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FOSTER CARE ADOLESCENTS AND HIGHER EDUCATION

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

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

by
Mary Ann Holmes

June 2006


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Approved by:



Dr. Janet Chang, Faculty Supervisor
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6/6/06
Date



Mr. Raymond Howard, Director,
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ABSTRACT

This study reviewed Independent Living Program (ILP) participants in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties in California. The programs were developed and special funding allocated to facilitate basic life skills, high school diploma attainment, job skills, vocational and postsecondary education training. Historically, aging-out youth have not transitioned well into the job and housing market or attained higher education; statistically their rate of homelessness and incarcerations is greater than their peer group. A quantitative data collection, using secondary analyses, provided an objective and impartial assessment of the number of youth who took advantage of the resources available to them before and after aging out of the foster care system.

Review of case files revealed progress in accomplishing the goal of moving foster care emancipated youth toward independence. These youth often lack familial support when transitioning, and their most frequently reported housing accommodation is with friends or living independently. The study supported earlier findings that less than 50% of the foster youth obtain a high school diploma at the time of emancipation.

Twenty-one percent of the youth are pursuing higher education; however, none have completed a program of study. Fifty-one percent of the youth were currently employed. This study was unable to show statistical significance and association between educational achievement and housing stability, or educational achievement and employment status. This researcher recommends that social workers and school district administrators begin to collaborate on policies to implement best practices that address the educational needs of children when the youth is entering foster care placement. Finally, it would be beneficial to human services policy and procedures administrators to collaborate with higher education institutions in a longitudinal study measuring foster care placement and how it impacts access to higher education.

DEDICATION

In Loving Memory of

My Mother

Beulah Elizabeth Cooper Syck James

and

My Friend and Kindred Spirit

Judith Rentz

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The problem of youth aging out of foster care, under prepared to live as independent productive young adults, is of epidemic proportion. Unique to their situation is a lack of social support from their biological family and extended kinship group. The ties that connected them to a foster family are too frequently broken once the youth age out of the foster care system at age eighteen. The statistics are alarming; less than 50% complete their high school diploma or obtain a GED. Their stories reflect a report card of "hard luck" success and failure for the foster care system. Legislation has been enacted to bridge the gap between their success and failure and to integrate these youth into the greater society through basic training in life skills and incentives for completing the high school diploma and extending their education into vocational training or post secondary education. Programs have been established to assist the youth beginning as early as age thirteen. Social workers are key members of the team that facilitates the necessary support and resources to enable aging out youth

to successfully transition to educated, connected independent young adults.

Problem Statement

Each year nationally 20-25,000 youth age out of the foster care system. Youth in foster care have consistently performed academically below their peer group (Zetlin, Weinberg & Kimm, 2004). Placement home movement, multiple school records and a shift to special education programs to address behavioral problems have contributed to few (less than 50%) foster youths leaving high school with a diploma. Youths who leave foster care and are reunited with their biological family disproportionately leave high school without a diploma and skip college. These two decisions at an early age increase the incidence of homelessness, depression and unemployment, as well as substance abuse experimentation or dependence (Greene, 2002).

An intervention program was established to provide basic life maintenance skills to youth aging out of the foster care system: establishing a residence, bill payments, job searches, people skills, and community resources. The Independent Living Program had a daunting

challenge to close the statistical gaps that plague those aging out of foster care within a few short years of leaving the system.

- Less than 50% graduate from high school, compared to 85% of their peer group ages 18-24;
- 25% have been homeless at least once;
- 66% have been unable to maintain employment over a twelve month period;
- 40% have become parents;
- Less than 20% are completely self supporting; and
- 25% of the males and 10% of the females have spent time in jail.

In 40 states, 42,680 youth have participated in independent living programs (Collins, 2001).

Each year 500,000 youths in the United States are supervised in their development by institutional caregivers in the foster care system. Each of these children remains an individual with their own set of circumstances. Some require short-term placement, while others are unable to return to their biological families. Two people, Jim and Alice Casey (Shirk & Stangler, 2004),

were attentive listeners to these reports and were so moved by them that they invested a substantial portion of their fortune amassed in the shipping industry to help prepare youth leaving foster care with transitional skills for the "real" world, absent safety nets for housing and food (Greene, 2002). To sing the Casey's praises would silence the voices of the foster care system. Their fragile, vulnerable, and often angry voices must be heard by a larger audience to inform and change societal opinion and involvement in providing transitional opportunities to foster care children aging out of the system. One is his brother's keeper. One must keep him close, value his individuality, and nurture his transition to adulthood or one will keep him at bay and pay to house him in a government institution. The Independent Living Program, implemented in 1986, seeks to provide a training ground to launch independent and successful aging out foster care youth into the American dream.

Examples of the Problem

In September of 2004 Martha Shirk, a seasoned writer for *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, and Gary Stangler, former senior administrator of the Missouri Department of Social

Services and currently serving as executive director of the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, collaborated on the book *On Their Own: What Happens to Kids When They Age Out of the Foster Care System*. This book is a haunting voice for the children in foster care, documenting cases in New York, Massachusetts, Florida, California, Kansas, and Iowa. The names, locations, sexes, and ages at the time they entered the foster care system are different; however, their voice is one. Their lives were dynamic, without consistent care and protective social systems; it is important to listen to their voices.

The Williams brothers, Lamar, Jeffrey and Jermaine, come from the crime ridden, poverty stricken, Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York. A loving mother attached herself to a male companion who fed her a steady diet of drugs and alcohol. The home environment deteriorated to a violent, food-free state that prompted the three young boys, ages six, seven, and eight, to walk to the closest precinct and ask the officers to place them in foster care. The youngest, Lamar, was so happy to have regular meals and a warm bed that he adjusted readily. The two older brothers, accustomed to

unsupervised play and freedom to roam, did not adjust as well to restricted foster care. They ran away from the system and back to their mother's home. Lamar remained in the system for 15 years, achieved a college degree and wisdom beyond his years. What made Lamar different from his siblings and others in the system was his understanding of how to play the game of foster care.

Shirk and Stangler stated:

Although there's rules and regulations you have to follow, a lot of kids don't grasp that that's just life. One staff always used to tell me 'life ain't fair.' ...a lot of kids at Children's Village, including my brothers didn't get it. They always feel that if they do something, they should get something. It's just not the case. (2004, p. 22)

While living in a bucolic setting called Children's Village, Lamar understood the importance of establishing his niche in his community and school that provided a social support system that functioned as a surrogate family. By the time Lamar aged out of the foster care system his brother Jeffrey was serving time for armed robbery and his brother Jermaine had died in an auto accident on his way to a drug deal in New Jersey. The

Williams family had three sons who took two paths through the foster care system: aging out and running away.

In the heartland of America another story was unfolded for a disabled, affable young man from Iowa. Reggie Kelsey was emancipated on his eighteenth birthday and his caseworker closed his file. Absent from his file was any transitional paperwork to move Reggie into a treatment facility for the chronically mental disabled. Reggie was known to give his psychotropic drugs away, as well as the coat on his back if he thought the other person's need was greater than his own. Without a safety net of independent living program participation in place, Reggie aged out of the system into a cold, unforgiving society and it cost him his life. Three months after discharge from the system Reggie's half clothed body was found floating in the Des Moines River.

A young lassie from the Southie section of Boston, Massachusetts was well practiced at attending to her personal needs, scavenging free food was a daily routine for Holly and her elder sister of eighteen months before being rescued by the local officials and placed in foster care. By the time she aged out of the Independent Living Program at the age of twenty-two, she had attended 8

schoels, lived in 7 placements, been separated from her sibling, and earned a college degree. She attributed her success to the first placement family, with whom she continues to be in contact; her first social worker, who became her friend; a steady boyfriend who walked through many placements and an attempted suicide with her; and her sibling who continues to be a daily social support. Holly identified this group of people as her "constructed family."

In the city by the bay a young twenty-one year old, Raquel, struggled to gain independence from the foster care system. She was alone, without a developed, biological or institutional support system. Failure to complete the independent living program plan of passing the GED and/or obtaining a job have thrown her into a wander lust life. She moved from shelter, to apartment, to homeless shelter, tapped into every reservoir for survival because in her words, "I never want to live on the streets." Raquel was like many of her peers aging out of the system, she was not prepared to transition into an economic system that was unforgiving and discarded the under prepared and emotionally crippled as easily as an investor would dump a poor performing acquisition on the

discount market. Raquel is currently destined to reinforce the aging out statistics that prompted the federal legislature to enact the Independent Living Program. In these stories are a measure of success and failure for the foster care system.

