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HOW INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS SERVICES AFFECT THE
OUTCOMES OF EMANCIPATED FOSTER YOUTH
IN ATTAINING SELF-SUFFICIENCY

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
Tracy Burks
Sandra Fernández
June 2011

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OUTCOMES OF EMANCIPATED FOSTER YOUTH
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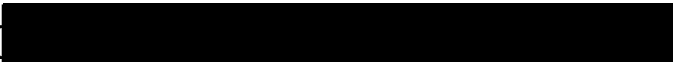
A Project
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Tracy Burks
Sandra Fernández

June 2011

Approved by:


Dr. Rosemary McCaslin, Faculty Supervisor
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ABSTRACT

The following discusses how self-sufficiency in emancipating foster youth is affected by the services provided by the Independent Living Skills (ILP) program. Face to Face interviews were completed with ILP participants as a data collection source.

The findings from this study revealed that foster youth participated in ILP services to prepare for their future and to gain necessary skills. Most of the participants felt that ILP services were beneficial. The program provided them with skills and services which proved to be helpful in their quest to attain self-sufficiency following their transition from the foster care system. Although the participants expressed that ILP services were beneficial, they also identified aspects of ILP services which were not helpful.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to express our thanks to the following, who have contributed to our education and research.

Thank you to our research participants for your time and contribution to this project. We appreciate your time, openness, and honesty.

Thank you to our field supervisors, Kevin Anderson and Sally Richter, and to Children and Family Services for their guidance, input and support.

Thank you to the faculty and staff of the Social Work Department who contributed to our growth and advancement. We would like to give special recognition to Professor Ray E. Liles for his continued knowledge and modeling of what it truly means to be a social worker.

Tracy Burks & Sandra Fernández

DEDICATION

I want to thank God, my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ for seeing me through this tumultuous journey. I could not have done it without you.

A big thank you to my children, Ashley, Nicole, Alanah and Johnathan, who I pass the academic baton too. Thank you for your patience and understanding. Everything I have and do is for you. I love you all always, love Mom.

Thank you to my support system for being there for me during these last three years. Whatever efforts and/or deeds you've extended to me, big or small, is greatly appreciated.

Tracy Burks

DEDICATION

To my handsome husband Daniel, whose love, humor and support helped me throughout this program. Thank you my love, for all of your pep talks and encouragement. Enjoy this book as you promised to read every word. Know that I love you deeply with all my heart and always will.

To my beautiful mother Gloria, who showed me through example the meaning of sacrifice. Thank you for believing in me, for your prayers and your unconditional love. Thank you for the many times you listened to me about being tired, worried, and frustrated...I love you Mom.

To my younger siblings, Aladino, Anthony, Andrew and Sophia, who without knowing, encouraged me to continue pursuing my education. I love you. Go to college!

To my God, for blessing me with the foundation and the opportunity to further my education. Thank you for providing me with the time and energy to follow through and finish the program. I love you always.

Sandra Fernández

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the services provided to foster youth participating in the Independent Living Program. It illustrates the challenging experiences foster youth face while in the Child Welfare System (CWS). It highlights the need for further services required for successful transition into adulthood, as the services currently available to foster youth are not completely effective in achieving self-sufficiency.

Problem Statement

According to the San Bernardino County Human Services 2009 Annual Report, out of 1,927 foster youth exiting foster care, 283 or 14.7 percent of these children exited the foster care system by way of emancipation. Emancipation is defined as termination of a Child Welfare System (CWS) case file; a child no longer in foster care, receiving foster care funding or assistance. A significant number of these children are likely to experience increased difficulty in achieving self-sufficiency, due to differences in the perceptions of the foster youth and the Independent Living Program

staff, as to what services are needed for a successful transition into adulthood. Many of these foster youth are ill-equipped to make provisions for themselves, forbidding them to attain self-sufficiency. They lack education, skills to obtain and maintain employment, and personal and social adjustment, development and growth, all of which are necessary and pertinent to their livelihood and independence. According to Ferguson, (2007), "socially, homeless youth are often unemployed, have limited formal job skills and have low literacy and educational levels" (p. 104).

Children in foster care represent one of the most vulnerable populations. The US Department of Health and Human Services (2003) estimate that there are 542,000 children in foster care in the United States, and of these, 20,000 to 25,000 will age out of the system each year. Although these children are expected to have the necessary skills, educational experience and financial self-sufficiency needed to succeed, many of them lack the necessary skills required to live independently. These youth may experience challenges preventing them from having a successful transition into adulthood due to the lack of preparation and services they receive while in

foster care. Unfortunately for these youth, their susceptibility to commit crime, become homeless, remain unemployed, have poor health care, remain uneducated is increased (Reily, 2003, p. 727).

Housing is a serious concern for foster youth who are in the process of emancipation. Shelter is a basic necessity for self-preservation. The lack of housing or not knowing where you are going to lay your head, from one night to another, makes it difficult for anyone to concentrate on education and/or attaining a skill. Because salaries and wages are not livable or consistent with the housing market, and good jobs are out of reach, it is impossible for them to acquire or maintain housing independent of others, i.e., a roommate, family, or housing subsidy. Hicks-Coolick et al., (2003) reported that because of the U.S. policies' failure to tackle issues such as livable wages, affordable housing, adequate transportation, decline in public assistance, and lack of education and training, there is evidence that the number of homeless families and children is growing at a disturbing rate (p. 198).

In 1987, the Independent Living Program (ILP) was established by the Federal government by way of the

Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconsolidation Act to minimize the need to seek welfare services immediately upon exiting or emancipation from foster care. Foster youth are six times more likely to receive public assistance, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and general assistance than non-foster youth (Choca et al., 2004, p. 475). Family Preservation and Support Services (FPSS), a program established under the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993, provides funding for family preservation services including pre-placement prevention, reunification, adoption, and follow-up services.

