do when this happens?*

mlc: So you were beyond check balancing and stuff?

312: *Oh, we still do that. With the teen parents....when we were first going it was terrible, we'd have to sit through lectures on how you buy a used car. They lectured and lectured. Now we go and talk, and whatever we need to do, we need to do. If someone is having a problem we talk about that. It's our own little group...we say whatever, do whatever is done that day.*

mlc: So you guys kinda set the plan? Who were the "adults", cause you guys are adults, are there mentor people there?

312: *(SELF leader) does it. Once in awhile she brings in someone to talk about something, or an intern. We more pick out...she says "what do you guys need to work on?" If somebody were to say "help me with my checkbook, I'm in trouble" we'd do that.*

----- Gap to talk with other participant -----

312: *We really did have a good time in the foster home...it probably could have been ten times worse if we had just gone about our daily things...*

mlc: you guys have managed to build a support network, which you still have now. What you have now that grew out of that foster home is pretty amazing. You have exactly what young parents need is people to help you watch your kids..

mlc: What do you think are possible ways of "educating" social workers and probation officers about your feelings as a youth in the system? How could we teach social workers and PO's about it.

312: *This is probably going to sound dumb, but it's easier learned than taught Now when I'm a social worker with teen moms I'm gonna know. I don't know how you can tell.*

mlc: So you think people who have been through the system will automatically be more knowledgeable than people who haven't?

312: *I'd say they'd be more knowledgeable, not necessarily a better social worker.*

mlc: I think when I was in that spot, at fifteen going into a foster home, I would have loved to have a social worker who had a clue. So is there anyway to teach what it's like?

312: *They should have a board of youth from every walk of life, young and old who have been through it. And have a big seminar somewhere. Have them sit and listen. It should be mandatory that they be there to keep their social work job, or whatever. Listen to them, actually listen to the stories. They would maybe say "wow, half these people are saying the same thing." They might get it. That might help.*

mlc: Do you guys know there is an organization (MAYPAC) that sometimes is real together, sometimes only sort of together, kids who have been in placement, some even your age. Who are organizing to do just that, to talk to workers....schools. You have thought of something that lots of other young people from care are thinking about.

mlc: did you have some of those visions, too?

312: *Oh, yeah. I wanted a baby, but I didn't think that would really happen. It wouldn't happen to me. I more had that "syndrome". But, man once I was pregnant it was like it was all gonna be perfect., the baby would be perfect*

Brother asked from across room "when did you tell mom?"

312 *The day I found out. From a telephone waaaaaaay across town. Didn't go home until late that night.*

312's brother: I hated him...all while she was pregnant, I hated him. I didn't once he was born. I don't know why. (312 interjected...he was embarrassed, he used to cry because he didn't want to get on the bus with me)

312: *When I got pregnant, I was hanging around with dirtballs, more or less. As soon as I got pregnant all groups no matter who they were, were coming up and feeling my stomach. Oh, everyone was my best friend. When I had the baby there were thirteen people in the waiting room!*

mlc: Why do you think all those people thought it was such an exciting event?

312: *Babies are so precious, and sweet...fun...it's not gonna keep me up all night, it's gonna be perfect.*

mlc: once you had the baby, how many of those thirteen people hung around to help?

312: *most people were really good, we've had a lot of support.*

mlc: You kind of answered this with the teen parent group stuff, but...have you ever worked together with other youth in/from care to try to influence a particular program or worker? What was that experience like for you?

312: *I guess just our group...we all put in our input.*

mlc: Are you aware of any groups of youth in/from care who have organized?

312: *I know one girl, one I interviewed for that paper...she tried to start a teen parents group at the ALC, but they're having trouble getting it going....After Christmas a lot of them dropped out of school....She wanted to talk about everything, but they couldn't get past talking about parent issues and their babies.*

mlc: What kind of advice could you give about teen parent groups? Because it sounds like yours is just exquisite.

312: *You can't really have a facilitator. You can, but you really can't because it's got to be your group. It can't be (leader's name) group. It has to be our group. Everyone has to have a say into what you do. That's why I think ours works so well, because we're given that freedom.*

mlc: Sounds like you weren't "given" the freedom, you kind of "took" it. It is your group.

312: *She did try to set stuff up for us like that, but we'd get off track....*

312: *We'd be jabbering about, oh my week was so hard... We'd talk for an hour and a half, and she'd be like, "let's get back to our sheets, girls". She tried to do a co-dependency thing for us one time...it didn't work.*

mlc: We're people just not into it, or was it hitting too close to home?

312: *Too close to home for almost all of us.*

312: *We were screaming at each other around the table.....(talked about group/friend dynamics) One of our friends in the group has an alcohol problem, and lots of other problems, ...we had told her to grow up or go away and she chose to go away. Then right after that we had this co-dependency thing...*

mlc: do you think there's a way to do the co-dependency thing and be nurturing...that seems like what you need is to be nurtured, not blamed.

312: *That's part of it..we nurtured, and you can only nurture so long before you get pissed off. It's like Listen to me, girl!!! Lay it on the line, come back and nurture, then lay it on the line again....this thing about her (the other participant)drinking really makes me mad, I came really close to "going away" yesterday.It just made me really*

mad....last night I was ready to kill her, if I would have gone over there, I would have been in her face.

mlc: Why are you so invested in whether she drinks? What is it about that....

312: Because I love her...and him(baby)...it would have been different if she went out once a week....it was too much. She wasn't taking care of anything.....

312: I didn't know that...I didn't know if I was over stepping my boundaries by stepping in. I didn't know how bad it was until one of our friends called last night and told me how bad it was.....

mlc: I'm sure you've done countless checklists on alcoholism....but you do realize that change of personality when you drink is near the top of the list? I just thought I'd throw that out, not that it's my place(laughter).

312: I think she has a problem, I think AA could help her, I think she needs to talk about it. I did it for a year straight. My friend took care of (son) I was out constantly....I went through that, and I don't think I'm an alcoholic.

mlc: Do you think it was the pressure of being a young mother?.....

312: I think it was that I never got to do it....I never partied.....

mlc: What does the future hold for you?

312: We're both at the Community College...taking general social problems, English.....other than English we're in the same classes.

mlc: What do you want to do with your degrees?

312: I'm getting my Masters...I might be forty, but I'm getting it.....in social work....I can't imagine that there's anything else I want to do. Besides, those teen moms need me. I love my social worker, but she doesn't have any kids! Tell me about it...tell me how to parent, tell me what kids need....come on lady!? There's one teen parent social worker in (town)...73 teen parents in 1993! they just count the moms, because they've got custody. I think there aren't enough social workers. I think (county) will make spots for both of us, we've done it all...we've been everywhere. We're in with the right people for the field we want to go into that's for sure.

mlc: Would it be awkward to go back into the system in this area, where you were a kid in?

312: Child protection needs to change in (town)....we have a friend who is emotionally and physically abusing her child.....there were thirteen reports from nine different people...finally they went and talked to the kid. We want them to go in and counsel, don't just take the kid, it's not gonna help! They kept saying "look for bruises, look for bruises". After the social worker came for two months, she (the mom) said she didn't want her to come anymore, so the worker went away. I mean, she had the option to tell the social worker to go away? Her child doesn't have the option to say "don't hit me. Don't call me a bitch." Why does she have the option to say go away? I know she couldn't have put on a good show for the worker, because she doesn't know how....she doesn't have a clue....We gave up...we don't call back...it doesn't do anything. Her mom

claims that she called child protection, and they told her who everyone was that called in. I'll be damned if I'm gonna call in if she knows who called.

312: We're gonna have a house, be neighbors, white picket fence. I'm gonna have a little girl one of these days.

Minnesota Youth in Care

Interview conducted 2/26/94
Participant # 105
Interviewed at her home

mlc: When you think about your experience with the system, who have been people that you feel understood what you had to say? How did you know they understood?

105: *My social worker and my foster mom definitely. They were willing to talk with me and work with me on what I wanted. My social worker at first wanted me to stay at home, it was really bad at my house. I said, I'd rather be in a foster home, if you put me home I'll just keep running. So, he made arrangements to put me in a foster home. My foster mom and I still keep in contact. She's great. I was sixteen when I moved in, I was there until I turned eighteen. I'm nineteen now. She is so great.*

I could talk to my foster mom about anything. Whereas, my mom you couldn't talk to her about anything. She was drinking all the time, she just didn't understand. She was only sixteen when she had me, so I thought it would be easier for her to relate to me...No way!! She couldn't. My foster mom, _____, she was really understanding about everything. If I needed help she was always there for me

mlc: At what times have you felt like you had an influence on the system?