Purpose of the Study

This paper documents the protective federal, state, and local measures that have been implemented to effect change to these statistics. Locally, the California counties of San Bernardino and Riverside have contracted with the Cameron Hill Aftercare Services to "provide educational, transportation, housing, basic needs, counseling, and other services to foster care youth ages 18-21" (Boyle & Whittington, 2003, p. 98). The department of social services incorporated Independence 101 classes for youth ages 15-18 to assist with basic life skills, as well as provided tutoring, career exposure, outreach and training workshops (Boyle, & Whittington, 2003; Eilertson, 2002). In Riverside County the local Riverside Community College became a partner with the Independent Living Program to bridge the aging out youth into the community college environment. Additionally, becoming an

attentive listener to the voices of the aging out population established a standard for providing the necessary resources and training to successfully transition aging out youth into independent productive young adulthood. Foster care alumni and current participants comprise the California Youth Connection (Ferrell, 2004) and speak as the advisory voice on the county Independent Living Program Council. Society expects an inordinate amount of childhood restitution from the independent living program at the time of emancipation.

Cameron Hill Aftercare Services receives faxed referrals from the department of social services; this action initiates a contact with "high risk" young adults prior to their emancipation. This standard procedure was implemented to ensure a seamless transition of information and services introduced in the independent living program classes.

This study reviewed the information collected during the initial contact/interview and services rendered to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. The youth are referred beginning at the age of 17.5 years and conclude on the youth's twenty-first birthday. The files studied

are of youth in their twentieth year, providing the most comprehensive data for services utilized. The review of data files to document the request for housing, employment and education assistance should be beneficial to the agency as an outcome evaluation study of services, provide a standard model for best practices, as well as supportive documentation in agency contract proposals.

The research design utilized at Cameron Hill Associates was a quantitative study of case files in the agency. This secondary data analysis design allowed a greater number of youth being served by the agency to represent a voice in the study. A systematic random sampling of case files prevented client bias. Higher education was the dependent variable of this study. Independent variables affecting the educational process that were collected are age (entry and exit), first paid employment, duration of employment, housing arrangement (entry and exit), gender, ethnic affiliation, and educational goal attainment as outlined by the individual's goals and plans agreement. A review of the services available to emancipated youth and the utilization of these services provided a paradigm for the

level of support necessary to facilitate a successful transition to independent living.

Significance of the Project for Social Work

The preamble of the National Association of Social Workers' Code of Ethics guides practitioners toward a service model addressing the empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty (NASW, 1981). The emancipated youth can be relegated to each of these categories when adequate preparation, resources and support are not provided. As a group, they comprise the ethnic and cultural diversity of the nation and appreciate competent advocates sensitive to their values, beliefs, and practices; they are our future caregivers.

A high school diploma is a milestone for adolescents and a stepping-stone to vocational and post secondary training. Social workers strive to provide adequate resources and placement stability to ensure this achievement. This study provided a benchmark for educational achievement for emancipated youth in the Riverside and San Bernardino counties aftercare program.

The education attained at the age of emancipation and the aftercare services utilized were collected to

evaluate the effectiveness of the independent living program model. The study reveals that an earlier intervention for termination preparation requires a shift in the paradigm for delivering foster care services. The results support the field of social work in securing a greater presence in the school environment to effectively oversee the planning, terminating and follow up of foster care youth's educational progress and aftercare services. These are three components of social work practice that have been identified as a best practice model required of generalist practitioners (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2002). Social workers should be receptive to adopting new practice models when, and if, research indicates that the current practice is not producing the optimal outcome for youth and their educational achievement.

Currently public schools' employee resource advocates, counselors and school psychologists are assigned the task to protect the education access rights of students (Constable, McDonald & Flynn, 2002). Social workers are required to attend collaborative meetings involving individual education planning (IEP) sessions for foster youth. High school counselors may carry a caseload of 500 students or more to track each year for

scheduling and parental communication. Social services agencies should proactively lobby to open these doors to social workers who can provide a stable presence for foster youth who need assistance in processing education angst, living transitions and family dynamics.

A known social services advocate on the campus may help alleviate behavioral adjustments and provide immediate access to the person who oversees their well being. The presence of a proactive social worker assigned to schools would provide a practical bridge to the delivery of child protection and education. Accessing social services resources, such as life skills programs, would be more readily accessed on a school campus that does not rely upon public transportation or foster care parents transporting youth to special meetings. A strong presence should prevent duplication of services and provide a stronger alliance between the social worker and the foster youth. A latent benefit of having permanent social work staff at education institutions would be the access to informal information regarding siblings who have graduated or left the school. Casual inquiry of a sibling's whereabouts and/or current school or job endeavor may help to identify emancipated youth, ages

18-21, in need of services, thereby, providing an opportunity to request services/intervention via a referral to an aftercare service agency, such as Cameron Hill Associates.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

History has a tendency to be repeated if society does not perceive a problem exists with youth aging out of foster care. Society has established a social services network to attend to and safeguard the vulnerable and oppressed. The network must review presenting needs of their clients (employment, housing, education) and utilize all resources necessary to transition this population into productive young adulthood. The literature reviewed is from a historical legislative prospective, needs prospective, and development theories perspective. Through these lenses a new view of transition for aging out youth to young adulthood is constructed.

Historical Legislative

In 1996 the field of social work celebrated one hundred years of attending to the welfare of the impoverished, vulnerable, and oppressed. Much ground has been gained in equality and access to social services and attending to the immediate needs of children who are

living in an environment where they are unable to thrive due to neglect, abuse, uncontrollable behavior, drug dependency, and all too frequently, abandonment (Goerge, Bilaver, Lee, Needell, Brookhart, & Jackman, 2002). The steps are firmly in place to help those under the age of eighteen in need of services and often the monetary expense is overlooked in the hope that the investment will turn around a life that is teetering on the brink of self-destruction. Until 1985, social workers' focus on these children ended at the age of maturity, 18 years.

In 1986 (P.L. 99-272) the federal Independent Living Initiative of 1986 was enacted by the federal legislature as an amendment to the Title IV-E regulations of the Social Security Act. It provides federal funds to enhance independent living skills for adolescents living in foster care (Mallon, 1998). The law was specific in outlining services to be implemented such as, "outreach programs to attract eligible individuals, education and employment assistance, training in daily living skills, individual and group counseling, integration and coordination of services and a written transitional independent living plan for each participant" (Collins, 2001, p. 273). The Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of

1993 reauthorized indefinitely the Independent Living Program.

In 1999, the Foster Care Independence Act provided states with more federal funding and greater flexibility to implement the mandate. The allocation was \$700 million over 5 years. Much of these funds are being focused on the children ages 18-21 that remain in the government surrogate family program, as well as those who have elected to leave their foster family and emancipate at the age of 18 or 19 depending on their high school progress on their eighteenth birthday (Shirk & Stangler, 2004). All who remain in the social services system are regulated during the period of receiving assistance, regardless of age. The passage of the Chaffee Act provided matching funds to states, requiring a 20 percent state match for the first \$45 million and a 50 percent match for additional funds. The Chaffee Act allocates up to a maximum of \$5,000 per annum for emancipated minors continuing in the education and job skills enhancement programs (Goerge et al., 2002).

Even with these safeguards for social workers to place and monitor the progress of children placed in foster care and a supportive monetary fund, the children

"aging out" of the foster care system are not prepared to integrate into the greater society as an independent, self supporting citizen free of government income supplementation and monitoring. What makes them so different from their peers? Each year it is estimated that 20-25,000 young adults age out of the system (Goerge et al., 2002) to find their niche in society; however, too frequently they are stumbling onto the merry-go-round of unemployment, isolation, drugs, homelessness, and incarceration. In order to provide a better outcome for children raised in foster care, one must first provide a better beginning in foster care.

