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EXPLORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A LIFE SKILLS TRAINING

PROGRAM FOR ADOLESCENTS IN THE TEXAS FOSTER CARE SYSTEM

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PROGRAM FOR ADOLESCENTS IN THE TEXAS FOSTER CARE SYSTEM

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the sixteen young men and women who participated in this study. I appreciate and admire them immeasurably for their courage and perseverance, their optimism about the future, and their willingness to share their stories.

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The purpose of this exploratory study was to gain an increased understanding of an independent living skills training program's impact on resilience, social support, and life skills for foster care youth participants. This study used a qualitative case study methodology and involved a purposive sample of 16 ethnically diverse youths and 9 adult staff members of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. Youth participants were recruited through one of several state-contracted agencies that provided life skills training to youths in Texas. Data were collected through multiple sources and were analyzed using content analysis and descriptive statistics. Scores on standardized

measures of resilience, social support, and life skills, and youths' descriptions of these same constructs were compared. The change in scores on the standardized measure of social support were statistically significant (p=.006; p<.05), while total scores on measures of resilience and life skills were not. Although scores were not statistically significant, scores on the measure of resilience were in the "high" range, possibly indicating high levels of internal and external assets, and scores on the standardized measure of life skills indicated that youths showed "mastery" of approximately half of the life skills. Youths' descriptions of social support, resilience, and life skills were consistent with scores on standardized measures. Participants described biological family members as their greatest sources of emotional support and encouragement and their verbal descriptions corresponded with the internal and external assets defined in the standardized measure of resilience. Most participants had difficulty describing and recollecting life skills information such as managing money and locating appropriate housing, which was consistent with scores suggesting they "mastered" only about half of all items on the life skills assessment. Staff participants cited placement changes and lack of transportation as the most frequent occurring reasons a youth stopped attending life skills training. Findings from this study highlighted the strengths of foster care youth and have implications for future use of strengths-based theories and frameworks, and for gender-specific life skills training. Findings also indicate important implications for teaching life skills to youths in foster care and policies related to independent living services.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Approximately 500,000 children and youth reside in foster care today. Most of these will reunite with their biological families, be adopted, or find permanent guardians. Recent estimates suggest that among those who remain in care, approximately 24,000 adolescents per year "age out", or emancipate from the foster care system, to attempt a life of independence (Adoption and Foster Care Reporting System, 2005). Of those who age out of the system, many fail to successfully transition to living independently. Their efforts to support themselves are often complicated by histories of abuse, loss, multiple placements and mental illness. In addition, many come from families of origin with characteristics associated with risk, including living in low income communities, lacking economic and social resources, living in large urban areas, and being ethnic minority, which further complicates their efforts (Courtney, Terao, and Bost, 2004). Outcome studies in the last decade reveal youths' difficulties in transitioning to adulthood, finding high rates of homelessness, non-marital childbearing, poverty, and criminal behavior (Barth, 1990; Cook, 1990; Courtney and Piliavin, 1995; McMillen and Tucker, 1999). One recent study illustrates the poor mental health outcomes among this group. In the study, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among former foster care youth were up to twice as high as for U.S. war veterans (Pecora, Downs, English, Heeringa, Kessler, & White, 2005).

Young adults may stay in foster care until their 18th birthday or until they complete an educational program in which they are enrolled, after which they are

expected to leave foster care regardless of how prepared they are to be self-sufficient (Blome, 1997). Non-foster care youth must also make the transition to adulthood; however, they generally retain parental support, both financially and emotionally, that youth in foster care do not.

In response to numerous reports of difficulties faced by individuals who had left foster care, Congress passed the Independent Living Initiative (P.L. 99-272) in 1985. It was the first piece of legislation that authorized states to develop and implement programs to assist foster care youths in their transition to independence. The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 replaced the initiative and gave states broader authority and more funds to design and implement independent living programs to assist transitioning youths. Most independent living programs include assistance in areas such as life skills training, financial management, mentoring, employment training, school achievement training, and health-related education (Barth and Ferguson, 2004); although there is wide variation in the quality of materials, their content and specific target. In addition, there are no widely accepted standards for content or delivery and a dearth of related empirical evidence (Collins, 2004).

In Texas in 2005, there were approximately 24,000 children living in substitute care, 17,000 of whom were in foster care. In the same year, there were approximately 7,000 youths aged 16 - 20 living in substitute care, about 1000 of whom left the system at age 18. Of the 7,000, approximately 6,400 individuals received independent living services through Texas' Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) program. For this group of individuals who received PAL services, the average number of placements while in

substitute care was 8 placements. The average length of stay in foster care was 5 years.

Among the youths served through the PAL program, rates of emotional disturbances,

learning disabilities, and runaway behaviors were high (Texas Department of Family and

Protective Services website, 2006). The next section of this chapter provides an overview

of the impact of the history and changes in foster care policy in the United States on

adolescents aging out of foster care. Also provided in this chapter is review of empirical

literature on youth aging out of care and independent living programs.

<div align="center">Changes in Independent Living Policy</div>

History of foster care in the United States

The phenomenon of adolescents leaving foster care at age eighteen unprepared for

self-sufficiency, today defined as a social problem, is better understood when examined

through the lens of history. Foster care as we know it today did not exist one century

ago. To fully understand the current system we must begin by examining the evolution of

foster care, as well as the political, economic, and social conditions under which the

system was created.

The earliest accounts of children being placed in homes in the United States

began in the early 1600's when children were placed into homes for indentured service

until they came of age. This practice was imported from the English Poor Laws and was

considered an improvement over the previous practice of placing children in almshouses,

where children did not learn a trade and were reportedly exposed to horrible

surroundings. The practice of indentured servitude persisted until the early 1900's,

though not without problems, as children were frequently abused and exploited (National Foster Parent Association, 2005).

In 1853, Charles Loring Brace of the New York Children's Aid Society (CAS) devised the free foster home movement after growing concerned over the increasing numbers of children sleeping on the streets of New York. In his "orphan train" movement, homes in the South and West were sought to take these children into their homes for free, and children were sent by train to their homes. Families' reasons for taking children into their homes were of no matter. Some children were taken in simply for charitable reasons and others were taken in for indentured service or for extra help in the family. The free foster home movement, in which an organization was involved in the placement of children into homes, prompted other social agencies and state governments to go a step further by regulating child placement through licensing laws and subsidies to foster families and agencies (NFPA, 2005). Sharp criticism came from Catholic agencies that were similar to Brace's Protestant Children's Aid Society. Catholic agencies accused the CAS of attempting conversion when it placed Catholic children in Protestant homes (Holt, 1992).

In addition to religious convictions, race shaped which children rode on orphan trains. Brace generally placed children whom he believed would be accepted into receiving communities and families, namely American and West European children. African American, as well as Chinese, American Indian, Spanish, Turkish, and Slavic children were virtually ignored by the Children's Aid Society, with records indicating their placement numbers only "in the tens" (Holt, 1992, p.71). While CAS did place some

African American children, these children were usually ones who could "pass" for white and likely encountered racism within their host families. Because the CAS program was dependent on charitable contributions of the white and predominantly prejudiced community and society at large, Brace distanced himself from the African American community and the abolition movement to avoid endangering the continuation of his entire program. In addition, Brace may have feared that placing African American children would lead to accusations of dealing in slavery (Holt, 1992).

The number of children placed into foster homes grew following this movement, resulting in the first White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children in 1909 recommending the use of local foster families rather than orphanages or orphan trains. However, the number of children placed out-of-home stabilized at about 250,000 per year due to the prosperity following World War II and to the effects of family supports such as the 1935 Social Security Act, which mitigated the need for poor families to place their children in foster homes (Rosenfeld, Pilowsky, Fine, Thorpe, Fein, Sims, Halfon, Irwin, Alfaro, Saletsky, and Nickman, 1997).

A Changing System

Two key events that further shaped our current foster care system occurred in the 1960s. In 1961, for the first time, the federal government became involved in the financing of foster care (Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, 2005). Prior to 1961, states were solely responsible for foster care funding, which was tied to the Aid to Dependent Children Program (ADC). Some states regularly denied ADC (welfare) payments to families with children born outside of marriage, citing homes as "unsuitable"

for welfare benefits. When the state of Louisiana took this practice to an extreme by expelling 23,000 children from ADC, the federal government intervened by establishing the Fleming rule, which ordered states to cease this discriminatory practice. Furthermore, states were no longer allowed to use the suitability criteria unless a home was deemed unsafe, in which case states were required to make ADC payments to the family, make efforts to improve homes' conditions or place children in foster care. States protested the additional costs incurred from protecting children in unsafe homes, so Congress created federal foster care funding to assist states in protecting children (ASPE, 2005). After federal funding for foster care was added, out-of-home placements significantly increased and poor children of color who had previously been denied many services comprised much of the foster care caseload.

The second key event was the publication of the "Battered Child Syndrome" (Kempe, Silverman, Steele, Droegemueller, and Silver, 1962). Following the book's publication, reports of child abuse skyrocketed, as did the placement of abused and neglected children. Children were placed against the wishes of their parents, creating the system of involuntary placement that operates today (Rosenfeld, et al., 1997). During this time, critics of foster care voiced concerns about agency practices characterized as deficient, lengths of stay averaging several years, and the new phenomenon of foster care drift, whereby children drift from placement to placement without permanency. By 1977, the number of children placed in foster care had increased from 250,000 to approximately 500,000 (Fanshel, 1981). The growing movement to overhaul the child welfare system and reduce foster care drift reached its zenith with the passage of the Adoption Assistance

and Child Welfare Act of 1980, which emphasized keeping families together, adoption subsidies, placement in least restrictive environments, case reviews, and parent-child visitation during placement. Despite the significance that the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 had on establishing national standards for state practice in child placement, the Act made little mention of the adolescents who would remain in foster care until being released from a state's custody upon turning eighteen (Mech, 2003). It would be another six years before the issue of foster youth preparation for adulthood was addressed through federal legislation.

Indeed by 1982, lengths of stay had declined and the foster care population decreased by half, to approximately 243,000 (Fein, Maluccio, and Kluger, 1990). The children who remained in foster care, however, were those deemed most difficult to place: children of color, older children, and children with physical/medical disabilities. In the last decade, the overrepresentation of children of color in the foster care system is increasingly identified as troubling and indicative of the need for drastic reform. African-American and Latino families are more likely than their white counterparts to be reported for abuse or neglect and to have children removed from the home, even though they are no more likely than their white counterparts to be abusive or neglectful. In addition, once in the foster care system, children of color tend to remain in foster care placement longer (Chipungu and Bent-Goodley, 2004). With children of color entering the system at disproportionately higher numbers than their representation in the general population, and their tendency to experience longer lengths of stay once in foster care, the demographic

composition of today's foster care system is quite different from foster care in its earliest form.

Outcome Studies 1924 – 1986

Researchers have studied outcomes of former foster care youth as early as 1924 (Festinger, 1983). Although early and current outcome studies of former foster children focus on certain outcomes as an indicator of success, the definition of success has changed somewhat over time. In early studies, success was partially defined by conformity to moral standards and living in an attractive home, whereas current outcome studies do not. Theis (1924) conducted one of the earliest studies of former foster care youth. Interviews were conducted with 500 former foster children and their caregivers at the time the young adults were at least age 18. All of the young adults had lived in foster care for at least one year. Based on caregiver ratings, 75 percent of the sample was rated as "capable" at the time of the interview, with capability defined as law-abiding, sensibly managing their affairs, and abiding by moral standards of the community (Festinger, 1983). In 1939, Baylor and Monachesi reported similar outcomes in their study of 500 foster youth ranging in age from 5 to 29, though the length of stay in foster care and age at discharge were unclear. The authors reported that 73.5 percent of foster children age 21 or older at the time of the interview exhibited behavior judged to be "favorable" (Festinger, 1983).

Possibly the first study to follow up youths who were discharged from foster care upon reaching legal maturity was conducted by Meier in 1965. Sixty-six former foster youth were interviewed when they were 28 to 32 years old. The study found that "with

few exceptions these young men and women are self-supporting individuals, living in attractive homes and taking good care of their children" (Meier, 1965, p. 196).

Another significant study of former foster care youth was conducted just prior to passage of the first legislation addressing the issue of preparedness for independent living. Festinger (1983) conducted a study of former foster youth in the New York City area, interviewing 277 adults who had discharged from foster care between the ages of 18 and 21. At the time of the interviews, study participants were age 22 to 25. Festinger found that foster care youth tended to fall behind in school and that institutional or group placement was linked to fewer grades completed and poorer sense of well-being. The study highlighted the risks youth face in the period following discharge from foster care and Festinger recommended extending foster care placement until age 21 for those individuals who need more time to prepare to live independently (Festinger, 1983).

Palmer v. Cuomo

By the early 1980's, the "self-support" goal of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) established a precedent for advancement of the notion to prepare foster for a life of independence (Mech, 2003). Increasing attention to the issue led the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in 1983 to issue a request for proposal to "study the adaptation of adolescents in foster care to independence and community life" (pp. 1-23). In response, throughout the early to mid 1980's, a series of demonstration projects aimed at preparing youth for independence were funded by the Children's Bureau.

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It was a legal case; however, which thrust the issue of preparedness front and center. Plaintiffs in the Palmer v. Cuomo (1986) case, ten youths between the ages of 17 and 21, claimed that the city and state of New York failed to prepare them to live on their own outside of the foster care system, and failed to supervise them after they were discharged from the system. After they were discharged, plaintiffs were homeless, seeking shelter in subways, public parks and tenement houses (Palmer v. Cuomo, 1986). One of the plaintiffs, Reggie Brown, was discharged from foster care the day he turned eighteen. He was provided no preparation for living on his own and was instead provided a subway token and directions to the local homeless shelter. He spent the next year-and-a-half homeless. In July of 1985, the New York Supreme Court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, and the state of New York was ordered to provide post-discharge services, which included supervision until age 21 (Mech, 2003).

Independent Living Initiative of 1986

Despite growing support for the movement to provide services to youth aging out of foster care, the movement was not without critics in the Reagan administration. Critics maintained that transition issues faced by 18-year-olds discharging from foster care were not unlike issues faced by non-foster care youth who are also responsible for living independently at age eighteen. Furthermore, critics opposed extending services to former foster youth until age 21 for fear that special programs for this group would possibly just turn into an early welfare check (Mech, 2003).

Despite opposition, Title IV-E of the Social Security Act was amended with the passage of the Independent Living Initiative (PL 99-272) in 1985, which authorized $45

million in funds for states to establish programs to assist youths aged 16 and over to transition to independent living. Funds were distributed to states through a formula based on the percentage of children in the state who received federal foster care assistance in 1984, as this was the most recent year for which data were available (Collins, 2001). In 1993, the Initiative was given permanent status with an allotment of $70 million and expanded to authorize states to provide follow-up services for six months post-discharge and the discretion to extend independent living services to age 21 (Mech, 2003).

Foster Care Independence Act of 1999

After realizing the limited funding power of the previous initiative, President Clinton signed the Foster Care Independence Act (FCIA) of 1999 (P.L. 106-169), creating a permanent change to Title IV-E of the Social Security Act. With the passage of this Act, state funding for the provision of independent living programs doubled from $70 million to $140 million per year, and the 1986 Initiative was renamed and replaced by the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (Cook, 1994; Propp, Ortega, & NewHeart, 2003).

According to the FCIA, an "independent foster care adolescent" is an individual who is under the age of twenty-one, was in foster care on his/her 18th birthday, and whose assets, resources and income do not exceed levels established by the state. The Chafee Program has six stated purposes designed to address the needs of independent foster care adolescents (P.L. 106-169, 1999):

> (1) To identify children who are likely to be remain in foster care until 18 years of age and to help these children make the transition to self-sufficiency by providing services such as assistance in obtaining a high school diploma, career exploration, vocational training, job placement and retention, training in daily living skills,

training in budgeting and financial management skills, substance abuse prevention, and preventive health activities (including smoking avoidance, nutrition education, and pregnancy prevention).

(2) To help children who are likely to remain in foster care until 18 years of age receive the education, training, and services necessary to obtain employment.

(3) To help children who are likely to remain in foster care until 18 years of age prepare for and enter post-secondary training and education institutions.

(4) To provide personal and emotional support to children aging out of foster care, through mentors and the promotion of interactions with dedicated adults.

(5) To provide financial, housing, counseling, employment, education and other appropriate support and services to former foster care recipients between 18 and 21 years of age to complement their own efforts to achieve self-sufficiency and to assure that program participants recognize and accept their personal responsibility for preparing for and then making the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

(6) To make available vouchers for education and training, including postsecondary training and education, to youths who have aged out of foster care. (Sec. 477.a)

The Act is considered a substantial change in the landscape of federally funded independent living programs, and provides more services to a broader range of youth and young adults.

With the passage of the FCIA of 1999, funding for states to provide independent living services and program doubled from $70 to $140 million. Funds are distributed to each state based on the state's total number of children/youth in foster care for the most recent fiscal year, however, the formula for distribution includes a provision for small state foster care populations, so that each state receives a yearly minimum grant in the amount of 500,000, regardless of total number of children in care. When states apply for their funds, they are required to contribute a 20 percent match with non-federal dollars

for the total amount received in order to receive their full share of appropriated funds (National Foster Care Coalition, 2005).

If states do not apply for all of the funds for which they are eligible, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reallocates that amount to other states as needed. Furthermore, states have two years in which to spend their annual Chafee allotment and any remaining (unspent) money at the end of the two years is reverted to the federal treasury. In addition to the authorization of $140 million for the Chafee program, an additional $60 million has been authorized for payments to states for educational and training vouchers (up to $5,000 per year, per person) for youth in post-secondary education or vocation (NFCC, 2005).

The FCIA includes a number of key provisions, several of which are additions or revisions to the Independent Living Initiative of 1986. The key provisions of FCIA are summarized as follows:

- The minimum eligibility age of 16 that was included in the Independent Living Initiative of 1986 was removed.

- Funds can be used for young adults who have been discharged from care but are under age 21.

- States may spend up to 30 percent of Chafee funds on room and board for discharged foster youths between 18 and 21.

- States may extend Medicaid coverage for youth who have exited the foster care system through age 21.

- Youth remaining in foster care no longer have to have assets limited at $1,000 to maintain eligibility for Title IV-E Foster Care Assistance. The new asset limit is $10,000.

- Adolescents participating in independent living programs must be involved in the design of their own program activities.

- States are required to train adoptive parents, foster parents, and agency staff on issues that adolescents face as they prepare to exit foster care and live independently.

The Act also includes language related to adoption practices. The Act explicitly states that independent living activities should not be seen as an alternative to adoption for children. Rather, states' efforts to place older youth for adoption can occur concurrently with their efforts to provide independent living skills and services. In fact, the Act also authorizes additional funds for adoption incentive payments to states that increase the number of children adopted from foster care (P.L. 106-169, 1999, Title I, Subtitle D., Sec. 131). The notion of concurrent planning of adoption and independent living is relatively new, and it remains to be seen how it will play out since the passage of the FCIA.

The Chafee Program has set aside 1.5 percent of authorized program funds for evaluation, technical assistance performance measurement, and data collection. To assess the implications of the Chafee program's key provisions relating to independent living services for youth preparing to exit the foster care system, the Act requires Health and Human Services, in conjunction with federal and state officials, service providers, and

researchers to develop outcome measures on state performance. The Act delineates that the outcomes to be measured include educational attainment, employment, avoidance of dependency, homelessness, non-marital childbirth, high-risk behaviors, and incarceration (National Indian Child Welfare Association, 2001).

Lacking in the literature is extensive study of what Propp, Ortega and NewHeart (2003) call "intangible" skills integral to preparing youth for adulthood. Tangible skills that are easier to define, teach and measure are the primary focus of most studies and of most independent living programs that prepare youth for self-sufficiency. The teaching of these skills usually takes the form of a skill-building class or job training course that youth attend on a weekly basis for several weeks (Westat, 1991). Intangible skills include communication, self-esteem, social skills and planning, and are considered equally if not more important to adolescents' preparation for independence. These skills are more difficult to teach and often require more experiential relationship-building opportunities (Wade, 1997).

Outcome Studies 1986 to Present

Outcome studies of the former foster care youth population suggests that they fare worse than non-foster care youth in many areas. A synthesis of outcome studies (General Accounting Office, 1999) concludes that a substantial portion of youths who have exited foster care have not attained basic education goals, are dependent on public assistance and may experience periods of homelessness and unemployment. Outcomes most often studied include education, employment and income, living arrangements, support systems, and health.

The Casey National Alumni Study (2003) collected records and conducted interviews on over 1,000 Casey foster care alumni to examine key factors and program components that are linked with better outcomes across several domains. Initial findings show several factors that are predictive of success, including life skills preparation, male gender, participation in activities while in foster care and completion of high school before leaving foster care (Casey National Alumni Study, 2003).

Education. There are a number of possible reasons that many youths do not reach their senior year in high school by the time of their discharge from foster care. Educational neglect prior to entering the foster care system, frequent moves while in the foster care system, learning disabilities, and repeating grades are all factors that may delay or end an adolescent's schooling (Loman & Siegal, 2000).

Among a sample of 277 male and female young adults who left foster care in the New York metropolitan area, Festinger (1983) found that at time of their discharge in 1975, more than one-third (34.6%) of respondents had not completed high school but most had finished the tenth or eleventh grade. Respondents who were discharged from foster homes as opposed to group settings tended to have completed more years of school, and females had received more education than males regardless of whether they were discharged from a foster home or a group home. At the time of contact with respondents in 1979 and 1980, differences in education by type of discharge facility (foster home versus group care) remained, but differences in education by gender were no longer significant.

In a study of young adults in the San Francisco area, Barth (1990) found that 38 percent had not graduated from high school. Among a national sample of former foster care youths the high school completion rate upon discharge from foster care was 48 percent and up to 54 percent when these youths were interviewed at two and four year follow-ups (Cook, Fleishman, & Grimes, 1991), compared to the national graduation rate of 80 percent. In their study of Wisconsin foster care youths, Courtney and Piliavin (1998) found that 55 percent of the youth in the sample (N=113) had completed high school 12 to 18 months after discharge.

The Midwest Evaluation, the largest longitudinal study of transitioning foster youth post-Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, began in 2002 and will conclude after three waves of data are collected from former foster care youths living in Iowa, Illinois, and Wisconsin, at ages 17-18, 19, and 21 (Courtney, Dworsky, Ruth, Keller, Havlicek, and Bost). Wave 2 interviews with 603 of the original 736 youths in the study revealed that among youths no longer in care, 36.1 percent had no high school diploma or GED, and 30.8 percent were enrolled in high school or a GED program, vocational training, or a two or four-year college.

Another recent effort to assess outcomes of foster care alumni was the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study (2005). The study examined outcomes for 659 foster care alumni, now ages 20 to 33, which were served by one of three agencies in the northwestern United States. Among the study sample, 84.8 percent had completed high school, compared to 87.3 percent in the general population.

Employment / Income. Maintaining employment appears to be problematic for many individuals making the transition out of foster care. Among the youths studied, those who were employed had histories of job instability and were paid, on average, less than their non-foster counterparts (Barth, 1990; Cook, 1994; Courtney, et al., 2001). Thirty-nine percent of the youths in the Cook et al. (1991) study had any job experience and only 17 percent of youths were self-supporting. Others either depended on other sources of income or received welfare. In four other studies, 10 to 40 percent of former foster care youth were unemployed at the time they were contacted, and many reported problems maintaining employment (Cook et al. 1991; Courtney & Piliavin, 1998; Festinger, 1983; Jones & Moses, 1984). Cook (1994) found that discharged foster care youth more closely resembled 18- to 24-year olds living below the poverty level than they did 18- to 24- year olds in the general population.

In the Northwest Alumni Study (2005), the employment rate among alumni age 20-33 was 80.1 percent, compared to 95 percent in the general population of similar age groups. Thirty-three percent of the alumni had incomes below the poverty level, compared to 11 percent in the general population of similar age groups. Employment outcomes were lower in the Midwest evaluation, with 47 percent reportedly employed at an average pay rate of $7.00 per hour, and 72.3 percent reported to have worked during the past year.

Living Arrangements. For youths remaining in foster care long-term, ignoring maintenance of kinship ties and focusing solely on preparation for independent living may overlook the reality of youths' post emancipation situation (Courtney and Barth,

1996). Most children are in the child welfare system because of abuse or neglect by their biological family members; however, many studies indicate that youths who have left foster care maintain ties to immediate and/or extended family members, even when relationships are so poor that returning home before age 18 is not a legal option (Loman & Siegal, 2000). Many return to live with family or relatives because they have no other options. Fifty-four percent of youths in the Westat (1991) study lived with family members after being discharged from foster care and 26 percent of youths in the McMillen and Tucker (1999) study moved in with relatives after leaving foster care.

Two-thirds of youths in the Barth (1990) study reported family contact following emancipation. Courtney and Piliavin (1998) found that 46 percent of youths reported that their families provided help or emotional support to them, and one-third lived with family members post-discharge. Youths in the sample reported that family members were the most common source of financial support post-discharge. Similar results were found in other studies (Courtney & Barth, 1996; Mallon, 1998).

Studies have also shown that between 10 and 30 percent of individuals formerly in foster care experienced at least one night of homelessness, on the street or in a shelter, after leaving foster care (Cook, 1994; Courtney et al., 2001; Courtney et al., 2005). Among the foster care alumni in the Northwest study (2005), 22 percent had experienced homelessness after leaving foster care, compared to 1 percent in the general population (Bert et al., 1999). The lack of permanent housing and frequent moves were commonly reported (Barth, 1990). In addition, among homeless adults, large percentages have a history of child welfare system involvement (Burt, Aron, & Lee, 2001).

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Mental Health. Mental health has been studied less as an outcome among former foster care youth, though it is frequently cited as a necessary component of independent living programs and often presented in terms of service use in the child welfare system. Rates of behavioral problems, developmental delays, and need for psychological intervention in studies of youth still in foster care range from 39 to 80 percent (Hochstadt, Jaudes, Zimo, & Schachter, 1987; Simms, 1989; Halfon, Medonca, and Berkowitz, 1995; Garland and Besinger, 1997; Clausen, Landsverk, Ganger, Chadwick, & Litrownik, 1998; Landsverk & Garland, 1999; Zima, Bussing, Xiaowei, & Belin, 2000).

McMillen et al. (2005) found that 61 percent of the 17-year-old youths in a sample of 373 qualified as having at least one psychiatric disorder during their lifetime; more than half of these (62%) reported onset of their earliest disorder before entering the foster care system. Thirty seven percent of youths met criteria for a psychiatric disorder in the previous year. Among the various maltreatment variables tested, the 'number of types of maltreatment' variable was the best predictor of the presence of a psychiatric disorder. Compared to 18-year-old youths living in the community, the youths in the study had higher prevalence rates of major Depression, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and disruptive behavioral disorder.

Cook et al. (1991) found that 38 percent of individuals studied were clinically diagnosed as emotionally disturbed. Administering standardized mental health scales to youth no longer in foster care, Courtney and Piliavin (1998) found that scores were significantly lower than those of youths in the general population. Another study used the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) to assess dysfunctional behavior, finding that youth in

foster care had scores in the clinical or borderline range at two and three times the rate found in the general population (Clausen, et al., 1998). The recent National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being found that nearly half of foster children have a clinical level of behavioral and emotional problems (Leslie, Hurlburt, Landsverk, Barth, & Slymen, 2003).

In the Northwest Alumni study (2005) mental health outcomes among the study sample were assessed through the use of the Composite International Diagnostic Interview (CIDI). The alumni outcomes were compared to the general population mental health outcomes measured by the National Comorbidity Study Replication (NCS-R). Study investigators found that 54.4 percent of alumni had current mental health problems, as compared to 22 percent in the general population. The prevalence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder within the previous year was 25.2 percent among alumni, 4 percent in the general population, and between 6 percent and 15 percent among American war veterans. Twenty percent of alumni had Major Depression within the previous year, as compared to 10 percent in the general population.

Independent Living Skills. Prior to the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, the General Accounting Office reviewed the Independent Living Initiative to determine the extent to which transitional services were being provided to individuals aging out of foster care (GAO, 1999). The review found that states were providing assistance in education and employment, as well as providing classes in daily living skills such as money management, housekeeping, nutrition, and hygiene. Some states offered supervised practice living arrangements and after-care services. Additional services such

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as counseling were provided when funds were available; therefore, these services were not consistently provided by states. Mental health needs of youths were primarily met through the provision of individual and/or group therapy and psychotropic medication, neither of which were components of independent living programs.

However, despite most states providing some type of transitional services to youth in foster care, states reported that their independent living programs could not provide all of the assistance youths needed to live on their own. Some programs did not have adequate connections to employers to provide job leads. Others lacked opportunities for youths to practice skills in real-life settings; therefore, were limited to teaching skills in classroom settings. Transitional housing sites were limited and many states reported that their after-care services were very limited. Furthermore, due to a lack of standardization and varying funding levels in independent living programs across states, states found it difficult to access and utilize findings from effectiveness studies being conducted at the time (GAO, 1999).

To better understand which aspects of independent living programs were useful, McMillen, Rideout, Fisher, and Tucker (1997) conducted focus groups with 25 former foster care youth who participated in an independent living program. Youth listed training in money management and financial matters as helpful, as well as the stipends and subsidies they received through the independent living program. Waldinger and Furman (1994) compared two models of preparing foster youths for emancipation in California, concluding that the primary difference between the two models was the extent of caseworker involvement in the delivery of preparation services, and that there are

increased benefits to a youth when one consistent person maintains responsibility for both the on-going case management and emancipation preparation. Furthermore, findings in this study indicated that a worker who focused on emotional needs as well as skill acquisition was more beneficial to youth than a model based only on instructional skill-building.

Hahn (1994) tested four assessment instruments on 206 New York foster care youths ages 16 through 19 to determine whether the instruments could measure the functional abilities of foster care youths. Among the skills tested, foster care teens on average were found to function in the adequate range. Findings also showed that there was a group of youths at the bottom one-fifth to one-third who were in great need of specialized services including independent living planning.

Research comparing different independent living programs for improved youth outcomes is limited; however, existing studies suggest that participation in an independent living program is associated with positive youth outcomes. In the Westat evaluation (1990), with a sample including 810 former foster youth in eight states, training in the five core areas of budgeting, obtaining credit, consumer credit, education, and employment significantly increased the likelihood of performing well in these areas. In addition, it significantly increased the likelihood of accessing health care, being satisfied with life, and overall self-sufficiency. Mallon (1998) also found increased acquisition of independent living skills in 14 life skill categories, including among them budgeting, employment skills, education, housing.

Among the effectiveness studies utilizing comparison groups, differences between youth participating and not participating in independent living programs were found. In a study of 51 former foster youth in Pennsylvania, youths who had participated in an independent living program were significantly more likely than youths who had not participated in a program to be living independently, and participating in social organizations and activities (Shippensburg University, 1993). Similarly, Harding and Luft (1994) found in their study of 30 Texas former foster youth who participated in an independent living program that program participants were significantly more likely than non-program participants to move fewer times and complete job corps vocational training.

Scannapieco, Schagrin and Scannapieco (1995) evaluated an independent living program focused on life skills training, comparing 44 current foster care youth participating in independent living programs to a matched group of 46 current foster care youth not participating in an independent living program. The study found that the youths who participated in the independent living program for life-skills training were significantly more likely to have graduated from high school, have a history of employment, live on their own, and be self-supportive and employed at the time the case closed than the youths who did not participate in the program. Although this finding is significant, data were obtained solely from case reviews and were limited to exit outcomes, which may imply limited validity and reliability.

Surveying former foster youth who had and had not been enrolled in independent living programs in eight counties in North Carolina, Lindsey and Ahmed (1999) found

that program participants were significantly more likely than non-participants to be living independently and paying housing expenses while living with others. Furthermore, independent living program participants were significantly more likely to have completed a vocational program or some college, or to be currently enrolled in college.