In 1999, the John H. Chaffee Foster Care Independent Program replaced the Foster Care Independence Act. Emancipating youth, who are exiting the foster care system, are provided with special assistance for independent living through funds authorized by the Independent Living Initiative of 1986 and the John H. Chaffee Foster Care Independence Program, Title I of the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (Samantrai, 2004). The Chaffee program provides more extensive services and extended the age of participation to the age of twenty-one.

Due to federal legislation, a specific goal of the Children and Family Services, for foster youth approaching emancipation is to establish a lifelong connection with a caring adult. Although it is the expectation that each child in foster care will make a lifelong connection with at least one caring adult, this goal is not a viable one as many foster parent/child relationships are severed following termination of financial assistance to care providers.

Emancipating foster youth, first and foremost, are concerned about this problem due to the fact that they are all on the path to encounter this inevitable life event. Even though many of these youth are not utilizing the services that are offered to them while in foster care, it becomes apparent to them during the termination process that they are not prepared to live independently. They often express feelings of fear, inferiority, and incompetence in attaining self-sufficiency.

Furthermore, the child welfare agency is concerned with this problem because it continues to contribute to the disservice of a large number of foster youth whom it is obligated to serve, benefit, and protect. Another concern is that the success rate of this population is

not in alignment with the mission of the agency.

Subsequently, the agency's funding is negatively affected and further contributes to the lack of services provided to these foster youth, thus becoming a concern to the general population at large.

Others who may be concerned with this problem include stakeholders in the public and private sectors, which might include families of the foster youth, service providers such as foster youth aftercare services, secondary and post-secondary schools, trade and skill providers, builders and developers, county officials, housing authorities and foundations for children's well-being such as United Way, Salvation Army, Children's Fund and Child Welfare League.

It is important to understand this problem further so that it can be resolved efficiently and effectively for the good of youth who are ultimately the future. It is understood that no one entity can do it alone. Collaboration with the previously mentioned stakeholders from the private and public sectors, which include the foster youth themselves, who are able to provide firsthand information about their experiences and perils,

and their perception of what is needed to overcome this phenomenon, is pertinent.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to highlight the services that are beneficial and highlight additional services that are needed in order to facilitate a successful transition for emancipating foster youth.

Children in foster care represent one of the most vulnerable populations. The US Department of Health and Human Services (2003) estimate that there are 542,000 children in foster care in the United States, and of these, 20,000 to 25,000 will age out of the system each year. "Unfortunately many youth leave foster care without a strong positive connection with a caring adult, so they have no one to count on when things get difficult" (Choca et al., 2004, p. 471).

Participation in the Independent Living Program is voluntary. Children in foster care between the ages of sixteen and eighteen are given the autonomy to decide whether or not they will participate in ILP services that are geared to assist them in achieving self-sufficiency. Due to the agency's policy of honoring the clients' right

to self-determination, many foster youth are choosing not to participate or utilize services ILP provides. It appears that the agency's policy contributes to the problem of the lack of participation in the necessary services provided to these youth while in foster care.

Quantitative research was conducted using surveys and focus groups to obtain firsthand information of personal experiences from former foster youth themselves. The information this research yielded is factual, detailed, and representative of the population being studied. A review of previously conducted agency studies provided information regarding intervention programs that are currently in place to help prepare foster youth for emancipation. The review of case records of former foster youth and those who are preparing for emancipation, provided information about what services were provided in the past, that continue to be provided due to effectiveness, what services have been discontinued and what alternatives have replaced them, and if they were and continue to be effective as well. Secondary data analysis enabled there to be a correlation of those who did and did not participate in preparation services and what their outcomes were.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter discusses various literatures in regards to research that has been conducted to find effective prevention and intervention services for emancipating foster youth. Areas of intervention and prevention are found in State and Federal legislation, instability in housing, barriers to employment, and a healthy perception of self. Also, a brief discussion of theories guiding conceptualization, including human development and social learning theories, show that the environment has a great impact on the self-perception of the individuals within it.

Legislative Framework

The Independent Living Initiative was enacted by the U.S. Congress in 1986 for the purpose of States developing services that foster youth should receive prior to exiting the foster care system (Stoner, 1999). The Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act provides aftercare and follow-up services for youth exiting the foster care system and provisions for independent living skills and

assistance. The Chaffee Program provides expanded services to states and communities for transitioning youth. However, there still remains a great need to prevent the phenomenon of unprepared youth exiting the foster care system.

Instability in Housing

Many foster youth experience frequent placement changes which may contribute to foster youth's lack of participation in Independent Living Services. Frequent placement change may also be attributed to the inability of establishing positive and supportive relationships, causing them to have disruptions with friendships and communities (Ferrell, 2004). As a result, foster youth are literally alone at emancipation with no one available to help them when they need assistance most.

Other research found on this topic was from a study completed with fifty-five former foster youth. It found that almost 30% of the participants reported that at least at one time they had no permanent housing. The youth in this study reported they wished they would have been provided with more independent living skills (Rashid, 2009, p. 241).

Researchers have focused on the causes of homeless among children and former foster youth rather than their ability to make a successful transition into adulthood.

Barriers to Employment

Rashid (2009) also found that emancipated youth lack employment skills after emancipation. Rashid's study found that of 810 foster youth surveyed after leaving foster care, 50% were unemployed, and 40% were a cost to the community by receiving public assistance or by being incarcerated (2009, p. 241). A similar study was completed by Courtney et al. in 2001, where foster youth were interviewed before leaving care, at twelve months, and again at eighteen months. It was found that of 113 youth interviewed, 19% had been unemployed since exiting placement and one-third had received some type of public assistance while on their own (Rashid, 2009, p. 241). It is obvious that lack of employment could lead to unsuccessful emancipation.