The American dream for many is a job, home and family; however, that dream is out of reach for many because they have not learned that free education was their ticket to independence and the American dream. President Clinton in his 1997 inaugural address focused on a "new America" with "doors to higher education open to all" (Sullivan, 2002, p. 1). Children aging out of the foster care system leave without jobs or a high school education (45%). Less than 5 percent of foster care youth graduate with a college education (Ferrell, 2004). Are they less ambitious or cognitively gifted than their

peers? No! To make such an assumption would require that one discount the years of being removed from one's biological family, shifted from foster placement on several occasions, moved from school to school mid-year and often separated from siblings without a price. The price foster care children are paying for placement may be a financially stable and rewarding future. Instead of moving up the Maslow hierarchy scale to self fulfillment, they are struggling to meet their basic needs of food, shelter, and safety. For the 20-25,000 aging out youths each year, 50% are no better off than the day they were placed in the government's surrogate family program. For many their outlook is even more dismal because their biological families no longer want to participate in their life and so they are isolated from a social support system unless they have learned to establish a supplemental family networked over their years in the foster care system (Shirk & Stangler, 2004; Barth, 1986). Are they different from their peers, and if they are, what can be done to integrate them into the learning process and their ticket out of poverty, higher education?

Employment

Twenty years have passed since the federal government intervened in the "aging out" stage of the foster care program. The Health and Human Services Department of the federal government published a 2002 report on the employment status of youth coming of age in the foster care system. The purpose of the report was to establish a benchmark for employment statistics of Independent Living Program recipients in comparison to their peer group who were reunified with their biological or kinship family and those who remained free from the foster care system but lived in poverty (determined by receipt of AFDC/TANF monies). The study compared three states' (Illinois, California, and South Carolina) data as reported by the individual's social security statement for quarter credits earned in the social security employment tracking system. The reported years 1995-96 were the data available for the state of California. This data set should prove to be the best measurements for the data collected at the end of the Chaffee funding which began in 1999 and is due to expire in 2004.

The *Employment Outcomes for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care* study provides a benchmark for future

research (Goerge et al., 2002). Discussion of this report shall focus on the data for the state of California. According to the general accounting office (GAO), "youth aging out of foster care have very low levels of employment and earnings. Fewer than half...have earnings in any given quarter" (Goerge et al., 2002, p. 25) Aging out youths earn less than the comparison groups and in 1997 remained significantly below the poverty level of \$7,890 for a single individual, earning on the average \$6,000 per annum. There are more females in the aging out group and Hispanics tend to fair slightly better than their white or African American peers. Additionally, "the older youth are when they enter foster care or AFDC/TANF, the less likely they are to be employed" (Goerge et al., 2002, p. 20). Youth who have not adjusted to the crisis of change in living arrangements or standard of living brought about by divorce, death or unemployment of their primary care giver tend to experience longer periods of unemployment; this finding is more prevalent in the Los Angeles area. Although urban youth experience fewer opportunities for employment, 23 percent of those tracked in the report were never employed during the thirteen months of the study. The employability of the aging out

youth may be attributed to having been in out of home care longer than their reunified group peers.

Housing

Collins (2001) reports that "states are allowed substantial flexibility in the design and implementation of their independent living programs" (p. 273). As long as the states who receive and match federal funding provide a plan for aging out youth to obtain employment skills and training in daily living skills, the federal government will continue to provide an expensive array of benefits that allow "the program [to] offer the possibility of covering room and board, post-secondary educational assistance, and Medicaid coverage for these youth" (Goerge et al., 2002, p. 4). In 1999, the GAO report "documents the substantial variation and limitations in services provided in different states, and the limited federal monitoring of state implementation of independent living programs" (Collins, 2001, p. 273). The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 permitted a maximum of 30 percent of the federal funds to be spent for room and board. The demand for room and board exceeds the allocation of the foster care act; therefore, the other

safety net accessed by the homeless aging out population is the Title IV-E Transitional Living Program authorized in the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act. The limitation of these facilities is the time allowed before services are terminated. Employment is difficult to obtain by this group who average 45% without a high school diploma or GED. One of the stipulations toward remaining in emergency housing is that they are actively seeking employment and making academic progress.

Education

Limited academic progress and the inability to secure employment is a report card for the early education experience. Without adequate finances and educational preparation the likelihood of foster youth attending college becomes slim (Barth, 1986). Few of the foster care youth requiring extended services have high school diplomas and the independent living programs provide few apprenticeships and affordable vocational programs that connect potential employers to the youths being served. Gardener (1983) has published extensive research on learning styles. Many of these youth who are unable to excel in the traditional classroom environment

may benefit significantly from apprenticeship tutelage that provides vocational instruction, as well as social skill development.

In prior years, many aging out youth opted for the armed forces to obtain basic food, shelter, clothing, social and employment training skills. In recent years, the armed forces changed their recruitment guidelines and now require that new enlistees must have a high school diploma, GED, or satisfactorily complete 15 credit hours at a post secondary institution. With the armed forces option no longer available, it becomes more imperative to bridge the education gap and provide a social support network to foster care children at an earlier age, years before they would age out of the system.

According to Collins (2001), "adolescents aging out of care are more likely to establish independence because they are dissatisfied with foster care (run away) or because state support ends (age out) rather than for more positive, opportunity-oriented reasons, such as attending college" (p. 280). The average teenager continues to receive financial and social support from their biological family beyond the age of eighteen. Biological and kinship families are available to provide emotional

support and advice on life altering decisions. Youth who age out of the system, and are not reunited with their kin, are left on their own to make these decisions (Collins, 2001; Barth, 1986).

In recent years, social workers have become the primary advocate for youth leaving foster care making the connection to higher education and vocational training (Barth, 1986). Assistance with college applications and financial aid resources have enabled an increasing number of foster care youth to enter the college environment. Community based organizations have been established to assist scholarship applicants who carried a "C" average in high school and desire further training (Ferrell, 2004; Shirk & Stangler, 2004; Barth, 1986). The California Community College system accepts all adults, over age 18, and provides a clean education slate upon entry. The system is the perfect environment for a second chance for foster care youth to reinvent their adult self. Grubb (2003) penned the aging out group as the disconnected youth. The natural transitional community resource for the disconnected youth is the community college. Programs are institutionalized to provide job skill training, certificates, Associate Degrees, and

transfer coursework to allow the motivated and/or engaged student to pursue a bachelor's degree at a four-year university.

Many community based organizations provide "programs" that are successful based on charismatic leadership and falter when there is a change in personalities (Grubb, 2003). Community colleges have proven institutionalized stability that leads to long-term reform in incorporating processes to include the foster care youth prior to leaving the system. Utilizing dual enrollment, the high school student can become familiar with the college environment and establish rapport with transitional staff. The college can become a catalyst for job training and placement, as well as foster a safe environment for establishing independent boundaries. California State University, Fullerton established a Guardian Scholars Program to support the higher education experience for former foster youth. They have been tracking success stories on their website since 2000 (www.fullerton.edu/guardianscholars/success_stories.htm). A concerted effort has been made to bridge the gap between educationally disadvantaged youth and the higher education system.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

The ecological system theory for development focuses on the balance of risk and protective factors. The ages of 12-21 are the development period for establishing self in a microsystem comprised of family, school, and friends. This is a phase of life for experimentation, and reliance on the individual microsystem for unconditional acceptance, as well as established boundaries for controlling behavior. Foster children operate in an ecological system that is artificial. The support system can change within a few short hours. A boundary that is challenged can force the "family" system to call the individual's social worker to request that the child be moved immediately. This move is an immediate, crisis driven adjustment to a new family, school and establishing a new network of friends. For those who balk at this transition, it may become a precipitous spiral that eventually moves them into a group home environment instead of the traditional family.

Collins states "Resiliency frameworks emphasize the ability to cope with stressors and the critical role of accessing social support as a key coping mechanism" (2001, p. 282). Each abrupt change in a life creates

stress. The initial removal of a child from their biological/kin environment, the transition to temporary placement, movement once more to a long term placement, and possible return to the home environment create stressful events in childhood and adolescent development. This stress has been linked negatively to emotional and behavioral development. At a time in their life that should be carefree days playing with family and friends, foster children are tested on their ability to identify and develop a secondary social network. Many of these adolescents rise to the challenge; however, a large minority does not transition as readily. Those who rebel over the constraints placed on their movement and behavior in foster care fail to be adequately prepared for adulthood via positive development experiences and activities to enrich their social, moral, emotional, physical, and cognitive competence.

Adolescence is a time when the individual begins to develop an adult identity, establishes boundaries and the capacity for intimacy, and learns adult role responsibilities (Erickson, 1968). Foster care as a surrogate parent leaves children afraid to get attached to and trust people (Ferrell, 2004).