Liebold and Downs (2002) evaluated the effectiveness of the San Antonio, Texas Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) classes by administering the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment (ACLSA) in a pre-PAL and post-PAL form to youth enrolled in the classes. The ACLSA Level 3 reflects six life skills domains: Daily Living Skills, Housing and Community, Money Management, Self-Care, Social Development, and Work and Study Skills. The first 78 of 90 items are scaled knowledge and behavior items, where response options are "not at all like me", "somewhat like me", or "very much like me". The last 12 items are multiple choice performance items, where youths are asked to choose the correct answer to life skills questions in each of the 6 domains. Results show that, as anticipated, life skills mastery scores on the ACLSA increased after youth completed their participation in the PAL classes. The domains of housing and community, money management, social development, and work and study skills showed statistically significant improvements in mastery scores. The domains of housing and community, and social development showed statistically significant improvements in performance scores. While other mastery and performance domains showed improvement in scores from pretest to posttest, the increases did not reach statistical significance. The authors caution against interpreting causation, as no control group was used as a reference for mastery scores improvements over time and score improvement may be a result of test-

retest effects. Although increases in scores cannot be exclusively attributed to the PAL program, mastery score improvements up to 72% greater from pretest to posttest suggest that there was a source of life skills learning (Leibold and Downs, 2002).

Qualitative Studies

Some researchers have used qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups to provide an opportunity for foster care children to share their perspectives and post-foster care experiences (Gil and Bogart, 1982; McMillen et al, 1997). In addition to reviewing case records, Festinger (1983) conducted interviews lasting 1.5 to 2 hours with study participants, with the goal of hearing their views of themselves and their lives, in addition to their views on foster care and what might improve it. With regard to preparation for life and discharge, young adults had a number of suggestions and recommendations for change. They suggested that foster care graduates be allowed to participate in discussion groups with youths still in foster care, to "present a positive image…that they too can make a success of their lives" (Festinger, 1983, p. 283). They suggested sorting out people's interests, goals and aspirations, and setting higher standards especially in the area of education. Young adults repeatedly reported that they were not prepared for life on their own, and that there should be better preparation in all areas, with opportunities to practice certain skills, beginning well before discharge.

In his study of 55 emancipating adults in San Francisco and Sacramento, Barth (1990) asked respondents for their suggestions to improve foster care. Respondents suggested there be greater attention to teaching life skills and to helping youths locate

housing. Others mentioned the need for educational services, counseling, life planning, career guidance, and aftercare services for three years following emancipation.

Iglehart and Becerra (2002) used qualitative interviews to learn what 28 former foster care individuals of color living in Los Angeles experienced as they left foster care, as well as how they viewed their lives. Emergent themes from the interviews included the importance of specific people in the independent living programs; vagueness in recalling the content of independent living programs; family conflict; housing instability; regrets, fears, and lessons learned; and future goals. Georgiades (2005) also sought former foster care individuals' perspectives on the quality of the independent living services they received while in foster care. Life satisfaction levels were assessed, as well as youths' recommendations for improving independent living services. Survey results indicate that independent living programs do best at preparing youths for educational success and least well at teaching youths parenting skills. Youths recommended that independent living counselors develop closer relationships with youths, and that the curriculum be strengthened in areas of parenting and organizational skills.

In a qualitative study of former foster youth in Central Texas, researchers located and interviewed 30 of the identified 513 young adults with foster care experience who transitioned to independence in 1990 and 1999 (Chandler, Shertzer, Graham, Mueller, Bailey, and Lein, 2001). Researchers discovered that the group was highly mobile and difficult to locate. In addition, 26 of the 513 youths had been or were currently incarcerated in state prison. In general, there was a lack of preparation for independent living among study participants. While some youths completed Preparation for Adult

Living (PAL) classes, several said the classes did not prepare them for challenges they faced once on their own. Others lived in areas where PAL was not offered, or left foster care before the services were provided to them. Additional trends that emerged in the analysis included a high incidence of untreated health and mental health problems, fear and loneliness, homelessness, financial insecurity, distance from available help, and engaging in risky lifestyles.

<div align="center">Study Purpose and Rationale</div>

The purpose of this exploratory study was to improve our understanding of independent living skills training provided to adolescents in Texas, in order to inform future, more rigorous research on the quality and effectiveness of independent living skills training. Using a qualitative case study approach, this study sought a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of the Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) independent living skills training course. More specifically, the study explored how the program was implemented and how the program was perceived by youth and by DFPS PAL staff. In addition, the study assessed how the program impacted resilience, social support, and life skills among adolescents living in foster care. This study did not aim to make causal inferences about the effectiveness of the PAL training program. Rather, a comparison of mean scores on standardized measures administered at two points in time was conducted for purposes of determining the practical significance of observed changes and for purposes of comparison to qualitative data on the same constructs.

The rationale for this study is twofold. While much is known about the outcomes of young adults after they have left the foster care system, fewer studies such as this one focus on youths who are still in foster care and the specific programs designed to train them to live independently. Hearing from youths as they have the experience of participating in independent living skills training and analyzing the implementation of training courses potentially allows for more immediate changes to the curriculum and facilitation of training courses. Furthermore, incorporating foster care teens' perspectives in order to better understand issues facing them as they prepare to transition from foster care addresses a call by researchers for such incorporation (Collins, 2001).

The literature on aging out youth also increasingly identifies the importance of studying social support and social networks (Mech, 1994), and the relationship between social support and resilience (Collins, 2001). Therefore, in addition to its focus on youths still in foster care, this study departs from much of independent living literature focused on negative outcomes by exploring the constructs of social support and resilience, both of which may play an important role in independent living skills training and the successful transition of youth from foster care.

<center>Chapter Summary</center>

Historically, preparation for independent living for teens living in foster care was largely ignored in the legislative arena until the mid 1980's, despite the rapidly growing number of youths aging out of the system and despite numerous studies documenting poor outcomes in the areas such as education, employment, housing, and mental health. Passage of the Foster Care Independence Act in 1999 considerably changed the landscape

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of independent living services to youths aging out of foster care, namely by doubling the funding of independent living services from $70 million to $140 million. The Act also gave states more authority and discretion in designing and implementing independent living services for youths still in foster care, and youths who have been discharged from the system.

The role of independent living services in positive youth outcomes is still not fully understood and research comparing different independent living programs is limited. However, the literature seems to suggest that the myriad services offered to assist youths in their transition from foster care to independent living may be an important external factor that contributes to successful transition and positive youth outcomes (Lemon, Hines, and Merdinger, 2004).

Gaps in the independent living literature related to incorporation of the youth perspectives, the study of youths still in foster care, and the study of social support and resilience in the context of independent living skills training served as the impetus and rationale for conducting this study. Chapter two presents the theoretical perspectives applicable to the study of youths' preparation to exit foster care and live self-sufficiently.

CHAPTER TWO

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter focuses on three interrelated theoretical perspectives in order to explore and understand the role of independent living skills training for teens in foster care: ecological perspective, developmental theory, and resilience theory. Collins (2001) argues that independent living policy, programming and evaluation lacks a sufficiently articulated theoretical base, and that programs and services not guided by explicit theory offer little guidance toward improving interventions. The large body of literature on the ecological perspective, adolescent development and resilience theory may provide such a base for understanding and making recommended changes to the independent living program specific to this study and independent living programs in general.

Ecological Perspective

Barth (1990) noted the precedent for use of an ecological perspective to understand the experiences of youth aging out of foster care. The ecological perspective places emphasis on the individual and the interrelationship with his or her environment. This interrelationship is fluid and reflects the synergistic and reciprocal connections that exist between the individual and others in particular geographic and socially-constructed environments (or systems), including the individual, group, family, community, institutions, class, and culture (Gitterman, 1996). Person and environmental exchanges, also referred to as the person and environment "fit", can be positive, negative, or neutral. When exchanges are positive (i.e fit is good), the environment is producing resources and experiences at the right time and in the right form to assure the individual's cognitive,

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emotional, biological, and social development and functioning. When exchanges are negative (i.e. fit is poor), the individual's development and functioning may be impaired and the environment may be damaged (Germain and Gitterman, 1996). The adolescent who is preparing to age out of foster care can be thought of as an individual system which works interdependently with other systems in its environment, including biological family, foster family, friends, community, the child welfare system, school, work, and church. Understanding how youth in foster care navigate the interacting systems in which they are involved, from their perspectives, may provide important information about the strengths and weaknesses among the interacting systems. Social constructionist's focus on language and meaning has led to the use of story as a metaphor for human experience (Foucault, 1980; Schnitzer, 1993; White & Epston, 1990; in Whiting & Lee, 2003). Constructionists maintain that meanings we attach to past events shape our present and future. Stories foster youth tell are likely to reflect life events that they experience as most meaningful. Children and youths' descriptions of their experiences are important for several reasons: (1) we lack understanding of how they experience foster family care. (2) having a clear picture of a child's experience could increase societal awareness and strengthen foster care policy. (3) most children want to talk about their experiences (Whiting and Lee, 2003).

To better understand adolescents in foster care, their preparation for independent living, and their transition out of foster care, all of these interdependent systems must be examined, including the individual system's cognitive, biological, psychological, emotional, social development and functioning.

Adolescent Developmental Theory

Some transitions and life events are so critical, either positively or negatively, that they alter developmental trajectories (Fraser, Kirby, and Smokowski, 2004). The effects of stressful life events on adolescent development were not thoroughly investigated until recently.

Puberty and adolescence are different, in that puberty is biological and adolescence is a social status not recognized in our society until the late nineteenth century (Kett, 1977). Lerner and Spanier (1980) define adolescence as the period in the life span when a person's biological, cognitive, psychological, and social characteristics are changing from what is typically considered childlike to what is considered adult-like. Even for children with biological, psychological, or social advantages, adolescence is a time of confusion for most children entering this developmental stage. Erikson (1968) states that adolescence is the time in which individuals begin to develop their adult identity, the capacity for intimate relationships, and adult role responsibilities. Specifically, fidelity is the particular strength that emerges in adolescence and is closely linked to infantile trust and mature faith. However, adolescents often face certain conditions in their social environment that hinders their adult development. When children experience effects of and resulting stressors of things such as poverty, abuse, neglect and foster care placement, their adolescent search for identity and emerging fidelity becomes complicated and perhaps compromised to the point of role confusion and deviation from societal norms (Miller, 2002). In addition, youth leaving foster care are thought to be at increased developmental risk because they are typically on their own

sooner than their non-foster care peers and often before completing high school or finding stable employment (Collins, 2001). Understanding these aspects of adolescent development and key transition points may inform more sensitive social policy and programming, potentially providing more "normal" experiences for foster care youth and better long-term outcomes.

Blos (1979) identified four preconditions of adolescent development necessary to attaining healthy adulthood. The first of these preconditions is individuation, or the awareness of oneself as separate. Youths in foster care, most of who have weak family ties in additions to histories of trauma, do not have the supportive family network or the sense of personal history from which to separate and develop a solid sense of self. Therefore, they often display a diffuse sense of self characterized by mistrust in relationships. The second precondition is the integration of past trauma. Depending on the nature and extent of loss and trauma, youths in foster care may struggle with these issues far past adolescence, missing key opportunities to focus on adulthood issues of intimacy and productivity. The third precondition is unique history, or a sense of continuity from child to adult, often a complex issue for youths in foster care. They may have gaps in memory or a fragmented sense of personal history, and the development of a sense of unique history may be further compounded by extensive loss, isolation, lack of social experience, and frequent moves (Wedeven and Mauzerall, 1990). The last precondition in adolescent development is sexual identity, which may prove especially problematic for foster youths who have experienced physical and sexual abuse, lacked healthy adult role models, or lacked adequate information to understand their bodies.

Wedeven and Mauzerall (1990) maintain that these four preconditions to adolescent development should be incorporated into the theoretical framework and design of independent living programs. Specifically, independent living programs should include opportunities for youths to develop trust and a positive self-image, as well as facilitate a youth's resolution of past loss and trauma. They should provide opportunities for youths to be less isolated, connect fragments of their histories, and practice communicating their feelings to others.

Resilience Theory

The ecological perspective posits that across the life course, individuals must cope with numerous status transitions within systems, such as attending a new school, having a child, entering foster care, or exiting foster care, and the stress associated with such transitions. Status transitions typically cause some degree of stress, and stress potentially increases when one enters into a new experience too early or too late in the life course (Germain and Gitterman, 1996). People cope with trauma, stressful life events, and adversity in the life course in different ways. A better understanding these individual differences in response to stress and adversity requires an examination of resilience theory.

Resilience has been defined in many different ways, from a substance of elastic qualities (Harriman, 1958) to a character defined by hardiness and invulnerability (Anthony, 1974; Kobasa, 1979; Rhodewalt and Zone, 1989; Maddi and Khoshaba, 1994; Florian, Mikulincer and Taubman, 1995; Ramanaiah, Sharpe, and Byravan, 1999), to a developmental course characteristic of healthy adjustment despite adversity or trauma

(Luthar, 2000). More recently, however, some researchers maintain that the description or definition of resilience contain an important distinction. The distinction to which the researchers refer is the distinction between resilience as an outcome versus resilience as a process. Conceptualized as an outcome, resilience is characterized by particular patterns of functional behavior despite risk (i.e. maintenance of functionality). Conceptualized as a process, resilience is characterized as a dynamic process of adaptation to risk that involves interaction between risk and protective factors both internal and external to the individual (i.e. mechanisms that modify the impact of risk), (Olsson, Bond, Burns, Vella-Brodrick, and Sawyer, 2003). The concept of resilience is thought to be a useful complement to other developmental theories because it provides a framework for understanding processes and mechanisms across time. It is thought to be particularly useful to social workers. If we understand resilience processes, we can target interventions to the youth's developmental level or pathway, to "produce turning points that lead to positive chain reactions, [and] upward rather than downward spirals" (Sroufe, 1997; Rutter, 1999; in Schofield and Beek, 2005). Rigsby (1994) said that what "we really want to understand are the processes of human development in different times and places, for individuals with varying risks and assets, and for individuals developing in a variety of social contexts" (p. 91).

While resilience theory is concerned with risk exposure among adolescents, its primary focus is on strengths and understanding healthy adjustment despite risk exposure (Fergus and Zimmerman, 2005). Resilience frameworks emphasize coping with stressors and accessing social support, which may be especially important given the numerous past

and current stressors faced by transitioning foster care youth, including family problems, system involvement, poverty, removal from home, placement changes, victimization, and leaving foster care (Collins, 2001).

The factors which help adolescents avoid negative effects of risks are termed "promotive" factors or "assets", which fall within three general levels: individual, social (peers and family), and societal (school and community). These levels may also be referred to as internal and external promotive factors. Utilizing this conceptualization of resilience as a process, effective interventions could be focused on developing the individual's internal resources and skills, while changing the social environment to further promote resilience. By the same token, interventions such as the independent living program specific to this study can be evaluated in terms of their effectiveness at building or maximizing existing promotive factors or assets at the individual (internal) and social (external) level.

<center>Proposed Conceptual Model</center>

Beyond obtaining a comprehensive understanding of how the life skills training program was implemented and perceived by participants and planners, this study explored the influence of multiple youth factors and program implementation factors on the change in levels of resilience, social support and life skills among youth transitioning from foster care in central Texas.

The theoretical perspectives outlined in this chapter guided the development of the proposed conceptual model for this study (see Figure 2.1). The ecological perspective honors the mutual relationship between individuals and their environments;

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therefore, this study focused on a variety of individual youth factors as well as a variety of environmental, or program and system factors. Exploring both individual youth factors and environmental factors allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the PAL training program and the foster care youths who experience it. In addition, analysis of factors at the micro and macro level was helpful in identifying quantitative and qualitative changes in levels of resilience, social support and knowledge of life skills.

In this study's conceptual framework, youth factors included age, gender, state-designated level of care, length of time in foster care, total number of foster care placements, and number of Circle of Support meetings each youth had. Circle of Support meetings, further described in the next chapter, bring together a group of individuals selected by the youth to provide the youth support throughout his or her transition process. Program and system factors included program design, program content and implementation, program setting, and TDFPS-PAL staff perspectives. The next chapter discusses study methodology, including research design, sampling, data collection, and data analysis.

Figure 2.1. Proposed Conceptual Model.

Youth Factors: Age, gender, ethnicity, length of time in care, number of placements in foster care, level of care, number of Circle of Support meetings
Program and System Factors: Program implementation, program curriculum, program setting, TDFPS-PAL staff perspective
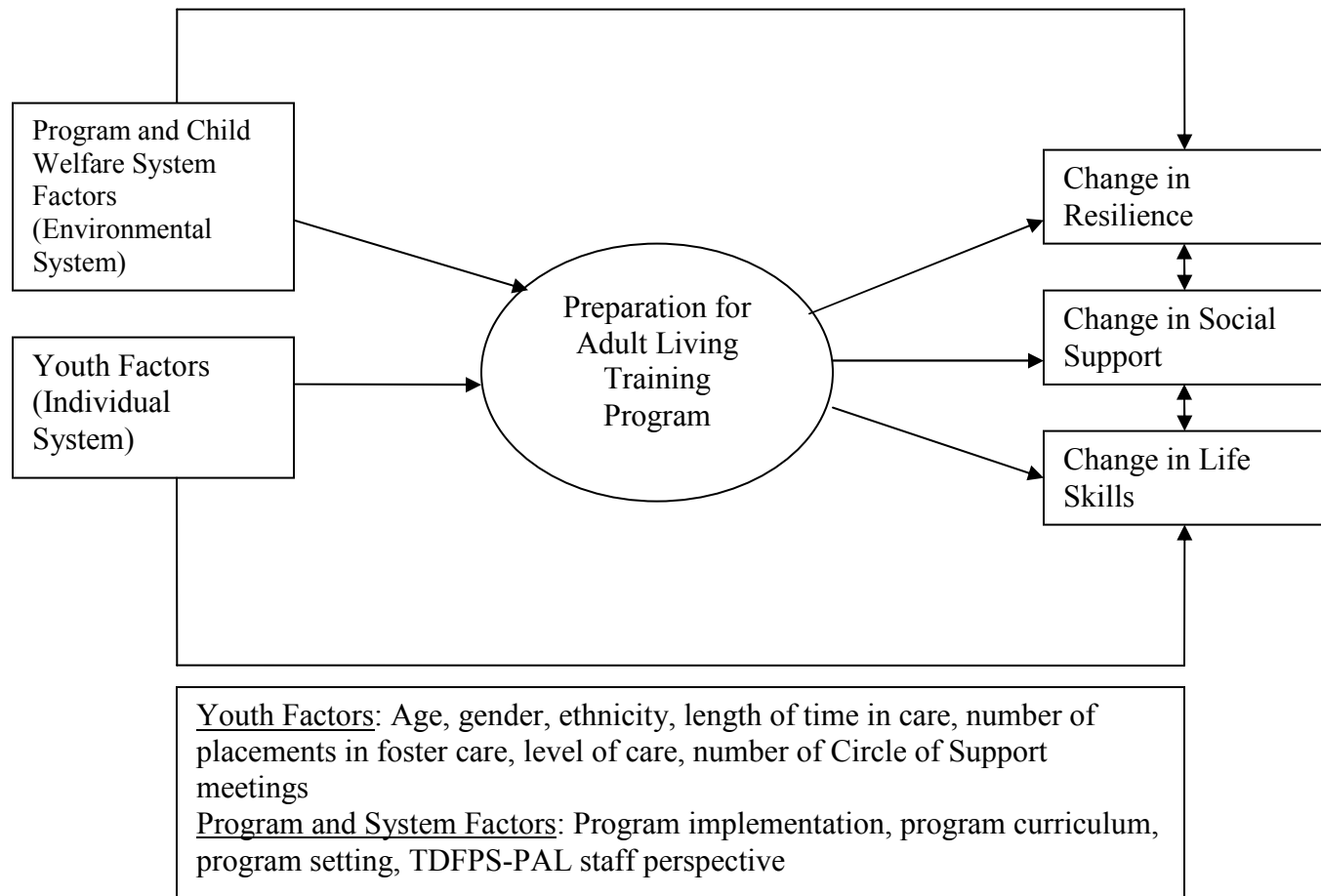
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Much of the research cited in Chapter One used retrospective methods to examine outcomes of youth in foster care and youths' perceptions of foster care. This study was a departure from much of the literature on independent living skills of former foster care youth in that it took an in-depth and comprehensive look at the life skills training program itself. It involved adolescents who still resided in foster care and followed them through their participation in the training program. Furthermore, it incorporated their views and perceptions of the program and events in foster care as they were happening. This chapter presents the research design, sample and sampling procedures, intervention conditions, study variables, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis strategies used in the study.

Research Design

This exploratory study utilized a qualitative case study design supported by qualitative and quantitative data to explore an independent living skills training program facilitated for foster care adolescents in two program training sites in Texas. The study also explored the role that program implementation factors and individual youth factors played in changing levels of resilience and social support and knowledge of life skills among youth participants. Youth factors included age, gender, level of care, length of time in foster care, total number of foster care placements, and number of Circle of Support meetings each youth had. Program and system factors included program design, program content and implementation, program setting, and staff perspectives.

Furthermore, the study sought to incorporate youths' perspectives on their participation on the program, on the training program itself, and on their experiences living in foster care. Additional perspectives on the training program and on adolescents in foster care were sought from the from TDFPS-PAL staff working in various regions in the state of Texas.

A qualitative study design was more favorable than an experimental or quasi-experimental design for two key reasons. First, although PAL is the designated course for teaching independent living skills in the state of Texas, there was no standardized curriculum, treatment manual, or instructor training to do so. All PAL instructors taught to the six core elements defined by Chafee legislation but the method of instruction varied by region, if not by instructor. Therefore, it was difficult to make any conclusive statements or generalizations about the implementation or effectiveness or PAL classes statewide. Second, an effectiveness study of PAL classes using random assignment was difficult if not impossible. Individuals enrolled in a PAL training program attended the course that was held in closest proximity to their residence. Furthermore, individuals were not always enrolled in a PAL course on a first-come first-serve or waitlist basis. In general, youths who were closest to emancipation and had not yet attended PAL were selected first; however, youths were also selected for PAL courses based on convenience for foster parents or group home staff, or to fit the youths' school or extracurricular activity schedule. A qualitative design was also chosen because a primary goal of the study was to incorporate youths' perspectives and opinions on the life skills training program and on their experiences in foster care.

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Case study was chosen over other qualitative traditions of inquiry because the goal of this study was to obtain a thorough understanding of a particular program from multiple vantage points and using multiple sources of data, rather than establishing a theory or understanding a particular phenomenon as one would aim to do in traditions of grounded theory or phenomenology. Case study research has seen intense periods of use and disuse but is thought to have first emerged in the United States in the early 1900s in the field of sociology. Issues such as poverty and unemployment resulting from immigration were ideally suited to case study research, as case study research emphasizes thoroughness in observation, reconstruction, and analysis of cases (Hamel, Dufour, and Fortin,1993, Zonabend, 1992), and typically involves questions of "how" and "why".

Case study involves the exploration of a "bounded system" over time through detailed, in-depth data collection with information rich in context. The bounded system is the case or cases being studied, whether an event, an individual, a program, organization, or activity (Creswell, 1998). Case study research can be used to better understand a complex issue and can add strength to what is already known through previous research. Case studies are typically complex because they generally involve triangulated (or multiple) sources of data and produce large amounts of data for analysis. In this study, multiple sources of data included interviews, surveys, scaled quantitative data, direct observation, and case file data.

The advantages of the case study method are its applicability to real-life, contemporary, human situations; typically taking place in a natural setting such as a classroom or neighborhood and striving for a more holistic interpretation of the event or

situation under study. Qualitative case studies are distinct from clinical case studies in that clinical case studies are used to instruct and advance clinical practice, whereas qualitative case studies are a method of inquiry (Stake, 1994; Yin, 1994; Padgett, 1998).

The single case in this study was the Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) life skills training program facilitated in two sites in Texas, bound by the timeframe in which individuals are enrolled in the program meant to prepare them for living independently of the foster care system. The multiple sources of data in this study included scaled quantitative measures, interviews with PAL participants, surveys of PAL staff who worked at the Department of Family and Protective Services, direct observation, and case file data. These data were used to gain greater understanding of the broader case, uncover important issues and perspectives, and explore specific variables thought to impact youths' transition.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. Do scores on standardized measures of resilience, social support and life skills change after participation in the PAL classes? How do scores compare to scores from other studies' samples using the same standardized measures?

2. How do scores on standardized measures and how youth actually describe their social support systems, assets, and resources (resilience) and knowledge of life skills compare?

3. How are adolescents in foster care described and perceived by the TDFPS-PAL staff?

Human Subjects Protection

Approval to conduct this dissertation using procedures and instruments described in this chapter was granted by the University of Texas Institutional Review Board on July 21, 2006 (See Appendix A). An amendment for Human Subjects approval to use the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment – Youth Level 4 instead of the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment – Short Form, and to change one PAL course site was approved on September 6, 2006. A second amendment to administer a brief, electronically mailed survey to TDFPS – PAL staff was approved on October 31, 2006. The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services submitted a letter support for the researcher's collaboration with one of several agencies under contract with the state to provide independent living skills training classes to youth in state custody (hereafter referred to as the "contract agency"). In addition, the terms of the researcher's partnership with contract agency were specified in a formal Research Agreement.

Sample Recruitment

Preparation for Adult Living classes were offered year-round and trainers typically taught two courses at a time in different locations within the region specified by their state contract. Course locations were determined by the number of referrals received by the contract agency. A purposive sampling technique was used in the study, in that respondents were selected based on their ability to provide the needed information. Sample participants included consenting youths enrolled in two sites in which PAL classes were taught in the fall of 2006. These sites were chosen for proximity and their potential for full enrollment at 15 to 18 participants each. It was expected that there

would be approximately 30-35 study participants, both males and females, age 16 and above. The eligibility requirements for study participation included:

- Youth must be a ward of the state and currently residing in a substitute care facility (i.e. foster home, group home, independent living facility or residential treatment center).

- Youth must be enrolled to participate in a PAL course in one of the two selected course sites.

Youth Referral Process

Within the region selected for this study, PAL classes were offered at multiple locations for the convenience of eligible youths. Typical practice in Texas is that at age14, each youth in state care is assigned to the state PAL Coordinator in the region from which he or she was removed. The PAL Coordinator then refers the youth to the agency contracted to provide PAL classes in the region in which the youth currently resides. Once the contracted agency receives the referral, the agency is responsible for assigning the youth to the first available course in the closest proximity to the placement in which the youth resides. In some areas in the state, PAL training classes reach maximum capacity so quickly that a waitlist must be formed, while in other areas of the region classes are not held until the number of referrals is sufficient to form a class. In this case, the contracted agency aimed to have a minimum of 15 participants and a maximum of approximately 18 participants per course. Foster parents or current caregivers were responsible for transporting youths' to and from the weekly PAL classes.

PAL Staff Recruitment

In addition to youth participants, regional PAL staff members working for the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services were recruited to complete a brief survey regarding their perceptions and opinions about their roles responsibilities, about PAL classes and their benefit to adolescents, and about the strengths and needs of adolescents who will age out of substitute care in Texas. The survey was created by the Principal Investigator and reviewed by state level PAL directors. At the request of the University of Texas Institutional Review Board, names of survey respondents were not collected; therefore, the survey and a cover letter serving as consent were electronically mailed to the state PAL director, who electronically forwarded the survey to all 27 regional PAL staff in the state. Respondents were asked to complete and print the survey, and mail to the Principal Investigator's address provided on the survey.

Intervention Conditions

Independent living skills training is one component of the Preparation for Adult Living program and is usually referred to as "PAL classes" or "PAL training". PAL classes are intended to help teenagers develop the life skills necessary to be self-sufficient in young adulthood after they have been discharged from the foster care system. Although there is no standardized curriculum used, PAL classes taught statewide must cover six core elements defined by the Chafee legislation. These core elements and required hours per topic include personal and interpersonal skills (5.0 hours), job skills (7.0 hours), housing and transportation (7.0 hours), health (5.0 hours), planning for the future (7.0 hours), and money management (7.0 hours), for a total of 38 hours.

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PAL life skills classes are comprised of six, 5-hour classroom-based classes and one 8-hour field trip, for a total of 38 hours of training. In order to "pass" PAL training, youths must complete 5 hours in money management and a minimum of 5 hours in at least 4 of the other core elements. Successful completion of these requirements earns participants $1000.00 upon their emancipation from the foster care system. This money may be spent on household items needed to live independently. In addition to the $1000.00 stipend, PAL participants are paid $5.00 for each class they attend. Participation in PAL classes is voluntary. If a youth chooses not to attend a PAL course, he or she is not given the $1000.00 stipend; however, he or she is still eligible for other aftercare benefits and services offered through the PAL program.

Courses in the two sites selected for this study ran concurrently for six weeks in the fall of 2006, with course topics taught in the same order in each site. In Site 1, PAL classes were held every Saturday from 12:00pm to 5:00pm. In Site 2, classes were on Tuesday and Thursday evenings from 6:00pm to 8:30pm.

Week 1: Orientation / Legal Responsibilities / Community Awareness

Week 2: First Aid / Nutrition / Substance Abuse / Stress Management

Week 3: Money Management I / Money Management II

Week 4: Housing I & II / Utilities / Transportation

Week 5: Job Skills I & II

Week 6: HIV / Sexual Responsibility / Interpersonal Skills

Field Trip: Apartment Hunting, Job Skills, and Consumer Awareness field trip / Program Review.

Study Variables

Independent Variable

PAL life skills training program - The independent variable in this case was the seven-week PAL independent living skills training program facilitated in two sites by a trainer from the agency contracted to provide PAL training to eligible youths. The independent variable was operationalized as program planning, program content, and program implementation.

Dependent Variables

Resilience – the total score of resilience and scores on subscales of internal assets and external assets, as measured by the Resilience Youth Development Module (RYDM).

Social Support – the total score of functional social support and scores for each of the five dimensions subscales: emotional/informational, tangible, positive social interaction, and affectionate, as measured by the Medical Outcomes Study Social Support Survey Instrument.

Life Skills – the total mastery and performance scores as measured by the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment – Youth Level 4; and mastery scores for each of the six subscales, including: career planning, daily living, housing and money management, self care, social relationships, and work life.

Youth Factors

    Demographics – Operationalized as the youth's age, gender, and ethnicity.

    Length of time in foster care – the total length of time each youth has resided in

    foster care, expressed by the number of months or years. These data were

obtained from state case records.

Number of placements – the total number of placements each youth experienced while in substitute care. Placements may include foster homes, group homes, residential treatment centers, therapeutic camps, and independent living centers. These data were obtained from state case records.

Level of Care – Level of Care information was obtained from state case records. Level of Care is assigned by the Youth for Tomorrow Foundation to all children who reside in facilities licensed by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, including less restrictive settings such as basic foster homes to more restrictive settings such as psychiatric hospitals. Levels of care are categorized as "Basic", "Moderate", "Specialized" and "Intense", based on type and amount of services needed. Youths assigned an "Intense" level of care are not admitted into the foster care system; therefore, this study will be limited to "basic", "moderate" and "specialized" levels of care. In general, "basic" needs are those considered to be routine and non-therapeutic and applied in less restrictive environments. "Moderate" and "specialized" needs are those requiring therapeutic services, such as individual and/or group therapy and psychotropic medication, to be applied in more restrictive settings (Texas Department of Family and Protective Services and Youth for Tomorrow websites, 2007).

Circle of Support Meetings – the number of meetings and participants in attendance at each. Circle of Support meetings are a new addition to transitional services offered to youth prior to aging out of foster care. The meetings, based on

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the Family Group Conference model, bring together a "safety network" of individuals (selected by the youth) to provide the youth support throughout his or her transition process. The meetings are supposed to be held as soon as possible after each youth's 16th birthday in order to establish and implement a transition plan. Additional Circle of Support meetings may be held to modify or monitor the transition plan.

<div align="center">Sources of Data</div>

The dependent variables of the study, including resilience, social support, and life skills were assessed with the following standardized measures: Resilience Youth Development Module (RYDM), the MOS Social Support Survey, and the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment (ACLSA) – Youth Level 4.

Resilience Youth Development Module (RYDM)

Resilience was assessed using the Resilience Youth Development Module (RYDM), (WestEd, 1999). This module was developed as a supplemental module of the Healthy Kids Survey (HKS), which was developed from the collaboration of the California Department of Education, WestEd (a national, non-profit on research and development) and Duerr Evaluation Services. The HKS has been administered in over 900 California school districts to almost 2 million students in grades 5 through 12 and is an example of a process-oriented measurement device. Through the use of this type of survey, one may assess the diversity of resources available to young people in various areas (home, school, community, peer group), with the assumption being that the greater range of resources an individual has, the more likely he or she will be capable of an

adaptive response to a life crisis (Olsson et. al., 2003)

The RYDM is a comprehensive assessment of resilience factors and assets associated with positive development, risk behavior protection, and achievement. The RYDM measures 11 external assets using 33 survey items and 6 internal assets using 18 items. External assets are the environmental supports and opportunities, or protective factors, which facilitate healthy and successful development in children and youth. The Module asks respondents their perceptions of Caring Relationships, High Expectations, and Opportunities for Meaningful Participation in the areas of home, school, community, and peer group. Caring Relationships are defined as those supportive connections with others who are "there" and who listen non-judgmentally. High Expectations are the strength-focused, consistent communications that the individual can succeed. Meaningful Participation is characterized by an individual's involvement in relevant and interesting opportunities for responsibility and contribution (WestEd, 1999). Internal assets, or resilience factors, include cooperation and communication, empathy, problem solving, self-efficacy, self-awareness, and goals and aspirations (WestEd, 1999). These assets are considered the personal strengths that result from having home, school, community and peer environments that are rich in external assets. All but one of the 56 items on the RYDM were positively phrased, and included items such as "At school, I do things that make a difference" (external asset), and "I try to understand what other people go through" (internal asset).

In California, the RYDM is administered in grades 5, 7, 9, and 11 and to students in "non-traditional" schools, including adult education programs, alternative schools,

juvenile hall, special education, and state special schools. The RYDM is administered once per year, and is not administered in a pretest posttest fashion as it was administered in this study. Developers do not advice against administering the module more than once; however, they caution users to testing effects that may result from multiple administrations in short time spans.

The RYDM has been extensively pilot and field tested with approximately 18,000 secondary level students in over 100 California schools, with an average coefficient alpha for all scales at .80 (Constantine and Bernard, 2001). Extensive testing resulted in several revisions of the tool. Although version 3.0 (used in this study) is currently available, a revised version (4.0) is currently in development. The RYDM is a fairly new tool in a relatively new area of research with youth resilience; therefore, has very limited reliability and validity data. Concurrent validity was assessed for the RYDM Internal Assets Scale compared to other strength-based scales that could be used in schools. The two strengths-based scales were the Extended Life Orientation Test (ELOT) and the Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS). Correlations were strong across instruments in expected ways, in that students with high internal assets reported being more satisfied with school, family, self, and peers; and students with high internal assets reported having more optimistic reinforcement expectations. Researchers concluded that the results of the study supported the concurrent validity of the RYDM Internal Assets Scale (Furlong, Soliz, and Greif, 2004). Further validation analyses were not reported.

The RYDM was scored using a Statistical Package Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) syntax available from the developers of the measure. For each item, respondents chose: 4-Very much true; 3-Pretty much true; 2-A little true; and 1-Not at all true. Means were calculated for total internal and external assets, as well as all subscales within each, and categorized as "High" (mean is above 3), "Moderate" (mean of at least 2 and no more than 3), or "Low" (mean below 2).

Medical Outcomes Study (MOS) Social Support Survey

Seeking and receiving help from others is thought to be a major form of coping, a construct closely linked to resilience (Wilcox and Vernberg, 1985). Having someone available to provide emotional support may serve as protection from some of the negative consequences of illness or stress (Sherborne, 1988). Social support was measured by respondents' scores on the Medical Outcomes Study (MOS) Social Support Survey (Sherbourne & Stewart, 1991), initially developed to assess outcomes among patients with chronic conditions. The survey was designed to comprehensively assess the various dimensions of social support, and was constructed for self-administration by individuals aged 14 and over or by a trained interviewer in person or by telephone. The MOS Social Support Survey contains four functional support scales, with functional support defined as the degree to which interpersonal relationships serve particular functions.

The survey contains 19 functional support items measuring the following five dimensions of social support: emotional / informational, tangible, positive social interaction, and affectionate. Emotional support is the expression of positive affect, empathetic understanding, and encouragement of expression of feeling. Informational

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support is the offering of advice, information, guidance or feedback. Tangible support involves the provision of material aid or assistance. Positive social interaction is the availability of others to do fun things with you, and affectionate support involves the expression of love and affection. Internal consistency reliability coefficients for all five dimensions (sub-scales) and the overall support scale are above .91. Tests of construct validity were supported (Sherbourne and Steward, 1991). Subscales were scored by calculating the average of the scores for each item in the subscale. Overall support score was calculated by averaging the scores for all 19 items included in the four subscales. Overall support scores were transformed to a 0 - 100 point scale.

Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment IV

Teaching adolescents life skills is one of the main strategies used to prepare youth for emancipation. In the state of Texas, life skills are taught through the state's designated independent living program, PAL. PAL policy requires that staff or contractors conduct an initial assessment of each PAL participant's general readiness to live independently. The assessment is conducted around the youth's 16th birthday and the results are used to develop specific plans and training to prepare each youth for adult living. A post-assessment is conducted between the youth's 17th birthday and two months after discharge from substitute care. Since 2002, Texas has used the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment to assess youths' general readiness to live independently (TDFPS Web site, 2006). The Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment (ACLSA) – Youth Level 4 (Casey Family Programs, 2000) was used to assess youths' life skills in this study since this is the version that is administered to youths in all other PAL life skills classes. The ACLSA

has a total of 118 items and is designed to measure preparedness for living independently by assessing the following areas: career planning, daily living, housing and money management, self care, social relationships, and work life. The first 97 items of the assessment are knowledge and behavior items, with response options including "Not at all like me", "Somewhat like me", or "Very much like me". The last 21 items are performance items, where youth are asked to choose the correct answer to life skills questions in each domain. Mastery and performance scores were obtained by entering each youth's completed paper format of the assessment into the online database at the Casey Life Skills website. Version IV of the ACLSA was recently developed and reliability and validity of this new version have not yet been established.

The RYDM, the MOS Social Support Survey, and the ACLSA IV contain 193 scaled items in total, and administered together took approximately 40 minutes for participants to complete.

<div align="center">Other Sources of Data</div>

Background Questionnaire

During the first PAL class, consenting participants in both sites were asked to complete a self-administered questionnaire designed to collect demographic and information as well as information on family history, experiences in out-of-home care, education, employment and expectations about the future. Permission was granted by the developers of the Wave 1 survey used in the Midwest Evaluation of Adult Functioning of Former Foster Care Youth, referred to as the "Midwest Study" (Courtney, Terao, Bost, 2004), to utilize their background survey in this study. The survey was quite lengthy and

administered by in-person interviews. Due to a lack of time and resources, the survey was modified to a briefer, self-administered questionnaire for this study. One set of questions in said interview schedule assesses youths' satisfaction with foster care. The questions that comprised this set were adapted by developers of the Midwest Study from the work of Trudy Festinger (1983), who interviewed 277 adults between the ages of 22 – 25 years old who had lived in New York's foster care system for a minimum of 5 years and discharged between the ages of 18-21 years old.

Semi-structured Interviews

Qualitative, in-depth interviews were conducted with youth participants approximately midway through the PAL course, using a semi-structured interview schedule (See Appendix E) developed by the Principal Investigator based on the central questions and conceptual framework of this dissertation. Interviews included open-ended questions regarding youths' expectations about their own impending transitions, sources of worry and strength, support systems, opinions and expectations of the PAL program, perspectives on the needs of young people preparing to age out of substitute care, suggestions to change or improve independent living programming, and thoughts on their futures. The interview schedule also included open ended questions about family history and experiences in out-of-home care.

TDFPS PAL Staff Surveys

Surveys developed by the Principal Investigator were administered to all Texas Department of Family and Protective Services PAL staff working in 1 of 11 regions within the state (See appendix F). PAL staff surveys contained questions about

background and training, job functions, PAL program design, implementation, and effectiveness, as well as the strengths, challenges and needs of youth in state custody.

Direct Observation

Because the technique of direct observation is useful for providing additional information about the topic being studied, the principal investigator directly observed sessions in both PAL course sites, minimizing her own involvement to avoid "reactivity", or the "potentially distorting effects of the qualitative researcher's presence in the field" (Padgett, 1998, p. 92). Indeed, Glesne and Peshkin (1992) recommended that researchers engaging in direct observation should be "as unobtrusive as wallpaper" (p. 8, http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR3-2/tellis1.html). Observations were recorded in field notes, with the goal of obtaining a "thick" description, whereby as much as possible is logged but without the interpretive filter of the researcher.

Case Record Data

Limited data were obtained from each youth's state case record, including each youth's level of care, the dates and participants of circle of support meetings in which youth participated, the length of time each youth resided in substitute care and the total number of placements each youth experienced during his/her tenure in substitute care.

<div align="center">Data Collection</div>

Quantitative Data

Table 3.1 illustrates the plan for collecting data in the study. Quantitative youth data were collected at two points in time using three standardized measures of resilience, social support, and life skills, which were administered by the principal investigator at the

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beginning and conclusion of each PAL course in two program sites in Texas, referred to as "Site 1" and "Site 2". With the exception of the first administration of the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment (ACLSA), which youths completed by computer in the one to two hours prior to the first PAL class, all measures were administered in paper and pencil form. Since this first administration of the ACLSA was completed electronically and not conducted by the researcher, the contract agency provided the scored results to the researcher. On the first class day in each site, youths were provided a description of the study and a description of what participation would entail should they choose to participate. Consent for participation was explained and obtained from 12 of 12 attendees in Site 1, and from 9 of 11 attendees in Site 2. Consenting participants were asked to complete the packet of paperwork containing, in the following order, the demographic and background questionnaire, the MOS Social Support Survey, and the Resilience Youth Development Module (RYDM) (See Table 3.1). The approximate time to complete the initial assessment packet was 30 to 40 minutes. To increase participant motivation, small monetary incentives of $10 were offered to youths at completion of questionnaires and standardized measures at the beginning and conclusion of the PAL course.

Three months after courses concluded, a brief survey was administered to all twenty-seven TDFPS-PAL staff members in the state. The survey and cover letter serving as consent were electronically mailed to the PAL Program Specialist, who in turn electronically forwarded the documents to all PAL staff members in the state of Texas. Respondents were asked to complete the survey and mail the printed copy to the Principal

Investigator's mailing address provided on the survey. Nine of 27 staff surveys were returned, for a response rate of 33 percent.

Qualitative Data

All sixteen youth participants were interviewed at one point in time approximately halfway through the PAL course. An interview schedule of standardized open and closed ended questions was used in face-to-face, individual, interviews. All interviews were conducted by the Principal Investigator at the participant's residence or in the training room after class had concluded. Completion time for interviews ranged from 20 minutes to over 1 hour. Interviews were tape recorded with consent of the participant and transcribed for purposes of analysis.

Table 3.1

Data Collection Plan

Course Beginning	Midway	Course Conclusion	3 Months Post-Course
Demographic & Background Questionnaire – Youth	Qualitative Interviews – Youth	Final Survey - Youth	TDFPS-PAL Staff Surveys
Standardized Measures – Youth		Standardized Measures - Youth	

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data

 All quantitative data produced by standardized measures and closed-ended and scaled questions on youth questionnaires and staff surveys were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 11.5 for Windows. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze demographic data, questionnaire data and survey data. This study did not aim to make causal inferences on the effectiveness of the PAL training program. Rather, a comparison of mean scores on standardized measures was conducted using Paired-Samples T Tests for purposes of determining the statistical significance of observed changes. The study went beyond an analysis of statistical significance by also analyzing the data for substantive (or clinical) significance. Substantive significance, not calculated with a formula, was assessed through subjective value judgments made by the researcher, and referred to a findings' practical or theoretical value or meaningfulness. Substantively significant findings may increase understanding of the study constructs and variables, measures of those constructs, and related theories (Rubin and Babbie, 2001), or

may add to what is already known about independent living programming for foster care youth.

In addition, participants' scores on standardized measures were compared to aggregate data collected in other studies using the same measures. Specifically, participants' resilience scores were compared to available resilience data collected by the California Department of Education using the Resilience Youth Development Module. Participants' scores on the MOS Social Support Survey will be compared to social support data collected in the Northwest Study using the same survey, and ACLSA-IV scores were compared to downloadable national benchmark data for the ACLSA-IV available on the Casey Life Skills website.

Qualitative Data

Data from sixteen youth interviews were collected and transcribed over a ten-week period. Although coding was not done until all of the interviews were transcribed, interpretation of the data was an on-going process that began well before the interviews were conducted, with the identification of the case and interviewees. Photocopies of the original transcripts were made and electronic copies of each transcript were stored in the principal investigator's personal computer. Multiple readings of each complete transcript allowed for the development of several broad response categories. Creswell (1998) compared this process of categorical aggregation to open-coding in grounded theory, where the aim is to conduct open coding in order to get a general sense of the data without relying on a priori concepts or expectations. This first-level coding produced descriptive rather than interpretive codes which simply named and classified what was in

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the data (Huberman & Miles, 1994; in Fielding & Lee, 1998). These codes were recorded by hand in the left margin of each transcript.

Following the addition of descriptive codes, each transcript was reviewed several more times to begin the process of second-level coding. Huberman and Miles (1994) emphasized the explanatory status of pattern codes used in second-level coding, in that pattern codes lead to the emergence of themes, persons or processes, or configurations of events in the data. These interpretive codes were recorded by hand in the right margin of each transcript. Additionally, codes, sub-codes, brief code definitions were put into table format and excerpts from interviews that corresponded to each category cut and pasted into separate individual documents. After categories were identified and data were sorted by category, overarching themes began to emerge.

The researcher used triangulation by data source by conducting individual interviews and collecting data from standardized measures, questionnaires and surveys, and state case data. The researcher also created an audit trail of field notes, interview transcripts, memos and coding to enhance the rigor of the study. Peer debriefing was an additional strategy used by the researcher to enhance rigor and trustworthiness. In the peer debriefing process, a social work doctoral student peer read portions of the interview data, coding memos and emergent themes in order to see if codes and themes corresponded to interview data, in a sense "double coding" interview data. Thematic coding of interview transcripts was complete when "saturation" occurred, or when repetition and redundancy was seen, such that any new information confirmed the existing coding scheme and discrepant cases no longer appeared (Padgett, 1998, p. 79).

Rigor. Although rigor is a concern in both quantitative and qualitative studies, the way in which it is defined with each method of inquiry varies. In qualitative studies, rigor is the degree to which study findings are authentic and interpretations are credible (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Strategies used in quantitative studies to enhance rigor such as randomization and generalizability do not apply to qualitative inquiries. Although the impossibility of generalizing and difficulty of summarizing a "thick" description is considered a drawback by case study critics, case study researchers see this not as a problem but as a sign that the study has uncovered a particularly rich problem. The debate continues among case study critics and proponents on whether or not summaries and generalizations are desirable. Perhaps siding with proponents of this debate, Nietzsche (1974) said of doing science, "one should not wish to divest existence of its rich ambiguity" (pp. 335, §373).

Qualitative studies rely on the notion of trustworthiness. Steinmetz (1991) calls a trustworthy study one in that is conducted in a fair and ethical manner, with findings that represent the experiences of respondents as closely as possible. Just as there are threats to internal validity in quantitative studies, there are also threats to the credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative studies. These include reactivity, researcher bias, and respondent bias (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In this study, attempts were made to minimize threats to trustworthiness. Reactivity, or the potentially distorting effect of the researcher's presence in the field, was minimized by using unobtrusive rather than participant observation methods during PAL classes. The researcher limited class involvement to observation only. The threat of reactivity was further minimized by

triangulation, or gathering data on the same variables from multiple sources. In this case, multiple sources of data include interviews, observations, and standardized measures.

Researcher bias involves observing and interpreting through a lens clouded by preconceptions and opinion, whereas respondent bias involves being led astray by respondents either through withheld or socially desirable information (Padgett, 1998). Because the researcher is a key actor in the qualitative study, mechanisms that hold the researcher accountable for her use of subjectivity are necessary (Padgett, 1998). One way to do this is through the researcher's use of internal reflexivity. Biases of the researcher include contextual factors of being a White female, a former professional in a foster care agency, and personal beliefs that child's rights should be valued, that foster children and youth have different experiences than non-foster care children, and that children's voices should be heard. Researcher and respondent biases were further avoided by interviewing all participants rather than only those with views similar to the principal investigator, using a structured interview schedule without leading questions, and paying careful attention to all data, not just the data that supports the researcher's views. Triangulating observational data with data from other sources further minimized these threats to trustworthiness.

<center>Chapter Summary</center>

This chapter presented a description and rational for use of a qualitative case study research design. It presented a description of the sample and sampling procedures, the intervention conditions, and study variables. This chapter also included a description of the multiple sources of data in the study, including a background questionnaire,

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standardized measures of resilience, social support, and life skills, semi-structured

qualitative interviews, surveys of youth and PAL staff members, state case records, and

direct observation by the researcher. The chapter also described the data collection

timeline and data analysis plans. The next chapter presents a description of the youth and

staff samples, and of the program implementation, both descriptions of which are relevant

to answering the three research questions in the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

This chapter provides descriptions of the youth and staff samples, and PAL program implementation. The description of the youth sample includes a demographic profile of the following variables: age, gender, and ethnicity, number of placements in foster care, total length of time in foster care, level of care, biological family visitation, Circle of Support meetings, educational attainment, and adoption plans. The demographic profile is followed by a discussion of the negative effect of attrition on the youth sample. Next, the PAL staff sample is described. Although data on age, gender, and ethnicity were not collected per Institutional Review Board requirements, data on their educational backgrounds and professional experience are presented. Lastly, course implementation in both study sites is described. Findings on course implementation were primarily gleaned from direct observations made by the researcher that were recorded in the researcher's field notes, and from analysis of written curriculum in the form of course handouts that corresponded to each curriculum topic.

Youth Sample

Table 4.1 presents a demographic profile of the sample. Complete data were obtained on 16 of 21 individuals who consented to participate in the study. Five cases were excluded due to attrition. Demographic and background information were collected using a background questionnaire, administered during the first PAL class in each study site. The table shows that the sample was evenly split between males and females, and course sites were almost evenly split between males and females. Site 1 had nine youth

participants, 8 of whom were female and 1 of whom was male, whereas Site 2 had seven youth participants, all of whom were male. Seven members (43.8%) of the sample were Caucasian, five (31.3%) were Hispanic, three (18.7%) were African American, and one (6.2%) was of mixed ethnicity (Hispanic and African American). Eight participants were placed in residential treatment centers. Of these 8, 6 were placed in the same all-male therapeutic, residential facility, and 2 were both placed in another residential treatment center. Six participants lived in foster homes, 3 of whom were lived in the same home. One participant lived in a transitional living center, and one participant lived in a group home.

State designated levels of care are categorized as "Basic", "Moderate", "Specialized" and "Intense", based on type and amount of services needed. Youths assigned an "Intense" level of care are not admitted into the foster care system; therefore, this study was limited to "basic", "moderate" and "specialized" levels of care. In general, "basic" needs are those considered to be routine and non-therapeutic and applied in less restrictive environments. "Moderate" and "Specialized" needs are those requiring therapeutic services, such as individual and/or group therapy and psychotropic medication, to be applied in more restrictive settings. In the study sample, 3 youths were assigned a Basic level of care, 8 were assigned a Moderate level of care, and 5 were assigned a Specialized level of care. As one might expect, two of the three youth participants who were assigned a basic level of care lived in foster homes, and one lived in a transitional living center. These three also exercised more independence than others in the sample, by doing things such as working, driving, or riding city buses to and from

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school and PAL classes.

Among sample participants, the average length of time spent in foster care was 4 years and 8 months, with a range of less than one year to more than ten years. Six participants had been in foster care between 4 and 6 years, five had been in foster care between 1 and 3 years, two had lived in foster care for less than 1 year, and 1 participant had been in foster care for more than 10 years. The average number of placements that youth participants had experienced during their tenures in foster care was 10 placements. The median number of placements was 8, and ranged from 1 placement to more than 20 placements. Three of 16 had experienced between 1 and 3 placements, six had experienced anywhere from 5 to 9 placements, four had experienced between 10 and 14 placements, two experienced between 15 and 19 placements, and one participant been in a total of 37 placements during her time in foster care. These numbers are comparable to numbers seen at the state level. In the state of Texas, the average length of time that youths spend in foster care is 5 years, and the average number of placements youths experience while in foster care is 7.9 (TDFPS website, 2007).

All but two of the sixteen study participants visited with one or more biological family members. Table 4.1 shows that the majority of the sample (n=9; 56.3%) currently had sibling visits that varied in frequency. Five participants (31.2%) visited their biological mothers, and the same number (n=5; 31.2%) visited aunts, uncles, and cousins. Three participants (18.8%) visited their biological grandparents, and only 1 participant (6.3%) visited with a biological father. In terms of frequency of visitation with biological family members, five participants (31.2%) visited biological family members on a

weekly basis, and an equal number of participants (n=5, 31.2) visited with biological family members on a monthly basis. Three participants (18.8%) visited with biological family members on a yearly basis, and one participant (6.3%) visited with biological family members on a daily basis.

Circle of Support meetings are a transitional service offered to youths prior to aging out of foster care. The meetings are based on the Family Group Conference model and bring together a "safety network" of individuals, for one or several meetings, to provide the youth support throughout his or her process of transitioning out of foster care. The meetings are supposed to be held as soon as possible after each youth's 16th birthday in order to establish and implement a transition plan. Among study participants, only two of sixteen (12.5%) had experienced a single Circle of Support meeting. Of those who had a Circle of Support meeting, one participant was 17 years old, and in the 12th grade. The youth's COS meeting was attended by a state caseworker, a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) worker, a PAL Coordinator, and family members. The other youth was 16 years old, and in the 10th grade. The youth's COS meeting was attended by a state caseworker, a CASA worker, and a PAL Coordinator. None of the remaining 14 participants participated in a Circle of Support meeting. The reasons why 14 participants had not yet participated in a COS meeting were unknown to the researcher.

Only 1 of 16 participants was employed at the time of the study. This participant had been in foster care for 3 years, resided in a foster home with no other foster children, was designated a Basic level of care, and had a car to drive herself to and from work, school, and PAL classes.

Table 4.1

Demographic Profile of the Youth Sample (N=16)

		Number	%
Age	15 years	3	18.8
	16 years	5	31.2
	17 years	8	50.0
Sex	Male	8	50.0
	Female	8	50.0
Race	Caucasian	7	43.8
	Hispanic	5	31.2
	African American	3	18.8
	Mixed Race (Hispanic / African American)	1	6.2
Current Living Situation	Residential Facility	8	50.0
	Foster Home	6	37.5
	Group Home	1	6.2
	Transitional Living Center	1	6.2
Level of Care	Basic	3	18.8
	Moderate	8	50.0
	Specialized	5	31.2
Number of Placements in Foster Care	1 – 4	3	18.8
	5 – 9	6	37.5
	10 – 14	4	25.0
	15 – 19	2	12.5
	20 +	1 (37)	6.2
Total time in Foster Care	> 1 year	2	12.5
	1 – 3 years	5	31.2
	4 – 6 years	6	37.5
	7 – 9 years	0	0
	10 + years	3	18.8
*Bio Family Members Visited	None	2	12.5
	Mother	5	31.2
	Father	1	6.3
	Siblings	9	56.3
	Grandparents	3	18.8
	Aunts, Uncles, Cousins	5	31.2
Frequency of Visits	Never	2	12.5
	Daily	1	6.3
	Weekly	5	31.2
	Monthly	5	31.2
	Yearly	3	18.8
Currently Employed	Yes	1	6.2
	No	15	93.8

*Participants asked to check all that apply, therefore, number may not add to 100%

The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 states that independent living activities should not be seen as an alternative to adoption for children, and the Act authorizes additional funds for adoption incentive payments to states that increase the number of children adopted from foster care (P.L. 106-169, 1999, Title I, Subtitle D., Sec. 131). Given the Act's attention to state adoption practices, four questions related to adoption were included in the background questionnaire completed by participants. Table 4.2 shows that 2 participants (12.5%) had ever been adopted. None of the participants reported to currently be in a placement in which the plan for them was adoption by their foster parents. One participant (6.3%) reported to have been in a placement, in the past, in which the foster parents planned to adopt the participant. Of the 16 youth participants, five (31.2%) wished that they had been adopted.

Table 4.2

Adoption Plans (N=16)

Adoption Questions As Asked	Number of Affirmative Responses	%
Have you ever been adopted?	2	12.5
Are you now in a foster placement where the plan of your social worker or your foster parents is that you will be adopted by the family that you are living with?	0	0
Have you ever, in the past, been in a foster placement where the plan of your social worker or your foster parents was that you would be adopted by that family	1	6.3
Ever Wish You Were Adopted	5	31.2

Education

Table 4.3 presents educational information on the sixteen sample participants obtained from background questionnaires. Of the 16 participants, 2 had completed the 8th grade, 5 had completed the 9th grade, 7 had completed the 10th grade, and 2 had completed the 11th grade. Fifty percent (n=8) reported to have been placed in special education any point in their schooling, while 37.5 percent (n=6) had not, and 12.5 percent (n=2) did not know if they had ever been placed in special education.

Children in foster care often experience changes in schools due to moves in foster care. In the background questionnaire, participants were asked to recall how many times they changed schools as a result of changing foster care placements. Of 16 participants who responded to this question, 1 participant never changed schools due to a change in foster care placements, 2 participants changed schools twice, 3 participants changed schools three times, 2 participants changed schools four times, and 5 participants changed schools five or more times. Three participants responded that they did not know how many school changes they experienced due to moves in foster care.

Participants were asked to recall whether they had ever repeated a grade, whether they had ever been suspended, or whether they had ever been expelled. Nine of 16 participants (56.3%) had repeated a grade in school, 12 of 16 (75%) had received an out-of-school suspension, and 5 of 16 (31.2%) had been expelled from school. Respondents were also asked to recall their final grades in English, Math, Science, and History from the previous school year. In all four subjects, the average grade among participants was "B".

Table 4.3

Education (N=16)

		Number	%
Highest grade completed	8th grade	2	12.5
	9th grade	5	31.2
	10th grade	7	43.8
	11th grade	2	12.5
Ever placed in special education	Yes	8	50.0
	No	6	37.5
	Don't Know	2	12.5
# of School Changes due to Foster Care	0	1	6.3
	1	0	0
	2	2	12.5
	3	3	18.8
	4	2	12.5
	5+	5	31.3
	Don't Know	3	18.8
School Experiences	Repeated a grade	9	56.3
	Out-of-school suspension	12	75.0
	Expelled	5	31.3

Sample Attrition

The contract agency aimed to enroll a minimum of 15 participants in each PAL class, therefore the expected sample size for the study, including both course sites, was approximately 30 to 35. There were 19 individuals referred to Site 1, and 15 individuals referred to Site 2. Of the 15 referred to the Site 2, 12 resided at the residential facility where this site's PAL classes were held. Of the 19 referred to the Site 1, 12 youths attended the first class and consented to participate in the study. Of the 15 referred to the site 2, 11 attended the first class and 9 of those consented to participate in the study. The total number of youths who consented to participate in the study was 21, which was well under the expected minimum sample size of 30.

By the time the PAL classes concluded and data collection ended, five youths who consented to participate in the study were lost through attrition, decreasing the sample size from 21 to 16. Three left the Site 1 training course, and two left the Site 2 training course. In Site 1, two young women who attended the first class, a 17-year-old and an 18-year-old, both African American and seven months pregnant, did not return for any subsequent class sessions. A third participant, a 17-year-old Caucasian female living in a residential treatment center, stopped attending after the third class session. Communication around these youths' departures was minimal at best. When the two young women who were pregnant stopped attending after the first class, the PAL trainer attempted to contact their caregiver, who indicated that a transportation problem had kept them from attending the second class and that future attendance should not be a problem. The trainer was unsuccessful in reaching them or their caregiver in subsequent contact attempts. The third individual who stopped attending after three weeks did so because of a court ruling which reunified her with her biological grandparents. The PAL Trainer called to inquire about the individual's absence and was informed of the reunification.

In Site 2, two young men, both 16 years old, one Hispanic and one Caucasian, stopped attending in the third and fourth weeks of classes because they moved to other foster care placements. In both instances of the boys leaving, the trainer and researcher were given no information about their departures. Both were absent from class, and when the trainer asked where they were, the other residents who lived with the two boys said they moved to new placements but did not why or where.

PAL Staff Sample

The state of Texas is divided into five districts, within which are eleven regions. Regions encompass several counties, which may be predominantly urban, predominantly rural, or equally urban or rural. Each region is typically assigned one to two PAL staff to cover all of the youth cases for that region. Survey respondents were asked the general population density of their regions. Three PAL staff members responded that they work in a predominantly urban area, two members work in a predominantly rural area, and four members work in an area that is equally urban and rural.

Of nine respondents, 4 had Master of Social Work degrees, 1 had a Bachelor of Social Work degree, 3 had a Bachelor's degree in a related field (Family and Consumer Science, Behavioral Science), and 1 had a Bachelor's degree but did not specify a field of study. The average length of time survey respondents had been in their current positions is 4 years and 3 months. Three survey respondents had previously worked for Child Protective Services for an average of 8 years. At the request of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services demographic information (age, gender, and ethnicity) was not asked of PAL staff survey respondents.

Course Implementation: Pre-Course Planning

As previously described, the agency contracted to provide life skills classes conducted PAL classes in various areas according to the number of referrals received in each area. Just short of one week before classes began, the researcher was informed that course plans had changed in order to accommodate a number of referrals received from one residential facility in the area served by the contract agency. Typically, youths living

in foster or group home placements are referred to the contract agency, and the contract agency assigns them to the next available course that is closest to their residence. In this case, one or two youths living in a residential facility had been referred to the contract agency for PAL classes by their respective PAL Coordinators. Rather than referring these youths to PAL training programs held in other locations in the region, the contract agency agreed to teach a PAL class on the grounds of the residential facility, since several residents had been referred for PAL classes. The contract agency realized that group dynamics might be different than other PAL training programs which are typically made up of males and females from many different substitute care placements. The residents of this facility who were referred to the PAL classes in Site 2 were all male, and knew each other quite well.

Prior to the classes beginning, the researcher met with the contract agency PAL trainer who conducted classes in both study sites. Study procedures and class logistics were discussed. A schedule was outlined for the entirety of both courses, with time set aside in the first and final sessions for administration of study measures. The trainer also agreed to the researcher attending all classes in both sites, observing in a non-participatory and unobtrusive manner, and recording observations in handwritten field notes.

<center>Course Implementation: Informed Consent</center>

Once a list of referrals for each study site was obtained and with permission from the TDFPS legal counsel, the PAL Coordinator Supervisor was contacted to sign youth consents. In addition, electronic mail notices were sent to all of the youths' caseworkers,

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notifying them that a youth or youths on their caseloads had the opportunity to participate in an upcoming research study if the youth wished. The email contained a brief description of the study, what each youth would be asked to do if he/she chose to participate, possible risks and benefits, compensation for participation, and the protection of data and confidentiality. Caseworkers were given several forms of contact information and were asked to contact the researcher with any general or specific concerns, questions, or comments they had. None of the caseworkers contacted the researcher in response to this notice.

<center>Course Implementation: Site Descriptions</center>

The Site 1 PAL training program classes were held at the contract agency offices in a large city in Texas. Site 2 program classes were taught in the school building on the grounds of an all-male residential facility located in a small Texas town approximately one hour away from the city in which Site 1 was located. Classes in both study sites ran concurrently for seven weeks, beginning in mid-September 2006 and concluding at the end of October 2006. Course topics were taught in the same order in both study sites. The researcher directly observed all class topics taught in both study sites, and recorded in extensive field notes the following observational data on each class topic, and on youth study participants. Although the written curriculum and order of class topics were the same in both study sites, participants as a group had different responses to some of the course material; therefore, distinctions were made between the two sites in the following analysis regarding participant response.

Class 1:

Introduction / Legal Awareness

Prior to any discussion of legal awareness, introductions, orientation, and administration of the contract agency Pretest/Posttest took place in both study sites. This pretest/posttest was not part of this study. Rather, it was an internal agency document used by the contract agency to assess program effectiveness. The PAL Trainer reviewed the class schedule and gave a brief description of each class topic and the final field trip, informing youths that all classes except for the class on money management may be made up due to absences. Participants were excited to learn they would earn $5.00 for each class they attend. Youths were provided a folder with the schedule of future classes and were allowed to keep these folders to store information packets and readings for each class topic. Class rules were reviewed: be present, be prompt, and participate. If a restroom break was needed, youths were allowed, one at a time, to go to the restroom without asking for permission. Youths were not allowed to use cell phones or other communication and music devices during class time.

After a brief introduction to the course, a PAL Coordinator gave a presentation on PAL program benefits. The Coordinator informed the youths that their participation and completion of the PAL course would earn them $1000.00 when they were discharged from foster care, to be used for household and other items needed to live independently. The Coordinator also explained the Education and Training Voucher, the tuition and fee waiver, aftercare room and board, and Circle of Support meetings. Because there were several types of benefits, participants were challenged to remember the benefits that were

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paid in advance and those that were paid through reimbursement. It was unclear if some participants knew the meaning of certain words that were used repeatedly (but not defined) in the discussion of PAL benefits, such as "waiver", "tuition", and "reimbursement". Youth participants appeared to be listening and asked several questions related to PAL benefits. Related to the tuition and fee waiver, which youths are eligible to access if they have passed 1 college course, one participant asked, "how are y'all gonna know if we pass a class?". The Coordinator explained that staff would be able to verify completed coursework through students' academic transcripts.

Another participant asked if youths are eligible for benefits if they have a baby, or if they get adopted, and the Coordinator said that they were. At the end of the Coordinator's presentation, youths were quizzed on various benefits and correct answers were rewarded with a choice of gifts, such as alarm clocks, kitchen gadgets, picture frames, and t-shirts. Information was presented fairly rapidly, and some participants appeared to be confused by the various benefits and services. During the quiz, when the Coordinator asked a question about a particular PAL benefit, one male participant replied, "Homeless". After the presentation on PAL benefits, the researcher explained the present study, gained informed consent for students who wished to participate, and administered the background questionnaire and three standardized measures.

Written curriculum

For the topic of legal awareness, students were given a booklet entitled "Now You Are 18" with two related fill-in-the-blank handouts. The 24-page booklet covered: voting, jury duty, driving, drinking laws, criminal charges, contracts, credit, consumer protection,

marriage, divorce and children, apartments, employment, and military service.

Activities

There were two activities conducted and one video shown for the topic of legal awareness. The first was based on the "Now you are 18" booklet. Participants were put into groups of two or three and asked to use the booklet to complete a handout. The first section was made up of 6 fill-in-the-blank statements, such as "At age ___, your parents are no longer required to support you or be liable for any accidents you cause". The written curriculum was not modified to address how the answer to this statement may be different for youth in foster care, who are in temporary or permanent custody of the state. The second section of the handout was made up of 6 true or false statements, followed by 8 multiple choice statements, and 15 terms to be matched with the appropriate definition. The pair or group with the fewest wrong answers were given a small prize. The second activity was entitled "A visitor from outer space". The premise of this activity was that space aliens had taken over Earth, and citizens were told they would have to give up most of their rights. Participants were asked to rank order 10 rights in the order that they would give them up. The class concluded with a short educational video with actors depicting teenagers violating others' rights and having their rights violated.

Participant Response

All participants knew the age at which a person becomes an adult, and the age at which they have the right to vote. They also knew that for some crimes, juveniles may be tried as adults. None of the Site 2 participants guessed the correct places to register to vote, but participants appeared to be engaged, as evidenced by their questions: "How

long does a voter registration last?" and "Can you register to vote on the internet?" About half of the Site 1 group knew where to register to vote, and only one student in the the group knew some of the specifics about serving on a jury. One study participant in Site 1had a driver's license, and one participant in Site 2 had a driver's permit. The participant with a driver's license also had a car and drove to and from PAL classes each week. Several students voiced frustration that the reason they could not drive or obtain a driver's license was because of foster care rules or foster parents not wanting to list their foster children on their automobile insurance.

Regarding drinking laws, 10 of 16 participants knew that the legal limit for intoxication in Texas was a blood alcohol concentration of .08. Regarding criminal charges, all students knew of their right to "not talk until your lawyer is there". To illustrate what contracts were, the trainer used the example of cell phone contracts, which appeared to be an appropriate example to use, as some of the students had their own cell phones or had seen a cell phone contract.

Overall, Site 2 study participants seemed more challenged by the legal awareness material than did the Site 1 group. Participants in the Site 1 group more frequently answered questions correctly without having to look them up, whereas participants in the Site 2 group were much more reticent to volunteer to read and answer questions aloud. While the Site 1 participants engaged in a lively debate over which rights were most important, the Site 2 group did not, as they seemed to have a poor grasp of what each of the rights meant. One question in the handout asked the age at which youths' parents are no longer required to support their children or be liable for accidents they cause. The

researcher suspected that this question may prompt a discussion or mention of the issues of termination of parental rights, an action often associated with long-term foster care placement of youth. In fact, none of the participants made any mention of their biological parents' rights or the rights of foster parents or substitute caregivers.

Noteworthy during this first PAL class was the clear familiarity among the male participants in the Site 2, held on the grounds of the residential facility. All but one knew each other and some had resided in the same placement for nearly one year. Site 2 participants who were residents at the facility were quick to partner with each other in group activities and frequently called out the correct word when a volunteer reader made a mistake. Although the boys seemed protective of each other, they also engaged in quite a bit of teasing and playfulness, which necessitated the need for classroom behavior management on the part of the trainer. Participants in Site 1 were not as immediately interactive. The two groups of girls in Site 1 who lived in the same foster and residential placements sat together and talked mostly to each other, but overall the students were fairly tentative and observant during the first class.

<div align="center">Class 2:</div>

<div align="center">Housing & Transportation</div>

Written curriculum

For the topic of housing, students were provided two packets of information totaling approximately 75 pages. The first packet covered the following topics related to housing: types of rental housing, things to remember when looking for your first apartment, questions to ask before you rent, things to know before signing a lease, things

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to consider when choosing a roommate, budgeting for household bills, and conserving energy. The second packet on housing covered landlord responsibilities, tenant rights, and more on choosing a roommate. The packets contained very detailed information with clearly defined terms and language that seemed to be consistent with a 10th or 11th grade reading level. Half of each packet was devoted to explanation and definition, while the latter half of each packet contained various worksheets and exercises for application of concepts and terms related to housing topics. Also included were sample lease agreements, sample apartment rental ads, a sample move in / move out form, a sample electricity bill, and a sample written contract between roommates. The packet of materials on transportation contained twenty pages of information and activities on: city, bus, and subway transportation, car purchases, formula for financing a car, costs of owning a car, and car insurance. Like the materials on housing, the materials on transportation were thorough, clearly explained, and included several practical exercises related to each topic.

Activities

There were several activities for these topics, some of which were part of the information packet and some of which were developed by the trainer. The first activity was learning and using common abbreviations in housing ads. Participants were provided a list of abbreviations and asked to interpret several apartment rental advertisements. Next, participants were given apartment guides that are available for free in local businesses. They were instructed to use these guides to find apartments to live in that met conditions of three hypothetical scenarios. When they located each apartment, they listed

the name of the apartment complex, the cost of rent, examples of amenities offered, any utilities included, and the telephone number for more information. First, they were to find a two-bedroom apartment no more than $700 per month ($350 per person) to share with a roommate. Second, they had to find a one-bedroom apartment that they would live in alone, since their roommate joined the Peace Corps. In the last scenario, participants were declared lottery winners and were asked to find the apartment of dreams. Participants also completed a budget for one-month of apartment living.

This was a group activity, with the trainer guiding students through the process of budgeting to cover a long list of monthly expenses, including rent, phone, electric, cable, transportation, food, clothing, spending money, etc. During the discussion of tenant rights, students worked in groups of 3 to 4 to create a list of rules for that they would enforce if they were landlords of an apartment complex. Lastly, students discussed the option of living with roommates. Each was asked to rank order a list of qualities and personality types that were most important in a roommate, and to write a "roommate wanted" advertisement including the qualities ranked most important and using the abbreviations common to advertisements.

For the topic of transportation, copies of Auto Trader magazine were handed out and students were instructed to find a car for under a certain dollar amount. The trainer walked the groups through car financing, demonstrating that a small loan for a relatively inexpensive car can end up being more expensive than one might think. As a class, participants worked together to tally the potential monthly cost of owning a car.

Participant Response

In contrast to the legal awareness activities, participants appeared to enjoy the activities related to housing and transportation. Overall, groups in both sites seemed to have a better grasp of most of the material in week 2, with the exception of car financing, which was difficult for all but one or two in the Site 1 group. Although the same two students in the Site 2 group volunteered to read and answered questions aloud, all students paid close attention, diligently completed the worksheets, and readily engaged in the classroom activities. Even though only one week had passed, the Site 1 group was much more interactive and talkative by the second week of program classes. They had all learned each other's names and spent free time asking each other questions such as where they went to school, what grade they were in, whether they went to the football game, etc.

The housing activities, particularly choosing apartments from the local apartment guide, proved great fun for all. One Site 2 participant exclaimed "my apartment comes with two sparkling pools!" Most voiced a strong preference to live alone but realized after completing the budget for monthly expenses that a roommate would probably be necessary. One participant shared that for her entire time in foster care, she shared a bedroom with at least one roommate, and looked forward to not having to share space anymore. In fact, only two participants, both of whom lived in small foster homes with one or no other children, reported having a bedroom to themselves. Another participant voiced confusion over what housing expenses are and are not paid through PAL benefits.

The activity in which groups were tasked with developing tenant rules, particularly for the participants who were residential treatment center residents, perhaps

revealed an effect of their living in more restrictive or institutional settings. Some of the rules developed by the small groups were not similar to typical apartment complex rules. One group listed the following rules for tenants in their hypothetical apartment complex: No pets, no kids, no throwing clothes in the yard, no smoking, no drugs or weapons, come home by curfew, and chemicals must be locked up. This last rule is a common regulation for licensed foster homes and residential treatment centers in Texas. Five girls in the Site 1 group came up with the following rules: no tattoos, no suicide attempts, no self-piercings, and keep room clean at all times.

<p align="center">Class 3:</p>

<p align="center">Interpersonal Skills / First Aid & Nutrition</p>

Written curriculum

Just as in previous weeks, a packet of information, examples, and worksheets was provided to participants. The packet contained information on the following topics: communication skills, communication styles (passive, assertive, and aggressive), social skills, solving conflicts, self-confidence and self esteem, and relationship dynamics. Another packet covered basic first aid, nutritional information, and good eating habits.

Activities

The first activity was intended to prompt participants to practice verbal communication skills. Participants were grouped in dyads and given a piece of paper with a maze on it. One member of each dyad was blindfolded and his/her partner had to communicate instructions so that the blindfolded partner could complete the maze. For the first aid section of the class, small groups were given a scenario of a medical

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emergency. Groups were tasked with deciding which first aid treatment was most appropriate for their scenario, and asked to describe in front of the class their scenario and choice of first aid techniques. A video on dating relationships was shown and students answered related questions about healthy versus unhealthy relationships, dating violence, aggression and low self-esteem. Lastly, students watched about three-quarters of the movie "Supersize Me", a movie about the negative health effects of fast-food, and followed along with a fill-in-the-blank worksheet with questions from the movie.

Participant Response

Although male participants participated and paid attention, the female participants were much more engaged in discussions and activities related to interpersonal skills. Females were quick to come up with several qualities that characterize healthy relationships: honesty, trust, friendship, humor, loyalty. When one female participant volunteered that a relationship is "when two people get along", another female participant replied that "it can't be that because some relationships are negative. A relationship is interaction between two people".

In response to the relationship dynamics video, one female explained that the boy in the video "was violent because he was modeling what he saw from his Dad". Although the participants who made up the all-male group (Site 2) participated and completed assigned tasks, they appeared to be uncomfortable with the researcher's presence in the room. The three participants who sat in closest proximity to the researcher looked at the researcher at least four to five times while the trainer discussed the violent relationship between a teen girl and boy depicted in the video. When the trainer presented

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different dating scenarios in which one member of the couple pressure the other to have sex, the same three boys laughed and repeatedly looked at the researcher as if to gauge her response. One participant said to the researcher, "Girls can take care of themselves, right!"

In studying various communication skills, such as "using 'listening' body language", "providing encouragement", "tell back / paraphrase", some male and female participants commented that this is not how they talk and behave. Males were more participatory in discussions and activities on health and nutrition, and were very animated in their descriptions of first aid techniques for various medical emergencies. All of the participants enjoyed watching the movie "Supersize Me" and many commented that it made them hungry for McDonald's.

<div align="center">Class 4:</div>

<div align="center">HIV Awareness & Sexual Responsibility / Substance Abuse & Stress Management</div>

Written curriculum

The course packets on the both of these topics were very thorough and detailed. The packet covered a variety of topics related to sexual responsibility and HIV awareness, including: going to a clinic, pregnancy prevention, choosing the right birth control, buying condoms, testing your sex IQ, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV and AIDS, and community resources. There were guest speakers for each of the class topics. One guest speaker was from a local women's clinic and the other was from a local alcohol and drug council.

Activities

Because there were guest speakers for both class topics, activities were fewer than in previous classes. A video on "drug IQ" was shown, and an activity called "Downward Slide" demonstrated the stages of experimentation, use, preoccupation, dependency, and addiction. During the brief lecture on stress management, the trainer demonstrated the impact of handling multiple stressors by asking for a volunteer and tossing writing pens to the volunteer, slowly at first then increasing in speed and number.

Participant Response

For the topic of sexual responsibility, the researcher made the decision not to observe at the PAL course site whose participants were all male (Site 2). Based on the male participants' behavior toward the researcher during the previous session on "relationship and dating violence" the researcher believed that her presence in the classroom would not be unobtrusive and may, in fact, change the way participants responded or reacted to the material.

In the study site that was observed, eight female participants and one male participant were present. The guest speaker made clear that the presentation would focus on abstinence as the best way not to get a sexually transmitted disease. One participant questioned the "abstinence only", and asked why "sex before marriage" is necessarily wrong. She stated that this may or may not be her personal belief, as she was attempting to play "devil's advocate". The guest speaker acknowledged that there are many approaches to thinking about these issues, but that the agency she represented taught an abstinence curriculum. In a discussion on providing condoms to teens, the speaker added

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that she never understood the "they're going to do it anyway" argument, and compared giving teens condoms to helping teens drink and drive by providing them alcohol.

Although participants laughed when the trainer or speaker used certain terminology, they paid close attention and actively participated in discussion and activities. They were clearly interested in the discussion, with one participant bringing up the role of religion and another commenting on the issue of population control. Their high level of engagement led the researcher to wonder whether they would be equally engaged if more male participants had been present. The one male participant in the group appeared uncomfortable among all females and declined to read aloud some material that described male and female body parts and how women become pregnant, and said "Aw, man" several times when he was embarrassed by something the guest speaker said.

All participants were engaged in the presentation on substance abuse. One boy admitted to using cocaine and marijuana, and another said that he used inhalants when he lived with his biological parents. When the conversation turned to negative influence and choice to take drugs or not, one student asked, "what about when I go home to my family?" The trainer replied that one always has a choice but did not discuss individual participant's drug use or family histories of substance abuse that are common to children in foster care.

Class 5:

Money Management

Written curriculum

The class on money management was required for completion of the PAL training. While absences in other classes may be made up, absences in money management classes could not. Participants were provided three packets of paperwork totaling over 80 pages. The first packet focused on budgeting, with several pages devoted to spending habits. Remaining pages covered planned versus unplanned expenses, necessary versus other (optional) expenses, understanding your wages (paycheck information), and income taxes. Samples of pay stubs, a W-4 tax form and an income tax return were also included. The other two packets contained samples and explanations of the basics of banking, from opening a checking and/or savings account, making deposits, writing and endorsing checks, keeping a check register, reading a bank statement, obtaining a loan, and buying on credit.

Activities

The first activity was coming up with a basic spending plan. Students were assigned hypothetical jobs paying different hourly wages. From the hourly wages they were assigned, they figured their total monthly income and were tasked with finding a way to pay their necessary and optional expenses. The dollar amount spent on each expense of the necessary and other expenses was totaled and subtracted from the monthly income to determine the amount remaining for spending money. Participants also practiced writing checks, endorsing checks, filling out a check register, and filling out an

income tax form. Lastly, they were shown a video that was a fictional account of two young adults mismanaging their money by gambling and accumulating large credit card debt.

Participant Response

For the majority of participants, this class was most difficult of all. Only one female participant appeared to have a strong understanding of money management concepts. This participant was the only participant in the sample who currently had a part-time job. She said that her foster mother made her complete a budget with money earned on the job, and that in the process of budgeting she figured out that she "spent $40 a month on Dr. Pepper". This same participant completed all budget, banking, and tax activities without difficulty and required no help from the trainer.

Activities were initially introduced as solo activities, but when several voiced confusion and asked for help, the activity turned into a group exercise with the trainer leading them through the various steps. When the trainer asked the meaning of "endorse", half of the participants did not know the answer. The majority had never written a check or kept a check register but were able to follow along, and all but one appeared lost during the discussion on income taxes. Participants struggled most with activities involving mathematics, and although though they were provided calculators, they often didn't understand what they were supposed to be calculating. Those who struggled most required several redirections from the trainer to pay attention, but those who were able to follow along with help from the trainer were able to complete the activities and seemed to enjoy them. One participant said jokingly of the job assigned to her in the hypothetical

scenario, "I'm an office receptionist – I quit!"

As had been observed by the researcher in previous classes, participants grew tired and had difficulty paying attention toward the end of every class session. Some participants drew, some talked to each other while the trainer was speaking, and others lay their heads on their desks. Participants routinely complained that the classes were too long about an hour before each class concluded, participants struggled to stay awake and engaged.

<div align="center">Class 6:</div>

<div align="center">Job Skills</div>

Written curriculum

As in all previous classes, packets of information were distributed to students. The packet included the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI) personality inventory, filling out job applications, finding jobs, preparing for an interview, networking, and creating a résumé. Sample résumés and sample job applications were included.

Activities

The session on job skills began with the administration of the MBTI, which was intended to give students an idea of what kinds of jobs best match their personality preferences. The MBTI classifies an individual's preferences along four dichotomies: extroversion/introversion, sensing/intuition, thinking/feeling, and judging/perceiving. The result is one of 16 four-letter combination, such as ISFP, indicating the individual's preferences. Other activities included filling out a job application and viewing a video showing examples good and bad job interviews.

Participant Response

Although participants seemed to enjoy learning about themselves through the MBTI, they may not have fully connected the usefulness of this information in terms of employment. In fact, one participant asked, "what does this have to do with jobs?" Another participant claimed she had completed this inventory before because she was taking a psychology class in high school. In reference to choosing one preference over the other, she said, "I'm both. I'm a perfect mixture". The trainer encouraged participants to "dream big" but at the same time "be sure to know exactly what it takes to accomplish that dream". When asked what they wanted to "be" someday, the following jobs/careers were stated: principal, computer technician, writer, cosmetologist, personal trainer, emergency medical technician, doctor, and actress. Participants were able to name several resources for finding jobs, and the trainer added to their list "temp agencies, schools, and unions".

In general, the female participants tended to appear much more informed about seeking employment. They were able to fill out job applications without any difficulty, one participant was currently working, and two others reportedly had held temporary jobs during the summer. Even those who had not worked had friends or knew someone who did, and they learned much of this session's information by watching and interacting with others.

Field Trips

The last PAL class was a field trip which included a campus tour of a local community college, a money management activity at a large grocery store, a housing

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activity at a large apartment complex, and for the Site 2 group only, a brief talk from a military recruiter. Following the field trip, groups returned to the classroom to complete the contract agency posttest and final measures for this study. The day concluded with a graduation ceremony, in which cake and punch were served, and students were presented with certificates of successful completion of the PAL training program. TDFPS caseworkers, caregivers and foster parents were invited to attend, and participants in Site 1 were given autographs booklets to exchange goodbyes and contact information with their fellow students. These were not distributed among the Site 2 group since all but one of the participants lived at the residential facility where the Site 2 group was taught.

Site 1 Field Trip

All participants except the one male participant in the Site 1 group attended the field trip. Participants arrived on time and at least two of the girls mentioned dressing up for the field trip in case they encountered "cute boys". The PAL trainer arranged for the Site 1 group to tour a large branch of a local community college. This branch of the community college more closely resembled a college campus than some of the other branches, with several buildings built in similar architectural style and landscaped grounds. The group toured the library, which was open, and the recreation center, also open and in use. Since the field trip took place on a Saturday, the only class found to be in session was a mechanics class, and the instructor and students graciously stopped class and spent 5 to 10 minutes talking to the group and answering questions. The group also toured the auto mechanics shop (in use), and the student services building. In the student services building, brochures and pamphlets of class descriptions and various majors were

available, and several of the girls took at least one of these. Two participants expressed wanting to tour a university rather than a community college campus. A presentation from a military recruiter was not arranged for this group.

Following lunch, participants visited a youth resource center, and participated in a grocery store and housing activity. Female participants seemed to have an easier time with the money management activity in the grocery store, as they completed the activity quickly and spent the remainder of their activity time browsing the aisles of the store. They also appeared a bit more skilled in the housing activity as well. Whereas some participants in the Site 2 group asked several questions two to three times, participants in the Site 1 group paid close attention and repeated a question or two only once.

Returning to the classroom at the contract agency, participants completed the agency posttest and the final measures for this study. By the time refreshments were served, three adults arrived to attend the graduation ceremony. One participant's foster mother attended, another participant's CASA worker attended, and a shelter staff member attended for the participant who was moved from a residential treatment center to a shelter during the course of the PAL program. Certificates were presented and participants spent the last portion of class signing each other's autograph books. Several girls hugged and promised to keep in touch with each other.

Site 2 Field Trip

On the Saturday morning following the last classroom session, the PAL trainer and researcher met at the school house on grounds of the residential facility at 9:00am. The boys who lived on grounds arrived promptly to the meeting point, accompanied by a

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facility staff member. Several of the boys each had a tube of toothpaste and their toothbrushes. When one of the other participants, who lived in a foster home, asked why they had these items with them, one of them replied that they might need these items during the day. The group traveled together in a 15-passenger van owned by the contract agency. Although the observation would be much less unobtrusive than was possible in the classroom, the researcher made the decision to ride in the van with the group, rather than drive separately, in order to observe interactions among the group and participants' responses to each activity of the field trip.

The first stop on the field trip was at a branch of the local community college located on the outskirts of the city in the direction of the residential facility. This branch was smaller than other branches, and housed entirely in one tall, several-story building. The group was met by a campus tour guide, who immediately apologized that much of the school was closed because it was the weekend. He spent 10 to 15 minutes talking to the group about the college itself and about majors and classes available at this and other branches. Participants listened intently, answered "yes, sir" and "no, sir", and asked questions related to specific classes available in their areas of interest. The tour guide led the group to the student services room, which was closed, so told the group what they would see if the room was open. The group was then led upstairs to see classrooms, the library, and the commons area. Again, classrooms and the library were closed, and group members looked through small windows on the doors to see what the inside of these rooms looked like. The commons area was a large room with tables, chairs, vending machines, and a small café. The room was lined on two sides with large windows that

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looked out of the edge of the city. The room was unlocked, so the group was able to go in, but the lights were off, the vending machines were closed off from use, and the café was closed. As the group was taken from floor to floor, most lights were off. Three of the participants hid in dark corners and pretended to shoot each other when one rounded the corner.

When the campus tour was complete, the trainer had arranged for a military recruiter to meet the group in the campus lobby to talk briefly to the group about a military career. The recruiter talked informally to the group for 5 to 10 minutes and talked about the educational benefit of being in the military. Participants paid attention and were polite, but did not appear to be significantly interested in what the recruiter had to say. Next, the group visited the resource center housed within the contract agency premises. The center is designed to be a "one-stop", free, service center for youth currently in foster care and for those who have aged out of foster care. The center offers a full range of services, including computer access, voice mail and mailbox access, support meetings, and educational classes. The staff explained to participants that several centers such as this one operate in other locations in Texas, and gave them instructions for contacting any of these centers. Participants were very attentive and appeared interested in the services available.

After lunch, the group traveled to a large, nearby grocery store for an activity on money management. Once in the store, boys were allowed to separate into pairs and walk the aisles to do price and product comparisons and record their findings on a worksheet. They had approximately 20 minutes to complete the activity. Participants stayed in the

store at all times, as the trainer requested, and all actively participated in the activity. Two pairs were observed helping each other, as one pair located a certain product on the list and told the other pair where to find this item.

The last activity before returning to the school house was a visit to a large apartment complex. The leasing agent was prepared for the group's arrival and invited the group to sit in the large lobby area of the main office. Participants were given a one-page handout of questions that were discussed in class as questions that one would want to ask when renting an apartment. The group was instructed to listen to the agent's presentation and ask any worksheet questions that were not answered in the presentation. Just inside the front door was a large basket of Halloween candy, meant for tenants of the complex and visitors. The candy proved distracting to two or three participants and several worksheet questions were asked several times due to their not paying attention.

Upon the group's return to the residential facility where Site 2 was located, all students completed the contract agency posttest and participants of this study completed study measures including: final survey, MOS Social Support Survey, the Resilience Youth Development Module (RYDM) and the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment (ACLSA). Following the completion of all paperwork, the PAL trainer presented students with certificates of completion. When the trainer told them that their caseworkers and caregivers had been invited to the graduation ceremony, several of the boys laughed and said that there was "no way" their caseworkers would attend.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a description of the youth (N=16) and staff (N=9) samples, and of the program implementation in both course sites. There were equal numbers of males and females in the youth sample. Half of the youths in the sample were 17-years-old, five were 16-years-old, and three were 15-years-old. A little more than half of the sample (n=9, 56.2%) was minority. Eight participants (50%) lived in residential treatment centers, six (37.5%) lived in foster homes, one lived in a group home, and one lived in a transitional living center. The average total amount of time spent in foster care was 4 years and 8 months, and ranged from 3 months to 14 years. The average number of placements while in foster care was 10.4, and ranged from 2 to 37 placements. The majority (n=14, 87.5%) visited family members, most often siblings, on a weekly or monthly basis. Half of the sample had been placed in special education, with all three African American participants having been placed in special education. Seventy-five percent (n=12) had received in-school suspensions, and 56 percent (n=9) had repeated a grade. Five participants (31.2%) said they wished they had been adopted. Five participants were lost through attrition and left out of all analyses. Course sites as well as course implementation by class topic were described. Overall, females tended to grasp material with greater ease and speed than did males, and curriculum on various life skills topics did not appear to appropriately incorporate issues specific to youths living in foster care.

Nine PAL staff members responded to the staff survey. Of nine respondents, 4 had Master of Social Work degrees, 1 had a Bachelor of Social Work degree, 3 had a

Bachelor's degree in a related field, and 1 had a Bachelor's degree not specified. The

average length of time employed in their current positions was 4 years and 3 months.

Three survey respondents had previously worked for Child Protective Services for an

average of 8 years.

The next chapter begins with a description of how sample participants perceived

and described their experiences in the foster care system, and their experiences in

preparing to live independently. Lastly, findings related to each of the three research

questions are presented.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS

The research questions for which results were reported included the following:

1. Do scores on standardized measures of resilience, social support and life skills change after participation in the PAL classes? How do scores compare to scores from other studies' samples using the same standardized measures?

2. How do scores on standardized measures and how youth actually describe their social support systems, assets, and resources (resilience) and knowledge of life skills compare?

3. How are adolescents in foster care described and perceived by the TDFPS-PAL staff?

In order to better understand the findings related to each of the three research questions, data from the background questionnaire and qualitative interviews conducted with all sixteen study participants were analyzed to determine how participants perceived and described their experiences in foster care and their preparation for independent living. Emergent themes from the analysis of these two data sources centered around four areas: "feelings about the foster care system", "advice to state caseworkers", "advice to foster parents" and "perceptions of PAL classes". Following the presentation of findings from the qualitative data, findings from the research questions are presented.

Feelings about the Foster Care System

Participants were asked in interviews what two or three words or phrases described their experiences in foster care. In addition to describing their experiences, participants shared their feelings about being in foster care, and about the child welfare system. Although two participants expressed that their placement in foster care was

beneficial or good for them in some way, the majority of participants characterized their

experiences in foster care with negative words, as evidenced by the following direct

quotes.

It's hard. Um, you really have to go through a lot of social things and emotional things and experience a lot of hard times doing things correctly, trying things correctly. So it's really hard, especially not always being around your family. It's really hard.

…it's rough. It's like you got to stay out of battles, you know.

Obnoxious. Infuriating. Helpful to self-development…Annoying because of all the crap I deal with and the people I have to live with. Infuriating because of the things that I can't do that all my friends can do…And also infuriating because being in foster care also even stands in the way of certain educational options that I would have available to me…[Foster parents] are too busy for me to go [places] unless I get my own transportation. Because there are so many kids in the house… there's no real choice.

Very dramatic…I mean coming into foster care was, was the most dramatic part but yet going through it has been dramatic too. I mean there's been my ups and downs.

Emotional, pain, and lack of trust. Emotional because I've never wanted to be in foster care when I got put it in. Pain 'cause I went through a lot of pain just being like, um, given up by my family. Lack of trust because of how many times I've moved around and the like six and a half years that I've been in foster care I can't really trust people that easily. And its hard to tell if they like really care.

Frustrating…because like living with my grandma, I was, I was technically still in the state's care but I had my freedom. You know, that I'd earned with my grandma, you know? Basically she treated me like I was an adult as long as I didn't do anything wrong or stupid…..and coming back into foster care where once again having people tell me what to do, where I can go, how I can do it, how long I can do it, it's frustrating.

Roller coaster ride of emotion. Kind of like the light at the end of the tunnel kind of thing. Like you're in the dark. [I] focus on what's all going to come out to be.

I hate CPS and I don't need them in my life. I wish I was never in here. It's all a waste of my time. Its nothing but depression and aggravation.

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Interestingly, although the majority of participants described their experiences in foster care using at least one negative term, analysis of a related question on the background questionnaire revealed that the majority of participants felt satisfied with their placement in foster care and believed that social workers, foster parents, and staff members had been a help to them (See Table 5.1).

Satisfaction with Foster Care

In the current study, youths were asked the extent to which they agreed with statements about their placement and experiences in the foster care system. Responses ranged from "very strongly agree" to "very strongly disagree". Table 5.1 shows that more than one-half (n=11, 68.8%) of all respondents agreed that they were lucky to have been placed in the foster care system. The same percentage (n=11, 68.8%) also agreed that they were generally satisfied with their experiences in foster care, and that social workers had been a help to them while in the foster care system. Fifty-six percent (n=9) agreed that foster parents had been a help to them while in the foster care system, and 62.5 percent (n=10) agreed that staff in group homes or residential treatment centers had been helpful to them while in the foster care system.

Table 5.1

Satisfaction with foster care (N=16)

All in all I was lucky to be placed in the foster care system.	#	%
Very Strongly Agree	2	12.5
Strongly Agree	2	12.5
Agree	7	43.8
Neither Agree nor Disagree	2	12.5
Disagree	0	0
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Very Strongly Disagree	2	12.5
Missing	1	6.2

Generally I am satisfied with my experiences in the foster care system.	#	%
Very Strongly Agree	3	18.8
Strongly Agree	4	25.0
Agree	4	25.0
Neither Agree nor Disagree	0	0
Disagree	2	12.5
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Very Strongly Disagree	1	6.3
Missing	2	12.5

Overall, social workers have been a help to me while I was in the system.	#	%
Very Strongly Agree	3	18.8
Strongly Agree	2	12.5
Agree	6	37.5
Neither Agree nor Disagree	3	18.8
Disagree	1	6.3
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Very Strongly Disagree	0	0
Missing	1	6.3

All in all foster parents have been a help to me.	#	%
Very Strongly Agree	5	31.3
Strongly Agree	0	0
Agree	4	25.0
Neither Agree nor Disagree	2	12.5
Disagree	2	12.5
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Very Strongly Disagree	2	12.5
Missing	1	6.3

All in all the counselors or staff of group homes, child caring institutions, or residential treatment centers have been a help to me.	#	%
Very Strongly Agree	2	12.5
Strongly Agree	6	37.5
Agree	2	12.5
Neither Agree nor Disagree	2	12.5
Disagree	1	6.3
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Very Strongly Disagree	3	18.8
Missing	0	0

Does the System Prepare for Independence?

When they described their past and their current experiences in foster care, participants also weighed in on whether or not they thought the foster care system itself prepared them to live independently. Participants varied in their responses. Some participants believed that the foster care system did prepare them for living independently, particularly because they were able to receive PAL benefits. The following direct quotes were stated by those participants who believed being in foster care prepared them for independent living.

> Uh, like for the PALS program I went into there, got some information there and then, um, just in general being in foster care allows you to have a view of like not being at home so you're kind of on your own when you're in care at a different home, that could be, you know, 500 miles away, but, you know, just depending on what your case is but, um, I guess you could say it prepares you because you're on your own with strangers that you got to get used to.

> Yeah….because it puts you on PAL program and gives you PAL benefits and helps, the state pays for your college.

> If you're in a [placement] with a bunch of people that kind of prepares you for working….that kind of helps you for working because it helps you to kind of learn how to deal with a bunch of different people that you have to live with or have to work with but don't necessarily like.

Other participants were definite that being placed in the foster care system did not prepare them to live independently, while other participants thought it depended on one's maturity level and living situation. One participant conceded that the PAL training program prepared youths for independence but that the foster care system itself did not. The following selections of direct quotes were stated by those participants who thought that the foster care system did not prepare them for independence and by those who were

not certain it did.

> I don't think it prepares you to be living on your own. My point of view, I don't think it does. Um, foster care is just something, somewhere for kids to be, to have a family…..But the program like PALS, I mean that, it prepares you for living out on your own. But not foster care itself. The programs foster care puts you into will help you to live on your own.

> No. Depends on where you're at and how mature you are and serious about your future.

> In some ways, yes but in some ways, no….Um, I guess you could say that in a way they help us get like how to figure out, you know, how to cook and how to clean and everything like that. Though we can't necessarily learn how to make our own doctor's appointments and stuff like that because they do it for us.

> It depends on the situation you're in. Like if you're in a good foster home that you've been there for a long time and your foster parents have accepted you as family and treat you like family, then yeah, [foster care] can be a good thing that teaches you how to live on your own. But like with institutions…the people that are there they think it's a job they have to do and they tell you what to do all the time and it doesn't teach you the responsibility to take responsibility for your actions.

> …It depends on what foster care you go to. But most they prepare you for all the things that are going to happen out there, you know? Because out there they ain't, it really ain't going to be nobody holding your hand…You know some other places try and give you nice and all that, hold your hand and get you that but some, you know, they train you real hard so that way when you're out there, you know.

> Uh, sort of. I think it just makes you want to live more on your own because everything is, everything that happens in foster care you just don't like.

Staying in Foster Care

Participants were also asked if they would stay in foster care until age 21, if given the choice. Nine participants (56%) stated that if given the choice they would not choose to stay in foster care until age 21. Four participants stated that they would choose to stay in foster care until age 21 because of the support and services that staying in foster care

would afford them. Two participants said that their staying in foster care would depend on certain conditions. One of the two said he would not stay in foster care until age 21 if it meant moving from placement to placement. The other of the two said that she would choose to stay in foster care past the age of 18 if she was still completing her high school education. Participants offered the following reasons for not wanting to stay in foster care:

> No. The number one reason is because I want to be out on my own and be able to actually know my real mom and my grandmother. And even though I've had that happen and it's a mistake there I still would like to see how I do when I'm 18, see if I'm matured up and see [what] my responsibility will come forward and do for me.

> Because of the fact that I wouldn't want to stay in a house and have to depend on other people to do stuff for me and I wouldn't have to deal, wouldn't want to have to deal with the younger kids trying to tell me what to do.

> I don't feel like I need to. I mean seriously right now if I was to walk out of foster care today, I'd be able to make it. I mean I can get a job and I can support myself and I can, I can take care of myself…..Like even my foster mom….she was like "You know, I don't have any fears about you going out and being on your own".

> No! It's a pain in my rear end and too much moving and rules.

> No. Because foster care sucks. I did not like it. It just makes me feel like I'm trapped all the time.

> [No]…because I've been away from my family for like 5 or 4 years. I couldn't remember anymore because it's been so long, you know, and I'm real, like I said I'm real close to my mom and I don't want anything to happen to her so I try to do my best to be there for her.

> I don't know whether I'd like to stay [in foster care until age 21] because I don't want to go from placement to placement to placement.

Worries

Participants were also asked in individual interviews what things worried them most. Only one participant expressed no current worries and reported to be eager to "live out on my own". The remaining 15 participants; however, expressed worries about finishing school, about their families, about their futures in general, and about living on their own and supporting themselves. The following selected quotes illustrated participants' current and future worries.

[I worry about] Rent and stuff.

In general [I worry] that I'll get set up with falling in all society's cheap and lame and little tiny rules for simply everything and I'll do something drastic and end up ruining or wrecking things.

Things that worry me the most I guess would have to be stuff that happens to my family. If something were to happen to like my brothers and my sisters it would really fall hard on me. I would really, I wouldn't know what to do.

Whether I'll graduate.

Being out on my own. Just not having anybody there for me, you know? Because like losing my grandmother, she's always been that one like center pillar in my life that's always been a constant.

Where my next placement is…where I'm going.

Like just life. Dying…And not, the fact that me not being able to pay something or do something and then once again be homeless.

Getting out there by myself. I ain't the best in math and my attitude sometimes cause I get mad over stupid stuff.

Losing my sister. I don't care what else happens. That happens, everything just goes down.

Going to prison.

Just not seeing my brother.

Hmm, being like, just struggle like, I just hate being in foster care and worrying.

Doing drugs. Not being able to support my family. Um, don't know if I'm going to finish school or not.

Advice to State Caseworkers

In addition to negative descriptions of the foster care system, several participants also had negative perceptions of state caseworkers. Overall, participants said that state caseworkers do not call and/or visit them enough, and even when they do, participants do not feel understood or heard. Participants experienced the problem of high turnover among state caseworkers, with one participant reporting to have had fourteen caseworkers during his time in the foster care system. Participants reportedly had many state caseworkers over the years, some of whom contacted participants more frequently than others. Participants who reported frequent contact with their state caseworkers knew of other youths or foster siblings who had very little or no contact with their caseworkers. The following direct quotes are illustrative of participants' experiences with caseworkers and of the advice that participants have for them:

> Take peoples' calls serious…when they call in, and always try to call them back and always try to visit your patients….there is a lot of caseworkers that sit on their butts and don't do anything at all.

> Listen to the kids and actually try to help them out in any way or form you can.

> To caseworkers I would actually like to tell them that maybe they should try to see their kids a lot more. I mean I know once a month is a lot to them, it really is……I know the judges load them with so many cases. I mean all of us in foster care know that and we really do get that but you should at least make a little bit of time where you can come out, out of a month to see your kid. Those are the times they look for so they can tell

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you what's going on in their life and tell you what they need to say.

Uh, see your kids. And listen to what they want, even if you don't think it's what's right for them and then at the end tell them. My caseworker in a year has seen me twice. And I, my caseworkers just never see me. I went 6 months last year without a caseworker at all, like no one was assigned to my case. And so just whenever I wanted to do something I just went and did it because no one would care anyway…..[My caseworker] let me know she was quitting and then she said that she would email me when I got a new caseworker and I never got an email and my foster parents never got an email or anything and then like 6 months later it was like, "This is your new caseworker."…And she took 2 or 3 more months to come see me and she lives on…the street behind us.

Stay in contact with your kids. You know, like I don't hear from my caseworker months at a time and then she'll just show up at my school, "Hi!"….I've had a bunch of different caseworkers but like I've always had the same supervisor. But she just recently left. Like she went back to school and she wants to be a foster parent so she left social work. And so I lost her.

Call your kids more often. Do for the kids not because it's a job…ask them what they want and don't do all the decision- making in their lives.

Listen to their, their foster kids. Like the guy that's here, he's been here a year and a half already and his foster, his CPS worker, his case worker, you know, they haven't listened to him at all and I'm pretty sure he wants to leave….I mean these people just don't listen to him.

[Caseworkers should] not quit their jobs so much. I've had like 14 of them. Like I just, I had a caseworker like 2 years and he's not my caseworker anymore. I just got a new one yesterday. Yeah, I don't even know his name. Sometimes it's a good thing and sometimes it's a bad thing. Because like sometimes they already understand…and the bad thing about it is you have to like, like stay somewhere else for like another year in order [for them] just to know what they're talking about.

I don't like caseworkers because they don't like, sometimes they'll just take you away for anything. Like sometimes I just think it's not necessary to take some kids away. I can imagine if the parents were like beating the kids or something but sometimes they just take them away for like stupid reasons and they make them like suffer and stuff.

Caseworker Contact

Data from the background questionnaire regarding yearly contact by state caseworkers showed that about half of the sample reportedly had between zero and three face-to-face visits and telephone calls with a social worker per year. Five participants had more than 10 face-to-face visits and phone calls with a social worker per year (see Table 5.2). These self-report questions required participants to rely on their memory of the past year, therefore, should be interpreted with caution. However, given the turnover rate of 29.8 percent among state caseworkers, participants' memories regarding caseworker contact may be fairly accurate (Texas Department of Family and Protective Services Data Book, 2006).

Table 5.2

Amount of Contact per year with Social Worker (N=16)

Type of Contact			
	Visits	Number	%
Face-to-face visits	0	3	18.8
	1-3	5	31.2
	4-6	3	18.8
	7-9	0	0
	10+	5	31.2
Phone calls	0	4	25
	1-3	4	25
	4-6	0	0
	7-9	3	18.8
	10+	5	31.2

Seeking Help from the Agency

Participants were asked the likelihood that in the future, after their discharge from foster care, they would turn to someone from their foster care agency for help. Table 5.3 shows that the majority of participants are likely to turn to someone from the foster care agency for help with finances (56.3%), with personal problems (62.5%), with employment problems (56.3%), with housing problems (62.5%), and with "some other problem" (68.8%). The sample was evenly split on the likelihood of turning to someone from the agency for help with family problems (50%) and with health problems (50%).

Although several participants offered negative descriptions of current and previous state caseworkers, Table 5.3 shows that the majority of participants said that it was likely they would, in the future, turn to someone from their foster care agency for help with a variety of problems. It is not clear whether they considered state caseworkers a part of their foster care agency, or if they had someone else in mind when completing

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those questions, such as a case manager or counselor.

Table 5.3

Likelihood of Seeking Help from Agency (N=16)

Type of Help	Number	%
Financial help	9	56.3
Help with a personal problem	10	62.5
Help with an employment problem	9	56.3
Help with a family problem	8	50.0
Help with a housing problem	10	62.5
Help with a health problem	8	50.0
Help with some other problem	11	68.8

Advice to Foster Parents

In recounting experiences in foster care and with former foster parents, participants recalled times when they and other foster children were treated differently than biological children living with them in the foster home. In some cases, participants perceived their foster parents to be "in it for the money". Participants expressed the importance of being treated "like family". Indeed, this sentiment was expressed in the advice that participants had for foster parents and caregivers. Participants advised foster parents to support their foster children, listen to them, believe in them, and treat them fairly, equally, and like their own children. In the analysis of interviews, the following direct quotes were extracted to illustrate participants' perceptions of foster parents and the advice participants offered to them.

> Listen to your children. Give them support when they need it. And always believe in them. That they can do better things.

> Don't ever accuse the foster kids of doing something they haven't done…there are some people that get their license taken away because of just excuses and not following the rules.

So just don't give up. Be patient with the kids…and through their life experiences and their trauma, they're like, they, to them you might remind them of somebody and they may be fearful of you but you can't give up on the kid. That kid looks up to you. That kid looks up to you as a parent so you can't give up on that kid.

…take a deep breath and let [kids' behavior] roll off your back like feather on a duck's back…just hold on because these kids are dealing with a difficult situation.

For foster parents, I think they should, you know, just don't be so hard on their kids. Try to be, try, treat all your kids equally. Don't treat them differently. I know because sometimes here everything, everybody gets treated differently. Really we do. I mean we don't mind sometimes but sometimes we do. On certain things we do mind…..okay, I mean, kids in foster care, they've already been through enough…we don't need to see other kids being treated differently in the home. I mean, I don't want to be in a home where kids get treated different than me, get treated better than me.

[Foster parents should] actually pay attention and notice problems between the kids, whatever, however subtle it may seem because especially in dealing with girls because girls are bitches. Let me tell you, I mean they can say something and it can be the nicest statement in the world and they can make it so cruel.

Treat your kids like they're family. You know, don't try to alienate them from stuff that you do with your family. Like with my first foster family. They had an adopted son…and I mean, um, granted yeah he was like 4 years old but you could tell by the way they treated me that they were just in it for the money. You know, I mean they didn't care at all.

Be caring for the kids. Don't do it for the money! Be understanding and flexible.

…listen to your kids. You know, don't just think, "Hey, you're a kid," because most of the time, most of the people in foster care , they're grown up already and they just, you know, the foster parents just don't treat them that way…..and they've got to consider what they've been through and everything and then think that through.

Staying Connected to Family

In describing their plans for the future, participants stressed the importance of

family, even when interview questions did not directly mention family. Some participants

spoke of current concern for their family members, while other discussed the importance of staying connected to their families or of contacting their family members after they left foster care. Their responses to particular questions and their spontaneous stories about family members implied the sentiment that "families are families forever". Indeed, the description of sample characteristics presented in Chapter 4 showed that all but 2 of the 16 sample participants currently had visitation with one or more biological family members, that the majority of the sample (n=9; 56.3%) currently visited their siblings, and that the majority of the sample (n=10; 62.5%) visited biological family members on a weekly or monthly basis.

Several participants' expected family members to figure into their immediate living plans. Some had already confirmed their plans to live with family members, as expressed in the following quotes. Some participants still thought about family members and planned to contact them despite what they experienced in their biological homes and despite feelings of ambivalence toward family members.

> Oh, yeah, be with my, not my biological mom but my mom that adopted me. She's actually my real grandmother and, um, I would just go ahead and try to hang out with her until there, you know, make sure she's doing alright because she's my grandmother and my dad passed away the day I came here so that kind of was bad. So I just want to make sure she's doing alright.

> For a few months I'm going to live with my aunt and then I'm going to get my own apartment…."Um, I will not [have contact] as far as my biological mother or my biological father. My dad says I'm an embarrassment to his name and my mother can barely remember my name….[I'll contact] just my aunts, my cousins and uncles.

> Family is very important to me….all of my family members, even though I've had hard times with some of my family members I don't, I don't say I hate them because I still love them and I still work stuff out with my family members.

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I'm hoping that my brother will come down from Arizona to come live with me. He's my, my primary, um, plan as a roommate, actually. It's either him or my sister, one of my sisters…I mean my brothers and sisters I, I'll always have contact with.

Like with my sister, the one I was talking about, she's, I talk to her almost every day….Seems kind of funny. My 25 year old sister calls me. This past week she was like, "Hey, do you have $200 I can borrow?" I'm like, "Jennifer, I'm in high school. I have a part time job. I work 20 hours a week and you're asking me for money?" She was like, "Well do you have it?" I was like "No!

They're my family and have always been there for me...they know me and understand me and they're there for me now.

Um, my sister lives in [city in Texas]. Well pretty much, the people I want to keep in contact. My sister and my uncle live in [city in Texas].

…my dad and mom are not together anymore, but my mom, you know, has been up to me a lot. I've been a momma's boy because I'm real close to my mom and I will always want to help her and she helps me.

One participant reported thinking about her biological mother much of the time, wondering where she is and planning what she will say to her when she makes contact with her in the future. She reported that she was angry at her biological mother for breaking her promise to get her and her siblings out of foster care. The participant said she spent her first couple of years in foster care telling her siblings that their mother would not leave them in foster care, but eventually realized this was not going to happen. She described the need to see her mother one last time:

My dad actually I haven't seen since I was 9 and my mom I haven't seen since I was like 10 and most likely maybe I'll see my mom once after…..I get out of care but only that time I see her will be the only time I see her just to tell her how I really feel just to get all my emotions out because like I have so much bottled up inside it's like driving me so crazy like…where I have like nervous breakdowns sometimes and I just go so crazy. It's just like, "Oh, my god, I really need to tell her and I can't and nobody knows where she's at". And sometimes it's like I wonder if she's dead. It's just really nerve racking to not know what's going on sometimes. Sometimes people just don't understand.

Perceptions of PAL Classes

In addition to describing the support and encouragement they feel from their

family members, participants weighed in on the helpfulness of the PAL classes. Some

participants believed the PAL training to be an asset of sorts, or believed that it would be

beneficial to them in the coming years. Other participants were motivated by money, and

said that the $1000 stipend and the $5.00 per class were the reasons they wanted to attend

and complete the PAL training program. Others thought that although PAL classes might

be helpful to some, PAL classes alone were not going to prepare one for independence

and responsibility. Participants offered suggestions for improving the PAL classes.

> [Classes] should be optional for people like me who've got this stuff pretty much
> down. Like they should test them or something and if they pass the test then like
> [by] all means go home…and with that you won't have to pay them for not going
> to those lessons so it would be more money in your pocket.

> Like how we learned money management or whatever it was last week, money
> management. All that stuff I learned last week, I thought I knew how to do. I
> really didn't. I actually, I thought I knew how to manage money and I did not
> know how to manage it at all.

> I mean 6 weeks isn't going to teach you to how to be a responsible person. It's
> something you learn over a lifetime….cause I was in the [residential treatment]
> and while I was there, I mean you have these people telling you exactly what to
> do every minute of every day and it doesn't teach you any personal responsibility.

> [PAL class] was more factual preparation for adult living than the psychological
> stuff, or the psychological stuff is equally important…but the psychological part
> is really equally important so if I was going to include it at all I'd probably have
> like an equal thing, like I'd have the business part, like how to run your life and
> then I'd have the psychological part of how to deal with shit once you get out of
> care.

> I mean just keep it interesting and, you know, treat the people that are in the
> classes like human beings….some people when they look at foster kids they're
> like, "Oh, there's something they did wrong and they're troubled kids and you
> know there's something wrong with them." And it's not always so…there's really

not that many kids that are in foster care because of their own actions.

Don't make the classes so long. [Make them] more interesting.

Before you think you can handle a group of teenagers, talk to the staff first because there is always one that acts up and isn't getting anything out of the lesson because he doesn't understand. It wastes everyone else's time.

I mean if someone is really passionate about living on they own and, you know, wanted to be independent and then these PAL classes are recommended for them because if any, if nobody, if they just come here for the money then that's the wrong business but if you really, if like you passionate about it and you want to do it and you want to be on your own, you want to prove to somebody that you could be on your own, these PAL classes are the real deal.

At the conclusion of PAL classes, participants completed a final survey as part of the study. This purpose of the survey was to give participants an opportunity to give their opinions about the PAL classes, what they liked and didn't like about the classes, and whether or not they believed the classes prepared them for living independently.

Overall, participants had favorable views of the PAL classes. First, they were asked how helpful to them each of the life skills domains would be in the future. In the domains of interpersonal skills, job skills, and planning for the future, all 16 participants (100%) responded that the skills they learned in these domains would be "somewhat" to "very helpful" to them in the future. In the domain of money management, fifteen participants (93.7%) responded that money management skills would be "somewhat" to "very helpful" in the future, while one participant (6.3%) said that money management skills would be "not at all helpful" in the future. In the domain of health, fifteen participants (93.7%) responded that health information would be "somewhat" to "very helpful", while one participant (6.3%) responded that health information would be only

"a little helpful" in the future.

The final survey completed by participants also showed that participants also had favorable views of the PAL Trainer. In the domains of job skills, housing and transportation, health, money management, and planning for the future the majority of the sample responded that the PAL Trainer taught material in each of the domains "very well", with the domain of housing and transportation earning the largest majority (n=12, 75%).

In terms of improving PAL classes, participants were asked if PAL classes should have incorporated more field trips, more practice in "real-life" settings, or more guest speakers, and whether the class time and place should have been changed. Overall, the majority of participants responded that none of these changes was needed. Despite some participants frequent complaints of attending classes for five hours on Saturdays, only four participants (25%) responded that the class time and placed should have changed.

Lastly, participants were asked if they believed PAL classes prepared them to live on their own. Fifteen participants (97.3%) responded that "yes", PAL classes prepared them to live on their own. When asked how prepared they felt to live on their own, eleven participants (68.7%) responded that they felt "very prepared", and five respondents (31.3%) believed that they were "somewhat prepared" to live on their own.

<div align="center">Research Questions</div>

Question One: _Do scores on standardized measures of resilience, social support and life skills change after participation in the PAL program? How do scores compare to scores from other studies' samples using the same standardized measures?_

Three standardized measures were administered at the outset and conclusion of the PAL training program in both study sites. All sixteen participants completed the background questionnaire and three standardized measures on the first day of PAL classes. Measures administered at the conclusion of PAL classes were completed as follows: 16 participants (100%) completed the final survey, the MOS Social Support Survey, and the ACLSA-IV, and 15 participants (93.7%) completed the RYDM. One participant's final RYDM measure was largely incomplete; therefore, the measure was left out of the analysis. The RYDM and MOS Social Support Survey measures were scored according to developer's scoring instructions. Total means were converted to scores on a 100-point scale and Paired-Samples T Tests were conducted to determine whether or not observed changes in overall scores were statistically significant. An alpha level of .05 was used for all statistical tests. Additionally, changes in scores were examined for substantive, or clinical, significance to determine whether the observed changes in scores over time have practical importance for the field or for independent living programming in particular. Finally, results from the standardized measures were compared to aggregated benchmark data and to studies that administered the same measures to sample participants.

<center>Overall Scores</center>

Table 5.4 shows that total scores on all three measures increased to varying degrees from pretest to posttest.[1] The MOS Social Support Survey had a pretest mean of 62 and a posttest mean of 75, a difference of 13 points, which was a statistically significant change in means (t (15) = -3.19, p=.006). The Resilience Youth Development

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Module (RYDM) had a pretest mean of 73 and a posttest mean of 76, which was not a statistically significant change in means (t (14) = -1.01, p=.329).

Two scores were calculated on the ACLSA: total mastery scores, and total performance scores. Total mastery scores were the percentages of all assessment questions answered "very much like me", and total performance scores were percentages of performance items answered correctly. The pretest mean of mastery scores was 39.9 percent and the posttest mean was 53.2 percent, a difference of 13.3, which was not statistically significant (t (15) = -1.99; p=.065). Performance scores changed very little from pretest to posttest. The pretest mean was 63.2 and the posttest mean was 65.0, which was a 1.8 point increase and not statistically significant (t (15) = -.619; p=.545).

Further analysis of overall scores revealed that females in the sample scored at least 10 points higher than males on all three standardized measures. Females scores were 10.37 points higher on MOS Social Support Survey; 12.25 points higher on the RYDM, and 48.75 on the ACLSA. Independent-Samples T Tests indicated that the differences between males and females scores on the social support and resilience measures were not statistically significant (t (14) = 1.009, p=.330), (t (13) = 1.577, p=.139) respectively), while the difference between males and females scores on the ACLSA was statistically significant (t (14) = 4.863, p=.01)[2]. Given the small numbers of cases in each of the following variables, statistical comparisons between them could not be made. However, in visual comparisons of the scores on all three standardized measures, no pattern of difference in scores was found when variables of age, ethnicity, and level of care were analyzed.

Table 5.4

Change in Overall Scores (N=16)

	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Change	Sig.	SD
MOS Social Support Survey	62	75	+13.0	.006	16.26
RYDM	73	76	+ 3.0	.329	15.56
ACLSA (Mastery)	39.9	53.2	+13.3	.065	26.91
ACLSA (Performance)	63.2	65.0	+ 1.8	.545	11.70

p<.05

In addition to analyzing overall scores, each measure was analyzed individually and compared to aggregate data and data from one study using the social support measure. The results of these analyses and comparisons are explained in the following sections.

Resilience

The RYDM measured 11 external assets using 33 survey items and 6 internal assets using 18 items. External assets are the environmental supports and opportunities, or protective factors, which facilitate healthy and successful development in children and youth. To assess external assets, the Module asked respondents their perceptions of Caring Relationships, High Expectations, and Opportunities for Meaningful Participation in the areas of home, school, community, and peer group. Internal assets (or resilience factors) included cooperation, communication, goal orientation, problem-solving, self-efficacy, self-awareness, and empathy (WestEd, 1999). These assets were considered the personal strengths that resulted from having home, school, community and peer environments that were rich in external assets.

The RYDM was scored and analyzed using the Statistical Package Statistical

Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) syntax obtained from the developers of the measure. For each item, respondents chose: 4-Very much true; 3-Pretty much true; 2-A little true; and 1-Not at all true. Means were calculated for total internal and external assets, as well as all subscales within each, and categorized as "High" (mean above 3), "Moderate" (mean of at least 2 and no more than 3), or "Low" (mean below 2).

Table 5.5 shows the total mean scores for Internal Assets and External Assets, as well as the total scores on questions related to Caring Relationships, High Expectations, and Meaningful Participation across the four domains of home, school, peer group, and community. As seen in the table, means on all total scores change very little from pretest to posttest on the RYDM measure, and none of the changes were statistically significant in Paired-Samples T Tests.

For total Internal Assets, the mean score actually decreases over time, with a pretest mean of 3.36 and a posttest mean of 3.31, which was not statistically significant (t (14) = .374; p=.714). For Total External Assets, the mean increased only slightly over time, with a pretest mean of 3.04 and a posttest mean of 3.16, also not statistically significant (t (14) = -.968; p=.349). Although changes from pretest to posttest were very small, all means were in the "High" range of assets.

Means were obtained on questions ascertaining Caring Relationships, High Expectations, and Meaningful Participation across the domains of home, school, peers, and community. Questions regarding Caring Relationships had a pretest mean of 3.09 and posttest mean of 3.32 (t (14) = -1.04; p=.316), and questions regarding High Expectations had a pretest mean of 3.12 and a posttest mean of 3.26 (t (14) = -.442; p=.665), neither

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was statistically significant but both were also in the "High" range of assets. Although not statistically significant, the last subset of questions on Meaningful Participation showed the largest change in means, with a pretest mean of 2.86 and a posttest mean of 3.09 (t (14) = -1.98). This was the only pretest mean in the "Moderate" range, while all others were in the "High" range.

According to the RYDM developers, Meaningful Participation is characterized by an individual's involvement in relevant and interesting opportunities for responsibility and contribution (WestEd, 1999). Given this definition and a "Moderate" mean among all other "High" means, it seemed that study participants may have had fewer opportunities in daily life for responsibility and contribution, such as being part of clubs, sports teams, church/temple, or other group activities. Ten participants in this sample lived in residential treatment settings, which may have limited their opportunities for responsibility and contribution. Two other participants living in a foster home expressed frustrations over perceived limits and restrictiveness of foster care, noting that lack of transportation inhibited their abilities to participate in community or extracurricular activities. Given the slightly lower mean in "meaningful participation", the area of resilience involving youths' opportunities for meaningful participation in foster care may warrant further study.

Table 5.5

Resilience Youth Development Module (RYDM) Scores (N=15)

	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Sig.	SD	*df*
Total Internal Assets	3.36 (High)	3.31 (High)	.714	.52	14
Total External Assets	3.04 (High)	3.16 (High)	.349	.49	14
Caring Relationships	3.09 (High)	3.32 (High)	.316	.54	14
High Expectations	3.12 (High)	3.26 (High)	.665	.53	14
Meaningful Participation	2.86 (Mod.)	3.09 (High)	.068	.45	14

Comparison Data

Scores obtained on the RYDM in this study, referred to as the "PAL Case Study",
were compared to RYDM aggregate data collected by the California Department of
Education. The RYDM is administered as part of the larger Healthy Kids Survey, which
is a "comprehensive and customizable youth self-report data collection system that
provides essential and reliable health risk assessment and resilience information to
schools, districts, and communities" (California Healthy Kids Survey website, 2007).

Between the years of 2004 and 2006, approximately 25,418 "non-traditional"
California students completed the RYDM. In this study, "non-traditional students" were
chosen for comparison, as this group was most similar to participants in this study who
were in public and alternative school settings in grades 9 through 12. Comparison data
reports show 2 percent of students in "non-traditional" schools lived in a "foster home,
group home, or waiting placement". Comparison data from California also shows that an
almost equal number of males and females completed the RYDM. Not known from the
comparison data is whether or not students had received any type of independent living or

life skills training.

Table 5.6 shows the percentage of non-traditional students and PAL Case Study participants who scored "High" (mean above 3), "Moderate" (mean of 2 to 3), and "Low" (mean below 2) in assets. Given that a strict comparison of data was not the goal, comparison on the broadest level showed that scores from California aggregate data and scores in this study were similar. The aggregate data showed that the large majority of California students scored in the "high" and "moderate" ranges of assets, while small percentages scored in the "low" range. Similarly, all participants in this study scored in the "high" and "moderate" ranges of assets on all both scales.

Table 5.6

Comparison of California Data and PAL Case Study Scores (N=16)

% scoring High, Mod, Low in Assets	California (non-trad.) N=25,418			PAL Case Pretest N=16			PAL Case Posttest N=15		
	H	M	L	H	M	L	H	M	L
Total Internal Assets	51	41	7	25	75	0	60	40	0
Total External Assets	35	54	11	69	31	0	67	33	0

Social Support

The MOS Social Support Survey contained four functional support scales, measuring the following five dimensions of social support: emotional / informational, tangible, positive social interaction, and affectionate. Emotional support was the expression of positive affect, empathetic understanding, and encouragement of expression of feeling. Informational support was the offering of advice, information, guidance or feedback. Tangible support involved the provision of material aid or assistance. Positive social interaction was the availability of others to do fun things with you, and affectionate support involved the expression of love and affection. Youth were asked to indicate on a 5-point scale how often each type of support was available to them (1=none of the time; 2=a little of the time; 3=some of the time; 4=most of the time; 5=all of the time).

Table 5.7 shows participants' scores across all items and on each of the four subscales. The data suggested that overall, participants reported that they received social support "some of the time" or "most of the time". The mean score across all items was

3.56 at pretest and 4.00 at posttest, which was a statistically significant change in means (t (15) = -3.06, p=.008). On the emotional/informational support subscale, the pretest mean was 3.26 and the posttest mean was 3.91, which was statistically significant (t (15) = -2.62, p=.01). On the tangible support subscale, the pretest mean was 3.50 and the posttest mean was 4.06, which was statistically significant (t (15) = -2.55, p=.02). On this subscale of positive social interaction, participants had a pretest mean of 3.92 and a posttest mean of 3.94, which was not a statistically significant change in means (t (15) = -.177, p=.908). On the affectionate support subscale, the pretest mean was 3.56 and the posttest score was 4.10, which was a statistically significant change in means (t (15) = -2.60, p=.02).

Comparison Data

MOS Social Support Survey scores and means were compared to means obtained in the Midwest Study (Courtney, Tarao, Bost, 2002). Like the comparison data used for the RYDM, the Midwest Evaluation did not administer the Social Support Survey in a pretest posttest fashion. The sample size of the Midwest Evaluation was 732 participants; however, only about half of all participants had received some form of independent living skills training or life skills classes at the time the survey was administered. The study did not distinguish between those who had and those who had not received training when administering the MOS Social Support Survey.

Despite these factors, these comparison data were chosen for the similarity of its sample population (youth aging out of foster care) to that of the current study. Table 5.7 shows that scores in this study were similar to Midwest Study data. Participants in this

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study had pretest means that were lower than the Midwest Study means on all subscales; however, participants' posttest means just surpassed the Midwest Evaluation means on all but one of the functional support scales. The overall posttest mean in this study was 4.00, whereas the overall mean in the Midwest Study was 3.93, which indicated that both groups received social support "some of the time" or "most of the time".

Table 5.7

Comparison of MOS Social Support Survey Scores (N=16)

Functional Support Scale	PAL Case Study (N=16)				Midwest Evaluation (N=732)
	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Sig.	SD	Mean
Overall Support	3.56	4.00	.008	.66	3.93
Emotional/Informational Support	3.26	3.91	.01	.98	3.89
Tangible Support	3.50	4.06	.02	.88	3.87
Positive Social Interaction	3.56	4.10	.02	.68	3.97
Affectionate Support	3.92	3.94	.908	.84	4.01

Life Skills

For each of the six domains on the ACLSA IV, mastery scores were calculated separately by dividing the total number of "very much like me" responses by the total number of items in each domain. This number was multiplied by 100 to create a percentage from 0 percent to 100 percent in each domain. Higher scores indicated greater mastery of the domain. Mastery scores were reported instead of raw scores because they were thought to be a better reflection of "true and complete acquisition of a life skills behavior or knowledge" (Leibold & Downs, 2002, p. 7). In addition to mastery scores, performance scores were also calculated. Performance items were those in which the

youth was asked to choose the correct answer to life skills questions in each of the six domains. These scores were obtained by calculating the percentage of performance items answered correctly by the youth.

Paired-Samples T Tests were conducted on the pre- and posttest total mastery scores and mastery scores on each of the six life skills subscale domains. Although total mastery and performance scores increased over time, the increase was not statistically significant. Table 5.8 shows that the total mastery pretest score was 39.9 and the posttest score was 53.2, which was not a statistically significant change in scores (t (15) = -1.99; p=.065). The total performance pretest score was 63.2 and posttest score was 65.0, also not a statistically significant change in scores (t (15) = -.619; p=.545).

In this study, varying degrees of improvements were seen in five of six domains, with the largest increase in mean scores seen in the domain of Housing and Money Management. In this domain, the pretest mean was 13.0 percent, and the posttest mean was 39.9 percent, which represented a 200 percent difference and a statistically significant change in means (t (15) = -3.16; p=.006).

The domain of Daily Living had pretest and posttest mean scores of 41.7 percent and 58.8 percent, respectively, which was a 41 percent increase in mean scores. In the domain of Career Planning, the pretest mean was 40.3 percent and the posttest score was 52.1 percent, which was a 29.3 percent increase in mean scores. Although the change in means for both of these domains was not statistically significant, it might be considered clinically significant since it is perhaps unlikely that increases of this size from pretest to posttest were due to testing effects.

The domain of Self-Care had slightly higher pretest and posttest mean scores than other domains, although the scores actually decreased from a pretest of 66.9 percent to a posttest of 64.2 percent, which was a 4 percent decrease in scores. Increases in mean scores in domains of Social Relationships and Work Life were small, at 3.2 percent and 2.6 percent, respectively. Neither of the changes in means scores on these two domains was statistically significant.

Table 5.8

ACLSA Mastery and Performance Scores (N=16)

	Pretest Score	Posttest Score	Percent Increase	Sig.	SD	*df*
Mastery Scores	39.9	53.2	33.3%	.065	26.91	15
Performance Scores	63.2	65.0	1.8%	.545	11.70	15

Comparison Data

Comparison data for the ACLSA IV were sought from two places. First, this study's scores were compared to national benchmark data that were available on the Casey Life Skills web site (www.caseylifeskills.org, 2007). Benchmark data were aggregated from all full-completed assessments taken online through the Casey Life Skills web site between approximately January 1, 2005 and March 31, 2006. The data were not aggregated into subsets by state or region, therefore, were considered a "nationwide response" (A. Puckett, personal communication, March 19, 2007). In addition, the data were aggregated by age and the level of ACLSA completed but it was not known whether assessments completed online were done so before, after, or during any type of independent living skills training. For this reason, a second source of comparison data was sought. The second source of data was collected as part of the San

Antonio PAL Classes Evaluation Report conducted by Casey Family Programs researchers in 2002. The San Antonio study evaluated the effectiveness of PAL classes with the ACLSA III. The ACLSA III was slightly different than the level IV version used in this study, but given that the differences between the two were small and given that the ACLSA III was used in a pretest/posttest fashion as it was in this study, the comparison of resulting scores was conducted. Because evaluators in the San Antonio study reported "percent increases" between pretest and posttest scores, percent increases were calculated and reported for pretest and posttest scores in this study as well.

Both the benchmark data and this study's data were based on the ACLSA IV, which is intended for youths age 16 to 18, and assesses skills and knowledge in the following six domains: career planning, daily living, housing and money management, self-care, social relationships, and work life. The ACLSA III that is currently available on the Casey Life Skills website is intended for use with youths age 13-15, however, the version used in the San Antonio study (also called "ACLSA III") may be slightly different from the current level III version online due to changes that have been made to the assessment since the time the San Antonio study was conducted in 2002.

Table 5.9 presents three sets of data for comparison. Mean scores in the PAL Case study were more similar to the benchmark data than they were to the results of the San Antonio evaluation. With the exception of the Self-Care and Work Life domains, both of which had higher means than the pretest or posttest in those same domains in this study, the benchmark data means fall numerically within the range of this study's pretest and posttest mean scores. Comparisons between scores in this study and the San Antonio

evaluation were complicated by the differences in the assessments. The assessments both had six domains of life skills but categories and individual items varied by domain; therefore, results of the comparisons should be interpreted with caution. Four domains that appeared to be most similar between the two assessments: Daily Living, Self-Care, Social Relationships/Development, and Work Life/Study.

In the domain of Daily Living, pretest scores for the PAL Case Study and the San Antonio evaluation were 41.7 percent and 58.8 percent, respectively, a 17.1 point difference in scores. By posttest however, there was only a two-point difference in scores. Participants in this study scored 73.6 percent and participants in the San Antonio evaluation scored 75.6 percent.

In the domain of Self-Care, pretest means for the PAL Case Study were higher than the San Antonio Evaluation mean scores, at 66.9 percent and 64.2 percent, respectively. Although PAL Case Study mean scores were higher than the San Antonio scores at pretest, posttest scores were higher in the San Antonio Evaluation. Participants in this study scored a mean of 76.2 percent, while participants in the San Antonio Evaluation scored a mean of 80.2, a four point difference in means.

Pretest and posttest means were exactly the same for the PAL Case Study participants in the domain of Social Relationships, called Social Development in the ACLSA version III. Pretest means for this study and the San Antonio Evaluation were 56.9 percent and 58.7 percent respectively, only a 1.8 point difference in means. Posttest mean scores in the San Antonio Evaluation were higher, at 64.1 percent, while mean scores in this study remained at 56.9 percent.

Lastly, in the domain of Work Life, called Work and Study in the ACLSA version III, the means actually decreased from pretest to posttest in this study. While pretest scores were similar between this study and San Antonio (67.7 percent and 69.5 percent, respectively), means at posttest showed a 10-point difference. At posttest, the mean for the PAL Case Study was 52.1 percent, and the mean in the San Antonio evaluation was 62.9 percent.

Table 5.9

Comparison of ACLSA Mastery Scores by Domain (N=16)

	Career Planning	Daily Living	Housing & Money Management	Self-Care	Social Relationships	Work Life
PAL Case Study (N=16)						
Pretest Mean	40.3	41.7	13.0	66.9	56.9	67.7
Posttest Mean	52.1	58.8	39.9	64.2	58.7	69.5
Percent Improvement	+29.3%	+41.0%	+200.7%	-4.0%	+3.2%	+2.6%
	Career Planning	Daily Living	Housing & Money Management	Self-Care	Social Relationships	Work Life
ACLSA Benchmark Data (N=23,672)	44.5	42.2	39.1	71.9	58.7	73.8
	Money Management	Daily Living	Housing & Community	Self-Care	Social Development	Work & Study
San Antonio PAL Study (2002) (N=101)						
Pretest Mean	36.5	73.6	39.4	76.2	56.9	52.1
Posttest Mean	62.7	75.6	52.8	80.2	64.1	62.9
Percent Improvement	+71.8%	+2.7%	+34.0%	+5.2%	+12.7%	+20.7%

In sum, participants scored relatively highly on all three standardized measures. On the MOS Social Support Survey, differences in total scores and scores on 3 of 4

subscales were statistically significant. On the RYDM, differences in total mean scores and subset scores changes in scores were not statistically significant, and did not appear to be substantively significant. On the ACLSA, only the change in scores for the domain of housing and money management was statistically significant. In addition, scores on all measures were similar to other studies using the same measures and to benchmark data available for comparison.

Research Question Two: How do scores on standardized measures and how youth actually describe their social supports, assets, and knowledge of life skills compare?

For purposes of data triangulation to enhance study credibility, the researcher sought to compare participants' scores on standardized measures of resilience, social support, and life skills to participants' verbal descriptions of these constructs in qualitative interviews. Overall, the analysis reveals that participants' scores and their descriptions of social supports, assets and resources, and life skills were consistent. Comparisons by construct are described in the following sections.

Social Support

Score Summary

On the MOS Social Support Survey, the overall pretest mean was 3.56 and the overall posttest mean was 4.00, which represented a statistically significant change in means, and indicated that participants received social support "some of the time" or "most of the time".

Verbal Descriptions

Participants' descriptions of their support systems appear to be consistent with

their generally high scores on the MOS Social Support Survey. Participants' family members, and the support they provided to participants, figured positively and prominently in descriptions participants provided in individual interviews. When participants were asked who or what supported them most, the majority of participants (n=12, 75%) listed one or more family members as their greatest source of support. While two listed their foster mothers and a CASA worker as most supportive, the remaining ten listed biological family members as most supportive. In addition to naming their greatest source of support, participants were asked what type of support this person or source provides. Emotional support and encouragement were most frequently named as the type of support they received. Only one interviewee said that the type of support she received from her foster mother was financial. In the following direct quotes, participants described their feelings about family members and the emotional support and encouragement they perceived or received from them.

> I would say, um, I'm, I might need some help, emotional help. I'm not really emotionally stable. I mean I do have my problems; everybody does. I tend to be a bit emotional at times in my life and just having somebody there like my family to help me through it, it's always good.

> I have to say my foster mom actually who I do call Mom, and my CASA worker [support me]…..love, the most. They're always there for me when I need them. This whole thing happens, they're the first ones that, when I'm in trouble they're the first ones…[my foster mom] is not going to let nothing happen to me and my CASA worker has been there since I've been in foster care, since the very beginning.

> My aunts…just let me know that anytime I need them they're there for me. So I can call them like 1:00 in the morning and they'll be there to talk to me.

> My family. Mostly with like emotional support….Talking to my family, mostly my sister Jennifer.

[My aunts tell me]…we'll be together soon and like encouragement.

I kind of need them when I have anger problems and stuff like that, if I want to talk or anything like that.

My sister and my uncle [get me through hard times].

Like with my sister, it's just that the only reason, like she's, she like supports me like, "Oh, well you can do this." Whenever I was little I wasn't really that smart and everything and I couldn't really do too much and then now she's, and she used to always pick on me and stuff but now she's always like, "You know what? I'm glad that you're doing all this stuff that you're doing," because I'm making all these good grades now and she just, you know, she just helps me through a lot because if it wasn't for her then it'd be a lot different in foster care.

[My mom], she like, like back when I used to, like I used to be walking around and stuff like in the middle of the night and my, I used to go around like at 4:00 or something and she'd always say like you can always come over here and I'll open the door for you.

My sister….gives me support, she tells me, "don't do this", she knows I'll get in trouble and stuff like that.

To further corroborate these descriptions of family connections, emotional support, and encouragement that biological family members provide to participants, participants were asked three scaled questions about the likelihood of their contacting and depending on biological family members after they leave foster care. Table 5.10 presents the responses to these questions. Specifically, the majority of participants (n=12, 75%) stated that they were likely to contact biological family members after leaving foster care. Far fewer (n=4, 25%) stated that they were likely to depend on biological family members for financial support.

Participants who stated that they were unlikely to depend on biological family members for financial support said they would not do so because family members did not

have the resources to provide financial support. One participant put it this way:

> Well 'cause my mom didn't, well if she couldn't help me now [financially] what makes you think, you know, she's going to help me in the future? Know what I'm saying? So with all the stuff that I want to do and all that I'm going to basically be supporting myself.

Similar to their responses in open-ended interview questions, the table shows that the majority of participants (n=13; 81.3%) stated that they were likely to depend on biological family members for emotional support after leaving foster care.

Table 5.10

Post-discharge Dependence on Biological Family (N=16)

		#	%
Likelihood of contact with biological family members?	Very Likely	8	50.0
	Likely	4	25.0
	Unlikely	1	6.3
	Very Unlikely	2	12.5
	Don't Know	1	6.3
Likelihood of depending on bio family for financial support?	Very Likely	2	12.5
	Likely	2	12.5
	Unlikely	7	43.8
	Very Unlikely	5	31.3
Likelihood of depending on bio family for emotional support?	Very Likely	5	31.3
	Likely	8	50.0
	Unlikely	2	12.5
	Very Unlikely	1	6.3

Resilience

Score Summary

The RYDM used 56 items to assess internal and external assets. Internal (or resilience factors) included cooperation, communication, goal orientation, problem-

solving, self-efficacy, self-awareness, and empathy (WestEd, 1999). To assess external assets, the Module asked respondents their perceptions of Caring Relationships, High Expectations, and Opportunities for Meaningful Participation in the areas of home, school, community, and peer group. All but one of the overall asset scores fell into the "high" category, which indicated that participants had high amounts of internal and external assets.

Verbal Descriptions

In individual interviews, participants' descriptions reflected certain internal and external assets defined by the RYDM. In the following sections, interview quotes that illustrated particular internal and external assets were identified.

Caring Relationships. Participants described and discussed their feelings about family members and the support they received from them, which appeared to indicate the presence of Caring Relationships. One participant's description seemed to indicate the presence of Caring Relationships and High Expectations, as expressed by the following sentiment:

> [Mom]…cares about me. Um, she don't want me to get hurt or anything. She wants me to, you know, find a house or get a job, do what's best for me. You know and if I ever had any kids or whatever I could be a good father or learn to become a good father.

The RYDM assesses external assets across the domains of peer group, community, school, and home. Two participants spoke in interviews about their friends.

> …whenever my friends have a problem or like, they come to me because I actually listen…But like when people come to talk to me and they ask me for advice and stuff I'll try to give them the best advice that I know.

> …I have understanding friends and the understanding love thing, not the really

crappy ones that so many people have.

One participant who had lived in her current foster home for four years described

how she felt about her foster home and her foster parents and her plans to

maintain contact with them after she leaves the foster care system.

> I'm happy to be living in this home. I really love this home. My mom and dad buy us stuff. They take us to the movies, IMAX, and everything. They do stuff with us. I wouldn't rather live anywhere else…CPS, my parents I have now, my foster parents, they're like, I call my mom and dad for a reason. They are my mom and dad. They're my family. And I wouldn't trade them for anything else…..if I have to leave [foster care] I'd come back to visit them every day.

> *Meaningful Participation*. In addition to their recommendations for improving

PAL classes, several said that the PAL classes were beneficial to them. One participant

also described PAL classes as an asset of sorts, and added that PAL classes should be

available to all youths, not just those in foster care. At the community level, another

participant belonged to an "alumni" group, which was a group for youths who have aged

out of foster care and for those who still live in foster care. The group met regularly to

discuss issues faced by young adults who had aged out of foster care. No other

opportunities for contribution and responsibility were mentioned.

> I've actually learned a lot [in PAL classes]. I think its really cool. It's a cool thing for kids to be in and it's cool that the state put us in it. It really prepares us for a lot. If all kids could be in it, it would be cool.

> I find this stuff out in my youth alumni group. It's crazy what some of these kids have gone through. Now they're 21 and, you know, getting out of foster care, you know, and this is what they've been through from foster care. They go, "We know what it's like." They go, "We've been in foster care since we were 3 years old, 2 years old." They go, "It was hard for us and we know what it's like for y'all being in care." And they go, "We don't want it to stay that way no more. We want it to change.

Future Aspirations. Somewhat consistent with their "high" scores in internal assets, data from interviews and background questionnaires suggest that youths have plans and aspirations, and that the majority feel fairly or very optimistic about their futures. All 16 participants spoke in individual interviews of having future plans, and all stated that these were plans that they developed on their own. Twelve participants (75%) stated a desire to go to college, one participant planned to attend a technical school, and the remaining three (18.8%) had not yet decided their future educational plans. Participants indicated that if they could go as far as they wanted in school, 12 participants (75%) would go to "some college", "graduate college" or "go beyond college", two respondents (12.5%) would like to graduate from high school, and two participants (12.5%) responded that they did not know how far in school they would like to go. Participants were also asked how far they thought they will *actually* go in school. Responses were as follows: three participants (18.8%) thought they would not graduate from high school, one participant (6.3%) expected to graduate from high school, two participants (12.5%) thought they would attend "some college", six participants (37.5%) thought they would graduate college, one participant (6.3%) expected to attend "more than college", and three participants (18.8%) did not know how far they thought they would actually go in school. The following interview excerpts illustrate participant's educational and employment aspirations:

> I want to become an EMT at ACC, get my certification and then go to Texas State and get my medical training as a surgeon and trauma ER doctor and go to Brackenridge Hospital.
>
> I plan to go to college…and get my business degree so I can open up my own salon.

And if I have to I'll like go to ACC for a couple of semesters and then try to transfer in somewhere because last year I kind of, I had junioritis. I had junioritis really bad.

Well I want to go to college. That's the one thing.

After I leave foster care my plans are to, you know, get a [high school] education…[and] be safe when I'm on my own, you know?

I want to be an engineer. Work on cars and build stuff.

After I graduate high school my plans are to become a personal trainer.

I'm going to be an actress.

I probably will major in literature because I want to be a novelist. Either that or I want to be in movie making…like script writing or something.

Related to goals and aspirations, participants were asked how optimistic they feel about their own personal hopes and goals for the future. Table 5.11 shows that seven participants (43.8%) felt "very optimistic" about their hopes and goals for the future, five participants (31.3) felt "fairly optimistic", two participants (12.5) felt "not too optimistic", and two participants (12.5) didn't know how optimistic they felt about their personal hopes and goals for the future.

Table 5.11

Optimism about the Future (N=16)

	Number	%
Very Optimistic	7	43.8
Fairly Optimistic	5	31.2
Not Too Optimistic	2	12.5
Don't Know	2	12.5

Self-efficacy. When participants were asked about depending on family members for various types of support and assistance when they left the foster care system, they tended to describe themselves as independent, as their own sources of support, and desiring to do things on their own, suggesting a sense of self-efficacy. The following direct quotes illustrate participants' desires for independence and their perceived abilities.

> I mainly depend on my parents for buying me things and everything and I want to become more independent as to when I turn 16 and get a job and show my mom I'm actually responsible because I don't think she's ever noticed any kind of responsible personality in me at all. So I'd like to help her out also instead of just me getting help from her.

> I think I'll actually try to, uh, be out on my own you know and not be so, like try to rely on other people for support. I'll try to be independent as much as I can…..I know as far as therapy and all that kind of stuff, I never really liked that so I know when I get alone I don't want therapy or counseling or anything like that. I'll probably as far as like health and all that, I'll probably get off my medications because I just don't believe they work for me. I just try to be more independent and rely on myself and control my anger if I have outbursts.

> I'm very independent and I don't need nobody to depend on.

> I developed my [future] plan. I don't need people to run my life for me. I can do it for myself. I have been so far and doing a damn good job at it too.

> I mean it's nice to have family that can help out here and there but for the most part I'd like to be able to, you know, make it on my own…..it's nice to have family as a contact I guess but for emotional support I don't really like to rely on too many other people that much. Just 'cause you know people can let you down and stuff…I can work out a lot of my own problems.

> Me. It's the support to know that I can pick myself up when I got nothing and no one.

> …with all the stuff that I want to do and all that I'm going to basically be supporting myself.

> I just figure I'll know what I'll do after I leave care. I'll take care of it. I'll just like figure it out.

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Empathy. When they offered advice to other teens living in foster care, participants were encouraging, supportive, and empathetic, as if to communicate that they understand what it is like to live in foster care and experience hard times. In interviews, the message to "hang in there" was prevalent among responses. Participants seemed to feel a strong connection to their peers in foster care and to younger children who will likely follow similar paths to adulthood, perhaps bonded as a result of common histories and experiences in foster care. Participants gave the following advice to others living in the foster care system:

> Just get through it. You know, you can't ever get over something. You can't ever get past it but you can always get through it so just get through the hard times, the problem, the issue that you face and don't give up.

> Keep your head up. It's going to get better. Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, and today is a gift. Better record that.

> …if [other teens in foster care] have siblings or something, you know, advice I'd give to them is like try and see them as much as they can.

> Just to make, make the best of a bad situation. That foster care may not be what you want for yourself but it's going to end up being good for you.

> It may seem hard but take CPS for everything they got. Paid college and free living!

> Do what you need to do and don't get mad over stupid stuff. Try to focus because in a few years you won't have foster care and you have to make your own choices.

> Just hang on 'cause you'll get through it soon enough. You know? It's crazy. Just most of the time, this is supposed to be the best years of our lives, you know, high school and everything like that but it seems like it gets like, it's like worse in high school. Like in foster care, when you're in foster care, seems like everybody else has the time of their life. Their parents are like, "Well they're in high school. They should be able to do that." But foster care you can't do that.

Knowledge of Life Skills

Score Summary

On the ACLSA IV, participants total mastery scores improved by 33.3 percent,

from an initial score of 39.9 percent to a final score of 53.2 percent. Participants total

performance scores improved only slightly, from 63.2 percent to 65 percent, representing

a 1.8 percent increase. Respondents scored lowest on the subscale of housing and money

management, with a pretest mean of 13 percent and a posttest mean of 39.9 percent,

which was a statistically significant difference in scores.

Verbal Descriptions

Several questions on the individual interview were intended to elicit responses

indicating youths' knowledge of life skills. Youths were asked to describe their plans for

education, employment and housing after exiting the foster care system. They were also

asked what other teenagers in foster care needed to know about each of the course

domains: personal and interpersonal skills, job skills, housing and transportation, health,

planning for the future, and money management.

Employment

Interestingly, although participants had the highest mean scores in the domain of

"Work Life" (pretest of 67.7%, posttest of 69.5%) only 1 of the 16 participants in the

sample reported to be currently employed. Their responses in the individual interviews

indicates that they retained much of what was taught in the PAL classes, as they were

able to state specific things that would be helpful in seeking a job. The classroom

discussion on employment covered many of the topics mentioned in the following direct

quotes and included exercises in which participants practiced the class topics. Participants

said other teenagers preparing to leave foster care should know the following things

about employment.

> They need to know about like temp agencies…and work force and companies like that.

> Be responsible about it and have good professional….there are certain ways you act like in work and then when you're not at work. And I mean there's sometimes when joking around at work is okay but its not all the time. I mean work is exactly that, work. There's like a different set of norms.

> I haven't really got a job yet, but I guess, um, come in with a nice attitude.

> [Know] their social security number.

> Hopefully [they know] their rights and nobody can discriminate against them.

> How to fill out an application. How much money they are getting paid. How to write a check.

> Good resume, I guess. Whatever you put on your application, make sure it's something good. Not anything negative. Just make sure you make yourself look the best.

> It's like what [the trainer] said, when you put an application in and they don't call you back after a week, you can call them or go up there and be like, "I applied for this job and I haven't received a call back and everything. I was wondering if, you know, something went wrong or something?" Then you'll be stuck in their head, be like this, "This guy really wanted this job", or like "This girl did". Just make yourself stand out in front of everybody else, like you really wanted the job.

> They need to have good job skills. They need to know how to look professional and speak professional, on a professional basis.

> They can't have a bad background because no one will hire you.

> Find [a job] you'll have fun in. I don't know…the one that is best for you.

> Well they need to know if the job is good for them. Or if they like the job and all that stuff like or what are their interests in and stuff like that.

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Interpersonal Skills

On the ACLSA IV, the domain of "Social Relationships" included interpersonal skills. Mean mastery scores in this domain were higher than those in domains of Career Planning, Daily Living, and Housing and Money Management. The pretest mean in the Social Relationships was 56.9 percent and the posttest score was 58.7 percent. In individual interviews, several participants had difficulty recalling what the word "interpersonal" meant, and when provided the definition, still had difficulty in giving concrete examples of interpersonal skills that would be helpful for teens aging out of care to know. Instead, participants offered rather non-descriptive advice, such as "I guess just be interpersonal". A few participants, however, gave concrete examples of interpersonal skills necessary to building social relationships.

Overall, participants' qualitative responses to questions about interpersonal skills seemed consistent with their responding "very much like me" to almost 60 percent of the items in the interpersonal skills domain. The first three direct quotes listed below were most descriptive, and happened to be stated by the 3 participants who are designated a Basic level of care and seem to exercise the most independence among the all participants. Although briefer and a bit less concrete than the first three, the last four quotes were show that these participants had a general understanding of getting along with others.

> Well, for a one-on-one conversation, eye-to-eye contact and a firm, clear voice and ask questions if you don't understand anything.

> Need to know what a healthy relationship is. And how to build and maintain healthy relationships.

Just how to relate to people, I guess. Like social skills, being able to adapt, to socialize with a lot of different types of people.

Try to realize what the other person is thinking but don't just assume….don't think you know everything too.

Have respect for each other for what they say.

Interact with people they know they can interact with.

How to say things the right way without getting someone else angry.

One participant, after asking the researcher to define the word interpersonal, said that his peers in foster care should "Stop, think, act, and review". This statement was not taught in PAL classes nor was it included in any written curriculum. The participant explained that this essentially meant thinking before you act, and was unable to think of any other interpersonal skills that may be helpful to young adult living independently. Another participant who had difficulty responding to this question in the interview stated, "Um, I guess interpersonal skills…It's kind of like shocking. I can't remember much".

Health

On the ACLSA, health topics are represented in the "Self Care" domain. On this domain, the pretest mastery mean was 66.9 percent and the posttest master mean actually decreased to 64.2 percent. When asked to state what other teens in foster care should know about health topics, participants were less descriptive than on other life skills topics, often stating one or two-word responses. Their terse responses seemed to be inconsistent with their scores on the health subscale of the ACLSA, which indicated that a majority percentage of health questions were answered "very much like me".

In PAL classes, health topics included discussed on nutrition and eating habits,

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first aid, HIV awareness, substance abuse, stress management, and sexual awareness.

Interestingly, one participant mentioned "mental health" when asked what other

teenagers in foster care should know about health, even though the topic of mental health

was not part of the written curriculum or in-class discussions. Most participants

accurately recalled information taught in class regarding physical health and nutrition,

although one of the youngest sample participants, a 15-year-old who lived in a residential

facility, advised other teens in foster care that they should "go to the dentist every month

or every year."

> Six food groups of the food pyramid. Healthy nutrition. Mental health. Checking your medication levels. Also going to the doctor.

> Don't smoke.

> Stay as healthy as possible…just like exercising, eating good food.

> Basic health stuff, when to know when something is wrong. And if you don't, just get like a health book or something that tells you….something to tell you symptoms for things and maybe home remedies.

> Try to see the doctor regularly. If you don't worry about your health, you might have heart problems.

> Don't do drugs.

> At age 21 I think our Medicaid expires…after you turn 21 and your Medicaid expires…go ahead and start trying to reapply…because Medicaid helps a lot with a lot of things.

> What are the signs if like you're sick, you know, obesity, STD's.

> They just need to know, like, um, like keep their self well. Just keep them self healthy and stuff, like eat good food, like not just junk food and stuff.

> The nutritional values in everything that's in the food that they're eating.

Planning for the future

Participants made statements similar to each other when asked what one should know about how to plan for their future. Most participants talked about the importance of having a plan in place for yourself, and that if there is no set plan, things can get "off track" very quickly. One participate expressed this same notion by saying that one should have an "image or thought in your mind" to act as a guide, while another said that whatever the plan, it should be carried out step-by-step.

> If you don't [plan for the future] then you're going to have a lot of trouble. You've got to just really hard when, like once you get into it you kind of realize, "Oh, I can do this. I can get this, I can do this." Things start to add up but if you don't even start to try it then it's, it you try to wing it through then you're going to mess up. You're going to, something wrong is going to happen. If you don't have some kind of an image or thought in your mind about what is going to happen.

> I'd probably [ask] them "what do you like to do?"…some plans don't work out but at least do it step by step.
> They need to know what they want to be. Um, how they want to do it. Where they want to do it.

> Education is the key. Supposedly that's what we're taught. But more importantly is the drive and willpower ….so basically know what you want and go after it. And if you don't know what you want, you're just screwed I guess.

> Plan wisely. Life is not easy out there…I don't know from experience but I have had sister who know, and she recently came back into care because she found out its not easier out there.

> You should have a set plan down if you want to go somewhere in life. You should not, you know, not have a plan down. You know, also should have a backup plan in case the first plan does not work out. Like I have the EMT plan down if the doctor plan does not, you know, work out and I fail medical school.

Housing and Money Management

On the ACLSA IV, participants showed the most improvement in their knowledge of housing and money management with an average pretest score of 13 percent and an average posttest of 39.9 percent. Although changes in scores on this domain were statistically significant, the posttest score was low compared to other subscale posttest scores. In their individual interviews, all but one or two participants were unable to verbalize what a young adult aging out of foster care would need to know about these two topics beyond giving broad and vague advice that they remembered from PAL classes. It should be noted, however, that individual interviews were conducted prior to the housing and money management activities that were part of the field trip. Having the opportunity to apply these classroom concepts in a "real-life" setting may have led to different responses if an additional interview was conducted after the field trip. The following direct quotes illustrated some aspects of money management that participants found challenging, and included the information and skills participants thought other young adults preparing to leave foster care should know about housing and money management.

> Like with the W2 forms and the W4 forms, those were the main things that come on that were hard for me or hard for other people and the class and what to remember on them. And also about the check register, I wasn't real accurate in understanding that very well so I don't know if anyone else had the same issue but I think those three things were the main concerns.

> It's always good to have money put back in case something happens. And like there's stuff that comes up that you just don't think is going to happen.

> Have the bank help you…Like [the PAL trainer] said before, don't just leave it in your sock drawer or something like that.

> Go pick up those [housing booklets] from HEB, from Wal-Mart. House-hunting, like job-hunting, you've got to have a lot of free time. And if you don't have any

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its going to be really hard.

They need to check if the house is okay. They got to check if there's any, they just got to check if there's any like, you know, holes in the walls, windows or anything broken right before they buy the house they should talk to their landlord about the house so they can fix it.

To clean up after yourself if you live with other people.

How to pick out the house, if it's right for them….how to turn on the stove, ….talk to the apartment guy and see if there's any questions you need to ask.

How to pay the bills, what the basic bills are and probably, hmm, safety hazards and how to avoid them. You know, like don't put the hair dryer by a bathtub while you're in a bathtub.

Find a good house, one that is not too expensive or too messed up. All you need is a kitchen, bathroom, bedroom, and living room. Don't buy past what you have. I'm getting a mobile home.

I just say, you know, get everything together and, for me, pay rent….for me, that's all a house is about, paying rent. I mean, and cleaning it after that.

You want a house that you can pay for and live in that you're going to be able to keep but still pay for all your other stuff.

Um, they need to know how to get a house, you know, the rent, what kind of roommate to choose. What the price range is, whether the price is for like a one-bedroom and two bath or one-bedroom and one bath…and what kind of neighborhood it's in.

That's a tough one for me. I'm not very good at that. Um, budget I guess. I think like before you even get out into the world you should probably determine a list of what you really need and what you don't. What you can survive with and what you can like survive without…

Manage your money and use your money wisely…That movie we watched was funny….Don't spend bill money for spending money.

Just try not to be like the two people over there on the TV. …Figure out the things you need and worry about what you want later when you be able to have enough money saved up.

They need to not have problems with managing money first and then learn how

to save their money and learn how to manage it because if you don't know how to manage your money it's going to be a big problem when you live older and live in a house by yourself. You have problems with spending it then you'll have problems with saving it.

Research Question Three: *How are adolescents in foster care described and perceived by the TDFPS-PAL staff?*

To understand the PAL life skills training program from an ecological perspective, and for purposes of data triangulation, the perspectives of PAL staff in Texas were sought. This group of staff members is one of several systems with which youths in foster care are involved. Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (TDFPS) - PAL staff members were surveyed on their perceptions of strengths of youth in foster care, their opinions on PAL training program usefulness, their ideas for recommendations or changes to training curriculum/implementation, and on the challenges associated with their job functions. The PAL independent living skills classes are one of many supportive services and benefits offered under the larger umbrella of the PAL Program to teenagers in foster care. A PAL Staff is a caseworker and coordinator of these supportive services intended to help older youth in foster care prepare for their departure and transition from state foster care. PAL staff members provide case management services to youth ages 15 to 21, including making referrals to various PAL services such as life skills training (PAL classes).

Approximately three months after PAL courses concluded, a brief survey was administered to all twenty-seven TDFPS-PAL staff members in the state. The survey and cover letter serving as consent were electronically mailed to the PAL Program Specialist

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working in the TDFPS state office, who in turn electronically forwarded the documents to all PAL staff members in the state of Texas. Respondents were asked to complete the survey and mail the printed copy to the Principal Investigator's mailing address provided on the survey. Nine of 27 staff surveys were returned, for a response rate of 33 percent.

<center>Survey Results</center>

In TDFPS terms, PAL staff members did not carry a caseload per se, but rather a number of youth cases "open" to them "in the PAL stage". At the age of 15, youths are referred to the PAL Coordinator for the region from which the youth was removed and entered state foster care. The average number of cases "open in the PAL stage" to PAL Coordinators was 293 cases. The high number of cases on their workloads was listed as the biggest challenge for three survey respondents. One staff member said, "As a PAL worker, I have so many [cases] that I am reactive instead of proactive". Another said, "I find it hard to devote quality time to a youth as I have so many to assist and lots of paperwork to complete." Yet another said, "I have a high number of youth on my caseload that I cover. Trying to give them all the support, motivation, and hands-on experience that I want to give them…is challenging when I cover so many youth." In addition to high workloads, four respondents listed funding and staff as the most challenging aspects of their jobs, which they said were particularly problematic when the amount of administrative tasks keep increasing. The following direct quotes illustrated the challenge that lack of staff, lack of funding and increasing job duties presented:

> The documentation keeps increasing, but the staff remains the same. It's very hard to maintain the required activities for the PAL program, keep up with the budget, attend all the community meeting and activities, trying to establish the required Transitional Living Center, and maintain documentation for all the youth on your

workloads. The job responsibilities are out of control with no end in sight.

…Youth are constantly in crisis and at times there is no funding or ways to assist. The other issue is there are not enough PAL staff in our region for the amount of youths we are responsible for.

One survey respondent stated that the biggest challenge of being a PAL staff member related to working in a predominantly rural area. The staff member said that being in a rural area means that some areas lack resources for youths. In particular, housing and a transitional living center or living placement was much needed.

PAL staff members were asked if there was anything they would change about their jobs or roles, responses reflected the issues that were identified as the biggest challenges in their jobs. Among the recommended changes were increasing budget to hire more staff members, reduce caseloads, and reduce the amount of administrative duties staff members are responsible for, specifically so that PAL staff members had more "hands-on" time with youths on their caseloads.

Reasons for Non-Completion of PAL

Staff survey respondents were asked to rank order the reasons a youth might stop attending a PAL training program once he/she has started a program in a particular location. All but one respondent (n=8, 89%) listed "youth moves to another placement" as the most frequently occurring reason that youths do not complete PAL classes once they have started. The same number of respondents (n=8; 89%) listed "youth lacks transportation to and from classes" as the second most frequently occurring reason that youths do not complete PAL classes once they have started. Six participants (67%) listed "youth chooses to stop attending classes" as the third most frequently occurring reason

that youths do not complete PAL classes once they have started.

In this study, four of the five sample participants lost through attrition left the PAL classes for the top reasons listed by staff survey respondents. Two left because they moved to other substitute care placements, and two left because they lacked transportation to and from PAL classes. It was unknown whether or not any of the four continued PAL classes to completion in another PAL course.

<div align="center">Perceptions of Teens in Foster Care</div>

Survey respondents were asked in an open-ended question to state what they believed were the strengths of teenagers in the foster care system. Responses indicated that youths were viewed as having many strengths, among which were their adaptability, their sense of family, their resilience, and their resourcefulness. Although youth participants were not directly asked to name their personal strengths, in their individual interviews participants spoke of the importance of their families and the support they received from family members. These statements corresponded to the staff members' opinion that youths with whom they work exhibit a strong sense of family and family relationships. The following direct quotes by PAL staff demonstrated their perceptions of participants' strengths.

> One of the most amazing things to me is the youth/young adult accept and treat each other as brothers and sisters, despite their many diverse backgrounds.

> Resilient, resourceful, know wants and are able to express them, feel a sense of culture of among other youth in care.

> They are survivors!! They have a lot of experience dealing with people from all walks of life and various races. They are able to find a way to get what they need.

> They each are unique and wonderful in their own ways and have many strengths.

Some of these strengths include leadership skills, communication skills, goal-oriented, family-oriented, loving, caring, friendly, etc.

They want to have better lives for themselves, better than those that brought them to CPS.

Resilient. Desire to give back or make a difference.

Very optimistic.

Perseverance. Ability to cope with crisis. Adapt to change.

They are resilient and capable of adapting to change. They seem to appreciate the smaller things in life such as family, support, and working for what they want.

Survey respondents were also asked to name the greatest challenge faced by teens preparing to leave foster care and explain why it was the greatest challenge. One survey respondent expressed that youths should be trusted to practice the "real life skills" that cannot be taught in the classroom.

> Basic life skills that a class room setting cannot teach. A very large percentage of youth aging out of the foster care system have no actual basic real life skills. All the skills they have come from the PAL trainer. They need to be allowed to do more for themselves to learn actual life skills, for when they leave foster care. Getting a job, using public transportation, buying groceries, taking driver's education, getting state ID. Most youth in their own families, these things are just a part of everyday living. I don't know why foster teens have to be mistrusted, denied and held back in learning these basic skills.

> No home base, never had job experience, lack understanding of housing and lacks housing. Unrealistic expectations of independent living, not being prepared for all responsibilities….without these tools it is hard.

> The lack of support and housing, especially if not college bound. Also, those with some type of mental illness and not MR. There is no supported housing or services to help these youth and they are the ones that end up homeless, on drugs, or in jail.

> Lack of money. Lack of support system is greatest challenge because they don't have someone to guide them.

Uncertainty of the future. Most lack the support of close friends or relative that provide the encouragement necessary for them to move forward and realize that they can be successful.

They have little work experience and little savings. With outsourcing, entry levels that have decent benefits are hard to come by." "Youth do not realize that they will need cash for down payments, supplies, etc.

Although the majority of survey respondents listed the lack of various resources and supports as the greatest challenges faced by teenagers in foster care, three participants stated that youths were most challenged by their own attitude of entitlement or lack of motivation to pursue their goals. One participant said, "Often times, they may feel like people <u>owe</u> them something and they do not want to take a proactive role in their future." Another said that youths have "unrealistic expectations of the adult world" and an "entitlement attitude". A third participant said that youths' "follow-through" is a challenge "because our youth are lacking self-esteem/confidence…also they have to 'want' to achieve their goals".

<center>Views on PAL Classes</center>

Survey respondents were asked several questions designed to elicit their opinions on several aspects of the PAL life skills training program. First, they were asked what they believed were the strengths of the PAL classes. Participants agreed that PAL classes provided youth with a basic understanding of life skills but that these basics needed "to be followed up with daily reinforcement". One respondent believed that even these basic skills are valuable because youths "may or would not get them otherwise." Furthermore, it was thought that the "Transitional Living Allowance that is attached….gives youths incentive to complete." Survey respondents also believed that PAL classes "[brought]

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youth together providing them with an opportunity to practice social skills and develop

friendships" while another appreciated that some PAL trainers used "fun games to make

their points."

> It gives youth hands-on experience with core areas about Life Skills. The youth
> get to go into the community or partners from the community come and talk with
> the youth during PAL classes.

> Introduction to things youth need to know. They are not useful if the youth is not
> interested or if the skills are not reinforced regularly.

Staff survey respondents were asked which of the six domains in the PAL course

content they believed were most useful to youths. More than half of respondents (n=6,

66.6%) ranked course content on money management as most useful. Seven participants

(77.7%) ranked course content on job skills and housing/transportation as second or third

most useful to youths. In terms of overall usefulness of PAL life skills classes to youth,

the majority of participants (n=6; 66%) said they were "very useful", while three

participants (33%) said they were "somewhat useful".

In addition to ranking the usefulness of course content in each domain, PAL staff

were asked to suggest ways that the PAL life skills curriculum should be improved or

changed. One survey respondent said that curriculum in all life skill domains needed to

be improved and updated, another noted that materials and internet resources related to

money management needed to be kept up-to-date, and yet another suggested that a

statewide curriculum be developed. Remaining suggestions called for the addition of

more strengths-based, hands-on activities. For example, in the domain of job skills,

"teach them all of the resources in the community in which job assistance is available", in

the domain of housing and transportation, "teach them a bus route in the area in which they currently live", and in the domain of money management, "…actually taking them to a bank". Another participant suggested incorporating more guest speakers, such as domestic violence counselors for topics within the domain of personal and interpersonal skills. The same participant also noted that "Circle of Support [meetings] are helping to improve youth's outlook on the future and helps them start planning ahead."

PAL staff were asked how prepared were youth for independent living following the completion of PAL life skills classes. Overall, PAL staff believed that youths were somewhat to very prepared for independent living. Seven respondents said that youths were "somewhat prepared", and two participants said that youths were very prepared for independent living following the completion of PAL classes.

One respondent added an overall comment on the state of PAL classes, needed changes, and the challenges of being a PAL staff member.

> The classes and the PAL services are good programs, but the youth need more actual daily life skills training, to enhance the PAL classroom training. The foster youths need to be given more freedom and trust, to make some normal teenage decisions, such as using public transportation, getting a job, and learning how to locate housing, be allowed to practice what they learn in PAL life skills training. The PAL Coordinator's job has become extended CVS, because we spend so much time doing actual casework with the youth, transporting them to search for housing and jobs, transporting them to obtain their ID's, and other important papers. We are often told we need to be involved with the community, these committees and boards take up a lot of time, and our workloads continue to increase and so does the documentation.

Chapter Summary

Through individual interviews and background questionnaires, study participants described their experiences in foster care, gave advice to foster parents and state

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caseworkers, and shared their perceptions of the PAL classes. Although participants often used negative words to describe their experiences in the foster care system, their responses in the background questionnaire suggest that the majority of participants felt "lucky" to be placed in foster care and were "satisfied" with their experiences in foster care.

In addition, although almost 70 percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that their caseworkers had been a help to them while in the system, participants had somewhat negative descriptions of their experiences with state caseworkers. Their descriptions suggested that they felt ignored and misunderstood by state caseworkers, and they advised caseworkers to visit children on their caseloads more often. In addition, several participants perceived some foster parents to be "in it for the money" and felt they were treated differently from biological children in the foster home. However, responses to the background questionnaire suggest that the majority of participants found foster parents to be a help to them while in foster care. Participants found PAL classes to be helpful but believed that classes alone would not prepare them to live on their own outside of the foster care system. Participants offered the most positive advice to their peers in foster care, encouraging them to "keep your head up", and persevere through the hard times.

In general, participants scored relatively highly on all three standardized measures. On the MOS Social Support Survey, differences in total scores and scores on 3 of 4 subscales were statistically significant. On the RYDM, differences in total mean scores and subset scores changes in scores were not statistically significant, and did not

appear to be substantively significant. On the ACLSA, changes in scores for the domain of housing and money management were statistically significant and suggested implications for future program changes related to incorporation of interactive exercises in which students can apply classroom concepts in a "real-life setting". In addition, scores on all measures were similar to other studies using the same measures and to benchmark data available for comparison.

Scores on standardized measures were compared to how participants actually described their social supports and assets, and knowledge of life skills in qualitative interviews. This analysis found that participants' scores were fairly consistent with their descriptions. The majority of participants stressed the importance of family, said that family members were their main sources of emotional support, and planned to contact biological family members after they leave foster care. To a lesser extent, participants stated that they would depend on biological family members for financial support. In general, participants appeared to have an understanding of independent living skills that one would need to live independently of the foster care system. Some participants had a greater understanding of life skills and grasp of the course material than others.

Analysis of PAL staff surveys (N=9) revealed that PAL staff averaged 293 cases for which they were responsible. Staff members cited high caseloads, funding, lack of staff, and lack of services in rural areas as the biggest challenges in their jobs. Staff members recommended the following changes to improve their jobs: increase budget, hire more staff, reduce caseloads, and reduce administrative duties in order to have more "hands-on" time with youths. Eighty-nine percent (n=8) of staff ranked "youth moves to

another placement" as the most frequently occurring reason a youth might not complete

PAL classes in a particular location, followed by "youth lacks transportation to and from

classes". In this study, four of the five sample participants lost through attrition left the

PAL classes for the top two reasons listed by staff survey respondents. Overall, staff

members perceived youths in foster care to possess many strengths, including

adaptability, sense of family, resilience, and resourcefulness. Staff members believed

PAL classes were beneficial for youths overall but should be reinforced with frequent

opportunities to practice learned skills in "real-life" settings.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Past research has suggested that youths in foster care are at risk for poor outcomes in the years after they have aged out of the child welfare system (Courtney et. al., 2004; Barth and Ferguson, 2004), and that participation in independent living skills programs may improve their outcomes (Cook, 1994; Scannapieco et. al., 1995). Past research; however, has not fully explored the relationship between resilience and independent living skills programs, and the ways in which these programs may potentially have a buffering effect against risk or adversity.

This study responded to a call for more qualitative research to augment the large-scale quantitative research aimed at testing hypotheses about resilience in children and youth (Furstenberg, 2000; Luthar and Burack, 2000). This exploratory study sought an increased understanding of independent living skills training provided to adolescents in Texas in order to inform future research on the quality and effectiveness of independent living skills training. More specifically, the study explored how the program was implemented, how the program was perceived by youth and by TDFPS-PAL staff, and how the program influenced resilience, social support and life skills among youth transitioning from foster care in central Texas.

Study findings provided further understanding of the supports, strengths, assets, and life skills that the sample of foster care youth possess, as well as the areas in which more preparation and work may be needed. In the following sections, the study's key findings, limitations, strengths, and implications are discussed.

Key Findings

Program Factors

Related to program implementation, findings indicated that the program curriculum addressed topics relevant to being self-sufficient, including personal and interpersonal skills, job skills, housing and transportation, health, planning for the future, and money management. Although the curriculum included these topics, it was not modified to address issues specific to foster care youth. For example, according to the curriculum on the topic of parental rights and liability, it was discussed that at age 18, parents were no longer legally liable for their children. For many youths in foster care whose parents' rights are terminated well before youths reach age 18, the question of legal liability may be different; however, this difference was not discussed in classroom nor was it addressed in the curriculum.

The curriculum was also not modified or adapted to accommodate developmental or other differences among group participants. Although data on participants' reading levels were not assessed or obtained from another source, the researcher observed that approximately 8 participants (50%), 5 of whom lived in the all-male residential facility, frequently made mistakes or did not know how to pronounce certain words such as "procedure" and "obligation", and "tenant" when reading aloud in class. Furthermore, at least half of the sample had been placed in special education and slightly more than half had repeated a grade. Varying developmental levels among participants and residing in restrictive placement settings may not only have influenced their performance in the course and on the study measures, it could potentially inhibit their overall learning and

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acquisition of life skills. The PAL curriculum should include instructions for trainers on ways to modify various lessons and exercises to accommodate varying developmental levels and cognitive abilities. It should also include methods of teaching concepts and skills without heavily relying on participants' reading abilities.

On at least two occasions when participants brought up particular experiences or asked questions related to the course topic, such as past drug use or returning home to family after leaving foster care, these were not followed up or discussed with the larger group. These occasions represented "missed teaching opportunities" that, had they not been missed, could perhaps further engage youths in the classes and address issues that may not be addressed in home or school settings. Lastly, participants' scores on the ACLSA IV were not used to develop specific plans and training to prepare each youth for adult living, although this is the intended use of these scores (TDFPS website, 2007). Had the scores been used to modify each youth's teaching plan, results in this study may be impacted, particularly their scores on the ACLSA and their verbal descriptions of what other teens in foster care should know about each life skills domain.

Youth Factors

While the sample in this study was in some ways similar to state and national foster care data, it also had some unique features that potentially impacted the study's findings and implications. Similar to state and federal foster care data, participants in this study had, on average, long tenures and multiple moves while in the child welfare system. Participants' average length of time in foster care was 4 years and 8 months, compared to the state average of 5 years. Participants' average number of placements

while in foster care was 10.4, compared to the state average of 8 placements (for youths with a permanency plan of emancipation). Related to length of time and number of placements in foster care, the question of how these two factors influence youths' development, educational attainment, and acquisition of life skills remains. In this sample, 3 participants changed placements during the PAL training course and it was unknown whether they were re-enrolled in another PAL training course after their moves. Additionally, Fifty percent of the sample (n=8) lived in two different residential treatment centers (RTC's). One of these residential placements, the all-male facility where Site 2 was located, was known in Texas as a placement reserved for male youths who were not able to maintain their behavior to live in a therapeutic foster home, or were in need of a more restrictive and therapeutic environment. It was not known if the participants living in either of the residential treatment centers were developmentally delayed or had more significant emotional or behavioral problems than participants living in foster or group homes. However, the researcher observed the youths living in RTC's to be less articulate, less knowledgeable, and less specific in their descriptions of life skills and future plans and goals.

Also similar to Texas data on children in foster care and consistent with the literature on the over- or under-representation of minority children in the child welfare system (disproportionality), this sample had a majority of ethnic minority participants. There were 5 (31.2%) Hispanic participants compared to 44.1 percent Hispanic youth statewide, 3 (18.8%) African American participants compared to 12.5 percent statewide, and 1 mixed race (African American and Hispanic) participant (DFPS, 2007).

There was also an overrepresentation of youth participants living in residential treatment placements (50%), compared to most youth in Texas foster care (approximately 56 percent) residing in less restrictive, basic or therapeutic foster homes. In addition, while most youths in the Texas child welfare system were assigned a basic level of care (58%), only 3 study participants (19%) were assigned a basic level of care (Texas Data Book, 2006). Half the sample reported being placed in special education at some point, and a little over half (n=9, 56%) had repeated a grade in school. Mech and Che-Man Fung (1999) researched the possible effects of living for periods of time in more restrictive settings. The study found that children who spent most of their foster care experiences in highly restrictive settings completed fewer years of school and had lower educational aspirations at age 21 than did children in less restrictive settings. Furthermore, the study found that 41 percent of children placed in the most restrictive settings failed to complete high school, whereas approximately one quarter of children in least restrictive settings failed to complete high school.

Statistical Findings

Scores on standardized measures were not analyzed for purposes of making inferences about program effectiveness due to the study's lack of random sampling and random group assignment. Rather, these scores provided one more vantage point to view the case (the PAL program) and provided quantitative data that could be compared to qualitative data of the same three constructs. These results must be interpreted with a substantial degree of caution. Most notably, this study was limited by a small sample size. Thus, differences in scores on the resilience and life skills measures may reach

significance with a larger sample. Furthermore, social desirability, testing effects, response set problems and respondent fatigue could have impacted study results. Despite these threats to internal validity, results of the standardized measures may be seen as encouraging, in that mean scores on all three standardized measures increased from pretest to posttest.

The MOS Social Support Survey had the largest change in mean scores, indicating that youths were receiving social support "some of the time" or "most of the time". The change in means from pretest to posttest o the RYDM was very small, yet overall scores on were in the "high" range of internal and external assets. Participants' high scores on the RYDM may be an indication of response set problems, or they may be an indication that participants indeed have internal and external assets that serve as sources of support and strength in the face of adversity. The scores may also be related to the youths' expression of a sense of optimism about the future.

Although differences in total scores and subset scores on the RYDM were not statistically significant, the mean score on "meaningful participation" was the only subset score in the "moderate" range, perhaps indicating the need for further study in the future into the types and number of opportunities for meaningful participation provided to youth in foster care. Although the total ACLSA scores did not increase significantly, scores on the housing and money management subscale were statistically significant. As for the statistically significant difference seen in the housing and money management pretest and posttest, the researcher hypothesized that the statistically significant change seen in the housing and money management subscale of the ACLSA subscale was perhaps related to

the fact that the only interactive activities that were part of the field trips involved

housing and money management. The groups visited an apartment complex and were

instructed to find answers to a long list of questions about rules and policies of the

apartment complex. To practice budgeting, the groups participated in a comparison

shopping activity in a grocery store. These activities that were conducted as part of the

field trips allowed youths the opportunity to apply concepts taught in the classroom. This

application of concepts perhaps resulted in greater comprehension of concepts.

Alternately, because the final administration of the ACLSA happened approximately two

to three hours after the field trip activities, participants may simply have had more

confidence in their abilities following the successful completion of field trip activities,

therefore, responded more positively on the mastery items of the ACLSA.

A comparison of scores on standardized measures to data from qualitative

interviews indicated that, for the most part, participants' descriptions of social support,

resilience, and life skills were congruent with their scores on the three standardized

measures. On the measure of social support, scores indicated that participants received

support "some of the time" or "most of the time". In individual interviews, participants

described family members as their greatest sources of emotional support and

encouragement. All but two participants currently visited some members of their

biological families, and 75 percent were "likely" to contact biological family members

after they left foster care.

On the resilience measure, participants' scores were not statistically significant

and did not appear to be clinically significant, yet fell in the "high" range of internal and

external assets. In individual interviews, emerging themes reflected the external asset of caring relationships, and the internal assets of empathy, goal-orientation, and self-efficacy. The extent to which participants talked about their families and the importance of their relationships with them suggested the presence of caring relationships. However, participants' relationships with family members and visitation plans were based on participants' self-report only and not confirmed in state case records, therefore, the high score on the caring relationship subset may accurately reflect the presence of this asset in participants' lives.

Participants' descriptions and attitudes about being able to take care of themselves and wanting to do things without help may suggest a sense of self-efficacy and be age-appropriate considering developmental theory. In particular, Erikson (1968) states that adolescence is the time in which individuals begin to develop their adult identity and adult role responsibilities. On the other hand, it was unclear in the interview analysis whether the attitude of "doing things on their own" was participants' developmentally appropriate expression of their developing adult identities and role responsibilities, or more of a defensive mechanism to protect themselves from being hurt or rejected. At least one participant spoke of wanting to do things without any help from others because "people can let you down".

Although participants' scores on standardized measures were somewhat comparable to benchmark data and data in other studies, the extent to which the program itself impacted resilience, social support, and life skills remains unknown, as inferences about program effectiveness could not be made. With the exception of the ACLSA,

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scores on the measures of social support and resilience were relatively high at pretest and posttest, perhaps suggesting the existence of social support and resilience, or perhaps were related to the nature of the standardized measures. Given that the measures had all but one positively phrased item, high scores at pretest were interpreted with caution. Analysis of pretest and posttest scores were also interpreted with caution, as testing effects posed a threat to the validity of the findings. Respondent fatigue and acquiescent response sets were also of concern given the number of items that participants were asked to complete. However, the congruence between participants' scores on standardized measures and their verbal descriptions provided at least a small degree of confidence in the validity of scores on standardized measures.

In further analysis of scores on standardized measures and interview data, findings indicated that females in the sample did better than males on all three standardized measures and were more articulate and verbose in individual interviews. These findings are supported by other studies involving independent living outcomes that had similar findings related to gender differences (Daining, 2004; Kerman, Wildfire, and Barth, 2002). One possible explanation for this finding is that the researcher's female gender influenced participants' comfort level and the extent to which they described and disclosed their experiences. Another possible explanation for the finding is that the gender differences were attributable to possible developmental differences. Research has substantiated that females mature earlier than males in several developmental aspects, including puberty (e.g., Blyth, Simmons, & Zakin, 1985) and some studies indicate gender differences in psychosocial development (Gore, 1993; Minnesota Women's Fund,

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1992; Sadker and Sadker, 1994, as cited in Clark, 1995). In relation to resilience, researchers have found significant gender differences in susceptibility to, and protection from, situations of risk (McGloin and Widom, 2001). Turner, Norman, and Zunz (1995) argue that, due to these differences, prevention programs should incorporate gender-specific resilience strategies in programming to meet males and females differing needs.

On the other hand, the differences in scores on all three measures may not be attributable to gender differences. Rather, differences may have to do with participants' placement types. Although scores did appear to differ along gender lines, all but one of the residents in the all-male Site 2 group was placed in a residential facility, a more restrictive environment for youths with more therapeutic needs. Perhaps there is another common factor among this all male group, such as the reasons for being placed in the residential facility, which accounts for their lower scores on standardized measures. The greatest difference in scores, almost a 50-point difference, was seen on the measure of life skills. Considering that differences might have been attributable to placement type rather than gender, it might have been that such a large difference in life skills scores was due to the fact that youths in residential treatment centers did not have as many opportunities to practice or learn life skills in real-life settings. In particular, male participants living in the residential facility attended an on-campus school and all activities were on-grounds and closely supervised by adults.

Qualitative vs. Quantitative Data

Analysis of the qualitative interviews and quantitative data from the background questionnaires and standardized measures revealed interesting contrasts in the data. For

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example, in qualitative interviews, 75 percent of the youth sample said they wanted or planned to go to college. Yet, analysis of the background questionnaires revealed that about half of the youth sample had been enrolled in special education, and more than half of the sample had repeated grades and received school suspensions. Furthermore, participants stated in interviews that what worried them most were such things as "graduating", "doing drugs", "going to prison", "death", and "being separated from family". Why might participants have stated plans and aspirations to go to college given their educational difficulties and worries that include far more serious issues than college attendance? There are a number of possible for this seeming disconnect in participants' reports.

First, the disparity could be related to the fact that data on the background questionnaire was based on self-report and did not specify time or extent of the event. Although half of the sample reported to have been placed in special education and more than half repeated grades and received suspensions, participants' memory of these events may be inaccurate or they may have misinterpreted the meaning of the questions. Furthermore, it was not asked or determined whether participants were placed in special education for just one subject or for all subjects, or if they received one suspension versus many suspensions. In addition, statements and questions in the background questionnaire did not specify whether these educational events (placement in special education, suspension, and repeating grades) occurred before or after placement into the foster care system.

On the whole, the questionnaire data suggested poor educational outcomes, which was contrary to participants' interview statements about high educational aspirations. However, the data was consistent with past outcome studies that showed graduation rates among foster care youth to be between 30 and 50 percent and that showed foster care youth as six times as likely to graduate with a GED as the general population (McMillen & Tucker, 1998; Scannapieco, Schagrin, & Scannapieco, 1995; Pecora et. al. 2005). Had background questionnaire specified "when" and "how much" in relation to educational variables, data from the two sources might be more similar. For example, a participant who repeated an early grade before being placed into foster care might have had higher educational aspirations than a participant who repeated a later grade while placed in foster care.

Another possible explanation for this disconnect between the two sources of data was that participants were simply thinking unrealistically about their educational futures. About 75 percent of participants thought they would go to college if they could go as far as they wanted in school, and about 50 percent thought they would actually go as far as they wanted in school. Even so, that 50 percent of participants thought they would actually go to college seemed relatively high considering that half the sample was placed in special education, and more than half had repeated a grade and received suspensions. Perhaps participants were unaware of the requirements for college acceptance and for completing a college degree. For some participants who stated a desire or plan to go to college, this seemed to be the case. For example, one young woman who stated a desire to become a doctor said that she would attend a college that was known to the researcher

as one that did not have a medical school. The participant did not seem to be aware that becoming a medical doctor required attendance at a medical school, rather than attendance at a four-year state college alone. Perhaps the unrealistic expectations about what they could accomplish indicated the extent to which participants comprehended or were provided career counseling in school and/or in the PAL training program.

Another possibility for the disparity in the data is that despite participants' poor school performance or educational attainment, they continued to have hopes and aspirations for educational attainment. Indeed, surveys of adults formerly in foster care found that they were unsatisfied with their educational experiences, and reported that the foster care system did not encourage high expectations for their educational accomplishments and attainment (Vera Institute of Justice, 2004).

Another perplexing aspect of the data was the comparison of participants' verbal descriptions of their experiences in foster care compared to their responses in the background questionnaire. In interviews, when asked to describe their experiences in foster care, participants used mostly negative words to do so, such as "pain", "lack of trust", "dramatic", and "emotional". They also described negative experiences with state caseworkers and advised state caseworkers to visit children on their caseloads more often. In fact, in comparing two models of preparing foster youth for emancipation, Waldinger and Furman (1994) found that the primary difference between the two models was the extent of caseworker involvement, and that there were increased benefits to a youth when one consistent person maintains responsibility for both the on-going case management and emancipation preparation. This clearly did not seem to be the case for

most study participants. Participants also described somewhat negative experiences with previous foster parents who "were in it just for the money", and treated foster children different from their biological children in the home.

The ambiguous phrasing of the statements, "All in all I was lucky to be placed in the foster care system", "Generally I am satisfied with my experience in the foster care system", and "All in all foster parents have been a help to me", left room for many possible explanations for the differences between questionnaire and interview data. Despite their negative views and experiences, results indicated that the majority of the sample were "satisfied" with their experiences in foster care and felt "lucky" to be in foster care. One possible explanation for this contradiction is that although participants had had negative experiences in foster care, they felt lucky to be in foster care because placement into foster care afforded them more benefits and resources, such as paid college expenses, than their biological homes. Or, perhaps participants felt "lucky" and "satisfied" compared to their experiences in their biological homes or with biological family members. For example, the one participant who spoke of a time in the past when he and his siblings were homeless might have considered this experience when responding to these questionnaire statements. Participants' overall satisfaction despite their negative descriptions may also be indicative of self-awareness or a sense of optimism, both of which are considered internal assets in the theoretical framework of the resilience measure used in this study. Another possible explanation of this contradiction is that participants felt "satisfied" and "lucky" in their current placement but used negative words to describe past placements or experiences with foster parents. A singular

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experience that was particularly negative may have been a strong point of reference for participants when answering this question, or participants may have had negative experiences in several different foster placements. This distinction was not made in these questions.

Indeed, one participant expressed this sentiment by saying that she was "better off" in foster care and advised other teens in foster care to take full advantage of what the foster care system can offer, such as paid college education. Findings in this study are consistent with findings in the Midwest Study (Courtney, Tarao, and Bost, 2004), from which most of the items in the background survey were borrowed. In the Midwest Study, 54 percent of the sample (N=732) agreed that they were "lucky" to be placed into the foster care system and 61.2 percent were satisfied with their experiences in the foster care system. Yet, in the Midwest Study and in the current study, participants were not asked to explain or clarify why they believed they were lucky or satisfied; therefore, their bases of comparison for feeling lucky and satisfied remain unknown.

When looking at the mostly positive responses to these questions, response set issues must be considered. For the following statements, responses ranged from very strongly agree to very strongly disagree, each beginning with very strongly agree: All in all I was lucky to be placed in the foster care system; Generally I am satisfied with my experience in the foster care system; Overall social workers have been a help to me while I was in the foster care system; All in all foster parents have been a help to me; All in all the counselors or staff of the group homes, child caring institutions or residential treatment centers have been a help to me. All of these statements are phrased in the

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positive, and response choices all began with very strongly agree. Participants may have chosen the first response choice for a few reasons. Participants may have attempted to give a socially desirable answer. Since these questions were near the end of the questionnaire, participants may have been fatigued and simply checked the first response in the list, rather than reading through each response item. In addition, given that some participants were observed to struggle in reading, participants who struggled to read certain questions may not have fully comprehended the statements and simply marked the first response (very strongly agree).

Another factor that deserves consideration is the researcher's use of monetary incentives to encourage youths' participation in the study. Although several youths told the researcher that they would participate in the study even if no money was involved, the use of incentives had the potential to bias participants' responses. In addition, for their participation in PAL, the PAL program paid participants $5.00 for each class and $1,000 for successful completion of the entire PAL course. These program incentives also could have had a biasing effect, as participants may have behaved, responded, or participated differently because of the monetary compensation. As a result, what the researcher witnessed through direct observation of each course may have been different from what might be observed had participants not been paid for PAL attendance and completion.

Social Desirability

The issue of social desirability with these questions and with all study measures in general also cannot be ignored. The background questionnaire was completed on the first day of the PAL class, whereas qualitative interviews were completed midway through the

PAL course. It is possible that the timing of these events influenced participants' responses. Because the questionnaire was filled out on the first day of class, participants also may not have trusted the researcher enough to provide truthful, and perhaps more negative, responses. By the time the interviews were conducted midway through the course, respondents may have trusted the researcher more or simply felt more comfortable talking about all of their experiences in foster care, both positive and negative. On the other hand, because the interviews were face-to-face, participants may have been more compelled to answer in a way thought to be desirable to the researcher. The researcher may have also unknowingly exhibited verbal or non-verbal behavior that reinforced responses in a positive or negative direction.

Participants may have responded that they felt "lucky" and "satisfied" with the belief that that was what the researcher wanted to hear, that positive answers would please the researcher, or because they did not want to be perceived as having negative views of foster care. Participants may have also believed that these favorable assessments of foster care were what they were "supposed" to say, or what they were "supposed" to believe. Perhaps participants had been told by state caseworkers, foster parents, biological family members or others that they were lucky to have been placed into foster care. Perhaps due to low self-esteem or a poor sense of self-worth participants viewed themselves as undeserving of quality care and attention in the foster care system, thereby feeling satisfied with their placement into foster care despite the negative experiences they described in interviews.

Social Comparison Theory

In questionnaire and interview data, participants made statements and answered questions in ways that suggested a sense of satisfaction with their current situations and a strong sense of optimism about the future. The question that is most intriguing remains: What explains participants feeling lucky and satisfied in foster care and feeling optimistic about the future in the face of abusive histories, loss of biological family, and reported negative experiences with foster parents, caregivers, and state caseworkers? Concepts and hypotheses of social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) may provide some answers or insights to this question.

Social comparison theory posits that humans have a drive to evaluate their opinions and abilities by measuring their attributes against direct, physical standards. When objective, physical standards are absent, humans compare themselves with other people. More specific to this theory is Festinger's "similarity hypothesis" which predicts that individuals prefer to compare themselves to similar others (Wood, 1989), and assumes that comparison choices will be typically oriented toward superior others in order to achieve greater abilities. This is termed upward comparison. Festinger also hypothesized that one's tendency to compare to someone similar lessens as one's own abilities and opinions differ from those of the target of comparison.

Social comparison theory has undergone numerous transitions over the years, developing from a theoretical statement into a varied area of research with many approaches and paradigms (Buunk and Mussweiler, 2001). One of these developments was made by Brickman and Bulman (1977) and Wills (1981) who argued that even

though upward comparisons might be informative, individuals may be threatened by others who are perceived to be superior and may avoid these comparisons altogether. Instead, they may compare themselves with others thought to be worse off, inferior, or less advantaged. These types of comparisons are termed downward comparisons. People may engage in downward comparisons even when they are not threatened. Downward comparisons appear to reduce distress or enhance self esteem (Crocker and Gallo, 1985; Gibbons, 1986; Hakmiller, 1966; Lemyre and Smith, 1985), and in studies involving individuals with such problems as job disruption, marital conflicts, general stress, and cancer, these individuals rated their circumstances as more favorable than those of others.

The process of downward comparison may offer a possible or partial explanation for participants' statements that suggested optimism and satisfactory feelings about foster care despite recounting negative experiences in interviews. If participants engaged in downward comparisons, they may have seen their circumstances (placement in foster care) as more favorable than those of others (perhaps in abusive biological homes). Perhaps comparing themselves to other teens in foster care who they perceive to be worse off or less advantaged made them feel better about themselves or somehow relieved pain or stress associated with their history or current circumstances.

Another aspect of the data that social comparison theory might explain is the many statements that participants made about other teens in foster care. Described in the previous chapters as participants' empathy for their peers in foster care, these statements may be reflective of a downward social comparison process. One participant's statement clearly suggested that she saw her circumstances (in this case her history of ritualistic

abuse), as more favorable (i.e. less severe) than some of her peers. This participant's

statement may have been made in an effort to enhance her self-esteem or to reduce her

distress about her own history of abuse.

> Some people's life, I have a good life in the sense that I wasn't abused. I was
> ritualistic abused but I wasn't molested by my parents. I [didn't] had my head
> pushed through a wall or anything like that. Most of the kids have had worse lives
> than I have and I'm amazed….I've had life made for me.

Participants also may have compared themselves to their foster care peers, those

who they perceived as similar, rather than to their non-foster care peers, who they

perceive as dissimilar. This would be consistent with Festinger's hypothesis that as

differences between reference groups diverge, tendencies to compare to those groups

decrease. That is, participants may have perceived themselves to be so different from

their non-foster care counterparts that they ceased comparing themselves to them.

Study Limitations

Despite the limitations, the study data provided exploratory insights into the

implementation of independent living programs and the use of resilience frameworks in

studies involving older youths in foster care. The small youth sample (N=16) was a

limitation and, as a result, a caution was added to the interpretation of statistical tests. It

was expected that the youth sample size would be between 30 and 35, as each PAL

course typically enrolled 15 to 18 youths. However, due to low enrollment in courses and

attrition, the final youth sample size was 16. Although the purpose of the study was not to

generalize to a larger population, a larger sample would have yielded more quantitative

and qualitative data, perhaps allowing for more precise analysis by particular variables

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such as gender, ethnicity, and level of care. Another limitation involved the variables of social support and resilience, which are difficult to measure change in a short period of time (in this case, 7 weeks). The somewhat short timeframe for administering the measures may have increased the likelihood of testing effects. Furthermore, the standardized measures of resilience and life skills had limited psychometrics. Construct validity had not been established for the RYDM, and because a newer version of the ACLSA was used, reliability and validity had not yet been established. One limitation of the comparison data used in the study was the uncertainty around the comparison sample participants' knowledge of life skills. Whether or not those study participants had received any type of life skills training before, during, or after completing the measures was unknown. Lastly, rigor of the study would have been enhanced by multiple interviews over a longer period of time, prolonged engagement with the study sample, and use of member-checking to verify emergent themes in the data.

<div align="center">Study Strengths</div>

Use of a case study design to further understand the impact of a particular independent living skills program on resilience, social support, and life skills was not found in the research literature. Departing from much of the retrospective and secondary analysis research on the independent living services and negative outcomes, this study involved youths who were still living in foster care. The study was framed by a case study method of inquiry, which combined a long period of direct observation of program participants with more objective, standardized measures to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the constructs under study. Furthermore, this design incorporated the

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youth perspective, which is increasingly called for in the aging out literature. Use of three complementary theoretical perspectives allowed for the development of a unique conceptual framework based on individual and environmental strengths and resources of youths in foster care. Lastly, scores on standardized measures and interview data were somewhat consistent with each other and with data collected in other studies using the same measures, increasing the researcher's confidence in the validity of the findings.

Theoretical Implications

Olsson et. al. (2003) identified that the study of resilience is closely related to intervention, in that protective processes can inform the development of targeted intervention. If resilience is indeed a process affected by environmental and developmental changes, then use of a conceptual framework such as the one in this study, which considers individual development and environmental factors, should be considered in the development of said targeted interventions. Although inferences about the PAL program's effectiveness in increasing social support, resilience, and life skills cannot be made, results of the comparison of standardized scores to individual interview data at least suggested further, more rigorous research into the question of whether the development of life skills positively affects the resilience process. In addition, the finding that scores on standardized measures differed, possibly by gender or by placement type, indicated the need for future research on how resilience processes may differ by these two variables.

In this case, findings suggested that the resilience process may not only be affected by the development of life skills, but also by the development of social supports

and external assets including caring relationships, high expectations, and meaningful participation. Foster parents and caseworkers can play an integral role in helping to develop these supports and assets for youths by helping youths maintain relationships with family members or other significant persons in youths' lives, and providing opportunities for participation in extracurricular or community activities, including life skills training classes.

The finding that participants' may be engaging in downward comparisons suggests the need for further examination of social comparison theory in the context of youth in foster care. In particular, how self-esteem and self-concept are related to the comparisons that teens in foster care make deserves further examination, as does the role that environmental factors play in social comparisons.

<div align="center">Implications for Social Work Practice</div>

This study has important implications for social work practice and programming of independent living skills training. The predominant theme of family connection that emerged in the individual interviews suggested the need for social workers or child welfare workers to conduct thorough searches for persons significant to each youth in foster care, whether a CASA volunteer, a coach, a former teacher, or a relative. One possible solution to ensure that adequate searches are conducted is through mandated, extensive searches for all persons significant to youths who could serve as a source of support.

Related to the theme of family and the finding that PAL program curriculum did not adequately address issues specifically related to foster care youth, life skills

curriculum should be re-written or adapted to better address family relationships, and returning home to family after foster care. Issues that may arise or exist as a result of returning to a live with a family member or to the home from which the youth was removed especially need to be addressed in the PAL curriculum. Furthermore, findings of the study showed that 87.5% (n=14) of the sample currently had visitation with some family members. Considering the stated importance of family by participants, the need for social workers to ensure and facilitate visitation whenever and wherever possible is needed, particularly given that the support of family members (or non-relatives that youths consider to be family) could potentially improve youths' chances of a successful transition to adulthood.

Study findings also indicated implications for foster parent education and involvement in the preparation of youths for living outside of the foster care system. The finding that study participants seemed to better comprehend and remember concepts and ideas when they were associated with opportunities to practice in "real-life" settings suggests the need for foster parent training. In particular, foster parents should be educated on ways to teach living skills and provide opportunities to practice these within the foster home. Following the advice of participants in the study, foster parents should be provided education on being sensitive and responsive to issues specific to foster children and on treating all children in the home fairly and equally. Not only did participants experience the effects of state caseworker turnover, results of the PAL staff survey indicated that PAL staff carried very large caseloads which PAL staff reported to be the biggest challenge in their jobs. These findings indicate the need for reduced

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caseloads and increased funding to hire more staff so that state caseworkers may visit

children on their caseloads on a monthly basis, and so that PAL staff may have more

"hands-on" involvement with transitioning youths.

Findings related to program implementation have implications for future

independent living programming and facilitation. Particularly, use of the ACLSA scores

to guide individual instruction and program implementation is indicated, as are curricula

modifications to better incorporate issues specific to adolescents in foster care.

Conversely, curricula should also be standardized to ensure that services are being

provided and taught consistently throughout the state, and to allow for more rigorous

evaluation of the program curricula's effectiveness. Participants in this study offered

advice and recommendations for changes to improve PAL classes. Youths' perspectives

and recommendations should be incorporated as much as possible in order to meet the

youths' self-identified needs and to increase youths' level of investment in the training

programs. The finding in the study that the life skills domain of housing and money

management had a statistically significant change in means, and happened to be the

domain that had real-life application during a field trip may indicate the need for more

opportunities to practice skills outside of the classroom setting. In addition, given the

possible gender and placement type differences found in this study, planners could

consider implementing gender-specific programs or programs that target youths living in

various placement types, particularly those placements types that are more restrictive and

offer fewer opportunities to practice skills in a real-life setting.

To address the finding that most participants stated a desire to go to college

despite their problems in school, schools should increase the amount of career counseling for youth, particularly if school counselors are aware of certain youths residing in foster care. These youths need to be counseled early and often by school staff, foster parents, and/or state caseworkers regarding their current educational status as well as their future plans and aspirations. If a youth aspires to attend college, early assistance and counseling by caregivers and other responsible parties could aid in making this a realistic rather than unattainable goal. If further research supports this study's finding that participants were optimistic about their futures and had plans and aspirations, practitioners should focus on findings ways to maximize their optimism about the future.

<center>Implications for Policy and Future Research</center>

First, future researchers studying youth aging out of foster care should be cautioned about interpreting certain aspects of this study's findings. In particular, participants' reports of feeling lucky to be in foster care and satisfied with their placement into foster care should not be taken at face value without carefully considering the possible explanations for these statements. One cannot assume that participants' positive outlooks and optimism are indicators that outcomes for this group will be positive, or that the child welfare system is without problems that potentially affect these outcomes. However, findings of this study, particularly those related to the comparison of quantitative and qualitative data, prompt many questions to be explored and examined in future research. For example, with a larger, diverse sample the question of how youths' educational aspirations differ by gender, ethnicity, and placement type could be further examined. In addition, related to social comparison theory, ways in which comparisons

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differ along ethnic and gender lines or ways in which youths in foster care make social comparisons to their non-foster care peers should be studied. Future research should also focus on the outcomes for youths aging out of foster care (low graduation rates, high rates of mental health problems, homelessness, unemployment, substance abuse and premarital childbirth). Future research should also expand on research that has found evidence of certain predictors of success, such as independent living skills training, minimized academic problems, and completion of high school while in foster care (Pecora et. al., 2005).

The finding that participants had desires and plans to go to college yet reported placements in special education, grade failures and school suspensions prompts future research questions. For example, Do youths and others (caregivers, caseworkers, etc.) have lowered educational expectations because they are behind in school and enrolled in special education, or do lowered expectations cause poorer school performance?

Findings in the study related to planning and implementation also suggested implications for state and national policy changes. First, because the study sample had a majority of ethnic minority participants, the issue of disproportionality must be addressed at the state and federal policy level. Specifically, culturally sensitive child welfare policies must be developed, or current policies should be amended. For example, given that Caucasian youths in foster care are adopted at higher rates than ethnic minority youth in foster care, the development of a policy surrounding adoption or other forms of permanency for youth in foster care may work to equalize this difference.

Second, given the findings that youths and PAL staff members all described PAL

classes as helpful, making the PAL training program mandatory instead of voluntary should be carefully considered. In addition, policies and regulations related to placement changes and extension of foster care until age 21 need to be carefully reviewed. In this study, one participant experienced a total of 37 placements while in foster care, another participant would have considered staying in foster care until the age of 21 if he was assured of staying in one placement, and PAL staff members reported that "moving to another placement" was the top reason a youth may not complete the PAL training program.

Indeed, two of the five participants in this study were lost through attrition due to placement changes, and it was unknown whether or when they were re-enrolled in another PAL training course. Ensuring that youths either stayed in one placement long enough to complete the course, or were enrolled in another course immediately upon a move could positively change the trajectory of their transition to independence. Two other participants left the program due to lack of transportation to and from PAL classes, which was cited by PAL staff as the second most frequently occurring reason a youth might stop attending a PAL training class. All but one of the study participants depended on foster parents or caregivers to provide them transportation to and from classes. If PAL training was made mandatory, caregivers may be more motivated to provide consistent transportation for youths. Or, perhaps the issue of transportation needs to be addressed at the contract level, whereby agencies contracted by the state to provide PAL training were made responsible for providing transportation for youth to and from PAL classes. The issue of transportation may also be addressed at a state regulatory or policy level, with

PAL staff being ultimately responsible for providing youth transportation to and from PAL classes.

In terms of research, many questions remain. Of particular concern is the needed clarification around social support, youths' feelings about foster care, and possible gender differences in acquisition of life skills and knowledge. For example, if foster children feel "lucky" and "satisfied" to be placed in foster care, the question of "lucky/satisfied compared to what?" needs to be asked and clarified. In addition, to avoid possible response set problems, questions/statements should be phrased in the positive and in the negative. Further examination and clarification may reveal that youths' definitions of "lucky" and "satisfied" differ from the researchers or from the conventional definitions of the words. Clarification is also needed around social support by foster parents and caregivers to determine whether youths experienced a lack of support by all foster parents, current and previous, or just one or the other.

Furthermore, the issue of perceived versus actual social support for foster care youths should be studied. In this case, scores on the standardized measure of social support showed that participants' had social support some or most of the time; however, the source of support in each of the four subscales was not asked. Although in the qualitative interviews most participants named a biological family member as providing them the most support in their lives, it was unknown whether participants were thinking of these same biological family members when rating statements on the standardized measure of social support. Also, if participants are reporting to have social support some or most of the time, how might this relate to the amount of family visitation or contact

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they have? Is actual support being provided by family members, or do participants perceive more support than is actually being provided? Further qualitative study and use of measures of actual and perceived social support may further our understanding of this issue, thereby potentially guiding social work practice related to creation of social support systems and facilitation of family contact for youths.

For future studies applying resilience theory, cohort and longitudinal studies may be particularly helpful since evidence of change in the construct of resilience is best seen over a long period of time. In addition, longitudinal studies allow for developmental and environmental changes, both of which are components of resilience processes, to take place and be examined. Future studies should also incorporate both quantitative and qualitative methods, including the use of standardized measures, comparison groups, and randomization whenever possible. More specifically, qualitative studies using semi-structured interviews should perhaps include a number of more concrete questions which may be more appropriate for adolescents. This addition and the use of probing questions would help to clarify information, and may reduce the possibility of conflicting or contradictory data.

<center>Summary</center>

Adolescence is a particularly difficult time for children in foster care, as many have endured many years and many placements in the child welfare system. At or around the age of eighteen, they are expected to leave the foster care system and live on their own, and approximately 24,000 young adults do just this every year. Past research has suggested that youths in foster care are at risk for poor outcomes in the years after they

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have aged out of the child welfare system (Courtney et. al., 2004; Barth and Ferguson, 2004). Research also suggested that participation in an independent living skills program, such as the one explored in this study, may improve their outcomes (Cook, 1994; Scannapieco et. al., 1995). Past research; however, has not sufficiently explored the relationship between resilience, social support and independent living skills programs, and the ways in which these programs may build support systems and have a buffering effect against risk or adversity. This study added to the exploration of this relationship, but its' findings also prompted additional research questions related to educational aspirations, optimism, expectations, reference groups and comparisons, and support system. The findings furthered our understanding and knowledge of the PAL program, its curriculum, its facilitation, and how it was perceived by the sixteen study participants and nine PAL staff. Individually and collectively, these findings suggested important implications and future directions for social work policy, theory, and research involving the population of adolescent aging out of foster care.

NOTES

[1] Assumptions of normality were not met in Paired-Samples T Tests; therefore, the non-parametric equivalent to t tests, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test, was conducted. The Wilcoxon test revealed no differences in the pattern of statistical significance seen in the Paired Samples T Test.

[2] Assumptions of normality were not met in Independent-Samples T Tests; therefore, the non-parametric equivalent, the Mann-Whitney test was conducted and yielded a similar pattern of statistical significance.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER

OFFICE OF RESEARCH SUPPORT & COMPLIANCE

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

P.O. Box 7426, Austin, Texas 78713 (512) 471-8871 - FAX (512) 471-8873)
North Office Building A, Suite 5.200 (Mail code A3200)

FWA # 00002030

Date: **07/21/06**

PI(s): **Courtney J Lynch**   Department & Mail Code: **SOCIAL WORK RES, CTR**   **D3510**

Dear: **Courtney J Lynch**

IRB APPROVAL – IRB Protocol #**2006-06-0025**

Title: **Exploring the implementation of transitional services for adolescents aging out of substitute care in Texas.**

In accordance with Federal Regulations for review of research protocols, the Institutional Review Board has reviewed your response to the explicit conditions and found it satisfactory. The Institutional Review Board approves your study for the following period of time:

Your study has been approved from 07/21/2006 – **07/10/2007**

__X__ **Please use the attached approved informed consent**

_____**You have been granted Waiver of Documentation of Consent**
According to 45 CFR 46.117 and/or 21 CFR 56.109(c)(1), an IRB may waive the requirement for the investigator to obtain a signed consent form for some or all subjects if it finds either:

____ The research presents no more than minimal risk,
                              AND
____ The research involves procedures that do not require written consent when performed outside of a research setting 45 CFR 46.117, 21 CFR 56.109(c)(1).
                              <OR>
____ The principal risks are those associated with a breach of confidentiality concerning the subject's participation in the research,
                              AND
____ The consent document is the only record linking the subject with the research,
                              AND
____ This study is not FDA regulated (45 CFR 46.117),
                              AND
____ Each participant will be asked whether the participant wishes documentation linking the participant with the research, and the participants wishes will govern.

_____ **You have been granted Waiver of Informed Consent**
According to 45 CFR 46.116(d), an IRB may waive or alter some or all of the requirements for Informed consent if:
____ The research presents no more than minimal risk to subjects;
____ The waiver will not adversely affect the rights and welfare of subjects;

Protocol # 2006-06-0025   Approval dates: 07/21/2006 - **07/10/2007**

___ The research could not practicably be carried out without the waiver; and
___ Whenever appropriate, the subjects will be provided with additional pertinent information they have participated in the study.
___ This study is not FDA regulated (45 CFR 46.117)

RESPONSIBILITIES OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR FOR ONGOING PROTOCOLS:

(1) Report **immediately** to the IRB any unanticipated problems.

(2) Proposed changes in approved research during the period for which IRB approval cannot be initiated without IRB review and approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the participant. Changes in approved research initiated without IRB review and approval initiated to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the participant must be promptly reported to the IRB, and reviewed under the unanticipated problems policy to determine whether the change was consistent with ensuring the participants continued welfare.

(3) Report any significant findings that become known in the course of the research that might affect the willingness of subjects to continue to take part.

(4) Insure that only persons formally approved by the IRB enroll subjects.

(5) Use **only** a currently approved consent form (remember approval periods are for 12 months or less).

(6) **Protect the confidentiality of all persons and personally identifiable data, and train your staff and collaborators on policies and procedures for ensuring the privacy and confidentiality of participants and information.**

(7) Submit for review and approval by the IRB all modifications to the protocol or consent form(s) prior to the implementation of the change.

(8) Submit a **Continuing Review Report** for continuing review by the IRB. Federal regulations require **IRB review of on-going projects no less than once a year** (a Continuing Review Report form and a reminder letter will be sent to you 2 months before your expiration date). Please note however, that if you do not receive a reminder from this office about your upcoming continuing review, it is the primary responsibility of the PI not to exceed the expiration date in collection of any information. Finally, it is the responsibility of the PI to submit the Continuing Review Report before the expiration period.

(9) Notify the IRB when the study has been completed and complete the Final Report Form.

(10) Please help us help you by including the above protocol number on all future correspondence relating to this protocol.

Thank you for your help in this matter.

Sincerely,

Lisa Leiden Ph.D., IRB Chair,
Director of the Office of Research, Support, & Compliance

Protocol # 2006-06-0025   **Approval dates: 07/21/2006 - 07/10/2007**

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APPENDIX B

YOUTH BACKGROUND QUESTIONNAIRE

Background Questionnaire

Please complete the following questionnaire to provide general information about you.

Name: _____

Date of Birth (Month, Day, Year):_____

Gender (check one):

□ Male

□ Female

Ethnicity (check one):

□ Black/African American

□ White/Caucasian (non-Hispanic)

□ Hispanic/Latino (please specify) _____

□ American Indian/Native American (please specify) _____

□ Asian/Pacific Islander (please specify) _____

□ Other (please specify) _____

1. Which of these best describes where you currently live?

□ Foster home without relatives

□ Foster home with relatives

□ Group home

□ Residential treatment center

□ Adoptive home

□ Independent living home

□ Other: _____

2. How long have you been in state care?

□ Less than 1 year

□ 1 year

☐ 2 years

☐ 3 years

☐ 4 years

☐ 5 years

☐ More than 5 years

3. Do you have any siblings?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Don't Know

4. How many siblings do you have? _____ (list the number)

5. Which of your family members do you visit? (Check all that apply)

☐ None

☐ Mother

☐ Father

☐ Siblings

☐ Grandmother

☐ Grandfather

☐ Aunt

☐ Uncle

☐ Cousins

☐ Other (please list): _____

6. How often do you visit family members?

☐ Daily

☐ Weekly

☐ Monthly

☐ Yearly

☐ Other (please explain):

_____

7. What type of school are you enrolled in?

☐ Not enrolled in school

☐ High School

☐ Vocational School

☐ College

☐ Don't Know

☐ Other (please list type of school) _____

8. What is the highest grade or year of schooling you have completed at this time? (Do not include the year that you are presently in.) _____ (Fill in highest year completed)

9. Were you ever in a special education?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Don't Know

10. Do you now, or have you ever gone to school on the same grounds where you were in a group home or institutional setting?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Don't Know

11. Excluding summer vacations and illness, did you ever stop attending high school or junior high school for at least one month because of a change in foster care or group care placements?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Don't Know

12. Which grade have you repeated or been held back? (list grade)
_____

13. If you could go as far as you wanted in school, how far would you go?

202

- ☐ 8th grade or less
- ☐ 9th – 11th grade
- ☐ Graduate from high school
- ☐ Some college
- ☐ Graduate from college
- ☐ More than college
- ☐ Other _____
- ☐ Don't Know

14. How far do you think you will actually go in school?

- ☐ 8th grade or less
- ☐ 9th – 11th grade
- ☐ Graduate from high school
- ☐ Some college
- ☐ Graduate from college
- ☐ More than college
- ☐ Other _____
- ☐ Don't Know

15. Have you ever received an out-of-school suspension from school?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't Know

16. Have you ever been expelled from school?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't Know

17. At the end of the last school year, what was your grade in English or language arts?

- ☐ A

☐ B

☐ C

☐ D or lower

☐ Didn't take this subject

☐ Took the subject, but it wasn't graded this way

☐ Don't know

18. And what was your grade in mathematics?

☐ A

☐ B

☐ C

☐ D or lower

☐ Didn't take this subject

☐ Took the subject, but it wasn't graded this way

☐ Don't know

19. And what was your grade in history or social studies?

☐ A

☐ B

☐ C

☐ D or lower

☐ Didn't take this subject

☐ Took the subject, but it wasn't graded this way

☐ Don't know

20. And what was your grade in science?

☐ A

☐ B

☐ C

☐ D or lower

☐ Didn't take this subject

□ Took the subject, but it wasn't graded this way

□ Don't know

21. How many times did you have to change schools because your family moved or you changed foster care placements? _____

22. During this school year how many times have you been absent from school for a full day with an excuse (for example, because you were sick or out of town)?

□ Never

□ 1 or 2 times

□ 3 to 10 times

□ More than 10 times

□ Don't know

23. During this school year how many times have you skipped school for a full day without an excuse? _____

24. Have you ever worked at a job before?

□ Yes

□ No

□ Don't know

25. Are you currently working at a full or part-time job or jobs?

□ Yes

□ No

□ Don't know

26. On average, how many hours do you work per week? _____

27. What is your hourly or weekly pay? $_____

28. How many months have you had a job?

□ Less than 1 month

□ 1 to 3 months

☐ 4 to 6 months

☐ More than 6 months

29. How many jobs have you been laid off from or fired from while in foster care?
(list number) _____

30. How many different foster homes, group homes, or residential treatment centers have you been in since first entering the foster care system?
 (list number) _____

31. How many times have you returned home to your family and then re-entered foster care?
(list number) _____

32. How many times have you run away from a foster home or group home? (By run away, I mean staying away for at least one night).
(list number) _____

33. Some people in foster care wish they could be adopted, others don't. Did you ever wish you were adopted?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Don't Know

34. Are you now in a foster placement where the plan of your social worker or your foster parents is that you will be adopted by the family that you are living with?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Don't Know

35. Have you ever, in the past, been in a foster placement where the plan of your social worker or your foster parents was that you would be adopted by that family?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Don't Know

36. Have you ever been adopted?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Don't Know

37. How many times during the past year, did you have face to face visits with a social worker?

_____ (List number of visits)

38. How many times during the past year, did a social worker talk to you on the phone?

_____ (List number of visits)

Please read the statements here that describe some ideas people have about the foster care system and state. For each statement, choose one box that comes closest to how you feel about each statement.

39. All in all I was lucky to be placed in the foster care system.

☐ Very strongly agree

☐ Strongly agree

☐ Agree

☐ Neither agree nor disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly disagree

☐ Very strongly disagree

40. Generally I am satisfied with my experience in the foster care system.

☐ Very strongly agree

☐ Strongly agree

☐ Agree

☐ Neither agree nor disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly disagree

☐ Very strongly disagree

41. Overall, social workers have been a help to me while I was in the foster care system.

  □ Very strongly agree

  □ Strongly agree

  □ Agree

  □ Neither agree nor disagree

  □ Disagree

  □ Strongly disagree

  □ Very strongly disagree

42. All in all foster parents have been a help to me.

  □ Very strongly agree

  □ Strongly agree

  □ Agree

  □ Neither agree nor disagree

  □ Disagree

  □ Strongly disagree

  □ Very strongly disagree

43. All in all the counselors or staff of the group homes, child caring institutions or residential treatment centers have been a help to me.

  □ Very strongly agree

  □ Strongly agree

  □ Agree

  □ Neither agree nor disagree

  □ Disagree

  □ Strongly disagree

  □ Very strongly disagree

How likely do you think that it is that <u>in the future, after discharge from foster care,</u> you will turn to someone from your foster care agency for any of the following:

44. How likely is it that you'll turn to someone from your foster care agency for

financial help?

- ☐ Very likely
- ☐ Likely
- ