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INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS'
PERCEPTIONS OF PERMANENCY AND THEIR
SERVICE NEEDS

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
Kimberly Margaret Stark

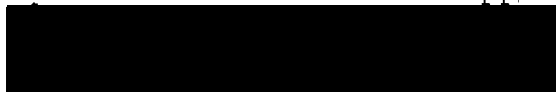
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Approved by:




Dr. Janet C. Chang, Faculty Supervisor
Social Work

6/1/10
Date



Lisa Shiner, Deputy Director, Riverside
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Dr. Janet C. Chang,
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ABSTRACT

As youth emancipate out of the child welfare system, they face many challenges. Many of these youth are ill-prepared to face adulthood and independence. Even with Independent Living Programs (ILP) in place, there is much room for improvement in the programs. This study investigated whether or not having a permanent connection was beneficial to young adults after they left foster care. It showed that even with the presence of an identified mentor to guide youth post-emancipation, these youth were still facing serious difficulties.

The study surveyed 53 emancipated foster care youth in Riverside County using a self-report exploratory measure with quantitative and qualitative elements. The findings indicated that the presence of a mentor, number of placements, and ethnicity do affect some aspects of well-being post emancipation.

Suggestions for social work practice, policy, and future research were recommended.

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Lastly, I would like to thank my family and friends; especially my husband Bill who is the love of my life, my

friend, confidant, and helpmate. His help throughout this process was invaluable. Thank you so much for all your support. Special thanks also to my children Caroline and Daniel for all your technical assistance as the computer acted up. Finally to my mother who reminded me to relax along the way.

DEDICATION

To all the youth in the child welfare system; especially those who participated in this research project. Thank you for being willing to share a part of yourself in the hope of making a difference for future generations of youth who follow behind you. It is my hope that this project may help to make some small difference in the way services are provided to youth as they prepare to emancipate out of the foster care system.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an overview of the struggles that emancipating foster youth face upon exit from the foster care system, legislation enacted to aid these young adults, and the importance of a permanent connection in their lives. A brief description of Independent Living Programs, current social work practice, and the purpose of the proposed study is also included.

Problem Statement

Each year approximately 25,000 youth emancipate out of the foster care system and transition into independence across the United States. Exactly 26,517 youth emancipated in 2006 (USDHHS, 2008). As these older adolescents exit the child welfare system many of them do not have the self-sufficiency skills needed to maintain their own living environment. After being removed from their biological families, life in foster care has not provided them with adequate independent living skills, social support networks, or educational options to live successfully once they leave the system.

Since 1986 when the Federal Independent Living Program (ILP) for Older Foster Children was enacted, the state and federal government have been aware that youth emancipating from the foster care system do not have good outcomes. Since that time legislation has been passed to help shape programs to improve these outcomes. In February 2008 the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) Final Rule made it clear that outcomes need to improve and that states must report to the federal government how youth are doing, post-emancipation, in order to continue to receive funding for ILP programs (NYTD Executive Summary, 2008).

Even with federal legislation in place, former foster youth who have aged out of the child welfare system often experience homelessness, become parents at a young age, have criminal convictions, lack interpersonal skills, lack a support network, and are plagued by mental and physical health issues. In addition to these deficits, emancipated youth have trouble continuing their education and maintaining employment after they exit the system (Collins, 2001; Mendes & Moslehuddin, 2006).

A recent survey by Mendes and Moslehuddin (2006) found that most young adults continue to receive support

from their parents until the age of 26. In California, a youth emancipates from foster care at the age of 18 or upon graduation from high school, whichever comes later. However, dependency services are terminated by age 19 regardless of educational status. Children who were removed from their biological families for abuse or neglect had a natural home environment where their needs were not met, and then they entered the child welfare system. While in foster care, many of these youth experienced multiple placements, moved from one school to another, and had countless social workers while they finished growing up. The state kept them safe, but was not able to replace a supportive, nurturing environment to help them become productive adults.

Most youth emancipate because they have reached the age of majority, not because they are ready to live independently (Freundlich & Avery, 2005; McCoy, McMillen, & Spitzangel, 2008). Child welfare agencies need to consider more than just preparing youth for how to live independently. The focus of Independent Living Programs in the past has been "skills" classes.

Riverside County has partnered with Riverside Community College (RCC) to provide ILP classes and

after-care services to eligible youth. ILP at RCC has 1,750 aftercare youth aged 18-21. About half of these have active cases. An active case means the youth is in contact with an emancipation coach to receive aftercare services. ILP at RCC teaches hard and soft skills in classes. Hard skills are tangible skills such as money management, transportation, and identifying resources. Soft skills are intangible skills like decision-making, problem solving, communication, social skills, and time management.

The transition to independent living needs to be broadened to consider permanency for the young adult. This will require reorienting existing policies to shift the focus from independent living to interdependent living, giving the youth a permanent connection (Courtney & Barth, 1996; Collins, Paris, & Ward, 2008).

Research indicates that youth who exit foster care without a permanent connection to a family member or other significant adult have more negative outcomes than those youth who have a permanent connection when they leave the system (Freundlich & Avery, 2005). There has not been much attention paid to whether or not a youth

has a permanent connection upon emancipating from foster care (Freundlich & Avery, 2005).

Since 1986, the federal government has been funding independent living services for emancipating youth but it has been difficult to account for the success or failure of the programs. Studies do tell us that when former foster youth have been contacted six to eighteen months after emancipation, 51-55% of former foster youth report having no health insurance and 18-41% report having been incarcerated. When contacted one to ten years after emancipation, studies have found 23-61% of former foster youth report not having either graduated from high school or received a GED. When contacted six months to four years after emancipation, studies found that 10-36% of former foster youth reported having experienced homelessness (D'Andrade, Osterling, & Austin, 2008). Child welfare agencies need to find ways to aid these youth so that these statistics will improve. Emancipating youth need to become productive members of society who have a lifelong connection to a supportive adult to help them navigate early adulthood.

At the time youth were interviewed for their exit from the foster care system, 99% of them claimed to have

had a permanent connection (DPSS 405E, 2007). A post emancipation interview can help determine if the permanent connection named at the exit interview was indeed a lifelong support for them. A second question would be: how is the youth doing on his or her own? Are child welfare agencies achieving permanency for emancipating youth as they exit foster care and enter early adulthood?

Purpose of the Study

This study investigated the aftercare outcomes for youth who have participated in the Independent Living Program through Riverside County, CA. Youth aged 18-21 were interviewed to find out if the permanent connection identified by the youth upon emancipation was truly a supportive adult. Additionally, educational attainment, employment, housing, health care, ILP services received, and social and emotional well-being were investigated.

The Chaffee National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) Final Rule, dated February 26, 2008, requires that states provide data on youth who receive ILP services and outcomes over time to the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) by May 15, 2011. States must begin to

collect their data by October 1, 2010 (NYTD Final Rule, 2008). Given the reporting mandate, every county and state in these United States is concerned with the services being provided to prepare youth in out-of-home care for independence. Riverside County Children's Services Division is concerned with the outcomes of youth emancipating from their child welfare system. This study provided evidence regarding the significance of a permanent connection in the life of a newly emancipated aftercare youth. The results of this study can be utilized for the NYTD required report.

This study was different from previous studies of services provided by Independent Living Programs. Previous studies have looked at satisfaction with services, challenges facing emancipated youth, and readiness for independent living (McCoy, McMillen, & Spitznagel, 2008; Scannapieco, Connell-Carrick, & Painter, 2007; Courtney & Barth, 1996). This study considered the significance of permanency in the everyday life of an emancipated youth. Permanency planning is a core component in case planning in child welfare work but the significance of the benefit for aftercare youth is sadly lacking. Permanency for an emancipated youth is a

confusing concept. Cook (1994) found that 54% of emancipating youth returned to live with biological family at the time of discharge from the system and 38% lived with relatives. Courtney and Barth (1996) determined that 17% of youth were placed with family on case closure, while Courtney, Piliavin, Grogan-Kaylor, and Nesmith (2001) interviewed youth and discovered that 31% were living with relatives twelve to eighteen months post emancipation. These statistics are significant because of the difficulties youth have after they leave the system and because so many of them have periods of homelessness (Collins, Paris, & Ward, 2008).

Permanence encompasses more than just a place to live or a plan. It is a healthy mindset gained from a supportive, nurturing relationship with a lifelong connection. Emancipated youth need these relationships in order to thrive in the community and live as productive members of society (Scannapieco, Connell-Carrick, & Painter, 2007).

Significance of the Project for Social Work

This project researched the significance of a permanent connection in the lives of young adults who

emancipated from foster care and participated in the ILP program. Child welfare workers will be able to see the results of a permanent connection and focus on facilitating these connections for youth who are about to emancipate. The research question was: Does the youth have the permanent connection that was identified on the State of California (SOC) SOC 405A form at the time of emancipation, and was having such a connection beneficial to the newly independent youth?

This study was needed because the benefits of permanency for in-care youth have been documented to yield positive results for families but little was known about permanency connections after youth leave the foster care system (Collins, Paris, & Ward, 2008).

As far as policy was concerned, if youth who have a permanent connection were shown to be doing better than youth without a lifelong connection, an argument could be made to consider letting the youth participate more in choosing a mentor figure before leaving foster care. The mentor may be a family member who would not otherwise have been selected by the foster care agency, but the youth being able to choose a connection is more important than leaving without anyone to support them. Social

workers can help develop these supportive relationships when working with the youth to develop their Transitional Independent Living Plan (TILP), which is updated every six months.

This study will also be able to be utilized to help with the new NYTD reporting requirements beginning in 2010. No one has tracked these youth yet, and the first step will be to find out where they are going once dependency is terminated. This study will help guide the agency as it begins to ask that question.

The youth participating in the ILP at RCC aftercare program were an indicator as to whether or not the youth are still in the same placement they thought they would be at the time of emancipation.

Social work agencies can also benefit from this study by learning the importance of preparing caseworkers to help facilitate reunification with parents or other family members who may have been out of the youth's life for a number of years. These families may not know how to respond to each other after being separated. The agency can give advanced training on what to expect if they choose to reconnect.

Social workers will be better able to terminate services to youth knowing that the youth has a permanent connection to help guide them into adulthood.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the legislation pertaining to Independent Living Programs, and known outcomes of formerly emancipated youth. This chapter also discusses theories which pertain to why these youth may not be successful on their own.

History of the Development of
Independent Living Programs

In 1986 Congress created the Federal Independent Living Program (ILP) for Older Foster Children. This initiative provided funds to states to create and implement services for emancipating youth. There were problems with this 1986 ILP legislation. Some of the major concerns were that states were not expected to contribute any funds to the ILP program; youth were not required to participate in the program; social workers did not require any special training to prepare the youth for their emancipation; and there was no provision for health care for the youth.

The Chaffee Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 replaced the 1986 legislation. The Chaffee Act increased the age a youth is eligible for ILP services to the age of 21, even post emancipation from the child welfare system. With the enactment of the Chaffee Act, the states also had to add a 20% match to the federal funds in order to receive funding. The federal government was trying to ensure that states were invested in the outcomes of emancipating foster youth. The Chaffee funds require that up to 30% of the funds received be used for youth from ages 18-21 to assist with room and board; some of the funds must be used to provide training to placement providers to assist them with the unique needs of youth about to emancipate; and that the youth themselves participate in their own emancipation program planning.

Prior to the Chaffee Act the preparation was limited and did not adequately provide the required training for emancipation. With the passing of the Chaffee Act in 1999 states were able to expand their programs and provide youth with ILP services and health care coverage until their 21st birthday. The Chaffee Act allowed states the flexibility to provide independent living skills classes,

employment and educational training, and funding for room and board (Rashid, Doherty, & Austin, 2001).

In 2008 the State of California developed a new Transitional Independent Living Plan (TILP) to help with goal planning for the youth in the ILP program. The new TILP became operational in July 2008 across the state. The State of California also added reporting requirements in the Child Welfare System/Child Management System (CWS/CMS) when entering a contact with a youth. The contact has eleven new areas to report what specific ILP services were provided to each youth at any contact. The new contact system in CWS/CMS makes it easier for the state to check up on the child welfare agencies and its workers to ensure that ongoing standardized assessments of children and youth from a strengths-perspective are being done. The hope is that the data the state pulls from CWS/CMS will be able to provide evidence that youth demonstrate positive outcomes and well-being as a result of service delivery (Lou, Anthony, Stone, Vu, & Austin, 2006).

Characteristics of Aftercare Youth

Previous studies have pointed out that youth emancipating from the child welfare system face challenges they are not prepared for as they exit their placements, especially youth who have had greater than five placements (Barth, 1990; Courtney & Dworsky, 2006; Needell, Cuccaro-Alamin, Brookhart, Jackman, & Shlonsky, 2002). These youth exhibit considerably lower levels of well-being than any other subpopulation of youth in the United States (Leslie, Gordon, Ganger, & Gist, 2002).

Atkinson (2008) identifies

...the needs and outcomes of youth who age out under current foster care policies. As a youth reaches the age of majority, he/she also reaches adulthood and loses several privileges like housing, healthcare, financial assistance or a social worker to call during emergencies. These youths are likely to suffer from homelessness, be involved in criminal activity, be uneducated, be unemployed, experience poverty and lack the proper healthcare. (p. 183)

Former foster youth have much to say regarding their experiences in foster care, how they are doing in aftercare, and how the two factors are related. Youth

have mixed opinions about the utilization and effectiveness of existing independent living programs, significant educational delays associated with frequent placements while in out-of-home custody, and strong attachments to families of origin (Petr, 2008).

Reilly (2003) interviewed one hundred youth six months after emancipation and discovered that even with exposure to an Independent Living Program a significant number of these youth are struggling to make it on their own.

Today, evidence indicates that transition into successful adulthood continues into the mid to late twenties (Rashid, Doherty, & Austin, 2001). Many young people return to their parents' home after college graduation. Upon leaving foster care in Riverside County the State of California (SOC) 405E form is used to attain exit data. This form shows that 99% of youth leaving the child welfare system from July to September 2008 stated they had a permanent connection (405 E Quarterly Statistical Report). If this is true, outcomes should look different as these youth are followed in the next few years. If Riverside County could interview newly emancipated youth during their first few years post

emancipation, then the 405E questions could be asked again in order to discover if the right questions are being asked at youth emancipation conferences.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

This study utilized Erik Erikson's psychosocial developmental theory and Bowlby's Attachment Theory to help understand where emancipated foster care youth were in life's development.

Erikson's (1950, 1968) developmental theory helped guide this study as it clearly explains the eight stages of development which must be successfully navigated in order to function well in each successive stage.

When foster youth age out of the system, they are still struggling with stage five, identity versus role confusion and/or stage six, intimacy versus isolation. The developmental goal is to successfully complete each developmental task before entering the next stage of development. In stage five, the primary developmental task is to establish a sense of identity. For youth in foster care, this can be a daunting task.

As foster youth are preparing for life outside of the system, they are now in stage six. These young adults

struggle to accomplish intimacy as they are being thrust into a world where they have to make it on their own and may not have the strongest sense of identity. If however he/she has a permanent connection, this may help them as they navigate the sixth developmental stage (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2007).

Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1988) also lends itself to being able to understand better, how and why former foster youth are not faring well after they leave the child welfare system. Children need to be able to experience a warm, supportive, continuous relationship with a permanent figure in order to thrive. Children who have been removed from their homes, parents, neighborhoods, siblings, and significant others do not have the permanent relationship that is critical to healthy growth and development.

Youth in foster care constantly have to adjust to new placements, which make it hard to maintain homeostasis. Maintaining homeostasis is important to the child as they try to form attachments, and successfully navigate Erikson's psychosocial developmental stages in order to enter young adulthood.

If healthy attachments are not formed and/or if successful completion of Erikson's developmental stages is impeded due to the child's environment constantly changing, this could help explain why emancipated foster youth are doing so poorly after they leave the child welfare system.

The importance of the support received from a permanent connection in the life of an emancipating foster youth during this time of transition is likened to the parental support otherwise received. This form of parental support is correlated with self-worth, adjustment, and satisfaction with life (Collins, Paris, & Ward, 2008). Former foster youth who have a permanent connection to a supportive adult may be more successful at the next major life event they face; leaving foster care and transitioning into life on their own.

Summary

This chapter examined the history of Independent Living Program (ILP) legislation, the vulnerability of emancipating foster youth, and the roles development and attachment may have on this population while trying to create lifelong, permanent connections.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This section contains an overview of the research methods used in this study. The study's design, sampling technique, data collection process, and data processing procedures are addressed. The efforts used to protect human subjects are discussed. Finally, data analyses are summarized.

Study Design

The purpose of this study was to follow up with youth who have emancipated out of the child welfare foster care system in order to evaluate their perception of permanency and well-being. The goal of this project was to identify if youth have a permanent connection (aka lifelong connection and/or mentor) and to evaluate whether or not this connection was indeed a support to help establish permanency for these young adults. This study was approved by Riverside County Children's Services Division (Appendix A).

An exploratory quantitative survey design was utilized along with qualitative open-ended questions to

allow for participants to provide additional feedback. The survey addressed the youth's well-being based on the State of California (SOC) form 405E questions on exit from foster care. This was a follow up to see if there were positive outcomes due to having a permanent support system. The questions asked the youth whether or not the permanency connection identified on exit from foster care was still the person they went to for support, advice, and guidance. By measuring these variables this study hoped to identify how permanency was established after emancipation from the foster care system.

This study method was chosen in order to build on the information provided about the youth at the time of exit from the child welfare system and compare it to how the youth was doing at the time of the survey, with or without the support of an identified, supportive, adult, permanent connection.

The limitation of this study was that the only youth who participated were those in contact with the Independent Living Aftercare Program. It was not able to address how youth not in contact with the program were doing. A second limitation of this study involved perceptions. Youth perceive permanent connections

differently. It is possible that permanent connections existed and were not being tapped into. Since perceptions are subjective in nature, this could make it difficult to generalize to all emancipating foster youth.

Even with limitations, this research study may be able to assist child welfare agencies to better prepare youth for emancipation by focusing on permanency. The research question of this study was: For those youth that identified an adult connection, did the adult actually serve in that capacity in their lives after emancipation?

Sampling

The sample was a purposive sample drawn from aftercare participants in the Independent Living Program at Riverside Community College (ILP at RCC). The participants were emancipated youth between the ages of 18 and 21. The sample included 53 participants: 26 female and 27 male.

Participants were drawn from ILP at RCC because this was the most effective way to recruit participants. This sample was chosen because they were representative of youth who emancipated from Riverside County and had been provided Independent Living Program services.

The sample was drawn from September 2009 - November 2009. A purposive sample of youth in contact with ILP at RCC was chosen due to time constraints and the ability to contact the youth.

Data Collection and Instruments

The data for this study were collected utilizing a self-reported questionnaire (Appendix B). The questionnaire was a specially designed tool for this study. It included items that have been used in other studies of emancipated foster youth and life skills assessments. In addition to the follow-up from the SOC 405E form, some of the questions were taken from the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment for Youth from the "Support" and "Health" supplements. The Ansell-Casey Assessment has been proven to be both a valid and reliable measure of youth perceptions of themselves (Casey Family Programs, 2005). The other questions were based on samples done by Osterling and Hines (2006) which assessed current level of education and future educational plans, personal adjustment, social support, and relationship with mentor. The questionnaire included demographic information (age, gender, ethnicity, length

of time in foster care, number of placements), and data regarding changes or sameness since exiting foster care, including educational status, means of financial support, housing arrangements, health care insurance, participation in independent living program services, and a permanency connection.

This study examined many independent variables including: demographic information, housing information, and means of financial support.

The demographic information included age, gender, ethnicity, current educational status, age of entry into foster care, length of time in foster care, length of time since emancipation, and presence of vital documents. Ages, length of time in placement, length of time since emancipation, and numbers of children were measured at the interval level. The other demographic information was measured at the nominal level.

The housing information included where the youth was currently living, why they had moved, who they lived with, homelessness status, and whether they had done anything illegal for survival needs which were all measured at the nominal level. The length of time in current living situation was measured at the ratio level,

and the number of moves they had made was measured at the interval level.

The means of financial support information included whether or not the youth was employed, seeking employment, reasons for leaving a job, and questions about earnings which were measured at the nominal level. The numbers of hours worked weekly, current wage, and number of jobs held were measured at the ratio level.

The dependent variables were the presence of a permanent lifelong supportive adult in the life of the emancipated youth and the youth's perception of well-being. The presence of a lifelong supportive adult was defined as at least one adult the youth went to for support, advice, and guidance.

The presence or lack of a mentor was measured at the nominal level along with the status of that relationship. The distance the mentor lived away, how often they talked, and how often they saw each other was measured at the interval level. Whether or not they participated in social activities with their mentor was measured at the nominal level. The youth's perception of well-being was defined as the youth's satisfaction with their life at the time of the survey.

Procedures

Participation in this study was sought through ILP at RCC by informing aftercare youth about the study during an already scheduled visit to the site. If after the visit they wanted to participate in the study the informed consent form was given to the youth by an emancipation coach followed by the survey.

A meeting was held with John Sousa, ILP, at RCC director to discuss procedures for data collection. The emancipation coaches who work with the aftercare youth were given informed consent forms (Appendix C) and questionnaires to distribute to youth who wished to participate in the survey. Participating youth were given the survey to fill out in private in an office and then handed it back in a sealed envelope. A debriefing statement (Appendix D) was also provided to the emancipation coaches to give to the youth upon completion of the survey. The deadline for collection of the forms was November 30, 2010. The surveys were picked up by the researcher once they were completed.

Protection of Human Subjects

Protective measures to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of the study participants were taken. Since all youth participating in the survey were emancipated, they were aged 18 and up and therefore able to provide their own informed consent to participate in the study. The list of participants was kept by ILP at RCC and identifying information such as names, addresses, phone numbers was not asked for on the questionnaire. Participants were informed of their right to decline the survey and/or quit the survey at any time without negative consequences. The informed consent forms asked participants to provide an "x" rather than a signature to designate their voluntary participation in the study. The informed consent and questionnaires were assigned matching identification numbers. These numbers were then used as identifiers in the SPSS data analysis program. Participants were assured that all data was destroyed six months after the study was completed. A debriefing statement was also provided to participants upon completion of their survey.

Data Analysis

This study employed quantitative data analysis methods. Univariate analyses were run on all study variables to determine frequency distributions. Secondary bivariate analyses were run to determine which variables and category of variables influenced the dependent variable. A Chi-square statistical test was run to assess the association between where the youth lived and the presence of a supportive adult in their life. Independent t-tests were performed to determine the statistical significance between the presence of a mentor and demographic information; educational levels; housing; means of financial support; and other supportive items.

The qualitative questions were analyzed for content in order to determine strengths and weaknesses in identifying a lifelong permanent connection for youth as they prepared to emancipate and how this related to their overall well-being.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the quantitative and qualitative study designed to evaluate the presence of a lifelong permanent connection and

emancipated youths' perceptions of overall well-being. The study was conducted at ILP at RCC using self-administered questionnaires. Preventive measures for human subjects were discussed. Finally data analyses methods associated with the study were discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This section presents the findings of this research study. The following frequency distribution tables describe demographic variables, education levels, housing information, presence of a mentor, means of financial support, and other levels of support.

Presentation of the Findings

Demographic Characteristics

Table 1 describes the demographics of the sampled participants. Out of 53 participants, 49.1% were female and 50.9% were male. Nearly 38% of participants were Hispanic/Latino, followed by African Americans, 28.3%, Whites, 13.2%, Other, 11.3%, America Indian, 7.5%, and Asian/Pacific Islander, 1.9%.

Nearly 40% of the participants were nineteen years old, followed by eighteen year olds, 37.7%, twenty year olds, 17%, the twenty one year olds, twenty four year olds, and twenty five year olds each represented 1.9% of the sample. The majority of the participants (66.7%) were

between thirteen and seventeen years old when they entered foster care placement.

Over 57% of the participants had three or fewer placements, twelve (24.4%) had four to six placements. The greater majority (86.3%) of the participants left the system at age eighteen. Over 50% of the participants spent three years or less in foster care. Of these, ten participants (20.4%) spent thirteen months or less in foster care. Five participants (10.2%) spent two years, and five participants (10.2%) spent three years in the foster care system.

The majority (66.7%) of participants have been out of foster care for eighteen months or less. Of these, eleven participants (21.6%) were four or six months out of foster care, seven participants (13.7%) were twelve months out, and five participants (9.8%) were two months out. Five participants (9.8%) were out for twenty-four months, followed by three participants (5.9%) were out for thirty-six months, and four participants (7.9%) were out of the system for thirty-nine months or more.

The majority of participants have never been married (96.1%). Over 84% of participants had no children. Over 92% had their birth certificate. Over 82% had their

California ID. Forty nine participants (96.1%) had their Social Security Card. Nearly 53% did not have their driver's license, and twenty four participants (47.1%) had their driver's license.

Table 1. Demographic Information of Former Foster Youth

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Race ID		
American Indian	4	7.5
African American	15	28.3
Hispanic/Latino	20	37.7
Asian/Pacific Islander	1	1.9
White	7	13.2
Other	6	11.3
Age		
18	20	37.7
19	21	39.6
20	9	17
21	1	1.9
24	1	1.9
25	1	1.9
Age at Placement		
1-5 years	5	10.4
6-10 years	8	16.7
11-15 years	16	33.3
16-18 years	19	39.6

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Number of Placements		
1-3	28	57.1
4-6	12	24.5
7-10	6	12.2
11 or more	3	6.1
Age at Exit		
16	2	3.9
17	3	5.9
18	44	86.3
19	2	3.9
Length of Time in Foster Care		
0-1 year	9	18.4
>1-2 years	17	34.7
3-6 years	9	18.4
>6 years	14	28.6
Length of Time Out of Foster Care		
1-6 months	18	35.3
7-18 onths	16	31.4
>18 months	17	33.3

Educational Information

Table 2 shows educational attainment levels of the participants. Of the 53 participants, over half graduated from high school, ten participants (18.9%) had a GED. Together, nearly 74% of former foster youth had the equivalency of a high school diploma. Of those who did not graduate, ten participants (18.9%) saw themselves

completing high school. Of these, six participants (11.3%) saw themselves obtaining a GED, and four participants (7.5%) saw themselves completing their diploma. Over 58% of participants were enrolled in college, 3.8% were enrolled in a vocational program, and 11.3% were not in school. Of those participants in school, 76% had someone who cared about their school success, 95.7% were not thinking of dropping out of school, while 4.3% were thinking of dropping out. Almost all (94%) of the participants had a place to study where they could concentrate, 71.4% had access to a computer and printer, while 28.6% did not have access to a computer and printer. Almost 80% of participants did not have family and childcare responsibilities which would make it difficult to do well in school, while ten participants (20.4%) did have these difficulties.

Table 2. Educational Attainment of Former Foster Youth

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Graduated High School		
Yes	29	100
GED/CHSPE		
Yes	10	100
How Do You Intend to Finish High School		
Diploma	4	40
GED	6	60
Enrolled in College		
Yes	31	100
Have Friends at School who Care About my Success		
No	12	24
Yes	38	76
Regular Access to Computer and Printer		
No	14	28.6
Yes	35	71.4
Place to Study Where I can Concentrate		
No	3	6
Yes	47	94
Family or child care responsibilities make it difficult to do well in school		
No	39	79.6
Yes	10	20.4

Housing Characteristics

Table 3 shows the housing characteristics of the participants. Over 33% of the participants were renting a place to live alone or with roommates. Fifteen

participants (29.4%) were living in transitional housing programs, 15.7% are living with other relatives, 9.8% were staying with friends, 3.9% live in birth or adoptive parents' homes, and 2% lived in their non-related foster parents homes.

In addition to where the former foster youth live, 36% (N = 18) lived with biological/adoptive parents, or other relatives, 30% lived with roommates, 24% lived alone, 1.9% were living with fiancé, and 1.9% were homeless.

Over one-half of the participants (59.2%) moved 0-2 times since leaving foster care, nearly 25% moved 3-4 times, 16.3% of the participants had not moved, 10.2% had moved 4.5-5, and 6% had moved 6-8 times. The reasons for moving included financial reasons (27.9%), conflict with roommates (16.7%), wanted a new location (33.3%), and other reasons (45.2%). Only 19% of respondents listed other reasons including; getting kicked out, got accepted into transitional housing, and tired of living where they were.

Fifteen participants (30%) had been in their current living situation for 3-4 months, 22% had been in their current living situation for 9-12 months, 20% had spent

one month or less in their current living situation, 14% had been in their current living situation for 5-6 months, and 6% had spent greater than two years in their current living situation.

Almost 31% of participants had experienced periods of homelessness since leaving foster care. Of these youth, 38.9% listed termination from foster care as the reason for homelessness, 27.8% of participants were asked to leave, 16.7% experienced homelessness as a result of addiction, and 10.2% of participants had spent at least one night in a shelter since leaving foster care.

Only 11.3% of participants reported participating in an illegal act for survival needs. Shoplifting was admitted to by 42.9% of these respondents, 28.6% admitted to drug sales, 14.3% committed robbery/burglary, and 12.5% admitted to prostitution.

Table 3. Housing Characteristics of Former Foster Youth

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Where are you living		
renting an apartment/house by myself	3	5.9
renting an apartment/house with others	5	9.8
renting a room in someone else's apartment/house	9	17.6
one or both birth/adoptive parents	2	3.9
non-related foster parents	1	2
other relative	8	15.7
transitional housing program	15	29.4
staying with a friend	5	9.8
college dormitory	1	2
other	2	3.9
Number of Moves Since Leaving Foster Care		
0-1	23	47
2-4	18	36.7
>4	8	16.3
Number of Months in Current Living Situation		
0-3 months	21	42
4-6 months	15	30
7-12 months	11	22
>24 months	3	6
Have Ever Experienced Homelessness Post Foster Care		
No	36	69.2
Yes	16	30.8
Spent at Least One Night in a Shelter		
No	44	89.8
Yes	5	10.2
Participated in an Illegal Act for Survival Needs		
No	47	88.7
Yes	6	11.3

Presence of a Mentor

Table 4 shows the presence of a mentor in the lives of the participants. The study showed that almost 74% of participants reported having an established long-term connection with at least one adult they could go to for support, advice, and guidance at the time they emancipated. Almost 79% of those participants who reported the presence of a mentor at emancipation responded that their mentor was still available to them today. Additionally, 50% of participants believed their social worker helped them to establish a mentoring relationship and 50% believed their social worker did not help them establish this relationship prior to emancipation. Over 26% of participants reported their mentor was a parent or other relative; nearly 24% reported their mentor was their foster parent or other member of foster family; and over 26% of participants reported their mentor was a friend. Most of the participants (58.1%) got together with their mentor, while 41.9% did not.

Over 70% of participants talked with their mentors once per week or more: 34.1% spoke daily, 13.6% spoke every few days, and 20.5% spoke weekly.

Over 25% of participants lived 0-5 miles from their mentor; over 23% lived 6-10 miles away, while 16.3% lived 11-25 miles away from their mentor.

Mentors provided the following assistance to participants: 52.5% helped to enroll in school, 47.5% helped to fill out job applications, 42.5% helped to prepare for a job interview, 40% helped with budgeting, 40% helped with grocery shopping, 37% helped with financial aid applications, 32.5% helped with cooking, 32% helped participants find a place to live, 30% helped create a resume, and 27.5% help to open a bank account.

Table 4. Presence of Mentor

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Had an established long-term connection with at least one adult to go to for support, advice, and guidance at emancipation.		
No	14	26.4
Yes	39	73.6
Is the identified mentor still available to you today?		
No	9	21.4
Yes	33	78.6
Do you feel your social worker helped you establish a permanent connection?		
No	25	50
Yes	25	50

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Mentor's relationship		
birth/adoptive parents	3	7.9
other relative	7	18.4
non related foster parent	4	10.5
friend	10	26.3
member of foster family	5	13.2
coach	5	13.2
counselor	1	2.6
other	3	7.9
Do you get together with mentor?		
No	18	41.9
Yes	25	58.1
How often do you talk to your mentor?		
0	1	2.3
Daily	15	34.1
Every few days	6	13.6
Weekly	9	20.5
Every two weeks	4	9.1
Monthly	2	4.5
As needed	7	15.9
How far away mentor lives		
live with mentor	4	9.3
0-5 miles	11	25.6
6-10 miles	10	23.3
11-25 miles	7	16.3
more than 25 miles	11	25.6

Means of Financial Support

Table 5 shows the employment statistics of the participants. Of the 53 participants, over 47.2% were employed. Of these, twenty-one participants were part time employees while four of the participants were full time

employees. All the respondents worked less than 40 hours/week. The majority of participants (56.3%) worked 20-28 hours/week; 31.3% worked fifteen or less hours/week; and 12.6% worked 30-38 hours/week. Two-thirds of the participants worked in minimum wage (\$8.00/hour) jobs.

Of the 34 unemployed participants, over 45% had held one job since leaving foster care; nearly one third had held two jobs since leaving foster care; and over 17% had never held a job.

About 75% of participants were currently seeking employment. Over 37% of participants left their last job because it was a temporary job; over 26% left for other reasons; about 13% were laid off from their last job; over 10% left for transportation reasons; over 8% were fired; and almost 3% left for a better job.

Over two thirds of participants did not earn enough money to cover their bills, while only about one third did.

Over 70% of participants reported not earning enough money to pay rent, over 50% did not earn enough money to buy groceries, over 74% did not earn enough money to buy new clothes, and over 82% did not earn enough money for entertainment.

Twenty-nine participants (55.8%) had a checking account, 78.8% did not have credit cards, and credit card debt was a problem for 23.1% of those with credit cards.

The participants also reported other financial assistance they had received: 62.5% had applied for or had received the Chafee Grant; 60.4% of participants had applied for or had received food stamps; 39.6% had received temporary financial assistance (gift cards from ILP as needed); 14.6% had applied for or had received General Assistance; 10.4% had applied for or had received SSI; 10.4% reported they had received support from family members; 2.1% had applied for or had received tribal financial assistance; and 2.1% received child support/subsidized child care. Three quarters (75%) of the participants felt satisfied with the path their life had taken since leaving foster care.

Table 5: Means of Financial Support

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Employed		
No	28	52.8
Yes	25	47.2
Hours working per week		
4-10	4	25
15-20	5	31.3
25-38	7	43.8
Hourly wage		
\$8.00-\$8.55	16	88.9
\$9.00-\$9.50	2	11.1
Currently seeking employment		
No	12	25
Yes	36	75
Earn enough money to cover bills		
No	32	64
Yes	18	36
Earn enough money to pay rent		
No	34	70.8
Yes	14	29.2
Earn enough money to buy food		
No	24	51.1
Yes	23	48.9
Earn enough money to buy new clothes		
No	35	74.5
Yes	12	25.5
Earn enough money to pay for entertainment		
No	38	82.6
Yes	8	17.4
Applied for or receiving SSI		
No	43	89.6
Yes	5	10.4
Applied for or receiving CalWORKS		
No	41	85.4
Yes	7	14.6
Applied for or receiving Food Stamps		
No	19	39.6
Yes	29	60.4

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Applied for or receiving General Assistance/Relief		
No	41	85.4
Yes	7	14.6
Applied for or receiving Chaffee Grant		
No	18	37.5
Yes	30	62.5
Applied for or receiving child support for minor children		
No	47	97.9
Yes	1	2.1
Applied for or receiving temporary financial assistance		
No	29	60.4
Yes	19	39.6
Applied for or receiving tribal financial assistance		
No	47	97.9
Yes	1	2.1
My family contributes to my financial support		
No	43	89.6
Yes	5	10.4
Satisfied with life path since leaving foster care		
No	13	25
Yes	39	75

Other Support

The results in table 6 show participants' other areas of support.

Almost three quarters (71.2%) had health insurance coverage; 84.3% knew how to access medical, dental, and vision services; 24.5% often felt lonely or isolated; 6.1% missed school or work because of feeling depressed; 32% missed school or work due to transportation issues; 54.9% had someone they could borrow \$50 from, while 45.1% did

not; 82.4% of participants were happy with their current health; and 68% reported needing help finding a full time job.

Table 6. Other Support

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Have health insurance coverage		
No	15	28.8
Yes	37	71.2
Know how to access medical, dental, and vision services		
No	8	15.7
Yes	43	84.3
Often feel lonely or isolated		
No	37	75.5
Yes	12	24.5
Missed school or work because of feeling depressed		
No	46	93.9
Yes	3	6.1
Missed school or work due to transportation issues		
No	34	68
Yes	16	32
I have someone I can borrow \$50 from		
No	23	45.1
Yes	28	54.9
I am happy with my current health		
No	9	17.6
Yes	42	82.4
Need help finding a full time job		
No	16	32
Yes	34	68

Independent samples t-tests were performed to determine whether the identified presence of a mentor upon

exit from foster care was related to how the participants were doing.

The presence of a mentor was significantly related to participants' earning enough money to buy food ($t = -2.11$, $df = 16.6$, $p < .01$). The presence of a mentor was also significantly related to participants' having family members who contributed to their financial support ($t = -2.38$, $df = 34$, $p < .01$).

A chi-square test was run to determine whether the person identified as a long term permanent connection at the time of emancipation was still available to participants to go to for support, advice, and guidance. The presence of this mentor was found to be statistically significant ($t = 20.81$, $df = 1$, $p = .00$).

Additionally, t-tests and Chi-square tests were run and the presence of a mentor was not found to be statistically significant to how participants were doing at the time of the study in relation to the quality of the mentoring relationship. For those participants who reported having a mentor, the distance the mentor lived from the youth did not have statistical significance upon any of the other study variables; how often the youth and mentor talked did not have statistical significance upon

any of the other study variables; the youth and mentor getting together for social activities did not have statistical significance upon any of the other study variables; and things that mentors helped participants with did not have statistical significance upon any of the other study variables.

Chi-square tests were performed to compare the outcomes between gender in the areas of education, housing, presence of a mentor, means of financial support, and other support. No significant differences were found.

Chi-square tests were performed to compare the outcomes between ethnicity in the areas of education, housing, presence of a mentor, means of financial support, and other support. In Table 7, Chi-square tests show the statistical differences found between ethnic groups in the areas of demographics and finances.

Table 7. Ethnic Differences

Variable	American Indian	African American	Hispanic/Latino	Asian/Pacific Islander	White	Multi Ethnic	Other	X ²
Birth Certificate								14.981
Yes	3	14	18	1	5	5	2	
No	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	
CA ID								14.791
Yes	5	14	13	1	3	5	2	
No	0	0	5	0	4	0	0	
Money to buy clothes								18.073
Yes	1	4	0	1	1	3	2	
No	4	8	16	0	5	2	0	
Money for entertainment								13.286
Yes	3	3	0	1	0	1	1	
No	2	9	16	0	6	3	1	

In consideration of Barth et al.'s (1990) findings that youth who had greater than five placements faced challenges upon emancipation that they were not prepared to face, Chi-square tests were performed to compare the outcomes between youth who had less than five placements while in foster care with outcomes of youth who had greater than five placements while in foster care in the areas of education, housing, presence of a mentor, means of financial support, and other support. This study found that nearly 59% (n = 31) of participants had four placements or fewer; while 34% (n = 18) of participants

reported having been in five or more placements while in foster care.

In Table 8, Chi-square tests show the statistical differences between the groups in the areas of education, employment, and finances. Youth with four placements or less enrolled in college more frequently than youth who had five placements or more ($\chi^2 = 4.81$, $df = 1$, $p = .028$); youth with four placements or less had held a job more frequently than youth who had five placements or more ($\chi^2 = 10.79$, $df = 1$, $p = .001$); youth with four placements or less had a savings account more frequently than youth who had five placements or more ($\chi^2 = 5.347$, $df = 1$, $p = .021$); and youth with four placements or less had a checking account more frequently than youth who had five placements or more ($\chi^2 = 5.749$, $df = 1$, $p = .017$).

Table 8. Differences Between Youth by Number of Placements

Variable	4 Placements or Less	5 Placements or More	χ^2
Enrolled in College			4.85
Yes	22	7	
No	9	11	
Ever held a job			10.79
Yes	19	7	
No	0	6	5
Has savings account			5.34
Yes	21	6	
No	9	11	
Has checking account			5.74
Yes	22	6	
No	9	11	

Qualitative Data

Two open-ended response questions were included in the survey in order to allow the participants the opportunity to comment on how they felt. These questions also allowed the researcher the opportunity to analyze responses to investigate strengths and weaknesses of what was done right, and what could have been done differently in order to facilitate permanency for participants prior to emancipation. Open-ended response questions also helped to identify what has helped youth to feel successful since emancipation..

A content analysis of the question, "Do you feel your social worker(s) helped you to establish a permanent connection with someone by the time you emancipated? If yes, how? If not, what could have been done differently?" allowed participants to provide feedback as to what may have better helped prepare them for emancipation.

As previously mentioned, the responses to this question were split, 25 participants replied "yes" and 25 participants replied "no". The following three themes were revealed in the "yes" responses.

1. Permanency: "I had somewhere to go before my emancipation by talking to the person I was going to stay with."

2. Attachment: "Helped me find my long lost brother. Kept me in contact with my siblings."

3. Mentoring: "My last social worker is still available to me as a resource & helped me to establish other permanent resources."

In answer to the question "What could have been done differently?" the following two themes were revealed by participants who replied the social worker did not help to establish a permanent connection:

1. Attachment: "She could have been more involved and treated me like a person versus a number on her caseload."

"Mental preparation as well as a personal interest in my well being."

2. Mentoring: "Social worker never came around."

"Actually prepare me."

The second open-ended response question was: "Do you feel satisfied with the path your life has taken since leaving foster care? If yes, what has helped you to feel successful? If no, what do you think would be helpful to you at this time?"

Almost 74% of participants replied yes to this question. The following six themes were revealed in the "yes" responses:

1. Permanency: "Being with family, having their support."

"Going to school, having help and assistance from ILP. Being surrounded by supportive people."

2. Education: "Going back to school."

"Graduating high school and living on my own."

3. Spirituality: "My walk with God, trusting in him, and everything falls into place. Which does not mean I'm not out there looking for a job.

"God."

4. Self Determination: "Just leaving and being on my own."

"Independence"

"The fact that I am independent makes me feel better and it helps me mature more and be more responsible."

5. Mentoring: "The people I have in my life that support me and INSPIRE."

"The people helping me."

"Mentor helped me find a great apartment with a great program. Everything is going well for me."

6. Resiliency: "fight even harder and strive to be successful."

"Just leaving and being on my own."

"Knowing that I am capable of doing it on my own, and never giving up when things get rough."

The 25% of respondents who did not feel satisfied with the path their lives have taken since leaving foster care revealed the following two themes as to what may be helpful to them at this time:

1. Money: "Financial assistance."

"More money."

2. Permanency/Attachment/Mentor: "Having parents to help."

"Budget money, find motivation."

"Don't know."

Summary

Both univariate and bivariate data analysis were performed to obtain the study's statistical results. The researcher utilized frequency distribution, and t-tests to determine the relationship between the presence of a mentor and the well being of the participants at the time of the study. Additionally, Chi-square tests were run to compare results between ethnic groups as well as between groups of youth who experienced four or fewer placements while in care with youth who experienced greater than five placements while in care. Finally, content analysis was used with two qualitative, open-ended questions to obtain youth perceptions.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This section discusses the study's findings, limitations, and recommendations for the field of social work practice, policy, and research.

Discussion

The purposes of this study were to examine whether youth have the permanent connection that was identified on the State of California (SOC) SOC 405A form at the time of emancipation, and were the results of having or not having such a connection beneficial to the newly independent youth?

The study's findings showed that 74% of participants reported the person identified as a permanent connection at the time of emancipation was indeed still helping, guiding, and available to them at the time of the study. This was the main question being investigated in this study. This is not in agreement with the 99% who reported having a lifelong permanent connection on the 405A form at the time of emancipation.

The question of whether this permanent connection is beneficial to the youth is harder to answer. The study also showed a relationship between the presence of a mentor and having enough money to buy food, and the presence of a mentor and having family members who contribute to participants' financial support.

The study consisted of 53 participants. The sample consisted of 49% (n = 26) female, and 51% (n = 27) male participants. Hispanic/Latino was the largest represented ethnic-group in this sample (37.7%), followed by African Americans (28.3%), Whites (13.2%), other (11.3%), American Indian (7.5%), and Asian/Pacific Islander (1.9%). Although this study did not primarily focus on examining ethnic and racial differences, these findings are similar to previous studies that found Hispanic/Latino and African American children to be over-represented in the child welfare system (Lu et al.; Lemon, Hines, & Merdinger, 2004).

The mean age of the participants in this study was 19 years of age. The mean age at which participants entered foster care was 12.6 years. The mean number of placements was 6.4 placements. The mean length of time in

foster care was 5.3 years. Finally, the mean length of time out of foster care was 1.4 years.

Although there were only a few significant differences between participants who reported having a permanent connection at the time they emancipated versus participants who reported not having a permanent connection at the time of emancipation it is noteworthy to point out that there were differences between the groups. Of the 39 participants who reported having a permanent connection/mentor at the time they emancipated, all 39 reported having graduated from high school; 22 reported that the relationship with their mentor was like that of a friend; 21 participants reported that their mentor helped them enroll in school; 19 reported that their mentor helped them fill out a job application; 16 reported that their mentor helped them with cooking; 17 reported that their mentor helped them prepare for a job interview; 13 reported that their mentor helped them find a place to live; 15 reported that their mentor helped them apply for financial aid.

These social supports provided by the mentors have helped prepare the participants for employment, and making life choices. This study's finding that the 79% of

mentors identified upon emancipation still being available to participants today supports other findings that establishing mentoring relationships while the youth is still in care can help make the transition more successful since a supportive relationship already exists (Scannapieco, Connell-Carrick, & Painter, 2007).

Erik Erikson's developmental theory also lends support to the benefits of having a mentor. Erikson identifies this transitional age as the stage known as identity versus role confusion. Here, the primary developmental task is to establish a sense of identity as children explore who they are (Erikson as cited in Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2007). Given that these children probably experienced abuse prior to entering foster care, as well as having experienced multiple placements in foster care during critical developmental stages may have made it difficult for these youth to form attachments, and adjust to their surroundings in order to develop a sense of self as well as feel a part of a group. Those youth who experienced fewer than five placements may have been more successful at developing a sense of identity than youth with greater than five placements.

Further, even though this study did not measure economic disadvantage, the frequency findings that about two thirds of participants were renting alone; approximately one third had experienced periods of homelessness since leaving foster care; 100% of all employed participants were working less than 40 hours/week; a majority of participants (66.7%) worked in minimum wage (\$8.00/hour) job; thirty four of the participants were unemployed; and over two thirds of participants did not earn enough money to cover their bills supports other studies' findings that most youth are not discharged from the child welfare system because they are ready for independence (Freundlich & Avery, 2005; McCoy, McMillen, & Spitzangel, 2008).

This study was able to support some of Barth et al.'s (1990) findings that youth who have greater than five placements face challenges upon emancipation that they are not prepared to face. As mentioned in Chapter Four, fewer youth who have greater than five placements are enrolled in college; had ever had a job; had fewer savings accounts, and had fewer checking accounts than their peers who had experienced four or fewer placements. Additionally, the researcher did find frequencies that

were consistent with Barth et al.'s finding: 59% of youth with greater than five placements did not have a driver's license, while 50% of youth with fewer than five placements did not have a driver's license; 61% did not graduate high school, compared with 39% of youth with fewer than five placements; 61% of these youth were not enrolled in college, compared with 29% of youth with fewer than five placements; nearly 18% of these youth have spent at least one night in a shelter, compared with only 7% of youth with fewer than five placements; about 22% of these youth have participated in an illegal act for survival needs, compared with only 6.5% of youth with fewer than five placements; 61% of these youth reported having a permanent connection at exit from foster care, compared with nearly 81% of youth with fewer than five placements; about 33% of these youth reported being employed at least part time, compared with nearly 55% of youth with fewer than five placements; credit card debt is a problem for 35% of this group, compared with 19% of youth with fewer than five placements; 0% of this group had family that contributed to their support, compared to almost 18% of youth with fewer than five placements; 41% of these youth had someone they could borrow \$50 from,

compared to 61% of youth with fewer than five placements; and finally nearly 65% of these youth were satisfied with their lives since leaving foster care, compared with nearly 81% of youth with fewer than five placements.

It is interesting to note that over 26% of participants identified their mentor as a parent or other relative, while 24% identified their mentor as a former foster parent. Additionally, this study's findings agreed with other research (Cook, 1994; Courtney et al., 2001) as 36% of participants were found to be living with relatives. This finding lends support to the argument for preparing youth for interdependent living. In order to do this, child welfare agencies should offer supportive services to youth and their biological families to assist them in strengthening and/or developing healthy relationships as the youth prepares for emancipation.

Although this study did not support the finding that former foster youth had lower levels of well being than other sub populations of youth in the United States (Leslie et al., 2002), the frequency differences between participants who had greater than or less than five placements indicated that these differences should be studied further.

The participants' responses to the questions about employment and ability to pay their bills supported Atkinson's (2002) findings which indicated that former foster youth were likely to be uneducated, unemployed, and experience poverty. However, this study did not find the homelessness, criminal activity, and lack of healthcare discovered in Atkinson's study (2002). One reason for this may be that youth are being made aware of how to continue their Medi-Cal coverage post emancipation by their ILP social workers.

The qualitative analysis done in this study agreed with Petr's findings (2008) that youth had mixed opinions about how they were doing, and attachments they had formed. This was evidenced by the 50/50 response rate to whether or not their social worker helped them to establish a mentor prior to leaving care as well as the different responses recorded. One participant replied: "My last social worker is still available to me as a resource & helped me to establish other permanent resources" (Participant 28, personal interview, September 2009). While in contrast to that, another participant reported: "She could have been more involved and treated

me like a person versus a number on her caseload”

(Participant 48, personal interview, September 2009).

Finally, this study can support Reilly’s (2003) results that six months post emancipation, youth are struggling to make it on their own. This study found that participants experienced extreme financial hardships as they were not able to earn enough money to pay their bills. Only about 48% of participants were employed, and most worked part time, between 20-28 hours/week. All employed participants reported earning between \$8.00 - \$9.00/hour. Only about 50% of participants reported having graduated high school.

In contrast to other research (D’Andrade, Osterling, & Austin, 2008,) aftercare youth in Riverside County are doing better than other youth who were contacted six to eighteen months after emancipation. D’Andrade et al. reported that 51-55% of former foster youth had no health insurance and 18-41% had been incarcerated. When contacted one to ten years after emancipation, studies found 23-61% of former foster youth reported not having either graduated from high school or received a GED (D’Andrade et al., 2008). In Riverside County 71% of participants reported having health insurance, only 11%

of participants reported having committed an illegal act, and 74% reported having the equivalency of a high school diploma or GED.

Riverside County has been working intently on bringing about better outcomes for their emancipating youth. The creation of the Independent Living Region in 2009 and assigning an ILP social worker as an extra support to youth preparing for emancipation has been beneficial to their emancipating youth as shown by the findings of this study as compared to other study findings (D'Andrade et al., 2008).

Limitations

There were several limitations which may have influenced the results of this study. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the outcome of this study. The primary limitation of the study was the small sample size. The sample consisted of a total of 53 participants. This is a very small representation compared to the over 600 youth who access aftercare services in Riverside County.

This study utilized purposive sampling, which resulted in a sample size which was fairly small. In

obtaining the study participants, the researcher utilized the ILP at Riverside Community College (RCC) aftercare program. The program was only able to sample youth who were available, and had the time to complete the survey as they were accessing ILP at RCC's services. Therefore, the participants were all ILP at RCC participants, which is not representative of all emancipated youth. This sample does not account for youth who may be doing much better, and therefore do not utilize the ILP aftercare services provided. Further, this sample does not account for youth who may be doing much worse, and are not utilizing the ILP aftercare services, nor does this sample account for youth who have moved out of the area and are no longer in contact with ILP at RCC.

Further, the sample was localized to participants in the Riverside and Moreno Valley area. These findings cannot be generalized to youth who live in other parts of the county such as Corona, Temecula, Perris, Cathedral City, Indio, etc.

Another limitation of the study was the utilization of a self-report measure. This type of measure is susceptible to response bias. Emancipation Coaches at RCC administered the questionnaires and did not answer any

questions participants may have had. Therefore, it is possible that participants may have skipped questions they did not understand, or answered questions incorrectly. Incorrect answers may have been by chance, or on purpose if they viewed themselves differently than they cared to admit. Further, participants may have found it difficult to be honest, and skipped a question, or answered in a more socially acceptable manner. Finally, the assessment tool may not have had powerful enough reliability and validity scores to measure how participants' relationships with mentors have affected how they are doing now.

A further limitation of this study was the lack of a control group to compare the study's findings with. The researcher did not have a group of young adults who had not been in foster care and not emancipated out of the system to compare the effects of the mentoring relationship with against how the youth in both groups are doing now. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalized to the general population.

This study's strengths were that it was able to answer with statistical significance the question whether or not the mentors identified by the youth at the time of

exit from foster care were still available once the youth was on their own. Also, this study utilized open-ended questions which gave participants an option to add their own comments. Further, the study was able to ascertain a picture of how the youth are doing now in a time efficient way. In approximately ten minute's time, a snapshot was created to provide insight as to how aftercare youth are faring in Riverside County. Finally, there were findings in this study which were in agreement with many findings of previous studies in this area.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

Even with a mentor to help youth after emancipation from the child welfare system, a significant number of these youth still face serious difficulties as they transition to life outside the system. It is for this reason that I propose the following recommendations to improve outcomes for these youth as they emancipate and strive to make it on their own.

As permanency is difficult to establish, and youth who are removed from their homes have undergone a life-altering event in addition to the traumas suffered prior to entering the system, workers should strive to

limit the number of placements youth have while in foster care.

Given that attachment is difficult to form while in traumatic situations, abusive homes, and multiple placements, the government should raise the age of majority for youth in foster care to 21. This would give these youth time to complete high school, enter college, and form healthy attachments prior to facing the world on their own.

This study found that youth were not gainfully employed after they exited the child welfare system. Given that underemployment/unemployment is such an obstacle faced by emancipating youth more needs to be done to alleviate this problem. Therefore, I agree with Henig's recommendation (2009) that congress allocate more Workforce Investment Act (WIA) dollars to focus on emancipating youth at the one-stop career centers nationwide. These centers have the ability to offer a range of employment services to these youth.

Early adulthood is a critical developmental stage for all youth and Independent Living Programs were designed to help prepare this population for self-sufficiency. Therefore, I recommend that Riverside

County create a transportation program to take ILP participants to and from classes in order to increase the number of youth who benefit from and participate in the program.

When the social worker listens to the foster youth's needs, and collaborates with the youth to make an emancipation plan, the youth is better able to make healthier choices for success in adulthood. It is for this reason that I believe the ILP Region should be reorganized. Instead of having a second social worker who specializes in ILP services work with the youth to create emancipation goals every six months, a new unit should be created. This unit should consist of Social Worker III - IV line staff, and be a specialized, case-carrying unit with reduced caseloads in order to have the time to productively work with these emancipating youth. The case management services should ensure that a realistic plan is created for the youth to be able to live on their own once they exit the child welfare system. Workers should also work to develop ongoing, supportive, long-term relationships for the youth prior to emancipation. This monthly contact would aid in more successful emancipation

planning than is currently utilized with planning that is done every six months.

Additionally, since about 30% of youth have been found to be living back with their biological relatives, child welfare agencies should work with youth and their biological families to assist with the reunification process if the youth is going to reunify with them post emancipation.

Additional research is needed to determine how youth are doing once they leave foster care. More research should be done using a larger sample size and broader geographical area in order to be representative of all emancipated foster youths, as well as to arrive at statistically significant conclusions. Further research should also assess which supportive services are being utilized most and which have the most impact on youth. Additionally, more qualitative studies are recommended in order to conduct in-depth interviews which will yield rich outcome information as opposed to just using quantitative studies which can be difficult for participants to understand. Further, more outcome comparison studies utilizing a control group of non-foster care youth versus youth who have emancipated

from foster care be done in order to determine the changing needs of this population.

Given that the themes of permanency, attachment, and mentoring emerged as important by participants in this study more research is needed into the significance of how permanency is achieved, how attachment affects this and the quality of mentor relationships with youth emancipating from the foster care system. Mentoring relationships which provide authenticity, engagement, and empowerment are critical to youth success. Therefore, the factors which make the mentoring successful should be examined in order to help aid the development of these healthy relationships.

Finally, research should be done to determine what factors assist these youth to succeed. Many of these youth are resilient, and despite their challenges, they succeed. The factors that help create positive outcomes should be researched and considered for preparation techniques in the future.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this study was designed to evaluate the influence on emancipating youth that the presence of

a lifelong permanent connection has and emancipated youths' perceptions of overall well-being. The study was conducted at ILP at RCC using a purposive, exploratory quantitative design with qualitative open-ended questions in the form of a self-administered questionnaire.

The findings of this study suggest that mentors, or a lifelong permanent connection can be identified by the time a youth is emancipating from the child welfare system and that the permanent connection is present even after the youth are no longer in care. This study surveyed 53 emancipated, former foster youth who had been out of the child welfare system for 18 months or less.

The study's findings significantly showed that the person the youth identified as a permanent connection at the time of emancipation was indeed still helping, guiding, and available to them at the time of the study.

As far as how the youth were doing, youth who had fewer than five placements have fewer challenges in the areas of transportation, education, housing, and employment. Further, there were differences between ethnic groups. Hispanic/Latino and African American youth were over-represented in the study. There were also a few

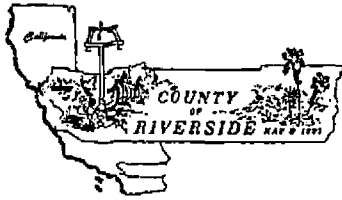
statistical differences discovered between the groups in the areas of demographics and finances.

The qualitative questions found that youth have mixed opinions about how they are doing, and attachments they have formed. This is evidenced by the 50/50 response rate to whether or not their social worker helped them to establish a mentor prior to leaving care as well as the different responses recorded. The responses revealed themes of importance to the participants including permanency, attachment, mentoring, education, finances, spirituality, resiliency, and self-determination.

Finally, recommendations for social work practice, policy, and research were addressed. In the future, more research should be done to determine what factors assist these youth to succeed; a control group should be used. Riverside County can create a specialized case-carrying unit to work with youth to prepare them for emancipation. Federal Legislation should increase the age of majority for emancipating foster youth to 21 years and the federal government should allocate more Workforce Investment Act (WIA) dollars to focus on emancipating youth at the one-stop career centers to aid in their employment prospects as they prepare for self-sufficiency. Further

research and the implementation of the suggested changes will help to improve outcomes for youth emancipating out of the child welfare system.

APPENDIX A
AGENCY LETTER OF SUPPORT



Department of Public Social Services

Administrative Office: 4060 County Circle Drive, Riverside, CA. 92503
(951) 358-3000 FAX: (951) 358-3036

Susan Loew, Director

April 22, 2009

California State University, San Bernardino
Department of Social Work
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino CA 92407-2318
909-537-5000

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is to indicate the support of the Department of Public Social Services, Children's Services Division, for Ms. Kimberly M. Stark to pursue her graduate research project titled, "Independent Living Program Participants' Perceptions of Permanency and Their Service Needs."

Sincerely,

Lisa Shiner
Deputy Director
Riverside County DPSS,
Children's Services Division
10281 Kidd Street
Riverside, CA 92509
(951) 358-7782



INNOVATIONS IN AMERICAN GOVERNMENT AWARD WINNER - 1996

APPENDIX B
QUESTIONNAIRE

Education

B1. I have completed:

1. Some high school

Do you see yourself finishing high school?

0. No 1. Yes

If yes how?

a. Diploma b. GED c. Other _____

2. Graduated high school

3. GED/CHSPE (more responses to question B1 on next page)

4. Currently enrolled in college.

5. Currently enrolled in a vocational program

6. Not in School

B2. I am thinking of dropping out of school. 0. No 1. Yes

B3. I have friends at school that care about my success. 0. No 1. Yes

B4. I have regular access to a computer and printer. 0. No 1. Yes

B5. I have a place to study where I can concentrate on my work. 0. No 1. Yes

B6. Family or child care responsibilities make it difficult for me to do well in school. 0. No 1. Yes

Housing

C1. Where are you living now?

- 1. Renting an apartment/house by myself
- 2. Renting an apartment/house with others
- 3. Renting a room in someone else's apartment/home
- 4. One or both birth/adoptive parents
- 5. Non-related foster parents
- 6. Other relative
- 7. Transitional housing program
- 8. Renting a room in a motel
- 9. Shelter/emergency housing
- 10. Staying with a friend
- 11. Homeless
- 12. College Dormitory
- 13. Rent free with: _____
- 14. Other: _____

C2. Who do you live with? (Check all that apply)

- 1. Alone
- 2. Roommate
- 3. Friend(s)
- 4. Relative
- 5. Spouse
- 6. Former foster parents
- 7. Biological/adoptive parents
- 8. Other: _____

C3. How many times have you moved since you left foster care? _____

C4. Why did you move? (Check all that apply)

- 1. Financial reasons
- 2. Didn't get along with roommates
- 3. Wanted a new location
- 4. Other (list) _____

C5. How long have you lived in your current living situation? _____

C6. Have you ever been homeless since leaving foster care?

- 0. No (skip to C7)
- 1. Yes

If yes:

1. What caused you to become homeless?

- a. Termination from foster care
- b. Evicted or asked to leave
 - c. Financial difficulties
 - d. Conflict in the home
 - e. Addiction
 - f. Other _____

C7. Since emancipating have you ever spent at least one night in a shelter?

- 0. No
- 1. Yes

C8. Have you ever participated in an illegal act for survival needs?

- 0. No (skip to D1)
- 1. Yes

If yes, what was the act?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> a. Prostitution | <input type="checkbox"/> d. Fraud |
| <input type="checkbox"/> b. Drug sales | <input type="checkbox"/> e. Shoplifting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> c. Robbery/burglary | <input type="checkbox"/> f. Other _____ |

Mentor

D1. When you left foster care, did you have an established long term connection with at least one adult you could go to for support, advice, and guidance?

0. No (skip to D4)

1. Yes

If yes:

D2. Is that person still helping you, guiding you, available to you?

0. No 1. Yes

D3. What is this person's relationship to you?

1. One or both birth/adoptive parents

2. Other relative: Relationship _____

3. Non-related foster parents

7. Member of foster family

4. Friend

8. Coach

5. Teacher or other school staff

9. Counselor

6. Neighbor

10. Other _____

D4. Do you have someone else that you can turn to for support, advice, and guidance?

0. No 1. Yes

1. Who is this person? _____

D5 How far away from you does your mentor live?

1. I live with my mentor

2. 0-5 miles

3. 6-10 miles

4. 11-25 miles

5. > 25 miles

D6. How often do you talk to your mentor?

1. Daily

2. Every few days

3. Weekly

4. Every two weeks

5. Monthly

6. As needed

7. Other _____

D7. Do you and your mentor get together for social activities?

0. No (skip to D8)

1. Yes

If yes: (Check all that apply)

a. Go out to eat

e. Movies

b. Shopping

f. Picnic

c. Church

g. Vacations

d. Other _____

D8. Which of the following has your mentor provided assistance with? (Check all that apply)

1. Budgeting

9. Opening a bank account

2. Filling out a job application

10. Preparing for a job interview

3. Creating a resume

11. Grocery shopping

4. Cooking

12. Finding a place to live

5. Home Furnishings

13. Obtaining medical care

6. Buying a car

14. Obtaining car insurance

7. Enrolling in school

15. Applying for financial aid

8. Other _____

D9. My relationship with my mentor is like: (Check all that apply)

1. Friend

4. Mentor

2. Parent

5. Big brother/sister

3. Teacher

6. Other _____

D10. Do you feel your social worker(s) helped you to establish a permanent connection with someone by the time you emancipated?

0. No

1. Yes

a. If yes, how?

b. If not, what could have been done differently?

Means of Financial Support

E1. Are you employed?

0. No (skip to E2)

1. Yes

If yes:

a. Full time

b. Part time

If employed full or part time:

a. Hours per week: _____

b. Hourly wage: _____

E2. If not employed, have you ever held a job?

0. No

1. Yes

E3. How many jobs have you held since leaving foster care? _____

E4. Are you currently seeking employment?

0. No

1. Yes

E5. Why did you leave your last job?

1. Better job

4. Laid off

2. Fired

5. Temporary job

3. Transportation Issues

6. Other _____

E6. Do you earn enough money to?

1. Cover your bills?

0. No

1. Yes

2. Pay rent?

0. No

1. Yes

3. Buy food?

0. No

1. Yes

4. Buy new clothes?

0. No

1. Yes

5. Pay for entertainment?

0. No

1. Yes

E7. Do you have a savings account? 0. No 1. Yes

E8. Do you have a checking account? 0. No 1. Yes

E9. Do you have credit cards? 0. No 1. Yes

E10. Credit card debt is a problem for me. 0. No 1. Yes

E11. Check any of the following that you are receiving or have applied for:

- 1. SSI
- 2. CalWORKs
- 3. Food Stamps
- 4. General Assistance/General Relief
- 5. Chafee Grant
- 6. Educational scholarships/financial aid
- 7. Child support for minor child(ren)
- 8. Subsidized child care
- 9. Temporary financial assistance (gift cards from ILP as needed)
- 10. Tribal financial assistance
- 11. My family contributes to my financial support
- 12. Other: (please list)

13. No means of financial support

E12. Do you feel satisfied with the path your life has taken since leaving foster care?

0. No 1. Yes

1. If yes, what has helped you to feel successful? _____

2. If no, what do you think would be helpful to you at this time? _____

Support

- | | | |
|--|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| F1. I have health insurance coverage. | <input type="checkbox"/> 0. No | <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Yes |
| F2. I know how to access medical, dental, and vision services. | <input type="checkbox"/> 0. No | <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Yes |
| F3. I often feel lonely or isolated. | <input type="checkbox"/> 0. No | <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Yes |
| F4. I have missed school or work because of feeling depressed. | <input type="checkbox"/> 0. No | <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Yes |
| F5. I have missed school or work due to transportation issues. | <input type="checkbox"/> 0. No | <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Yes |
| F6. I have someone I can borrow \$50 from. | <input type="checkbox"/> 0. No | <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Yes |
| F7. I am happy with my current health. | <input type="checkbox"/> 0. No | <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Yes |
| F8. I need help finding a full time job. | <input type="checkbox"/> 0. No | <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Yes |

APPENDIX C
INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT

You are being asked to participate in a research study designed to investigate the relationship between emancipated youth and a mentor. This study is being conducted by Kim Stark, MSW graduate student from California State University, San Bernardino, under the supervision of Dr. Janet Chang, Associate Professor of Social Work. The School of Social Work Sub-Committee of the Institutional Review Board has approved this study.

In this study you will be answering questions about how you have been doing since leaving foster care, housing, a personal mentor, finances, support and education. It will take approximately 20 minutes of your time. All of your responses will be kept confidential. Your name will not be associated with your questionnaire. The final results of this study will be reported in group form only. You may receive the group results upon completion of this study at the Pfau Library at California State University, San Bernardino or through ILP at RCC after June 2010.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to. Upon completion of the survey, you will be given a debriefing statement describing the study in more detail. ILP at RCC will not know whether you participated or not.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact my advisor Dr. Janet Chang at (909)537-5184.

By marking an "X" in the space below I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and 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.

Place an "X" above

Date

APPENDIX D
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

Debriefing Statement

The research study that you have just participated in is being conducted by Kim Stark, MSW student at California State University, San Bernardino to investigate the effect of the connection between an emancipated youth and an adult mentor. One of the goals of the Independent Living Program is to ensure each emancipating youth has a permanent lifelong connection when they leave the foster care system. This study examines whether or not that goal is being met and the effectiveness of that relationship. Your input has been critical in the gathering of information related to permanency.

It is hoped that the findings from this study will help social workers to achieve the goal of establishing a personal mentor for each youth and improve the effectiveness of the mentor.

The final results of this study will be reported in group form only. You may receive the group results upon completion of this study at the Pfau Library at California State University, San Bernardino or through ILP at RCC after June 2010.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please feel free to contact my advisor Dr. Janet Chang at (909)537-5184.

Thank you for your time and participation in this study.

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