Summary

The preceding review provides a historical perspective on the complexity of preparing foster youth to integrate into society as independent young adults. They are a very fragile population with extraordinary histories that often retard developmental stages, leaving the youth under prepared to provide their basic needs on emancipation from the foster care system. Ongoing research has identified the weak links for obtaining self sufficiency and federal and state funding resources have been designated to gird basic needs such as housing, employment, and post secondary education/vocational training. These links are intertwined and lack of stability in one area can create disequilibrium and psychological stressors that prevent the young adult from integrating successfully into the adult sphere of independence.

Community resources have been linked to bridge the gap between the foster youth and their peers. Social workers have become the advocates for providing stable housing, life skills training, and access to resources upon aging out of the foster care system. The aftercare services provided by agencies, such as Cameron Hill

Associates, are the final phase of adaptation to self sufficiency for the foster youth. Finally, the strength of this final component of foster care should be measured by the deferment of foster youth from the infinite social services systems.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

The placement of youth in the foster care system may or may not influence the educational achievement of this protected population. Secondary analysis of transitional living program client files using the Cameron Hill Associates aftercare services for Riverside and San Bernardino counties in California (2004-05) provided a snapshot of the educational progress program participants achieved prior to entering, and in their last year of participating in, the independent living program. The program goal was to provide basic living skills, job training, employment placement, monitor educational achievement and assist youth toward successful transition into self sufficiency, and independence from social services.

Study Design

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the independent living program in Riverside and San Bernardino counties to transition foster care youth to independence of the social services

system. In order to evaluate what changes, if any, were necessary to accomplish the goal of an employable and educated society one had to first review what was occurring. Cameron Hill Associates' case files were reviewed to support the claim that clients' access to resources and higher education enable youth to become self sufficient. The selection of a quantitative data collection method allowed a review of a larger pool of participants. Secondary analyses of case files provided an objective and impartial assessment of the number of foster youth who took advantage of the resources available to them prior to and after aging out of the system at eighteen years old. The outcome of this study provided the agency with information to support the current practices that are positive contributors to youth's successful transition, as well as helped to identify modifications necessary to attain their service goals.

The limitation of this study was the law of probability. There are approximately four hundred case files with an open status, not all were reviewed. There was a possibility that one hundred cases could be reviewed in which not one person participated in the

higher education opportunity. This would not mean that there are no foster youth enrolled in college, but instead that of the files reviewed, none were college education recipients.

A consideration in reviewing client files was the terminology used to record client information, as well as the accuracy and thoroughness in recorded client/worker interactions (e.g., a youth may have moved and the new address was recorded on the form; however, the conversation that revealed the change in housing was not recorded in the client notes). Additionally, the client population may have required a period of time to development rapport and trust with their aftercare specialist before personal information was revealed without prompting. The preceding consideration may have influenced the accuracy in recorded disruptions in housing, employment and educational attempts.

An additional limitation to the study was the shared information revealed in the referral form, especially for youth transitioned from a group home environment. Unless unusual circumstances existed, such as profound mental or physical impairment, the youth was released from the group home on their 18th birthday. The file was closed at

the group home agency, and no further contact information was provided to the Cameron Hill Associates agency for continued follow up and transitional services.

Confidentiality law restrictions prevented sharing client information between agencies and this may hindered or prevented the youth from receiving aftercare services upon emancipation. Without family information or a forwarding address, the agency lacked the basic information required to initiate contact for aftercare services.

Of particular interest to this study was the number of youth that attained a high school diploma and are enrolled in and/or have completed a post secondary education. The question this study pursued was: "Does foster care placement lessen the likelihood of adolescents attaining/entering higher education?"

Sampling

The sample available for the study was approximately four hundred files at the Cameron Hills independent living program centers. The goal was to review one hundred files, fifty from each county. The selection criteria are that the age of the youth be twenty years.

This age group was selected because at the age of twenty-one their transitional services are terminated. The youth's progress toward independence in the final year of the program should become a reliable predictor for successful, independent transition on termination from the program. The method used was a systematic random sample of the files.

Cameron Hill Associates' director, Nikki Thurston-Venable granted permission to access client files. The data was collected from the aftercare program referral form, intake assessment document, goal and plans document, and consultation notes. Results of the research study were submitted to the program director as supportive documentation for program reviews and grant/contract proposals.

Data Collection and Instruments

The data from case files were collected in March 2006. The following independent and dependent variables were collected. Higher education was the dependent variable of this study. Using secondary data from the Cameron Hills Independent Living Program of Riverside and San Bernardino counties in California, 100 case files

were reviewed to determine the effectiveness of the independent living program established under the Title IV-E of the Social Security Act (Public Law 99-272) toward obtaining an education that allowed aging out youth to be self supporting and independent of the social services support system. The following data was used as the independent variables affecting the education process:

- The criteria for measuring outcomes was obtained by studying the age of the participant at entry into the voluntary program as a interval value demographic, as well as the age services are no longer requested, a interval value.
- The age of first paid employment was documented as a value demographic, as well as duration of employment, a ratio value.
- The housing arrangement (i.e., with foster family, kin family, friends, independently) at the time of entry into the program was recorded as a nominal value.

- The gender, a nominal value, of the participant was recorded to determine if there was a difference in commitment to completing the independent living program contract. According to statistical records (Goerge et al., 2002) there are more females in foster care.
- The declared ethnic affiliation, a nominal value, was included in the study.
- The living arrangements, a nominal value, will be captured in the study to determine if at exit from the independent living program participants selected kinship housing, independent housing or a group house environment.
- The education level, an ordinal value, at entry into the program was compared to the education level attained, an ordinal value, as determined by the individual's contract.
- The registration, a nominal value, was recorded for these programs: high school diploma, GED, vocational training, and post secondary education.

- The completion rate, a nominal value, was recorded for a high school diploma, GED, vocational training, and postsecondary education and any combined achievements.
- Vocational training placement was documented for inclusion in the employability element of the study (nominal).
- The application for financial support through the FAFSA and Chafee federal grant programs was recorded (nominal).
- The years, interval value, of foster care placement was collected.
- The number, ratio value, of out-of-home placement facilities was recorded.
- The number of times a participant requested, a ratio value, resources in the independent living program was recorded in the study.

Procedures

The collection of data process has been completed. The formal request to review files was received from the Cameron Hill Associates Corporation that contracted with the Riverside County until September 30, 2005 and has

ongoing contracts with San Bernardino County Department of Social Services to provide the independent living program. The data was collected March 2006 in the San Bernardino office, the repository of official records. The data was collected by this researcher and maintained in her possession until the data was recorded into a computerized format for processing at a later date. At the conclusion of this research project, the data collected was returned to the Cameron Hill Associates office and shredded by the San Bernardino county disposal system.

Protection of Human Subjects

Each case file reviewed was assigned a number beginning with one for the first file reviewed and an identification letter string (the first three letters of the sir name and the initial of the first name). Sequential numbers were continued until data from one hundred files was collected. There was no direct contact with the individuals in the study and no names or incidental information regarding a particular youth was used in this research project. After completion of data sets and a summary of the findings was recorded, the raw

data was shredded to protect the human subjects being studied.

Data Analysis

Data has been collected at this time. This quantitative study utilized Pearson's correlative coefficient, the Chi-square, and t-tests to measure and assess the relationship between independent living program participation and participation in higher education. Descriptive statistics, including frequency distribution, measures of central tendency and dispersion, were used to identify all the characteristics of the variables.

Summary

Access to and attainment of higher education by aging out foster youth was the focus of one hundred case files reviewed in the Cameron Hill Corporation's independent living program. The variables collected were pertinent to housing, employment, and educational training, as well as years participated in the foster care system. Studies were conducted that indicate foster care placement hinders the educational advancement of the youths in the system. New programs were implemented, such

as the independent living program, to improve the outcome of youth aging out of foster care placement. This study provided unbiased documentation of the educational progress of emancipated youth in Riverside and San Bernardino counties, as well as ancillary support systems necessary for successful transition to self-sufficiency.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

The quantitative analysis of 100 youth's case file in the Cameron Hill Associates Aftercare Program provided a snapshot of the youth emancipating from the foster care system in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties in California. Their documented access to, and usage of, resources provided through federal, state, and county allocations provided valuable data for assessing the diverse populations served and steps taken after emancipation to achieve adulthood independence.

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the case files reviewed. There were a total of 100 young adults from Riverside and San Bernardino Counties in California who received aftercare services from Cameron Hill Associates. Fifty-one cases came from Riverside County and forty-nine from San Bernardino County files.