105: *Sometimes. Like with my worker, he thought the best thing for me was to stay at home and try to work it out there. After sitting down with him, and explaining to him all the problems that I had with my family, I think I made him realize that it wasn't a good idea to keep me at home. Otherwise, he just wanted to keep on working with me in the home. It would have never worked that way. I know that. My dad didn't want me there...my mom and dad were divorced, and I couldn't live with her because of her alcoholism. Anyhow, I think I convinced him that it would be best for me to be in a foster home and not in my house.*

It was too hard to live with my dad and his girlfriend. They didn't want me there. My dad's in recovery now, but he was an alcoholic and drug user at the time. So was my mom. My mom went through treatment, after that she left my dad for some other guy. She went right back to drinking again. That was really disappointing. But, now she's in recovery, and she's doing really well, and so is my dad. We have a good relationship now. I see my dad all the time.

He adopted me through the courts when he and my mom got married. My biological father never had anything to do with me anyway. We have a really good relationship now, and I think being in a foster home made it possible. Because if I would have lived with my dad we probably would have killed each other. He thinks one of the best things was for me to go to a foster home, we talk about it all the time. We didn't talk at all for the first two years I was at (foster home).

mlc If you could give three pieces of advice to a young adult who is just entering the system (either getting a probation officer, social worker or going to their first placement), what would you tell them?

105: *Try to work with their social worker or foster parent or whatever. Because if you can't work together than it's definitely not gonna work there, either. You end up running out of options.*

Second, even if they weren't in the home, try to keep a strong bond with their family because sooner or later no matter how much you hate your family at one time or another, you need them. Even though you go through bad times, they love you. I hated my mom so many times, but I love her. She's my mom. I know she'll always be there to support me in the choices that I make. She gives me good advice sometimes. I can take what I want and leave the rest behind.

At first I tried to keep in touch with my dad, but his girlfriend hated me, and my little sister. She threatened to kill us. She told my dad to choose between her and us. He picked her and his alcohol and his drugs. We were just kind of left out in the cold. I wrote him letters all the time, she would tell him "it's a con, don't talk to her". I wrote him two or three months before I graduated, he called me at (foster home) and told me he was sorry about everything, and wanted to work things out. I went over there and we talked about everything. We talked about where I was at that point in time. We got everything worked out. Now we have the best relationship, we're best friends, although he's my dad.

mlc: Did your worker seem to have an opinion about your contact with your dad? Did they, maybe, want you to see him sooner, or later than you did?

105: *They didn't really have an opinion about it. They knew that my mom was really abusive. They didn't say much about my dad. (Foster mom) was really helpful with that, she encouraged me to keep trying. She said sooner or later something would happen that we'd end up talking.*

It was hard to talk to my mom. She was such a bitch sometimes. She just had her opinion that I was gonna turn out just like her, be an alcoholic and a teenage mother. I don't know if she wanted it, but I think she thought that if she harped on me enough it wouldn't happen. It didn't happen. Now that she's in recovery, she's proud of me. She's difficult sometimes, but we get over it.

Third piece of advice, stay in school. You need your education. You can't go far without one. A girl who was in foster care with me dropped out, was gonna go back for her GED, but she never did that either. She doesn't do anything. We don't talk now, she doesn't even work or anything. She doesn't try for anything.

mlc Tell about your best placement experience, either one specific event that was really positive, or a placement that was very positive for you. What do you think made this event or placement positive?

105: *I think going to (foster home). She was so encouraging. She didn't treat you like you were a foster child. She treated all of us like we were her own. She was supportive of everything we did. If she thought there was a problem, she'd give her opinion about it and then say, "if you don't think I'm right you can do whatever you want to do." She gave us the freedom to make our own choices. A lot of people aren't like that. They say "you're gonna live by my rules". She's a very nice lady. She's a recovering alcoholic, too. She's about the same age as my mom. It was hard, her and her husband ended up getting a divorce, so she's doing it herself. She's gonna stay in foster care, she really likes it. She works her program. It was fun to be in her house, I wish I still lived there sometimes.*

mlc: What's the difference between treating you like a foster kid, and treating you like her own kid?

105: *One of the times I was in the shelter, my biological dad decided that he wanted me to come live with him, his wife and their three kids. He told me "I don't treat you like you're my biological father, act like this is a foster home". He treated me like I wasn't his daughter when I stayed there. And (foster mom) everyone who comes there, she just welcomes you into her home. You're free to make your own decisions, you have a curfew and everything, but she's really lenient. She doesn't make terrible rules, she's not wicked or anything. Some places don't let you go out at all except on weekends, I think that's unfair, because everyone needs a social life. One girl who was in a different foster home, she had to do all this work, cleaning all the time, and taking care of their kids. I don't think that's fair. We had chores, and everything. We got paid for chores. And we had curfew. But we could go out every night of the week and still go out on the weekend. As long as we set aside time to be with the family. We did a lot as a family, bowling or movies. She just treated us like one big family.*

Her or her son would help with homework. I guess why I'm so interested in school is that my mom dropped out when she got pregnant with me. She told me she went back and got her GED, but she lied. She never did. But, she's taking classes right now. It was a big accomplishment for me to get my diploma. It was a bigger deal to go onto college, but I hated it. I went one year. It was hard, my friends were there acting like college is a big party-time. So I left after one year, once my friends leave I'll go back and finish my other year. I was going for legal secretary, but I don't know what I want to do...maybe auto mechanics. I've thought a lot about psychology. I'm not sure yet. I took typing and basic office stuff, computer, sociology, speech and stuff like that...about seventeen credits a quarter. It was fun. It was exciting, but it was a lot like high school. But I wanted that diploma and have that accomplished.

mlc: Tell about the worst placement experience you have had. It can be either a specific event or a placement that was a particularly bad experience for you. What do you think made this event or placement negative?

105: *One time when I went to the shelter, it was terrible. I don't remember what happened with my parents, but they put me in the shelter on my fifteenth birthday. The good thing about it, one of the other girls there I knew, and she knew it was my birthday so they had a cake there for me. My parents didn't even try to work anything out with me, they just put me in the shelter. They made me stay there for almost a month. That's hard, because there's so many people in and out of there, you don't even have time to make friends, really. Not knowing when I was going home was hard. I was in the shelter a lot of times. After awhile I got to know a lot the people who worked there, I liked them all. Every time I had a problem with my parents, I'd just run away so I could go to the shelter. I was in there seven or eight times.*

mlc: How did the staff react when you kept coming back?

105: *We'd talk about it and everything, but there were so many problems at my house. When my parents were still married they were drinking and using drugs all the time, so they were never home. My younger sister was born when I was nine. From the time she was born until she was six, I took care of her. 'Cause they were always at the bar. I'd go to school, come home, baby-sit, put her to bed. The shelter was an escape for me. I was hoping sooner or later they'd say there's a problem here.*

mlc: If you could give three pieces of advice to probation officers / social workers about what it is like to be in the system what would you say?

105: *They have to listen more to what the kids want. A lot of social workers will just talk to the parents, and the parents will say, "this is a problem with my son or my daughter". They never hear really the full problem with the parents, too.*

I think if a child believes they should be in a foster home it should at least be tried. If you put them in on a temporary basis, you can see how they do in the foster home as compared to home. It gives a lot of insight.

They should just listen to the kids more. You can't trust all of the kids in the system. I know some who are really bad. A lot of kids have good input, too, about foster homes, probation officers, social workers or whatever. (Foster mom) said there's just a shortage of kids right now, because the county is trying to work with them in the home. What if the kid's not the problem? What if the parent's the problem? They're just stuck there, they can't get out. Obviously, they're just gonna rebel, and then they'll get stuck somewhere they don't belong, like detention or a work farm, or a group home or whatever.

I'm glad I never rebelled so much that I ended up at a work farm or anything like that. I probably would have tried to run. I never tried to run from the shelter. I liked it. I never tried to run from (foster home) either. One girl did, she ran...she was kind of stupid. She had a baby that she was gonna put up for adoption, when she ran it was during the proceedings, so there was no way she could change her mind. I guess a couple months after she ran, she got pregnant again.

She could have talked to (Foster mom) about anything. But some kids didn't like her. (the Foster mom) They'd say "she's a bitch, she's never home". She went to a group almost every night just to help keep herself sane and able to deal with everything. People that run are just stupid. If you get in enough trouble to get put in a shelter or foster home, if you keep running eventually there's nowhere else to go. You just get in more trouble.