Healthy Perception of Self

Resiliency appears to be a common theme regarding personal characteristics of foster youth in their quest to seek normalcy and acquire stability. Foster youth's

perception of how they were able to overcome and resist the harsh reality of life in foster care, was based on the youth's perceived self-efficacy, distancing oneself from the risks, new opportunities, and the multiplication of benefits (Drapeau et al., 2007, p. 978). Hope has also been identified as a driving force necessary to overcome feelings of oppression. Hope was defined as an inner-strength utilized to make adjustments from a complicated situation in anticipation of a better tomorrow. Many children in foster care are uncertain of their future. They do not know if they will return to their family or if the connection has been lost or severely damaged due to extended periods of little or no communication and/or interaction. Labeling homeless youth as victims seems to contribute to a self-fulfilling prophecy and belief that they lack talent and are incapable of overcoming their status as "victim" and being successful.

Foster youth lose their ability to trust and lack motivation to achieve developmental and education tasks that are necessary for them to progress. Five ways children retained and increased hope were: through connectedness, internal resources, cognitive strategies,

energizing moments and hope objects (an inanimate object with special meaning). A study of ten former homeless youth, currently between the ages of eighteen and thirty-nine who at one time had been homeless for six months to nine years as adolescents, described what needed most to prevent or get children off the streets was compassion. Social and coping skills, available resources, and how to access them were also necessary to prevent children from being on the streets. The instillation of pride and treating them with dignity, an outlet to express oneself and fulfill their needs aside from physical comforts were also identified as significant in keeping children off the streets. Showing them what life has to offer and the negatives of street life, structured environments- somewhere to go in times of need and not be looked down on, feelings forced to go to the streets where one is accepted and more education were also found as supports to keep children off the streets (Raliegh-DuRoff, 2004, p. 569).

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Bandura's (1986), social cognitive theory illustrates that behaviors are learned through imitation,

modeling, and observation (Lessor & Pope, 2007, p. 65). Unfortunately, many foster youth do not have positive role models to imitate or observe. Many foster parents have biological children who have priority over foster children. Foster youth may not possess the necessary motivation to make strides and accomplish goals, nor are they encouraged by their care providers who treat them as second-class citizens. Caring for foster youth can be analogous to a job that is half done; you do the bare minimum to get the paycheck.

Cognitive behavioral constructivist theory is applicable to this population in that it attempts to explain how and why realities are constructed and their consequences (Lessor & Pope, 2007, p. 68). The focus of this theory is empowerment, resilience, education, and instillation of hope. Although many foster youth possess resiliency, they lack the education, hope, and empowerment needed to overcome the many challenges before them. The inability to meet societal expectations and attain a measure of success can negatively affect self-esteem and behavior tremendously. An individual's perspective about an idea and their coping skills will

determine the outcome of a stressful situation, hence the education and empowerment components.

According to Erickson's (1968) theory of identity development, specifically Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt, if an individual is not successful in meeting developmental milestones, such as graduating high school, attending college, pursuing career goals, it may lead to self shame and doubt. Pre and post-emancipated foster youth are likely to experience shame and doubt in regards to completing high school because they are often significantly behind in credits and may lose hope of completing high school and pursuing career goals. Subsequently these youth may engage in delinquent behaviors that lead to unproductive adult functioning.

Human development theory states that transition to adulthood is a critical period as relationships with social supports are being reestablished (Mech, 1994). Mech (1994) explains that self-sufficiency is not the norm or even expected for adolescents at this point in development. It is not understood how the government would expect this population to be prepared and ready to function in the world, independent of their parent(s)/caretaker, when the general population remains

with their parents(s)/caretaker well beyond this age. More so, when young adults in the general population attempt to conquer independence, they have their parents(s)/caretaker and/or other support systems in place in the event independence is not achieved.

Summary

Foster youth are a vulnerable population, in danger of failing and becoming menaces to society. They are ill-equipped for the transition into adulthood. Children their age in the general population are not expected to attempt or achieve this major life "rite of passage." There are minimal services available on both the micro and macro levels which are not viable to a successful emancipation. Thus the urgency to provide services that are broad and directly related to the expectations; meet the need of a diverse population and various career options; accessible and effective.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This chapter discusses the study design, sampling methods, data collection and instrument, procedures, protection of human subjects, and data analysis which was used in analyzing the outcomes for emancipated foster youth.

Study Design

The specific purpose of the study is to explore how independent living skills services contribute to successful outcomes for emancipated foster youth. A qualitative method was implemented to conduct face-to-face interviews with former emancipated youth participating in aftercare services such as housing. The face-to-face interviews used in this study consisted of asking the participants a combination of 35 to 40 open and closed-ended questions. Some advantages of in-person interviews are that the response rates are typically higher than other alternative survey methods and the participants' responses can be clarified.

Conducting face-to-face interviews provides a personable environment with the former foster youth regarding their foster care experience and an attempt to gather information as to how prepared they felt about living independently.

The use of interviews and focus groups yielded personal experiences from former foster youth themselves. The information obtained from these methods was factual, detailed, and representative of the population being studied. Also, qualitative research identified common themes and responses which can be converted into quantified data if necessary. The information obtained from this study provided insight to agencies providing services to emancipated youth, in hopes that the number of ill-equipped transitioning youth will decline.

One limitation of this method, as it pertains to this study, is the inability to access a large sample in the time allotted to conduct and complete the research. Face to face interviews are limiting in that they can result in social desirability bias in which participants may have an inclination to respond in a way that is pleasing to the researcher. This study design will attempt to answer the question: How do independent living

skills services affect outcomes for emancipated foster youth in attaining self-sufficiency?

Sampling

This study sought input from 20 to 25 emancipated foster youth between 18 and 23 years of age. The participants must have transitioned from foster care to the Transitional Housing Placement Program (THPP). The study participants were identified through the assistance of the aftercare service agency. Due to the limited number of foster youth participating in the Transitional Housing Placement Program (THPP), the researchers anticipated that a snowball sample method was necessary. A snowball sample assists with identifying additional participants to obtain a large enough sample to make more accurate generalizations. These participants were specifically selected due to their extended exposure and experience with the foster care emancipation process.

Data Collection and Instruments

To determine how independent living skills affect the outcomes of emancipated foster youth, information was gathered by audio recordings of participants' responses to a series of open and closed-ended questions in the

form of a verbal interview (See Appendix A for interview guide).

Some independent variables relevant to this study included the lack of the following: education, employment and employable skills, job searching skills, familial support, positive support system, social skills, mental illness, unaffordable housing, emancipation readiness, Child Welfare System (CWS) experience and duration of time in CWS. Dependent variables included self-sufficiency, independence, and emancipation readiness.

The variables identified in this study were measured by analyzing the responses to various questions. Participants were asked numerous questions about their employment skills, education and affiliation with the Independent Living Program. Questions regarding the participants' demographics were also asked (see Appendix A).

Participant surveys were composed of questions formulated by the researchers were conducted to gather the necessary data. Currently, there are no known standardized instruments used to measure self-sufficiency among emancipated foster youth. A needs assessment may be

beneficial in providing insight to the service provider as to the participants' perceived needs in attaining self-sufficiency rather than the agency's perception of what is needed to attain self-sufficiency in regards to this population.

Limitations of the data collection may include untruthful responses provided by the participants due to fear of being judged by the researchers; the participants' right to decline to answer questions may lead to an inaccurate interpretation of the foster youths' experience while in foster care.

Procedures

Prior to the study, the researchers met with Kevin Anderson, ILP supervisor, to discuss and collaborate on the research process and procedures. As a result of this meeting, the researchers gained direction on how to access potential participants. The face-to-face interviews were completed at the transitional apartment sites where the participants reside. The researchers compiled a questionnaire of approximately 25 to 35 questions with individual interviews lasting no more than 30 to 45 minutes. Prior to interviewing the participants,

the researchers obtained their consent to be tape-recorded.

Protection of Human Subjects

Confidentiality was upheld to protect the participants' identity. All identifying information obtained was destroyed upon completion of the data collection and analysis. All participants were informed (Appendix B) of all aspects of the study including voluntary participation, risks, and benefits. Further, participants were provided with a debriefing (Appendix C) statement containing contact information for available counseling services in the event that their participation in the study results in a need for further discussion.

Data Analysis

Based on the information obtained from the data collection, the researchers used qualitative data analysis. The data was transcribed from written form in which the researchers identified common themes. The data was separated and organized into categories. The researchers also converted the data from qualitative to quantifiable data where appropriate.

Constructs that are likely to emerge from the analysis of the data may include how the variables are defined with consideration of and openness to varying definitions by the participants and the importance the participants place on these constructs. For example, "family" can be considered only those of biological connection by some whereas others may define "family" as those with whom they have emotional attachments to, regardless of biological connections.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter presents details of the findings of a qualitative study. These findings were analyzed to describe former foster youths' perception of the effectiveness of independent living skills services in attaining self-sufficiency. This chapter will identify the sample and presents demographic information on participants and other findings.

Presentation of the Findings

Demographics

The sample consisted of 12 former foster youth who participated in the Independent Living Skills Program (ILSP) prior to exiting the foster care system. There were twice as many women (66.6%) as men (33.3%) in the sample which consisted of eight females and four males. The majority were African American, who represented 58.3% of the participants; 33.3% Hispanic and 8.3% Caucasian were represented. In regards to gender and ethnicity, among African Americans, two (16.6%) were male, five (41.6%) were female; of Hispanic two (16.6%) were

males and two (16.6%) were females; of Caucasian, there was one (8.3%) female and no males. No other ethnic groups were represented in this sample.

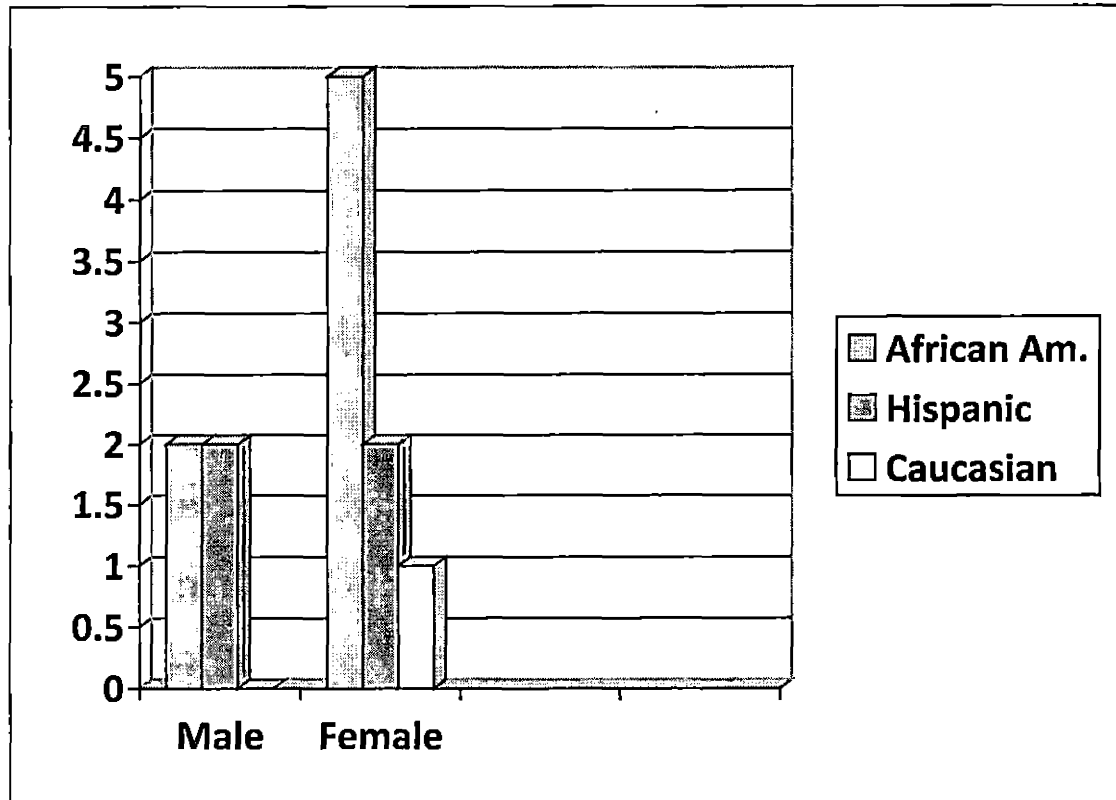


Figure 1. Demographics

The participants were asked about their level of education. Out of twelve participants, five females and three males reported having some college education. There were four participants who reported they completed high school and of these, three were female with one male.

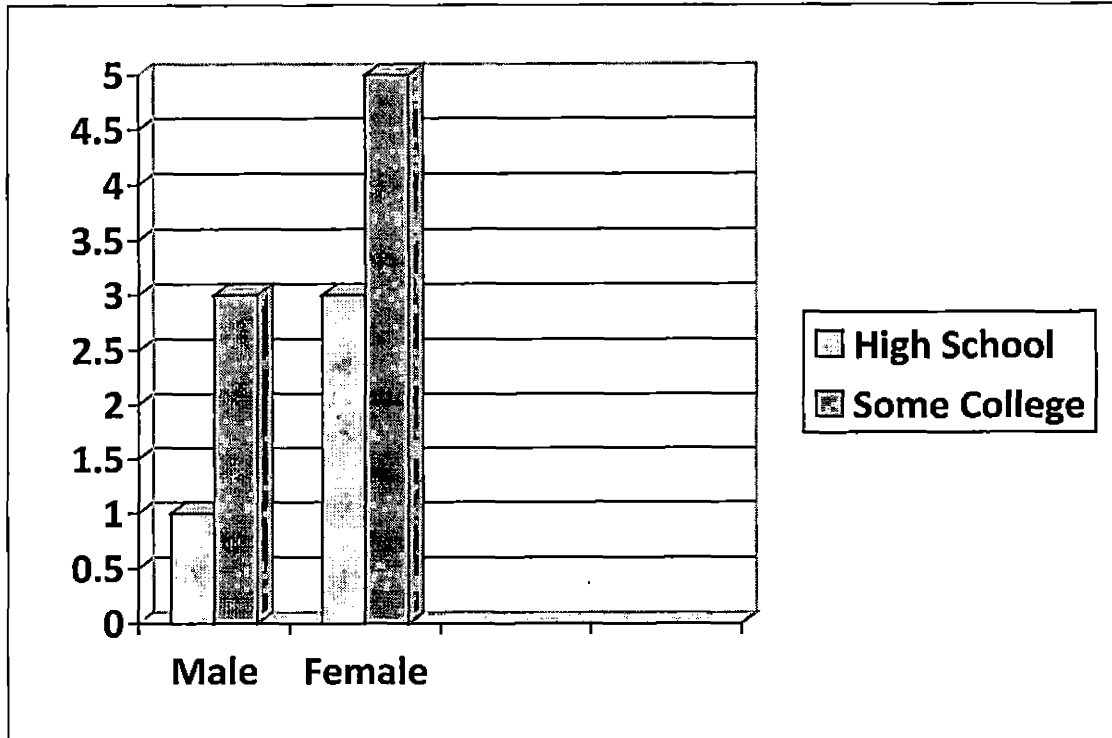


Figure 2. Education

Participant Responses

Of the twelve responses as to why participants chose to participate in ILP, nine (75%) reported participating because they were in need of life skills or help in specific areas. Some of the responses included "Because I was needy at the moment and needed extra help"

(Participant 12, personal survey, January 2011), "Because I was in the foster care system and needed to know how to be independent" (Participant 1, personal survey, January 2011) and "Because they gave incentives and I needed

money, as well as getting out of the house" (Participant 11, personal survey, January 2011).

Of the twelve responses regarding employment, 6 (50%) were employed and 6 (50%) were not employed. Of the 6 employed participants, 3 (25%) were male and 3 (25%) were female. Of those unemployed, 1 (8.3%) were male and 5 (41.6%) were female.

The majority of the participants, 9 (75%) reported possessing employable skills. Some of the responses included, punctuality, works well independently and with others, computer skills, communication, leadership skills, bilingual, public speaking, planning, organizing, and cashier experience. Of the twelve participants, 8.3% reported having no employable skills, 8.3% reported not having a lot of skills and 8.3% did not respond to the question.

The majority of participants, 3 (24.9%), who were not employed reported a lack of job availability as a barrier to employment; one (8.3%) did not respond to the question; one (8.3%) reported transportation and location as a barrier to employment.

The majority of the participants, 7 (58.1%) reported they felt they were adequately prepared for living

independently. Some of the reasons that participants listed as being prepared for living independently included having lived independently in the past, employment and/or enrollment in college. Five (41.6%) participants reported they did not feel adequately prepared for living independently, because of a lack of budget skills, transportation, unemployment and/or needing more experience and maturity.

The majority of participants, 9 (75%), felt ILP Services contributed to their preparedness. Some of the common themes included learning skills, being taught about money management, and receiving help with their current job. Of the three (25%) who reported that ILP services did not contribute to their preparedness, one (8.3%) did not participate in ILP services.

Four (33.3%) of the participants reported a specific service which was not offered but would have been beneficial. The participants identified the following services: driver's education, self-empowerment/advocacy courses, transitional conferences/ resource knowledge, job searching, and/or team building/ peer connectedness courses. Of the seven (58.3%) participants who did not identify a specific service that would have been

beneficial gave the following responses: three (25%) answered N/A, two (16.6%) indicated they did not know, two (16.6%) answered nothing and one (8.3%) did not respond to this question.

Three (25%) of the participants reported they were currently receiving Transitional Housing Placement Program (THPP) services, five (41.6%) reported they were not currently receiving any ILP services, one (8.3%) did not respond to this question and one (8.3%) was not sure. One (8.3%) reported they were receiving gas cards and one (8.3%) reported they were receiving cleaning, food, shopping, counseling and cooking preparations.

Eight (66.6%) of the participants reported liking that ILP would assist them in preparing for the real world; three (25%) indicated this question was not applicable and one (8.3%) reported liking everything about the program.

Of the twelve participants, six (50%) reported they did not dislike anything about the program. The following responses were given by one participant each: disliked their roommate; disliked not receiving enough allowance; disliked their case manager; did not respond to this question; disliked meeting with the case manager weekly

and felt the program was not considerate of the participants' input.

In response to what motivated them to participate in the program, the most common responses were: staff support; inexperience and classes offered. The following responses were given by one participant each: self readiness and maturity, their future and their child was their motivation.

In response to their motivation to learn a new skill, the majority of the participants reported a common theme of personal growth and future use as their response to what motivated them to learn a new skill. The following responses were given by one participant each: their child and their interest level.

In response to what discouraged them from participating in ILP services, the majority reported that nothing discouraged them. Sixteen point six percent reported a lack of transportation.

The participants identified the following services they would make available with the most common responses being transportation, employment resources and college courses.

Of the services they would discontinue, the majority of the participants reported none and one reported the low allowance.

The majority of the participants reported they felt the ILP services offered were effective. The majority of the participants reported that housing and/or classes were most beneficial.

More than half of the participants felt they would be prepared to live independently upon exiting the program. The remaining participants reported they were unsure or would not be prepared to live independently upon exiting the program.

When asked which services they would benefit from upon leaving the program, the most common responses were employment and no additional services. The following responses were given by one participant each: transportation; transportation and management.

The majority of the participants reported their needs are being met through the program with only one participant reporting their needs are not being met.

The participants stay in transitional housing extended from one month to two years. Twenty-five percent

of the participants did not participate at all in this component of the program.

The participants reported the following responses as to how long they felt they needed to remain in transitional housing before being prepared to live on their own: one to two years. The following responses were reported by one participant each: three years; "over one year" (Participant 7, personal survey, January 2011), "when there are many jobs available" (Participant 3, personal survey, January 2011) and "when I am more mature" (Participant 9, personal survey, January 2011).

Half of the participants reported they will know when they are ready to live independently when they are more financially responsible. One participant reported they will be ready to live independently when they have exhausted their time in the program.

The majority of the participants reported they did not have a mental health diagnosis. Only two reported having a mental health diagnosis. Half of the participants reported they did not have a family history of mental illness. Four of the participants reported having a family history of mental illness and one was unsure.

All of the participants reported having contact with their families. Less than half of the participants reported they receive emotional support from their families. The remainder of the participants' responses ranged from receiving all support to receiving no support.

Less than half of the participants reported ILP services did not assist them with maintaining family connections. Other participants reported the following areas that ILP was helpful: educated them about maintaining family connections; facilitated family visitation and provided them with anger management classes.

Table 1. Majority Responses to Interview Questions

Question Number/Response	n	%
Q1. Life skill/help	9	75
Q2. Employed	6	50
Q3. Seeking Employment	6	50
Q4. Employable skills	9	75
Q5. Barriers to Employment	3	24.9
Q6. IL Preparedness	7	58.1
Q7. ILP Contributed to IL	9	75
Q8. Beneficial Services: (Driver's Ed., etc)	4	33
Q9. Current Services	0	0
Q10. Enjoy about ILP: (Real World Experience)	8	66

Question Number/Response	n	%
Q11. Motivated by (staff support, inexperience classes offered)	6	50
Q12. Skill Learning Motivation (Personal Growth & Future Use)	10	83
Q13. Participation Discouragement (Nothing)	4	33.3
Q14. Services Not Offered (Transportation)	3	25
Q15. Undesired Services (None)	5	41.6
Q17. Effectiveness of Services (Housing/Classes)	9	75
Q18. Desired Services (None)	3	33.3
Q19. Needs Met	9	75
Q20. Time Spent in THPP (At Least One Year)	3	25
Q21. Time in THPP Needed (At Least Two Years)	3	25
Q22. IL Readiness (Financially Responsible)	6	50
Q23. Mental Illness (MI)	2	16.6
Q24. Familial HX of MI	4	33.3
Q25. Family Contact	12	100
Q26. Family Support (Emotional)	5	41.6

n = Number of Participants

Conclusions

For various reasons the participants suggested that ILP was beneficial in attaining self-sufficiency, although there were additional areas of need, for which help was not available. Participant 7 stated "ILP was a major contributor to my success due to various skills I learned" but later indicated, "Transitional conferences would have been beneficial if offered, to provide resource knowledge" (Participant 7, personal survey,

January 2011). Participant 11 reported, "ILP contributed to some skills I obtained" but expressed, "Team building courses would have provided connectedness amongst peers" (Participant 11, personal survey, January 2011). Lastly, Participant 12 stated, "ILP taught me about money management, got me into school, and got me my current job" (Participant 12, personal survey, January 2011). Participant 9 also indicated, "Driver's training and self-empowerment (advocate) courses would have been beneficial if offered" (Participant 9, personal survey, January 2011).