The gender distribution in the random sample study was 51 females and 49 males. The Riverside County group

had 30 males and 21 females and the San Bernardino group had 30 females and 19 males.

All case files reviewed had a parameter that the young adult would be twenty years of age. According to the guidelines established by public law, the Independent Living Program defines the optimal age for the referral and intake assessment to be 17.5 years of age. The data files (n = 100) reflected that only 16% were referred at that optimal age; 29% referred at age 17.75 years; 19% at age 18; 8% at age 18.25 years; 10% at 18.5 years; and 17% at 18.75 years and older. The significance of the delay in referral was that youth were eligible to receive services to the age of 21.

A referral was initiated to begin aftercare services to youth; within thirty days a contact with the youth to initiate an intake assessment was the guideline. Table 1 indicates that optimal service was difficult to obtain as indicated with the practical application. Fifteen percent of the youth were unable to be contacted; 20% completed the intake assessment during their seventeenth year; 44% completed during their eighteenth year; 18% completed during their nineteenth year; and, 3% had no intake assessment on file but had documented aftercare services.

The ethnic identification of clients served in aftercare was recorded as the following: 38% were Hispanic; 33% were Caucasian/white; 26% were African-American/Black; and, 3% were Native-American. The recorded information did not differentiate for mixed races or the various Latin (Hispanic) populations. Each county's ethnic representation in the client population was very similar. For Riverside County, 37.3% of the clients were Caucasian/white; 37.3% Hispanic; 23.5% African-American/Black; and 2% Native American. For San Bernardino County, 38.8% of the clients were Hispanic; 28.6% African-American/Black; 28.6% Caucasian/white; and, 4.1% Native-American. The notable fluctuations in distribution were that San Bernardino County had a 5% greater African-American client population than did Riverside County; and, Riverside County had a 10% greater Caucasian/white client population than did San Bernardino County. Hispanic populations did not fluctuate in county comparison. The difference in Native-American populations is negligible because they represented only 3% of the case files reviewed.

According to the 2000 United States Census Bureau Report, the study does not portray an accurate

representation of the counties studied. Both counties have a higher Caucasian/white population than the sampling indicates (65.6% in Riverside County and 58.9% in San Bernardino County). There is a significantly smaller percentage of the African-American/Black population in each county (6.2% in Riverside County and 9.7% in San Bernardino County). Both the Hispanic and Native-American populations in the sample are fair representation of the Census Bureau statistics.

In terms of the marital status of the young adults, (n = 100) at time of entry into the aftercare program, 96% were never married and 4% were currently married. Eighty-eight (88%) of the young adults reported no children at time of entry into the program; 11% reported one dependent; and, 1% reported two dependents. In Riverside County, (n = 51) 17.7% of the youth entering the program had children and only 6.1% of the San Bernardino County youth (n = 49) were reported to have dependents. This finding is significant because the female sample was greater in San Bernardino County (n = 30) as compared to Riverside County (n = 21). However, at the time the data was collected for this

study it was possible that two to three years had lapsed from the initial intake interview

Table 1. Demographics of Case Files

Gender N = 100			
Riverside County		San Bernardino County	
Female	21	41%	Female 30
Male	30	59%	Male 19
			61%
			39%
Age Referred to Aftercare Program N = 100			
Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage %	
17.5 years	16	16%	
17.75 years	29	29%	
18 years	19	19%	
18.25 years	8	8%	
18.5 years	10	10%	
18.75 years and older	17	17%	
Missing birth date	1	1%	
Age at Intake Assessment N = 100			
Unable to contact	15	15%	
17 years	20	20%	
18 years	44	44%	
19 years	18	18%	
No Intake Assessment but received services	3	3%	
Ethnicity N = 100			
African American	26	26%	
Caucasian	33	33%	
Hispanic	38	38%	
Other	3	3%	
Marital Status at Program Entry N = 100			
Riverside County (n = 51)		San Bernardino County (n = 49)	
Never Married	100%	Never Married	92%
Married		Married	8%
Dependent Children at Program Entry N = 100			
No Children	88	88%	
Children	12	12%	
Dependent Children at Program Exit N = 100			
No Children	80	80%	
Children	20	20%	

and the percentages shifted to 80% reported having no dependents; 17% reported one dependent; and, 3% reported having two dependents. The San Bernardino youth reported a slightly higher (2%) birth rate than did Riverside County participants.

Employment

One of the early indicators of self motivation and initiative in a youth's life is the first job and an early employment history. In this sampling (n = 100), 55% of the youth reported employment while in foster care; 38% reported never having a job; and, 7% did not have any employment data recorded in their file. When breaking away the data by county, in Riverside County 64.7% (n = 33) of the youth were employed while in foster care; 31.4% (n = 16) were never employed; and, 3.9% (n = 2) did not have the data recorded in their file. In San Bernardino County, 44.9% (n = 22) of the youth reported employment during placement; 44.9% (n = 22) did not work and 10.2% (n = 5) did not have the data recorded in their file.

With the passing of two to three years, the employment history begins to shift statistically. According to the data recorded in the individual files

(n = 100), 51% reported current employment; 33% were unemployed; and, 16% had no employment tracking information documented in their file. When individual county data was reviewed, Riverside County indicated a 55% employment (n = 28) rate; 26% unemployment (n = 13); and, 19% (n = 10) that had no current data recorded. Youth in San Bernardino County reported that 47% (n = 23) were currently employed; 41% (n = 20) were unemployed; and, 12% (n = 6) had no current data reported. It appears youth in Riverside County fared better than their peers in securing employment while in placement, as well as after emancipation.

Employment stability is an indicator for successful emancipation of foster youth. The study reported that 35% of the youth remained without that first job two years after their emancipation; 45% reported having only one job; 11% reported had at least two jobs; 1% had 3 jobs; 2% had 4 jobs; 1% had 5 jobs; and, 5% did not have any employment history recorded after emancipation but had been employed during placement. The limitation of this finding was that the date of employment was not captured in the study to crystallize the significance of how long

the 45 youth who reported only one job had maintained their positions.

The current vocation recorded in the client file indicated retail sales was the largest employment market (30%); followed by the service/food industry at 14%; public safety, including military service, was 4%; the medical field 3%; both the construction industry and the office/clerical 2% respectively and the most significant was the absent data representing 45% of the data files. Forty percent of the files absent current vocational data can be accounted for by the previously discussed unemployed statistics, leaving 5% of the study population without current employment documentation.

At the time of entry into the aftercare services program, 32% were in their foster home; 21% were in group home facilities; 18% in kinship care; 12% were with biological family; 8% lived independently; 5% roomed with friends; 2% were homeless; and 2% were other (not documented). As indicated in the table, the government/courts remain the guardian for 53% of youth in the foster care system (foster care and group home). Only 30% of the youth live with a parent or relative.

The age of emancipation has been a tumultuous period for foster youth taking flight from regimented foster care. Youth have bounced around from earlier housing arrangements as indicated in Table 2. Although emancipated youth are free to leave their foster placement, many have bonded as a family and 11% reported living with the former foster family two years after emancipation. Twenty-seven percent reported living independently; 21% resided with a relative; 19% moved in with friends; 10% were on active military duty; 7% remain with their biological parent(s); 4% were homeless; and 1% remained in the group home environment.

A notable fact was that at emancipation 30% lived with biological family/kinship care and two years later 28% remain in a similar arrangement; however, 7% shifted out of the parent's home. A strong indicator of movement toward independence was the cumulative total of 46% of the youth reported living with a friend or independently, which for some was an interchangeable concept constrained by a monetary decision.