It took me a couple years to figure out that if I kept running from home they'd eventually put me somewhere else. I talked to my social worker a lot. He's very understanding. I'd call him from school at lunch and stuff. He helped me through a lot of bad decisions I made to run away. I guess all and all it worked out OK.

mlc: What do you think are possible ways of "educating" social workers and probation officers about your feelings as a youth in the system?

105: *When I was in the SELF program, _____. We would sit around and talk about what we think should be done. Gave him suggestions and everything. I think it would be a good idea if social workers got involved with these groups. A lot of good information gets tossed around for people to think about. I know we did a lot of talking. We talked about being in foster care, and what we wanted to do in our lives, and what we wanted to do for other foster kids. For instance, for alcoholics they have alcoholics anonymous and they have al-anon and al-a-teen for the people it effects. In foster care whoever is the "bad influence", I think they should have a group for those kids to be able to talk about your family and what happened. Our group was really good for that. We'd talk about everything. We had so much fun. We went up to the Boundary Waters. We did rock climbing. It was nice to know that there was somebody there. All the people you met in group, we were all supportive of each other. If you ever needed someone to talk to, you just pick up the phone and call.*

I was with SELF for a long time. I can't remember how long one period is, but we went through ours and then when they started the next group, we got to stay for that one, too. We played a lot of volleyball....challenged people from other cities

THE REMAINDER OF THE RESPONSES ARE NOT VERBATIM, BUT TAKEN FROM INTERVIEWER NOTES, AS THE TAPE RECORDER CUT OFF.

mlc: Have you ever worked together with other youth in/from care to try to influence a particular program or worker? What was that experience like for you?

105: *I have influenced other kids by helping them. Sometimes influenced the outcome of what they decided to do. That felt good, like a sense of accomplishment for me, and for the other person. When you help someone in placement it helps you grow as a group, more like a family.*

In SELF, originally (the leader) was really rigid in what he wanted to do. He had things all scheduled. He would give us all these worksheets on making a budget and buying a car. He thought we could learn that stuff by doing worksheets. We told him that was boring, and we wanted to go to car dealers to learn how to buy a car, and go to the store to learn how to shop. We influenced him on what to do in group, he didn't know.

mlc: Are you aware of any groups of youth in/from care who have organized? If so, which groups? If not, what do you think an organized group of youth might look like? What might they do?

105: *No, I'm not aware of any. I think they might get together and offer each other support about how to work with the system. Maybe help other people in the system to get through.*

mlc: What does the future hold for you?

105: *Lots of school! Kids and marriage, I want kids. A house and stuff, I don't want to be rich. I just want enough so I don't have to worry every month whether or not I have enough money to pay the rent.*

mlc: Any last things you think I should know?

105: *"Even though kids might seem bad, they're not bad. Their actions are." Workers need to remember that.*

Minnesota Youth in Care

Interview conducted 2/4/94
Participant # 305
Interview conducted in local restaurant

mlc: When you think about your experience with the system, who have been people that you feel understood what you had to say? How did you know they understood?.....Like anyone at treatment when you were there?

305: *Sometimes people at (treatment) did...(staff name)...He trusted what I said...(staff name) in Cottage II.....He would sometimes let me borrow stuff from him, tapes or something like that. (XXX)another staff at (treatment).....communicating and stuff.*

mlc: At what times have you felt like you had an influence on the system?

305: *What does that mean?*

mlc: What times have you felt like what you said..like with rules, or something workers were trying to do...if you didn't agree with something that you could help make it something you could agree with.

305: *Writing out passes...And you have to do something, like chores in order to be able to go out. on passes.*

mlc: What were some things you liked to do on pass?

305: *Watch TV....they kept on changing the rules...I was there just about a year in '89, right after the summer.*

mlc: Did you like it there?

305: *yeah, I'd like to go back....to visit.*

mlc: If you could give three pieces of advice to a young adult who is just entering the system (either getting a probation officer, social worker or going to their first placement), what three things would you tell them?

305: *Not get so mad or you won't be able to do the things that they would let you do. Like go on field trips and stuff, you'll have to stay back.. Not to talk back to staff.*

mlc: If you think of a third, we can go back.

mlc: Tell about your best placement experience, either one specific event that was really positive, or a placement that was very positive for you.

305: *What does that mean?*

mlc: When you think back to your year at (treatment), can you think of one event that was really positive, that you enjoyed or got something out of?

305: *Being good and getting friends, and that. Having trust with staff. Having confidence with staff.*

mlc: How did that happen?

305: *Certain staff were friends, too. They helped me speak and not to be so shy...like sometimes I am.*

mlc: So, what did you do with your friends up there?

305: *Watched TV. and called for pizza some nights....the staff knew. I think it was probably Domino's, Italian sausage, extra cheese and onions. And talk to staff.*

mlc: Tell about the worst placement experience you have had. It can be either a specific event or a placement that was a particularly bad experience for you. When you think about your time up there, what's the worst thing you can remember?

305: *Getting restrained....you would get hurt. They would hold you down.*

mlc: What do you need to do to get restrained? What do you have to do?

305: *Make the staff mad. Also if you don't do somethings.*

mlc: So if you stick your tongue out at the staff they'll come restrain you???

305: *No.*

mlc: Well, what do you mean make them mad?

305: *Not listening to them, or going off.*

mlc: "Going off" do you mean walking away, or do you mean getting wild?

305: *Well they'd warn you first.*

mlc: What would they say?

305: *To stop talking....either you'd get on the chair, or get restrained if it was major.*

mlc: What's something major one that happened that you got restrained?

305: *Picking on them....making them really mad....by my behavior....swearing.*

mlc: Could one staff restrain you, or did it take more than one?

305: *Probably one*

mlc: One could restrain you? Did they just hold you, or did they take you on the ground?

305: *On the ground....*

mlc: One staff could hold you on the ground? You're a pretty big guy. So, you didn't like that. You said sometimes you got hurt? Did staff ever get hurt?

305: *Yeah, if they fought back too much.*

mlc: So it wasn't an easy thing, people were kind of fighting? How did it feel getting restrained? Besides the physical of sometimes getting hurt?

305: *Not good...people look at you...probably smiling...When the person is getting restrained for the first time, it's funny for the other people to see that.I felt embarrassed.*

mlc: How would you interact with the staff after that? The staff who restrained you?

305: *Sometimes I was calmer....talked to them the next day or after that.....it was hard in some ways.....Because after the first time it happened, and how silly it was...we were all being silly.*

mlc: If you could give three pieces of advice to probation officers / social workers about what it is like to be in the system what would you say.....If you could sit down with a couple probation officers or social workers and you were going to tell them three things you thought it was important for them to know.

305: *How hard it is to be in the placement.....it's a lot harder than being at home, because you need passes to go somewhere. And you have to ask if a person's downstairs or upstairs, and you had to ask to go there.....asking permission is hard.....If someone goofed up, everyone has to pay for it.....*

mlc: What did you do if you were doing what you were supposed to do, and someone else goofed up and everyone else had to pay for it?

305: *Got upset...Asked them why they did that.....(other advice?)... When you have to go through steps one, two, three., or (XX) step, that's for people who hit someone when they get real mad....you can't be in the TV. room or the game room. Well you can't be in the TV. room when the TV. is on.....you don't have privileges until after the staff meeting on Wednesday if you hit someone.I think it happened to me once....A lot of people got (XX) step a lot.*

mlc: Did you stay away from those people? Did they make you nervous?

305: *In some ways. I don't like fights....not unless I have to....*

mlc: What do you think are possible ways of "educating"/ teaching social workers and probation officers about your feelings as a youth in the system?

305: *By telling them my experience...*

mlc: Have you ever worked together with other youth in/from care to try to influence or give advice to a program or worker?

305: *At (location) about my experience was there, and how I changed and learned, that's where my SELF program was....How good it works for some people, for people who want to.*

mlc: What was a day at SELF like for you?

305: *Weird.. After school I walk over there....I would talk to them until it was time..._____program....learned independent living skill, and learned how to not get into such predicaments money-wise, through the mail.....I did that a lot.....*

mlc: What have you learned? Are you going to do things differently because of the SELF program?

305: *Yeah. Stop getting so many magazines, cause I owe so much. Too much, over a \$1,000 and I paid over \$600 last year....I worked for a cleaning service. Since I was getting sick too much in the cold weather, they decided to fire me.....I learned how to buy stuff on credit, and to put stuff on lay away.*

mlc: I know you and your mom are talking about you moving out, is there anything else from the SELF program that helps make you feel more prepared for that?

305: *The high rise apartments....the rent goes by income....they told me I have to go downtown, I hope to get down there.*

mlc: It was a good experience for you telling the SELF people about your experience?

305: *Sometimes I wish it was better. If they had more information on credit...how to get credit at stores, and to buy on credit....*

mlc: sounds like that could be dangerous for you...if I handed you a Penny's card what would you do with it? What would you buy?

305: *I would only get what I want today, and wait for the other stuff....since my hobby is collecting game systems, I'd only get one of those. And a VCR, since I don't have one. I think that's about it.*

mlc: Are there things you might need for your apartment that you might get?

305: *yeah. a kitchen table, furniture, a sitting chair or a couch, and a lamp.*

mlc: Do you think you could go back and get more help from (program) if you needed more advice when it's time for you to move out on your own.

305: *I'm still in SELF, I go every week if I can. I try to make it every week.*

mlc: Are you aware of any groups of youth in/from care who have organized? Who have got together to talk about what their experiences were like?

305: *What does that mean?*

mlc: Do you know of any groups, more than one person, who have been in placement who get together to offer each other support?

305: *No.*

mlc: What does the future hold for you?

305: *I haven't found a special person yet...cause I've asked about everybody in town, no luck in that area yet. Searching so I can earn more per hour. Join the Reserves.....Want to live close to my parents' home.....*

mlc: anything else you want to tell me?

305: *I need to find a girl that will go out with me*

mlc: you want SELF to help you with that??? You'll have to talk with them about that. I live too far away to help you with that.

305: *Cause it's been like three years since I've been straight....not doing some of the bad things I did....First of all , my counselor _____, he keeps in touch sometimes...he knows that I've changed a lot. First of all I couldn't see through what's lies or not lies, I always thought they'd tell the truth. They would say "girls like you to touch them and stuff". I've been getting nightmares and stuff. I just don't want to have nightmares anymore.*

mlc: Do you still see your counselor? Have you talked to him about this?

305: *Yeah. He also told me if I forgive myself for what I've done, then I can go out and ask all those girls that I touched for their forgiveness.*

mlc: I think that's probably true. That's a big job, it takes a very brave person to do that.

305: *So I did. Some of them laughed at me, I don't know why....Since I was there about a year or so, I had friends, girls, they know that I changed. They helped me, too...they'd talk to me.*

mlc: It takes time to build back trust. I guess that's when you really feel that you're responsible for your behaviors, when it takes all that time to clean them up. That's hard. Sounds like you need to keep on being patient.

305: *Sometimes I'm not patient. It just gets to me. ...In 1990, in January there was somebody, in a spiritual way.....it was the Lord, actually. Told me what would happen if I didn't change. It took me a few days to make up my mind. I thought about it for two days. Then I set a promise not to do that again. I've stuck with it for three years.....sometimes it's scary. To think about what I've done is scary.*

mlc: I hope you're proud of yourself. It sounds like you've done a lot of work.

305: *Before I was eighteen I would order everything...from catalogs, I'd say send me a trial issue.....I'd just keep all those magazines in my room, I think it helped relieve stress.*

mlc: How do you relieve it now?

305: *lifting. Actually I lift a lot.....Before at the place where I worked.....Since I didn't go to school today, I was preparing for the three students that I teach....I work with them on their math.....I just found out that my brother who is in special ed. since kindergarten they've only taught him addition and subtraction....I don't feel very good about that. I help my brother with my math from elementary school....The kids seem to like my school better than the public schools....they keep asking when I'm gonna do school again. I do it in my mom's basement, or upstairs....I have to prepare a lot.....One of my teachers in elementary thought that I would be good teaching, so they began to give me a lot of stuff....I did once for like two or three years, then I had to stop when I got in seventh or eighth grade because I had too much homework.....I got kicked out of the regular high school, because I had eleven absences. The unexcused ones were because there was too much pressure...they'd make me feel no good at school...kids were mean to me at the public school.*

mlc: Do people treat you better at the ALC?

305: *Yeah.*

Closure.....

Minnesota Youth in Care

Interview conducted 2/6/94
Participant # 321
Interviewed at Parents' home

mlc: When you think about your experience with the system, who have been people you felt understood what you had to say?

321: *My mom and dad.*

mlc: How do you know that they understood...what made you think that?

321: *'Cause they've been in places like me before.*

mlc: Foster homes and stuff?

321: *Yeah.*

mlc: Did you ever run into anyone like workers or staff...have you been in more than one foster home, or just one?

321: *Just one.*

mlc: Was there anyone there that you felt like you could relate to or anything?

321: *No.*

mlc: So when you say your parents understood, did you feel like they believed you when you talked about what it was like?

321: *Yeah.*

mlc: Do you live with them now, is this their house?

321: *Yeah.*

mlc: At what times have you felt like you had an influence on the system? Like if there was something you wanted to change or that you didn't like...

321: *No.*

mlc: have you ever tried to change something..get a worker to do something, or not do something?

321: *No.*

mlc: If you could give three pieces of advice to a young person who's just entering the system, just getting a P.O. or a social worker or going to their first placement, what would you tell them?

321: *It might be rough.*

mlc: how might it be rough?

321: *Like some of them that have come here haven't stayed that long.*

mlc: Do you guys have foster kids here? How come they haven't stayed that long do you think?

321: *I have no idea. Some of them don't like it and there are other things that were not right and took it out on them.*

mlc: Other things that weren't right for them and they took it out on you guys, or other things that weren't right for you guys and you took it out on the foster kids?

321: *The foster kids took it out on my parents.*

mlc: So your parents here take in foster kids, and you were one somewhere else? Did they take in foster kids while you were one somewhere else?

321: *Yeah. It was at the same time.*

mlc: So, it might be rough. How would you tell them to deal with stuff when it gets rough?

321: *Go up in their room and write down what they're feeling.*

mlc: Like a journal or something? (*Yeah.*) Is that something that you've used when things are rough for you? does that help? (*Yeah*) Where did you learn that trick?

321: *Up in (treatment center).*

mlc: Were you at the (name of center in town?) (*Yeah*). So wait, you were at (center) and at the foster home, were you ever in the Crisis Center here?

321" *"Til I got here and then I got sent up to (Treatment center).*

mlc: "Till you came here? OK, hopefully I can understand all this stuff... So you would tell them it might be rough, and you would tell them to go to their room to write down stuff, what else might you tell them if you could look back on your experience and give them some advice?

321: *Not to go on run and to talk about what's going on.*

mlc: How come you'd say not to go on run? (quiet) Did you not have real successful runs? Did you run into trouble (*Yeah.*) Kinda got hurt? (*No.*) How long were you gone when you ran?

321: *I got brought back by a State Trooper. (How old were you when you did that) I was fifteen. (How old are you now?) I'm nineteen.*

mlc: So that was when you ran from home...got brought back by the state trooper...did you go back home after that?

321: *No. The cops brought me home and I ran again.*

mlc: Is that what got you into the foster home? (*Yeah*)...then you went to the foster home? Then you came back here? When did you go to (treatment)?

321: *I was there last summer...I came back last June.* (How long were you there?) *Two months.*

mlc: Is that a pretty short time to be there compared to other people? (*No*)... and that's where you learned to write down feelings and stuff? (*Yep*)... OK, you'd tell them not to go on run, and that it might be rough...are the problems still there when you get back? (*Sometimes*).....You mentioned talking about stuff, how has that been helpful for you?

321: *It just gets stuff off my mind* (Have you found people who could help you deal with stuff when you talked about it with them?) *Yeah.* (Who's been able to help?) *The school counselor* (Where do you go to school?) *The Senior High* (So that's somebody that you kinda trust?) *Umhmm.*

mlc: Tell me about your best placement experience...it can be one specific event that was really positive or it can be a whole placement that you thought was OK.

321: *I never ran from (treatment center) I don't know why.*

mlc: What did you like about it?

321: *I thought it would help me. 'Cause I was there and then my brother got stuck there and so I...my brother thought about going on run and I told him not to...It was like two days before his birthday and he was thinking about going on run. I told him "if you go on run they probably won't let you go out with mom and dad and grampa and gramma". (For his birthday?). I had my sixteenth birthday down there. See we had a trust level chart, if you weren't on the right level you couldn't do anything...you had to be on the right level, or you'd have to be in a room by yourself or something*

mlc: So you pushed yourself so you could be on the right level to go out for your birthday? You were there on your sixteenth birthday...I thought you said you just got back...have you been there more than once? (*Yeah, twice*). How long were you there around your sixteenth birthday?

321: *I got out around June 12th, actually the 11th.* (and when was your birthday?) *The -- -- of January* (Had you just got there around your birthday?) *Yeah.* (So you were there about six months? and then another two months recently?) *Yeah.*

mlc: So you thought it helped? Is that why you went back?

321: *No, I was having more problems again, getting into more trouble again. My mom brought me up there again.*

mlc: How was treatment different than the foster home...obviously you didn't feel like that helped since you ran from there?

321: *There was more people there that could help me.* (kids or staff?) *Staff..*

mlc: So the foster home only had the foster parent people? (*Yep.*) Do you have a pretty good temper? (*Yep.*) I've known people who sometimes feel safer in a place where there's more staff, because they're nervous if they lose it, go off and stuff, they might hurt somebody if they're in a house with just regular people, but if there's staff around they

might not. Does that fit at all for you? (*Yeah*). Maybe those guys could handle you better? (*Yep*)

mlc: Think of the worst placement experience you've had...again it can be one specific event or a whole placement that was particularly bad.

321: *The Crisis Center. I hated it there. Because, They put us in our rooms if we swore. I was there from April until May when I was Thirteen .*

mlc: That's the _____ County Crisis Center? Getting shut in your room was one thing that you think made that placement really negative...were there other things?

321: *We couldn't play the computers unless we asked. (But they let you use them if you asked?) Yeah. (but it was still a drag to have to ask?) Yeah.*

mlc: If you could give three pieces of advice to probation officers or social workers about what it's like to be in the system what would you tell them?

321: *Not to be harsh on the kids. (what are some examples of being harsh?) Giving so many community service hours. (So you don't have a P.O....your social worker gives you community service hours?) She can if she wants to. (You think they gave you more than what was fair?) Yeah.*

mlc: What else would you tell them about what it's like to be a kid in the system? Well, you're not really a kid anymore...what would you say about what it was like?

321: Long Silence... *I don't know.* (kind of hard isn't it?)

mlc: Earlier you said that you didn't have very many workers or staff who understood what it was like for you or what you had to say. I'm wondering what you might want them to know.

321: *When it's OK for them to come home (you would want them to let kids know?) Yeah. (What are they doing instead?) Call the cops. (Oh, you mean like when a kid's on run?) Yeah. (so, do you want them to make it safe for the kid to come home instead of sending the cops?) Yeah. (that happened to you, huh) Yep...they called the cops. (How would you have rather that they handled it?) Let me come back on my own. (would you of?) Probably. (How long do you think it would have taken?) Not that long...it was boring. (was it, were you staying with friends or something? Did you have somewhere to stay) Yep. (were you going to school?) Nope. I was supposed to be going to school, but I wasn't. (so you were bored and you were getting behind in school? Is that all the advice you've got?)*

mlc: What do you think are possible ways of educating social workers and P.O.'s about what it's like to be a youth in the system. How do you think we could explain to them?

321: Long silence...(Do you think there are ways to help them understand?..Do you think there are ways that they could know what it's like?) *No.* (No way at all?) (Do you think they should know? Do you think it would help them do their jobs better if they did know?) *Sometimes.* Long silence.

mlc: Have you ever got together with other youth either when you were in placement or since you've been out to try to influence a particular worker or program...like when you

were in (treatment program) did you ever try to change something, or tell the staff something you didn't like?

321: *No*

mlc: Are you aware of any youth who are in care or have been who have got together to try to do some of that kind of stuff?

321: *No*

mlc: What do you think a group like that might look like...say a group of ten people eighteen, nineteen and twenty years old got together in a room and talked about what it was like for them in placement, what do you think they might decide they wanted to do?

321: *Go and be a big brother or sister to kids who were in foster care.*

mlc: What use do you think that would be?

321: *Help them get stuff off their mind. (That's a pretty neat idea...is that something you could ever picture yourself doing?) Probably. (Don't worry you're not signing up for anything...laughter)*

mlc: What does the future hold for you?

321: *Nothing.*

mlc: Nothing! ? What you're just gonna sit here at this table until you're eighty-five?

321: *I'll probably be in the Army. (Have you looked into that....what will you need to do to get into the Army?) Take tests and stuff. When I'm done with school I'll go join. I'll finish school this year. (You're a senior? You have all your credits and everything?) Yep. (Well, all right! Are you about ready to be done?) Yep.*

mlc: Did being in placement screw you up credit-wise? (*No*). Maybe it got you ahead? (*Yep*). You got credits in treatment? (*Yep*) Where do you want to live?

321: *Florida. (somewhere warm, eh?) Yep, somewhere where I don't have to look outside and see all that white junk. (are you the one responsible for shoveling here?) I blow the snow...on the driveway.*

mlc: Anything else you want to tell me? (*Nope*).....teasing and closure...

Minnesota Youth in Care

Interview conducted 2/25/94

Participant # 112

Interviewed in mall food court (1.5 hours from her hometown)

mlc: When you think about your experience with the system, who have been people that you feel understood what you had to say? How did you know they understood?

112: *My social worker, my therapist. When I was having a lot of problems, the police officers from the town I was from weren't helpful. After I got workers they were more understanding. When I was in the hospital, they were very helpful.*

Their ways of going about doing things. One social worker told me at first that I was going to go back home. I refused to go back. After I got out of the hospital, she wanted me to go home. I said I wanted a new social worker. My second one helped me. I was scared because I didn't know anything about the system. I was taking chances in believing they knew what to do to help me.

I used to be really inside myself, a real turtle. I was in the hospital for two months, I had overdosed on lots of pills. I had run to a friend's house, she came and picked me up. She didn't have a license. My dad knew we were up to something so he called the police. The police called my friend's family and told them they'd be charged \$500 for boarding a runaway. They told me that I was going to stay there anyway. I was abused.

The police picked me up. They said "you know, everyone has problems in their family...." I told them that they didn't know what went on in that home. I told the police I wanted to go to shelter, I didn't want to go back there. They said no. The next day I was at school, talking to one of my teachers. I always had my assignments done, that day I didn't. She asked me why it wasn't done, and I broke down crying. She left the room to call the police, and I took a bunch of pills. I woke up in the Psych. Ward in (town). I didn't like the psychologist at first. He really pressed. He said you were abused sexually, physically... I didn't want to get anyone in trouble, so I said he was wrong and I hauled off and hit him in the face. He had a black eye. They had seven people tie me down. Put me in a straight jacket. They had a padded room, lock-up I was in there for a week. The whole time I was in there my family didn't come visit. They didn't want to. They said it was my choice, that I did it to myself. I fought every minute of it. They just kept pressing me for information.

There was another girl on the locked unit with me, she was suicidal too. We used to sneak over to the chemical dependency unit, and hang out with them. We all wore the same kind of clothes, so they couldn't tell the difference, we fit right in.

mlc: Would you consider your time on the psych. unit to be your worst placement experience?

Yeah. I was at the hospital for two months and then I went back six months later for two weeks. My dad was threatening me, so I ran. I overdosed again with pills, that did it. I lied my way out of the program the second time. They have all these groups and goals and criteria. I knew all the criteria, so I went along with them. I lied my way out of there. As I walked out the door, I said, God did I fool you guys. I'm never like that. When I look back I can't believe I was so bad. The nursing staff was really mean. They were cocky towards us. They were trying to help us and stuff, but they should have been

more sympathetic. They had no feelings for any of us. They were just like we were the rebellious ones in our family. The first time I was up there I wouldn't even talk. I wouldn't say a thing.

The only one I talked to was that other girl, who was going through the same thing I was. We were making plans all the time, like how to hang ourselves from the curtain. We weren't positive influences on each other at all.

I'm safe now. I just came to my senses. Going through therapy with my psychologist from (hometown), he would say things that made me think. It's like I'm out of the home now. I would be doing a permanent solution to a temporary problem. It took me over a year to get over suicidal. My foster mom watched me. It was to the point where it was so bad, this might seem weird to you, that I'd be walking with friends and I would see an image of myself walking in front of a car. Then my body would just follow it. I wouldn't stop. My friends pulled me out of the street a few times. It was really scary.

They put me on Prozac. It just made me tired. Then they put me on Zoloft. It was a really helpful drug. I really didn't want to be on any drug because I thought I'd be on it for life. When I started Prozac it was when all those articles were coming out about it. They gave it six months to start working. I was on Zoloft for three years. Then I wanted to get off it and see if I could deal with my problems without it. I was dealing with a lot.

I have two handicapped brothers with muscular dystrophy. My dad's real abusive to them. It's really hard for me to see. (Name) is twenty now, they gave him fifteen years to live, so he's been dying progressively for years. He's had broken ribs, punctured lungs. But they refuse to take him out of the home because he's twenty, he's not a kid. They say they don't have proof. They say the injuries could be caused by anything, which they can. If you pick him up you can break a bone. I could deal with that all real well off the drug. I've been off it for about a year and a half, and have done real well. Even school is stressful.

The last time I thought about suicide was probably three years ago. I've settled down a lot.

mlc: At what times have you felt like you had an influence on the system?

112: *Whatever they (foster family/social worker) said I did. They helped me. If they didn't encourage me, I would never be this far. They made me want to make more of a commitment towards life. They helped me choose a school I could afford. They've helped me with money.*

mlc If you could give three pieces of advice to a young adult who is just entering the system (either getting a probation officer, social worker or going to their first placement), what would you tell them?

112: *Let them help you. Don't fight with them about what they tell you to do, or don't tell you to do. They're trying to help you.*

Try working out problems with your family. I can at least have a decent conversation with them. Don't quit on your family. They'll always be your family. If there's even a chance that they want to try to have a relationship you need to try. At least establish a relationship, even though they're not healthy themselves. You have to, well, not go down to their level, but you have to at least try. My dad was physically abusive, and so I don't remember my childhood from ten years and younger.

I was sexually abused by my oldest brother. I never wanted to establish a relationship with my parents because they always believed him, they still do. He's in the Service and everything. He lied through it all. All he got was probation. I had to go through therapy to work through all the problems of being a victim of it. I've overcome it. But the feelings are always going to be there. I see my parents a lot now, I'm really close to my second oldest brother, he's the one who has the disease. After he dies, I know that there will be less contact with my family. My parents are divorced now.

My dad's getting remarried now. I don't care what he does with his life as long as I'm not in it. I mean I can say hi and bye to him, but that's it. In our family when we were growing up no one said I love you, no one gave hugs to each other. To this day it's still like that.

Third one, make the best out of it. A lot of the girls I lived with were real drinkers and were real rebellious. Try to find things to do. A lot of girls go to drinking and sex, they figure "they're not my real parents". Don't take advantage of the foster family. A lot of kids lied to my foster mom, they took advantage of her. She'd go out of her way to buy something nice for us, and they'd turn around and stab her in the back. I hated to see that. They're willing to take you in, don't give them a hard time.

It's really hard being a foster parent. I could never do it. They have to deal with their own family, and then they're trying to deal with this child's problems. If the kids are giving them more problems... And they have to wonder where the child's at. They're responsible for the child. If something happens to them, their parents can come back and sue you. That happened with one girl who lived with us.

They have to set limits. I admire people who can be foster parents. I never gave them any problems, I was really honored that they'd take me in. One thing I didn't like about the system is that they're really cheap with you. My parents paid \$500 a month for me to be in foster care. Well, supposedly they did. My dad worked three well-paying jobs and the whole time I was in foster care he never paid a penny. When I graduated he gave me \$10.00 and said the rest went into foster care. When my brother graduated they gave him \$5,000 and a new car. Now they've been taking money out of his checks.

All we got a month for being in foster care was \$10.00 a week if we did our chores, if we didn't do something (like missed a dish or something), we would get our allowance cut to \$5.00. We did get \$50 a month for clothing. So, you got \$100 a month and that had to go for everything. Incidentals, clothing. We had to buy our shampoo, everything. It's not much money when you need hair spray, make-up. You learn to ration your money. I'm a tight spender now. I mean I spend a lot of money, but I look for deals.

Each summer they made us go out and get a job. That was good. I did secretarial work with (company name). I worked for them three summers in a row, they just loved me. I got lots of awards from them. We went to a recognition dinner with Governor Carlson. I'm really proud of myself. I could never say that about myself before.

The family I live with now, he's the principal of (town) schools. My mom is a secretary for a different school district. I told them I loved the foster care system, except some of the rules. If I wanted to go out of town, I had to get out of county forms signed. When I was talking to him about it, he went home and talked to his wife about it (having me move in). They never had kids. They decided to take me in. I've been living with them about a year and a half. They bought me a new car. My room is huge, I have two walk in closets, a TV. and VCR, queen sized bed. In a way I feel guilty, I talked to the dad (I just call

them my parents now) he said that she likes to do it, to just let her. When I moved in they told me never to call it a foster home. They got a special license to let me move in, when I turned eighteen it expired. I stayed there, and they said never to call it a foster home, it's a home and they want me to be there. I just call them my mom and dad now.

My real parents have never liked any of my foster parents. They get upset when they hear me call those guys my parents. But, who's been parents to me? They never were. I had to go to private church school, it was so strict. If you did something wrong you'd get a spanking. If you got a spanking at school, you'd get one at home, too. When I got home I had to go right to my room and work. They'd bring me my dinner up there. I hardly ever ate with the family. When I moved into a foster home, everybody was so nice to me. I kept wondering, what's going to happen. I didn't expect anyone to be nice.

For the first year I was in eight or ten different foster homes. I felt like no one wanted me. Some of them didn't have enough money to keep it going. Some of them wanted to use me as a baby sitter. Some of them were really strict.... the last one was a good experience. She was strict. She got all the tough kids, all the drinkers. I told her right away that I wasn't a drinker. Every time you go to a new foster home, my dad had to be there. He told all the foster parents that he didn't want me dating any guys. My last foster mom said, "what do you want her to do, date girls?" My dad is someone who you don't talk back to. He lives more towards the olden days...girls don't work outside the home, go to school, wear make-up, or drive.....

I could never lie very well. Every time we got in trouble, she just looked at me, I'd break into tears. The other girls wanted me to go to a party...they said "if you want to live here, you have to get along with the rest of us..." I was so paranoid, they got really wasted. When we got home, our foster mom was in the living room. I tried to cover up that (other girl) was drinking. I was so scared. The next morning (foster mom) called me into the kitchen. She asked me how the "school dance" was last night, I broke into tears. She said she was just trying to see if I'd be honest. The other one got kicked out over it. Every girl who was in there, besides me, was pregnant or on drugs.

After that, my foster mom and I had the best relationship. I was honest with her after that. She wanted us to learn honesty. We still talk a lot. They live in Wisconsin, now. She calls me a lot.

mlc Tell about your best placement experience, either one specific event that was really positive, or a placement that was very positive for you. What do you think made this event or placement positive?

112: My last foster home. She let us watch TV., but she didn't want us to just sit. We always had to be doing something crafty while we watched. I learned how to crochet, I made many afghans. She was into wood carving and stuff. She was really creative and artistic. It was hard to leave that family, when they moved to Wisconsin. I knew they really cared about me and wanted me to move with them, but it was my senior year and I didn't want to go.

They locked the doors every night at 11:00pm. If you weren't home by then, you had to call. If you ran, and didn't tell anyone you were not welcome back to the house. If you told, she wouldn't stop you from leaving. She called the police right away. But if you snuck off and left the door unlocked, you left their family open to danger. You couldn't come back.

We never went up to their area of the house, unless there was an emergency. It was for them to have their family time. They had baby monitors all over the house. It helped me one night. I had a ruptured appendix. My foster dad had to carry me out.

I liked them a lot. They were really honest with us. Their rules were strict, but reasonable. Like we could only be on the phone for ten minutes each hour. Now, I'm on the phone all the time. You can't even get through.

mlc: If you could give three pieces of advice to probation officers / social workers about what it is like to be in the system what would you say?

112: Understand the child very well before you jump to conclusions. Understand their explanations of why they did it. A lot of the time they jump right in..... They don't ask why, and they just bust you, or send you to detox.

Encourage them to associate with their family. A lot of times they discourage that. I think it's more healthy to have at least some contact. I think it's important because it helps not just the person, but also the family to understand that the kid is not totally against them. For the first two weeks I was in foster care, I didn't have contact with my parents, I know they thought I wanted nothing to do with them. All parents, even if the kid doesn't know it, care about their kid. They want to hear that they're OK and safe.

Help the child more with therapy. Encourage them to participate more. I never wanted to talk about my problems. Encourage them to talk about what's going on with their families. I talked more easily to my social worker about my sexual abuse, because she was female. I've had to tell my sexual abuse story to about eight different guys. Each time I told that story, I was in tears. Telling another man was so hard. You have to tell all the details. By the end, I bet I told fifteen different people. I got so used to talking about it, that I warned them that I was afraid they wouldn't think it was true, because I was so used to talking about it. I didn't express a lot of feelings. My foster mom gave me an article on sexual abuse....I read it, and knew that it was me. She was in the next room, and came in and talked to me, I cried. I was really scared after I talked about it. My psychologist came over. They were afraid I would go back to the suicidal stuff.

My brother's a pedophile. He got off with nothing.

The workers made me tell my family. That was the hardest thing I've ever done. I told my dad when we were alone in the car. He reached over and slugged me in the stomach. He said I don't ever want to hear you say that about your brother again. I ran all the way home. That whole six months was hell. My brother said that he just admitted to it in court so he wouldn't have to drag me through court. My family blames me. He didn't continue in the Service. He was in for six years, he's in school now. He wanted to get a job at the Post Office. On the application they ask if you have been convicted of a felony. He marked yes. Now my parents say he doesn't have a job because of me. My mom knew this was going on the whole time. When I told her she said, "I figured something like that was going on".

She said there wasn't anything she could do about it. Our rooms were in the basement. She'd be in the living room, and he'd sneak into my room. He'd put socks in my mouth so I couldn't scream. At first it was just petting. Then it got to....it happened for five years. I knew something wasn't right, but he told me if I told anybody he'd beat me up and stuff. What was I supposed to do? My dad said, "if you knew it was going on, why didn't you say something sooner?" My brother still threatens me. He tells people when they see me to tell me I'm dead.

mlc: Are you recording that, writing that down when that happens?

112: *My social worker and his Probation Officer knows. He can't be with our younger siblings, because he's listed as a pedophile. My family blames me for ruining that relationship.*

mlc: What do you think are possible ways of "educating" social workers and probation officers about your feelings as a youth in the system?

112: *Before they're done with their client...ask them questions about how they can improve things. That's the best way, because it's fresh in the child's head. They'll have the feelings right there in their head. I would do that with my worker. I told him the good and the bad. I was real honest with him. The questions on the exit interview would be: What helped? What did not help? How have I helped you in getting on with your life? As I dealt with you as a client, what are some things that helped you? Do you feel that social workers are a good help for you? Do you think the system is run fairly? Do you think they're fair to each client. Do you think we were ever too forceful or strict in ways we shouldn't have been? (like going out of the county).*

When I was in foster care, they favored me. They gave me a later curfew. That wasn't fair to the other kids. I got a \$10.00 higher allowance than other kids. That wasn't fair.

mlc: Have you ever worked together with other youth in/from care to try to influence a particular program or worker? What was that experience like for you?

112: *No, I can't say I really have. I was in this group called (name). It was a group that helped us when we were in foster care. It was girls and guys, we went hiking and to games. We were all in foster care. We talked about what we liked and didn't like about the system. He helped us financially, like balancing our checkbook.*

mlc: Was that the SELF program you were in?

112: *I never knew. Then I started getting these surveys. Now that you tell me this, I bet it was. The group was very good. They taught us independent living skills. We learned to live in the wilderness. We had to ration our stuff- no curling irons! They gave us \$10.00 every time we came. We went to the grocery store, and compared generic things to name brands on price. We went to clothes stores. We went rock climbing, and bowling. We influenced each other, we said there's more to life than partying. A lot of the girls slept around. The guys there talked to them about it. It was all very realistic. The two counselors were just great. Whoever in foster care who turns eighteen gets a call, to see if they want to join. If they want to learn about independent living skills.*

If you graduate, after high school, you're done. You need to leave a spot for the next person.

mlc: Are you aware of any groups of youth in/from care who have organized? If so, which groups? If not, what do you think an organized group of youth might look like? What might they do?

112: *The SELF group I was talking about before. They had groups in school when I was in high school. There were groups of people who drink, and groups of kids in foster care. You know on this questionnaire, you asked about telling kids about foster care. I sort of agree and sort of not. Some kids think it's a joke, I can go live in a foster home and get*

away from my own family. Other kids in foster care need to know that they're not the only one who's in care. They need to know there are people who will listen. They could get together with other kids for support. Others will know what's going on.

Teachers should know a little. Because it's not easy being in foster care. You're not living with your real family. The teacher should know that the kid is dealing with a whole lot more than a "normal" kid and might struggle in school.

mlc: What does the future hold for you?

112: It looks really good for me. I've learned a lot in the system. I feel like I'll be very successful in what I decide to do. I'll have my LPN in a couple months. I want to join the Air Force for two years. I can do that because I'll be going in with a degree in something. I'll go in as an LPN. I like the health care field, I want to do that in the Air Force. I could go in as a higher rank, too.

Then I want to come back and get into special imaging. It's CAT scans, MRI's and ultrasounds. I'll have to go back to school after I take a break by going to the Air Force.

I used to be a 4.0/3.5 student. This LPN program is really hard. I'm so excited with life right now. I'm eighteen, and I'll have my LPN by nineteen. I used to be afraid I'd be messed up for my whole life. My self esteem has risen drastically. The family I live with has been nothing but positive.

My boyfriend's in school in Colorado. We'll be apart for awhile, but that's OK. He gave me this promise ring. The people I live with were so excited, they think he's the love of god. I'm happily in a relationship with my boyfriend.

I exercise, run or play music to release my stress. I'm a long distance runner, and I just love it.

My brother's still alive. He's been a really positive influence. My dad tried to blame me for my brothers' muscular dystrophy. I couldn't have caused it. He's two years older than me.

Went on to talk about poor relationship with dad's girlfriend. Strong negative feelings and anger about their upcoming marriage. I told them I won't put up with your crap anymore. I put up with it for fourteen years. Now he's trying to buy my love. I have this much (showed with fingers) love for him. I'll always have this much, no more no less because he's my father.

March 3, 1994

Dear XXXX,

Enclosed is a copy of the transcription of our interview. Please take a few minutes to read over it. Feel free to *write on the pages and make any changes* that you think would make the text clearer. Write any additional comments on it that you would like me to add if you think they would make your points clearer. Of course, you're welcome to add anything you thought of after we finished.

Once you make corrections, please *initial at the top of the first page*, where it gives the date of the interview and your ID #. Then **send the revised text to me in the enclosed envelope** so that I can make the changes to my copies of the interview. I will destroy the tapes of our interview once I have completed corrections to your specifications.

Thank you again for your help in this project! I really appreciate your willingness to share with me. I am very grateful for the chance to learn from you. (Some sort of personal note about our interview)

I know that you're busy with work and school, but I would really appreciate it if you could get the revised transcription back to me by the March 15. I hope that gives you enough time.

Thanks again for your help,

Michelle Chalmers
(612) 722-7692

FREQUENCIES /VARIABLES Q1 TO Q21.
 The raw data or transformation pass is proceeding
 11 cases are written to the compressed active file.

Q1 PO LISTENS

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
	2	1	9.1	33.3	33.3
	4	2	18.2	66.7	100.0
	6	8	72.7	Missing	
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 3 Missing cases 8

Q2 SW LISTENS

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
	1	1	9.1	9.1	9.1
	2	3	27.3	27.3	36.4
	4	3	27.3	27.3	63.6
	5	4	36.4	36.4	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 11 Missing cases 0

Q3 YIC WANT TO SAY

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
	2	1	9.1	9.1	9.1
	3	2	18.2	18.2	27.3
	4	1	9.1	9.1	36.4
	5	7	63.6	63.6	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 11 Missing cases 0

Q4 I HAVE IDEAS

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
	1	1	9.1	9.1	9.1
	2	1	9.1	9.1	18.2
	3	2	18.2	18.2	36.4
	4	2	18.2	18.2	54.5
	5	5	45.5	45.5	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 11 Missing cases 0

Q5 I WANT TO SPEAK

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
	1	1	9.1	9.1	9.1
	2	1	9.1	9.1	18.2
	3	2	18.2	18.2	36.4
	4	2	18.2	18.2	54.5
	5	5	45.5	45.5	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 11 Missing cases 0

APPENDIX H

Q6 I HAVE BEEN RESPECTED

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
	1	1	9.1	9.1	9.1
	2	1	9.1	9.1	18.2
	3	1	9.1	9.1	27.3
	4	1	9.1	9.1	36.4
	5	7	63.6	63.6	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 11 Missing cases 0

Q7 OTHER YOUTH DO NOT UNDERSTAND

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
	2	2	18.2	18.2	18.2
	3	2	18.2	18.2	36.4
	4	1	9.1	9.1	45.5
	5	6	54.5	54.5	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 11 Missing cases 0

Q8 ALL YOUTH SHOULD HEAR

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
	1	1	9.1	9.1	9.1
	2	3	27.3	27.3	36.4
	3	2	18.2	18.2	54.5
	5	5	45.5	45.5	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 11 Missing cases 0

Q9 ALL TEACHERS SHOULD HEAR

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
	1	2	18.2	20.0	20.0
	3	1	9.1	10.0	30.0
	4	4	36.4	40.0	70.0
	5	3	27.3	30.0	100.0
	.	1	9.1	Missing	
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 10 Missing cases 1

Q10 I WOULD BE A BUDDY

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
	1	1	9.1	9.1	9.1
	3	1	9.1	9.1	18.2
	4	2	18.2	18.2	36.4
	5	7	63.6	63.6	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 11 Missing cases 0

APPENDIX H

Q11 I AM SOMETIMES EMBARRASSED

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
	1	4	36.4	36.4	36.4
	2	1	9.1	9.1	45.5
	3	1	9.1	9.1	54.5
	4	3	27.3	27.3	81.8
	5	2	18.2	18.2	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 11 Missing cases 0

Q12 FOSTER HOME

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
	0	4	36.4	36.4	36.4
	1	7	63.6	63.6	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 11 Missing cases 0

Q13 GROUP HOME

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
	0	8	72.7	72.7	72.7
	1	3	27.3	27.3	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 11 Missing cases 0

Q14 SHELTER

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
	0	8	72.7	72.7	72.7
	1	3	27.3	27.3	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 11 Missing cases 0

Q15 FAMILY MEMBERS

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
	0	9	81.8	81.8	81.8
	1	2	18.2	18.2	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 11 Missing cases 0

Q16 JUVENILE DETENTION

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
	0	10	90.9	90.9	90.9
	1	1	9.1	9.1	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 11 Missing cases 0

Q17 CORRECTIONS PROGRAM

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
	0	11	100.0	100.0	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	
Valid cases	11	Missing cases	0		

Q18 RESIDENTIAL TREATMENT

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
	0	7	63.6	63.6	63.6
	1	4	36.4	36.4	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	
Valid cases	11	Missing cases	0		

Q19 OTHER

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
	0	9	81.8	81.8	81.8
	1	2	18.2	18.2	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	
Valid cases	11	Missing cases	0		

Q20 RUN FROM HOME

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
	1	7	63.6	63.6	63.6
	2	4	36.4	36.4	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	
Valid cases	11	Missing cases	0		

Q21 RUN FROM PLACEMENT

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
	1	3	27.3	27.3	27.3
	2	8	72.7	72.7	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	
Valid cases	11	Missing cases	0		

DESCRIPTIVES /VARIABLES Q1 TO Q21.

Number of Valid Observations (Listwise) = 3.00

Variable	Mean	Std Dev	Minimum	Maximum	N	Label
Q1	3.33	1.15	2	4	3	PO LISTENS
Q2	3.55	1.51	1	5	11	SW LISTENS
Q3	4.27	1.10	2	5	11	YIC WANT TO SAY
Q4	3.82	1.40	1	5	11	I HAVE IDEAS
Q5	3.82	1.40	1	5	11	I WANT TO SPEAK
Q6	4.09	1.45	1	5	11	I HAVE BEEN RESPECTE
Q7	4.00	1.26	2	5	11	OTHER YOUTH DO NOT U
Q8	3.45	1.57	1	5	11	ALL YOUTH SHOULD HEA
Q9	3.60	1.51	1	5	10	ALL TEACHERS SHOULD
Q10	4.27	1.27	1	5	11	I WOULD BE A BUDDY
Q11	2.82	1.66	1	5	11	I AM SOMETIMES EMBAR
Q12	.64	.50	0	1	11	FOSTER HOME
Q13	.27	.47	0	1	11	GROUP HOME
Q14	.27	.47	0	1	11	SHELTER
Q15	.18	.40	0	1	11	FAMILY MEMBERS
Q16	.09	.30	0	1	11	JUVENILE DETENTION
Q17	.00	.00	0	0	11	CORRECTIONS PROGRAM
Q18	.36	.50	0	1	11	RESIDENTIAL TREATMEN

Number of Valid Observations (Listwise) = 3.00

Variable	Mean	Std Dev	Minimum	Maximum	N	Label
Q19	.18	.40	0	1	11	OTHER
Q20	1.36	.50	1	2	11	RUN FROM HOME
Q21	1.73	.47	1	2	11	RUN FROM PLACMENT

CROSSTABS /TABLES= Q7 BY Q8 /TABLES=Q2 BY Q4 /TABLES= Q8 BY Q10/
 TABLES= Q12 BY Q11 / TABLES= Q13 BY Q11 /TABLES= Q14 BY Q11/
 TABLES= Q15 BY Q11 / TABLES= Q16 BY Q11 /TABLES= Q17 BY Q11/
 TABLES= Q18 BY Q11 / TABLES= Q19 BY Q11 /TABLES= Q21 BY Q6/
 TABLES= Q21 BY Q4.

Q7 OTHER YOUTH DO NOT UNDERSTAND by Q8 ALL YOUTH SHOULD HEAR

Count	Q8				Row Total
	1	2	3	5	
Q7	2	1	1	1	2
					18.2
	3	1		1	2
					18.2
	4		1		1
					9.1
	5	1	1	3	6
					54.5
Column Total	9.1	27.3	18.2	45.5	11
Total					100.0

Number of Missing Observations: 0

Q2 SW LISTENS by Q4 I HAVE IDEAS

		Q4					
Count		1	2	3	4	5	Row Total
Q2	1				1		1 9.1
	2			1		2	3 27.3
	4				1	2	3 27.3
	5	1	1	1		1	4 36.4
	Column Total	1	1	2	2	5	11 100.0

Number of Missing Observations: 0

Q8 ALL YOUTH SHOULD HEAR by Q10 I WOULD BE A BUDDY

		Q10				
Count		1	3	4	5	Row Total
Q8	1				1	1 9.1
	2	1			2	3 27.3
	3			1	1	2 18.2
	5		1	1	3	5 45.5
	Column Total	1	1	2	7	11 100.0

Number of Missing Observations: 0

Q12 FOSTER HOME by Q11 I AM SOMETIMES EMBARRASSED

		Q11					
Count		1	2	3	4	5	Row Total
Q12	0	2		1	1		4 36.4
	1	2	1		2	2	7 63.6
Column Total		4	1	1	3	2	11 100.0

Number of Missing Observations: 0

APPENDIX H

Q13 GROUP HOME by Q11 I AM SOMETIMES EMBARRASSED

Count	Q11					Row Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
0	2	1	1	2	2	8 72.7
1	2			1		3 27.3
Column Total	4	1	1	3	2	11 100.0

Number of Missing Observations: 0

Q14 SHELTER by Q11 I AM SOMETIMES EMBARRASSED

Count	Q11					Row Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
0	2	1	1	3	1	8 72.7
1	2				1	3 27.3
Column Total	4	1	1	3	2	11 100.0

Number of Missing Observations: 0

Q15 FAMILY MEMBERS by Q11 I AM SOMETIMES EMBARRASSED

Count	Q11					Row Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
0	3	1	1	2	2	9 81.8
1	1			1		2 18.2
Column Total	4	1	1	3	2	11 100.0

Number of Missing Observations: 0

Q16 JUVENILE DETENTION by Q11 I AM SOMETIMES EMBARRASSED

Count	Q11					Row Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
0	4	1	1	2	2	10 90.9
1				1		1 9.1
Column Total	4 36.4	1 9.1	1 9.1	3 27.3	2 18.2	11 100.0

Number of Missing Observations: 0

Q17 CORRECTIONS PROGRAM by Q11 I AM SOMETIMES EMBARRASSED

Count	Q11					Row Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
0	4	1	1	3	2	11 100.0
Column Total	4 36.4	1 9.1	1 9.1	3 27.3	2 18.2	11 100.0

Number of Missing Observations: 0

Q18 RESIDENTIAL TREATMENT by Q11 I AM SOMETIMES EMBARRASSED

Count	Q11					Row Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
0	2	1	1	1	2	7 63.6
1	2			2		4 36.4
Column Total	4 36.4	1 9.1	1 9.1	3 27.3	2 18.2	11 100.0

Number of Missing Observations: 0

Q19 OTHER by Q11 I AM SOMETIMES EMBARRASSED

Count	Q11					Row Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
0	4			3	2	9 81.8
1		1	1			2 18.2
Column Total	4 36.4	1 9.1	1 9.1	3 27.3	2 18.2	11 100.0

Number of Missing Observations: 0

Q21 RUN FROM PLACEMENT by Q6 I HAVE BEEN RESPECTED

		Q6					
Count		1	2	3	4	5	Row Total
Q21	1	1	1	1		1	3 27.3
	2				1	6	8 72.7
Column Total		1	1	1	1	7	11 100.0
		9.1	9.1	9.1	9.1	63.6	

Number of Missing Observations: 0

Q21 RUN FROM PLACEMENT by Q4 I HAVE IDEAS

		Q4					
Count		1	2	3	4	5	Row Total
Q21	1	1			1	1	3 27.3
	2		1	2	1	4	8 72.7
Column Total		1	1	2	2	5	11 100.0
		9.1	9.1	18.2	18.2	45.5	

Number of Missing Observations: 0

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