Summary

This study set out to identify emancipated foster youth's perceptions about ILP services. The findings from the study conveyed the following results. Foster youth participated in ILP services because they wanted to be ready for the future and they needed skills. However, all but one participant did not participate in ILP because he was adopted and therefore, was not eligible for services. Most of the participants felt that ILP services were beneficial, in that the program provided them with skills and services that proved to be helpful in their quest

attain self-sufficiency following their transition from the foster care system. The participants identified the following skills learned from ILP services: money management, parenting, employment, and basic life skills such as cooking, shopping, and cleaning.

Although the participants expressed that ILP services were beneficial, they also identified aspects of ILP services, which were not helpful. Participants stated that ILP lacked reliable transportation and other participants were rude.

As far as identifying services they could benefit from prior to transitioning out of foster care, the participants reported the following: assistance with enrolling in college, getting into the housing program, getting a job, and assistance with personal transportation (car match program).

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

Chapter Five will discuss the conclusions based on the findings of the research project. In addition, it will identify the study's limitations, discuss recommendations for further research, and give a summary of social work practice implications.

Discussion

The study collected qualitative data about how independent living skills services affect the outcomes of emancipated foster youth in attaining self-sufficiency. Former foster youth who participated in the Independent Living Skills Program (ILSP), prior to exiting the foster care system, shared their perceptions of services they received by responding to various open-ended questions.

Foster youth participated in ILP services because they wanted to prepare for the future and they needed additional skills. Mech (1994) explained that self-sufficiency is not the norm or even expected for adolescents at this point in development. Contrary to Mech's findings, most of the participants felt that ILP

services were beneficial in their pursuit of self-sufficiency, following emancipation from the foster care system.

The participants reported that they desired the following services that were not provided by ILP: assistance with enrolling into college, getting into the housing program, getting a job, and assistance with personal transportation through the 'car match program' which is no longer offered. This is consistent with the study conducted by Rashid (2009) which reported that youth wished they would have been provided with more independent living skills.

Only half of the participants were gainfully employed. The findings on this question are consistent with previous research conducted by Rashid (2009) which indicated that 50% of former foster youth were unemployed and 40% were a cost to the community by receiving public assistance or by being incarcerated. Those who were not gainfully employed were either seeking employment or working as a volunteer. Although, many of the participants reported having employable skills such as computer and typing skills, bilingual, and heavy equipment operation, they felt that there is a lack of

jobs available. A lack of job availability can be attributed to a historical event, specifically, the current state of the economy which has been officially declared to be in a recession.

The majority of the participants are well educated. All of the participants reported they were high school graduates. Out of twelve participants, eight participants reported that they had some college education.

All of the participants reported that they have connections with their biological family, but they are mainly emotional supports, with all but two reporting their family does not provide any financial support. The participants' responses to this question are consistent with Mech's (1994) findings which indicate that human development theory states that transition to adulthood is a critical period as relationships with social supports are being reestablished. Many children who are in foster care lose their connection with their biological family. Although much of this population may desire to have an emotional relationship with their biological family, they also expect to have some financial assistance and life direction as well. This information is consistent with Choca et al. (2004) who found that many foster youth

leave foster care without a strong positive connection with a caring adult, so they have no one to count on when things get difficult.

Limitations

The study identified several limitations. First, due to the small participant pool, the findings cannot be generalized to the larger population of emancipated foster youth. Also, since the participants were from only two regions (San Bernardino and North Desert) of the county, foster youth from other regions (Eastern and Western) were not able to share their perceptions about the effectiveness of ILP services.

Another limitation of the study was the sample size consisted of predominantly female participants, with eight females and four males. It was difficult to identify participants in this population due to a lack of housing options and permanency following transition from the foster care system.

Furthermore, all participants did not answer all of the questions that were asked. A bias of the study might be that the majority of the participants that indicated they were employed, by CFS.

Recommendations for Social Work
Practice, Policy and Research

The findings of this study can be utilized to assist Children and Family Services' (CFS) Independent Living Program (ILP) for San Bernardino County. The research findings can assist the department in program evaluation and in the implementation of program changes, services and additional resources for foster youth nearing emancipation. The participants' responses regarding their thoughts about the effectiveness of ILP services can be utilized for policy change recommendations. The recommendations include ILP providing more assessable transportation, providing services that assisted with college enrollment, getting into a housing program, becoming employed and returning the "car match program."

A recommendation for policy change is for foster care youth to be eligible to participate in the ILP program at a younger age, such as age 14, the age that youth typically enter high school. If foster care youth were able to participate in the ILP program at age 14, they would gain an extra two years to prepare for emancipation, and the duration of this time would correlate with their high school experience.

Another recommendation is making participation in ILP mandatory for all eligible youth in foster care. Currently, participation in this program is optional and many foster care youth decline to participate. All youth in foster care can benefit from the services that ILP offers, such as job preparedness, money management skills and housing education. Making participation in ILP mandatory would assist the department in assuring that all foster youth are provided with emancipation preparedness instead of only the youth that choose to participate.

Another policy change recommendation would be for ILP to include or enhance their services regarding assistance with college enrollment, getting into the housing program, finding employment, and assistance with personal transportation through the 'car match program' which is no longer offered. It is understood that funding often affects the quality of services in any organization but emancipating foster youth are a population deserving of services that suite their specific needs during this transitional period in their lives, regardless of budget availability.

A recommendation for social work practice is for social workers to increase their knowledge and awareness of the resources, services, and program eligibility for youth nearing emancipation within and out of the department. The more knowledgeable the social worker is as to what services and programs are available for emancipating foster youth, the more successful the youth's transition out of the foster care system will be due to the services that the social worker can put in place prior to case closure.