Table 2. Housing

Housing Accommodations at Entry to Program				
Variable	Frequency		Percentage	
	Riverside (n = 51)	San Bernardino (n = 49)	Riverside	San Bernardino
Foster family	15	17	29.4%	34.7%
Bio-family	6	6	11.8%	12.2%
Kinship care	7	11	13.7%	22.4%
Group home	17	4	33.3%	8.2%
Friends	1	4	2%	8.2%
Independently	5	3	9.8%	6.1%
Homeless		2		4.1%
Information not available		2		4.1%
Housing Accommodations at Age 20				
County Served	Riverside (n = 51)	San Bernardino (n = 49)	Riverside	San Bernardino
Foster family	4	7	7.8%	14.3%
Bio-family	6	1	11.8%	2%
Relative	8	13	15.7%	26.5%
Group home		1		2%
Friends	7	12	13.7%	24.5%
Independently	16	11	31.4%	22.4%
Homeless	1	3	2%	6.1%
Military	9		17.6%	2%
Transient Data				
County Served	Riverside (n = 51)	San Bernardino (n = 49)	Riverside	San Bernardino
Reported Homelessness	9	6	17.6%	12.2%
Reported Shelter Accommodation	3	5	5.9%	10.2%
Number of Residences After Emancipation				
County Served	Riverside (n = 51)	San Bernardino (n = 49)	Riverside	San Bernardino
None recorded: homeless		2		4.1%
One	22	13	43.1%	26.5%
Two	13	19	25.5%	38.8%
Three	9	12	17.6%	24.5%
Four	4	1	7.8%	2%
Five	2	5	3.9%	2%
Six		1		2%
Eleven	1		2%	

Not one youth had achieved home ownership since emancipation. Of those who reported living accommodations, 43% stated they paid rent; 22% do not pay rent; and, 35% had no rent payment notation. Cameron Hill Aftercare Services did supplement (17%) rent/deposit fees at least once. Homelessness has been documented as a plague of the emancipated youth and 15% (9 cases from Riverside County, 6 from San Bernardino County) reported being homeless at least one night and 8% (5 cases in San Bernardino County and 3 in Riverside County) reported shelter accommodations. Two youths, one from each county, documented receiving assistance with emergency housing. Absent from documentation was the 21% that reported homelessness and received no assistance, perhaps by either lack of personal or corporate resources. Reported homelessness and shelter accommodations was of significance when it affected 23% of emancipated youth (n = 100) in the two county areas.

Education

At the time of emancipation 52% reported no high school diploma; 35% of the youth had attained or were on target to complete a high school diploma within a few months; 4% reported they had a GED; and, 9% of the case

files were not documented. The non completion rate was equally distributed between counties (26% from each county). San Bernardino County had slightly higher reports of high school diploma (n = 19) than did Riverside County (n = 16). Three of the four youth who completed the GED were from San Bernardino County.

Once released from the high school environment, self motivation became the mantra of the youth hoping to change their personal situation. Seven (n = 7) of the youth enrolled in a high school diploma program after they entered the aftercare program; 57% (n = 4) were in-progress and another 43% (n = 3) had completed. Five (n = 5) youth pursued the GED program; 80% (n = 4) had completed and 20% (n = 1) was in-progress. Three (n = 3) youth enrolled in an adult education or ROP career program; 67% (n = 2) had completed; and another 33% (n = 1) was in-progress. Twelve (n = 12) youth chose to attend a vocational school; 42% (n = 5) completed their program; 42% (n = 5) were in-progress; and 16% (n = 2) dropped their program. Twenty-one program participants enrolled at a community college; 81% (n = 17) were currently enrolled and the remaining 19% (n = 4) had dropped their courses. The four-year university routine

has been known to intimidate youth and prevent/delay application to these institutions. Seven (n = 7) youth attended a university; 57% (n = 4) were currently enrolled; and 43% (n = 3) had withdrawn. The community college environment was overwhelmingly the preferred arena to pursue educational goals in the files reviewed.

The motivation level of the youth reviewed indicated that 47% of the youth were motivated to continue their education after emancipation. The youth who dropped their university program (n = 3) either transferred to a community college (n = 2) or enrolled in a vocational program (n = 1). One youth who dropped their community college program enrolled into a vocational program. The final analysis of the data indicated forty-seven youth pursued education after emancipation with a 30% (n = 14) completion rate, 68% (n = 32) currently enrolled in a program, and 11% (n = 5 when adjusted for transfer programs) withdrew from educational programs (youth completed and enrolled in multiple program variables).

Table 3. Educational Achievement at Program Entry

Variable	Frequency (n = 100)			Percentages		
High school diploma	35			35%		
G.E.D.	4			4%		
None	52			52%		
Unable to contact	9			9%		
Educational Achievement at Program Exit (N = 47)*						
Variable	Frequency			Percentages		
	In-progre ss	Completed	Dropped	In-progre ss	Completed	Dropped
High school diploma (n = 7)	4	3		57%	43%	
G.E.D. (n = 5)	1	4		20%	80%	
R.O.P./adult school (n = 3)	1	2		33%	67%	
Vocational school (n = 12)	5	5	2	42%	42%	12%
Community College (n = 21)	17		4	81%		19%
University (n = 7)	4		3	57%		43%
TOTALS (n = 47)	32	14	5**	68%	30%	11%

* 8 case files pursued two educational goals

** 4 case files transferred to other educational programs/goals

Ancillary Support

Cameron Hill Aftercare Services (CHAS) provided support to emancipated youth. The extent that youth relied upon CHAS for support was evidenced in Table 4. CHAS, a three year program, functioned around established rapport and trust with the youth. This study recorded the number of aftercare specialists assigned to each case file during the program. Youth who were assigned one aftercare specialist (AS) represented 18% of the study population; 22% had two AS; 25% had three AS; 17% had four AS; 7% had five AS; 8% had six AS; and 3% had seven ASs. The transfer of case files appeared excessively high

for 35% of the study group (4-7 workers) over a three year period.

Aftercare specialists provided services through direct (face-to-face), written, and telephone contact (see Table 4). Direct contact was not made in 25% of the case files reviewed (n = 100); 63% of the youth saw their AS between one and ten times with a mean average of 3.5 direct contacts; 7% had eleven to twenty contacts; 9% had between twenty-one and thirty contacts; and 2% had more than thirty-one contacts.

Written contact was initiated through a letter of introductory to the agency. Three (3%) of the program participants (n = 100) had no mailings documented; 17% had one mailing; 39% had two mailings; 17% had three mailings; 10% had four mailings; 6% had five mailings; 5% had six mailings; and 3% had eight mailings. After discounting the initial introductory written contact, San Bernardino County participants received more mailings from CHAS than did their peers in Riverside County.

Telephone contact was the preferred method, and most financially sound practice, for providing support to the emancipated youth. Eight percent (8%) of the program participants had not spoken to an AS by telephone; 54%

spoke to an AS between one and ten times; 24% had spoken to an AS between eleven to twenty times; 7% had spoken to an AS between twenty-one and thirty times; and 7% had spoken to an AS thirty-one times or more. The importance of this information was that the company had a policy to maintain quarterly contact with the youth as a minimum standard.

Each attempt to contact (ATC) youth was documented in their file (n = 100). These ATC may have been generated by telephone dialing either the youth's last known number or that of a former foster parent or relative. Two percent (2%) had no ATC record in their file; 33% had between one and five attempts; 29% had six to ten attempts; 20% had eleven to fifteen attempts; 9% had sixteen to twenty attempts; and 7% had twenty-one ATC or more documented in their file (see Table 4).

Table 4. Ancillary Support

Communication Support		
Variable	Frequency (n = 100)	Percentages
Aftercare Specialists assigned to file		
One specialist	18	18%
Two specialists	22	22%
Three specialists	25	25%
Four specialists	17	17%
Five specialists	7	7%
Six specialists	8	8%
Seven specialists	3	3%
Direct contacts with young adult*		
No contact	25	25%
1-10	63	63%
11-20	7	7%
21-30	3	3%
31 or more	2	2%
Written contacts with young adults**		
No contact	3	3%
One	17	17%
Two	39	39%
Three	17	17%
Four	10	10%
Five	6	6%
Six	5	5%
Eight	3	3%
Telephone contacts with young adult***		
No contact	8	8%
1-10	54	54%
11-20	24	24%
21-30	7	7%
31 or more	7	7%
Attempted contacts with young adult		
No contact	2	2%
1-5	33	33%
6-10	29	29%
11-15	20	20%
16-20	9	9%
21-25	4	4%
26 or more	3	3%

* The median is 37.5 direct contacts with an average mean of 4 direct contacts per young adult.

** The median is 48.5 written contacts with a n average mean of 2 written contacts per young adult.

*** The median is 46 telephone contacts with an average mean of 8 telephone contacts per young adult.

Inadequate transportation service has been known to keep youth from becoming mobile and exploring education and employment options. CHAS provided 22% of the youth (n = 100) with personal transportation service utilizing an employee's vehicle (8% in Riverside County and 14% in San Bernardino County). Another transportation option was the public transit/bus system and 26% of the youth received bus passes to access education, employment, entertainment and retailers. Youth from each county were just as likely to use the public transit system (13% in each).

A substantial investment and program incentive for San Bernardino County youth (n = 49) was the car match funds (up to \$2000) for each individual. Forty-five (91.8%) of the youth did not participate in the matching funds program; three youth (6%) signed a receipt for these funds; one youth (2%) requested the funds but there was no documentation for the release of the funds. Riverside County does not offer this program to its emancipated youth.

One of the criteria set forth in the public law allocating funds to ensure a successful transition for emancipated youth was the Life Skills Workshop program.

The value of these workshops cannot be evaluated in this study because 72% of the youth whose files were reviewed did not have any workshop attendance recorded.

At the time of emancipation there are basic legal documents that should have been obtained by the county social worker assigned to their case for release upon emancipation. Included are the essential birth certificate and social security card without these two items the youth are hamstrung when applying for employment, educational programs, housing, and continuation of medical benefits. Ten percent (10%) of the youth required assistance in obtaining their birth certificate and 5% received assistance in obtaining a social security card.

Youth need identification to conduct legal transactions and 13% received assistance with the California driver's permit; 9% received assistance with obtaining the California identification card; and, 5% received assistance in obtaining their California driver's license. Once a youth reaches the age of eighteen, the state of California does not require behind the wheel training prior to testing for the license. CHAS provides free behind the wheel training to the youth and

95% who were eligible to receive free training did not request it.

In terms of youth's request for assistance when they apply for public benefits, 4% requested assistance with reactivating/securing Medi-Cal benefits; 3% requested assistance with securing child care assistance; 3% requested assistance with securing food stamps 3% requested assistance with SSI benefits; 2% requested TANF assistance; and, 1% requested Section 8 housing for low income residents;.

Finally, eleven case files in San Bernardino County recorded the number of years a youth was in foster care they were on a continuum of one to fifteen years with a median number of 6 years in placement. Riverside County documented two placement histories, this data was too negligible to include in the study. Placement information for the number of out of home placements was restricted and only available through the youth, the data collected via interviews was too negligible to include in this study.

To accurately portray the youth's transition to independent living, responses were recoded (living independently, with friends and military service) and

collapsed into a new variable "independence." When crosstabulation chi square and t-test analysis were conducted on the dependent variable educational achievement after emancipation against the independent variable independence, the results were not statistically significant. The data sample distribution was insufficient to calculate the expected relationship significance indicator of .05. Likewise, the independent variable current employment also was not statistically significant when analyzed against the educational achievement.

Summary

No significant relationship was found that associated earlier foster care placement to the lack of pursuit of higher education after emancipation. The foster care aging out population often lacks familial support (biological or relative) and this was evidenced in the most frequently reported housing accommodation, shared housing with friends or living independently. Although twenty-one percent of the youth are currently pursuing educational goals, the link between employment and higher education was not substantiated due to a zero

completion rate. There was no significant difference in higher education participation, housing stability between counties in the study; however, Riverside County youth were more likely to be employed. The small sample used in this data set lacked substantial and essential information that hindered a thorough review of the emancipated youth's progress toward independence.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The youth whose files were included in this study provided insight into an unpredictable future that dominated their road to independence from the foster care system. Major findings of housing, employment, and education status two years after emancipation are discussed in further detail. Limitations that affected data collection and analysis are reviewed. The chapter further delves into the implications for social work practice and policy and provides recommendations for further research in the area of the Independent Living Programs and the aftercare services component.

Discussion

This study utilized a random sample of 100 open case files in the Cameron Hill Associates Aftercare Program. The ethnic representation of the group studied was diverse representing African-American/Black, Caucasian, Hispanic and Native American youth. The African-American/Black youth emancipated and serviced by this agency was 20% higher than would be expected for

these counties when compared to demographic data in the 2000 United States Census Bureau Report. Few of the youth reported being married; however, at the time of the study 20% reported being a parent. The average age (18 yrs.) that youth are referred for services from Cameron Hill & Associates exceeds the Independent Living Program guideline of 17.5 years.

The study found that 33% of files reviewed in this study during 2003-05 period in Riverside and San Bernardino counties in California reported higher frequencies of unemployment than did earlier studies (e.g., Goerge, 2002) funded by the United States Department of Health & Human Services that reported 23% of the emancipated foster youth in California did not have earnings in the entire 13-quarter period analyzed. Local growth and increased job opportunities should have adjusted these percentages proportionately; clearly, this was not the result. Economic indicators have stated that service industry jobs are the fastest growing and most available market to those seeking employment. The service industries provided the major source of income to the emancipated youth (30%).

Ninety-two percent of the youth eligible to apply for car match funds did not do so. This finding may have been the result of the youth's required deposit of \$2000 in matching funds and their socioeconomic status of low paying service industry jobs and unemployment. Twenty-six percent of the youth requested and received public transportation passes. The two counties studied are very large in square miles, sparsely populated in outlying areas, and public transportation is not readily available to all youth. This topic should be addressed in future foster care emancipation studies.

The long term goal of the aftercare services provided through Cameron Hill Associates, as well as the federally funded Independent Living Program is to assist emancipated youth in maintaining stable housing. As reported earlier in this study (Shirk & Stangler, 2004; Barth, 1986), biological and kinship relationships are not a consistent or reliable support for the foster care population. Once emancipated, the youth move toward becoming independent of former supportive links in housing. Of the various living accommodations reported in this study, the majority (46%) reported living with friends or independently. Twenty-three percent of the

youth reported at least one day of shelter accommodations or homelessness since entering the program.

Fifty-seven percent of the youth who reported an independent living arrangement were documented as currently employed. The data collected in the study encompassed the years 2003-05; and during this period, the mean for "number of residences reported" was 2.4 moves per individual. It was not possible to find a causal relationship between employment and stable housing. However, the findings are another example of the youth's ability to adapt to uncertain life paths; because, stable housing, with or without employment, is a major milestone indicating a level of maturity and self management.

The genesis of this study was centered on the influence of education in predicting successful emancipation through access to higher education, better employment opportunities and stable housing. Early reports on emancipated foster youth stated that 50% were not graduating from high school (Collins, 2001) and this study supports that finding (52% reported no high school diploma).

Of the 100 case files reviewed, 21% of the youth are currently enrolled in postsecondary education programs at either the community college or university. According to the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC), most recent data (1999-2002) Riverside County had a college entry rate of 21% for the community college; this study showed approximately 16% (n = 8) of the emancipated youth are attending community colleges. San Bernardino County has a 30% college entry rate for the community college; this study showed 18% (n = 9) of the youth are enrolled in a community college. The state CPEC study indicated that 15% of high school graduates in both Riverside and San Bernardino Counties were attending a university; this study indicated that 4% (n = 2 Riverside; n = 2 San Bernardino) of the each county was enrolled in a university program. This study supports earlier findings that foster care youth lag behind their peer group ages 18-24 in education achievement (Collins, 2001). CPEC officials readily admit that "areas where the educational attainment of the adult population is low tend to have low college-going rates. As a result, existing inequities in income and opportunities for advancement tend to persist" (CPEC, 2004, p. 7).

Cameron Hill & Associates offer an array of ancillary support services to emancipated youth. This study found an underutilization of these services by the youth. This may be due to the youth's personal initiative to become self sufficient and/or reliance upon other support systems outside the agency. A second possibility is that there is not a clear understanding of the support services provided through the agency. Further exploration of current ancillary support services and their usage may be of research interest to the Cameron Hill & Associates' management team.

Limitations

As mentioned earlier in this document, the researcher anticipated that there was a possibility that significant information pertinent to this study would be missing from the client files. Information regarding the number of placements and years in foster care was missing so frequently that the researcher disregarded the information collected as a fair representation of the study sample of 100. Additionally, there was inconsistent collection of "goal and plans" of youth upon entering the CHA aftercare program. Attempts were made by the agency

staff to review their plans during the intake process. However, a formal document was not possible due to the inability to locate the youth, cancellation of appointments and/or the youth declined the request. This is a vulnerable population who can be leery of a new agency inquiring into their personal affairs at a juncture when they thought agency scrutiny was coming to an end.

Another limitation to the quality of the data was the reliability of the documentation in the files, particularly the question used to ascertain the information and the writing skills of the aftercare worker. The consultation notes were paltry in comparison to the scope of the influence the aftercare program has on a youth's successful transition after emancipation. The agency's recent transition to a newer form in the files provided continuous client information which proved more helpful in tracking the youth's employment, housing, and education stability. A periodic review of the intake information, as well as goals and plans, would have proven invaluable to the outcome of this study.

Finally, the sample size proved to be inadequate, as well as the time lapsed since emancipation. To produce

significant findings about the youth's transition, sufficient time must be given to complete higher educational pursuits. The aftercare program guidelines state that youth's services are discontinued at age twenty-one. However, the average high school graduate entering college in September will complete their college program between the ages of 22-24 according to recent studies indicating a four year degree is taking five years to complete (CPEC, 2003).

Recommendations for Social Work Practice,
Policy, and Research

Independent Living Programs have been federally funded for two decades and educational funds (i.e., annual \$5000 Chaffee Grant) have been established exclusively for former foster youth. However, the improvement in educational achievement is not gaining significant ground toward assisting emancipating youth in an established, self reliant future. Greater emphasis on education needs to be made at an earlier age when the youth is entering foster care placement. Zetlin et al. stated:

Because children in foster care lack parents to advocate on their behalf and because of the extreme

educational vulnerability, it is important for the child welfare and school systems to develop strategies to identify and resolve the problems (i.e., academic, behavioral, and bureaucratic) that impede the educational progress of this population of children. (2004, p. 427).

Social workers and school district administrators must begin to collaborate on policies to implement best practices that address the educational needs of children in foster care. It must no longer be acceptable for foster youth to attend non-public special education schools or alternative school programs (e.g., continuations schools, community day schools) that do not have credentialed teachers or offer college preparatory courses. Twenty-four percent of the youth who were living in a group home at the time they emancipated are now enrolled in college. As indicated by this very small sample of emancipated youth, the ability to compete academically with their peers is a contributing factor when designing learning programs for group home residents separated from traditional elementary, junior high and high school students. Another consideration is that these restrictive environments do not adequately prepare the

youth for their emancipation into the greater society where independent decision making is no longer monitored by staff.

As recommended earlier in this study, the social services system, social workers in particular, should be housed on school campuses to provide services to youth and their family, as well as monitor behavior disturbances and link the necessary tutorial services for foster youth beginning to lag behind their peers in educational progression. It should no longer be acceptable to have foster youth one year behind their peers in academic achievement, or to have 30-50% of the foster youth placed in special education classes, or allow foster youth to withdraw from school prior to completion of a high school diploma.

Consideration must be given to and resources must be provided to assess the academic and vocational preferences of foster youth long before they are emancipated from the foster care system. The social services agencies must provide advocacy and exercise necessary authority to preserve the welfare of the foster youth. It becomes very difficult to follow up with youth when social services do not release pertinent information

prior to emancipation. Knowledge of the youth's social support system, skills, vocational preferences, behavioral history and limitations would allow aftercare agents to provide a more comprehensive service plan directed by the youth's preferences and abilities.

One of the core ethical principles outlined by the NASW for social work practice to recognize the central importance of human relationships as they are an important catalyst for change. Opportunities for self expression, skills development, and interpersonal skills are necessary for foster youth prior to emancipation. Life skill classes offered through the county agencies pay foster youth to attend each session; this researcher believes this to be bad practice. The information and social skills youth obtain through the program should be incentive enough. When and if the social services system agrees that an allowance to establish money handling skills is necessary, funds should be provided on a weekly or monthly schedule, separate from the monies allocated to the foster parent/agency for providing basic needs of the foster youth.

A longitudinal study of foster youth pursuing higher education is necessary. This study was unable to prove

any statistically significant relationship between higher education and stability in housing and/or employment. However, this study, used as a three-year post emancipation sample, is a good pre test for a future study of the emancipated population over a period of time. A recommendation for a post test would include information on youth's performance in their colleges and universities. A 2003-04 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study conducted by the National Center for Education and underwritten by the United States Department of Education, published the data necessary to implement this recommendation. This study was underwritten by the United States Department of Education. It would be beneficial to human services policy and procedures administrators to collaborate with higher education institutions in a longitudinal study measuring foster care placement and how it impacts access to higher education.

Summary

The data collected in this study was unable to provide the necessary outcomes to prove that foster youth's educational achievement lead to their achievement of independent living. The study provided a compilation

of services available to emancipated foster youth to assist with successful transition toward independence. The measure of success was access to higher education and stability in housing and employment. Many of the youth utilizing the services and resources provided by Cameron Hill & Associates Aftercare Services are making strides toward education achievement and stability in their housing and employment.

APPENDIX
DATA EXTRACTION FORM

I. IDENTIFYING INFORMATION FILE NUMBER: _____
County of Service: _____ Riverside _____ San Bernardino

Number of foster care placements prior to program entry: _____

Number of years in the foster care system: _____

Gender: _____ Female _____ Male

Ethnicity: _____ African-American _____ Asian
 _____ Non-Hispanic Caucasian _____ Other _____
 _____ Hispanic

Marital Status: _____ Never married _____ Divorced
 _____ Married _____ Widowed
 _____ Separated

Dependent children at time of entry to program: _____ Yes _____ No

How many _____

Dependent children at time of exit of program: _____ Yes _____ No

How many _____

Currently pregnant _____ Yes

Age at referral _____

Age at intake to program _____

Age at exiting program _____

Age of first paid employment _____ Duration: _____ months _____ years

II. HOUSING

Housing accommodations at program entry:

_____ Foster family
_____ Biological family
_____ Kinship care
_____ Group home
_____ Friends
_____ Independently
_____ Other _____

Housing accommodations at program exit

_____ Former foster family
_____ Biological parent
_____ Relative
_____ Group home
_____ Friends
_____ Independently
_____ Other _____

Is there a rent fee: _____ Yes _____ No

Cameron Hill Aftercare Services supplemented rent/deposit

_____ Yes _____ No

Homeowner: _____ Yes _____ No

Number of residences since leaving foster care: _____

Youth reported homelessness _____ Yes (Number days) _____ No

Youth reported shelter accommodations _____ Yes (Number days) _____ No

III. EMPLOYMENT

Employed while in foster care: _____ Yes _____ No

Currently employed: _____ Yes _____ No

Number of jobs documented since leaving foster care _____

Type of current work:

_____ Retail/Sales _____ Service/Food Industry

_____ Public Safety _____ Building/Construction Trades

_____ Medical Field _____ Office/Clerical

_____ Other _____

IV. EDUCATION

Education level at time of entry into program:

_____ High School diploma _____ GED _____ None _____ Other: _____

Education achievement during program participation:

_____ High School diploma _____ In-progress _____ Completed

_____ Dropped out

_____ GED Program _____ In-progress _____ Completed

_____ Dropped out

_____ Adult Education/ROP _____ In-progress _____ Completed

_____ Dropped out

_____ Vocational School _____ In-progress _____ Completed

_____ Dropped out

_____ Community College _____ In-progress _____ Completed

_____ Dropped out

_____ University _____ In-progress _____ Completed

_____ Dropped out

V. ANCILLARY SUPPORT

Number of Aftercare Specialists assigned to file _____

Number of direct contacts with young adult _____

Number of written contacts with young adult _____

Number of telephone contacts with young adult _____

Number of attempted contacts with young adult _____

Transport services provided: _____ Yes _____ (how many) _____ No

Bus passes provided: _____ Yes _____ (how many) _____ No

Car match funds provided: _____ Yes _____ No

Number of life skills workshops attended: _____

Assistance with clothing: _____ Yes _____ No

Assistance with obtaining the following legal documents:

_____ Birth Certificate	_____ Driver's Permit
_____ Social Security Card	_____ California Driver's License
_____ California ID	_____ Other: _____

Assistance with obtaining public benefits:

_____ SSI	_____ Unemployment	_____ Medi-Cal
_____ TANF	_____ Worker's Comp	_____ Child Care Assistance
_____ GAIN	_____ Disability	_____ Food Stamps
_____ GR	_____ Section 8	_____ Other: _____

Assistance with basic life skills:

_____ College Application	_____ Financial Aid	_____ Chafee Grant
_____ Job Search	_____ Interviewing	_____ Work Attire
_____ Apartment search	_____ Securing Furniture	
_____ Room for Rent	_____ Securing Child Care Facility	

Assistance with emergency housing: _____ Yes _____ (how many times) _____ No

Participant in Youth Council: _____ Yes _____ No

Aftercare Services declined by young adult: _____ Yes _____ (at what age) _____ No

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