Social work practice should revolve largely around ensuring that emancipating foster youth have access to health and mental health care during their emancipation period and after. It would be helpful to the youth if the department assigned a medical liaison that would work with the youth during their time in foster care and especially after foster care to ensure the youth receives medical benefits after emancipation. Many emancipating foster youth do not know that they must reapply for medical benefits as an adult after their case is dismissed and thus receive a lapse in medical coverage.

Another recommendation for social work practice is for social workers to hold transitional conferences for

their youth, beginning at age 14, the same age a youth typically enters high school. The social worker implementing a transitional conference two years earlier would provide the youth with more time learning and gathering information regarding their education, legal documents, health benefits, and life skills.

Further research is needed on the resilience of foster youth. Foster youth often face challenging, stressful, and unstable times during their time in foster care. The factors that assist them in achieving positive outcomes can assist the departments with intervention efforts.

Conclusions

This study examined former foster youths' perceptions about the affects of independent living skills services in attaining self-sufficiency. Twelve participants were identified to provide data about their personal experience with the ILP. The participants identified suggestions for improving preparedness for foster youth transitioning out of care, which include more skills and services, job placement and immediate housing. Ultimately, the participants reported the skills

they acquired from ILP helped them following their transition from care. Most participants reported participating in ILP services to fulfill a need or acquire additional skills. However, they also noted that there was a need for more services. What they disliked about aftercare services is that "their aftercare case manager did not know what she was doing half the time," "meeting too frequent with case managers," and "staff do not consider what participants have to say or think."

This study was pertinent for future foster youth transitioning out of care, to provide insight in regards to the need for provision and improvement of services provided to adequately prepare this population for success in adulthood. This study also provided an opportunity for a select few from this population to advocate for themselves and their peers who will inevitably share this experience.

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Why did you choose to participate in ILP program?
2. Are you employed?
3. If not, are you seeking employment?
4. What employable skills do you possess?
5. Is there anything preventing you from getting a job?
6. Do you feel you are adequately prepared for living independently?
7. Do you feel ILP services contributed to your preparedness or lack thereof?
8. What services do you think would have been beneficial, but were not offered?
9. What services are you currently receiving from ILP?
10. What do you like about the ILP aftercare program?
11. What motivates you to participate in ILP services?
12. What motivates you to learn a skill?
13. What discourages you from participating in ILP services?
14. What services would you make available?
15. What services would you discontinue?
16. Do you feel the services offered are effective?
17. Do you feel you will be prepared to live independently when you leave the program?
18. Do you feel there is anything you could benefit from prior to leaving the program?
19. Do you feel your needs are being met through this program?
20. How long have you been in transitional housing?
21. How long do you feel you need to stay in transitional housing before you are able to live on your own?
22. How will you know when you are ready to live alone/independently?
23. Do you have a mental health diagnosis?
24. Does your family have a history of mental illness?
25. Do you have any contact with your family?
26. If so, what type of support do they provide?

Developed by Tracy Burks & Sandra Fernández

DEMOGRAPHICS

- Gender: 1.) Male _____
 2.) Female _____
- Ethnicity: 1.) African American _____
 2.) Asian/Pacific Islander _____
 3.) Hispanic _____
 4.) Caucasian/non-Hispanic _____
 5.) Other _____
- Education: 1.) Some High School _____
 2.) High School Graduate _____
 3.) Some College _____
 4.) College Graduate _____
- Children: 1.) None _____
 2.) 1 _____
 3.) 2 _____

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to explore your views of transitional housing services. This study is being conducted by Tracy Burks and Sandra Razo under the supervision of Dr. Rosemary McCaslin, Professor of Social Work Research at California State University, San Bernardino. This study has been approved by the Department of Social Work Institutional Review Board Subcommittee, California State University, San Bernardino.

In this study, you will be asked to share your views of services provided by the aftercare program. All of your responses will be held in the strictest of confidence by the researchers. Your name will not be reported with your responses. All data will be reported in group format only. You may receive the group results of this study upon completion in the Pfau Library at California State University, San Bernardino or from Children and Family Services.

Your participation in this study is totally voluntary. You are free not to answer any questions and withdraw at any time during this study without penalty. There are no foreseeable risks to participating in the study. However, the benefits are that social welfare system will be able to gain more insight and make more informed decisions regarding emancipated youth in the future.

Upon completion of the survey, you will receive a debriefing statement describing the study in more detail. Your cooperation will aid in maintaining or improving aftercare services. There is no foreseeable risk to your participation. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Rosemary McCaslin at 909-537-5000.

By marking below, I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and that I understand the nature and purpose of this study, and I freely consent to participate. I also acknowledge that I am at least 18 years of age.

Mark

Date

APPENDIX C
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

The study you have just completed was designed to explore opinions about aftercare services. In this study, two views were assessed, what you like and dislike about aftercare services while in transitional housing. We are particularly interested in your confidence level regarding your transition from foster care.

Thank you for your participation. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact Dr. Rosemary McCaslin at 909-537-5000. If you would like to obtain a copy of the group results of this study, please contact San Bernardino County Children and Family Services.

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ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE

This was a two-person project where authors collaborated throughout. However, for each phase of the project, certain authors took primary responsibility. These responsibilities were assigned in the manner listed below.

1. Data Collection:

Team Effort: Tracy Burks & Sandra Fernández

2. Data Entry and Analysis:

Team Effort: Tracy Burks & Sandra Fernández

3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:

a. Introduction and Literature

Team Effort: Tracy Burks & Sandra Fernández

b. Methods

Team Effort: Tracy Burks & Sandra Fernández

c. Results

Team Effort: Tracy Burks & Sandra Fernández

d. Discussion

Team Effort: Tracy Burks & Sandra Fernández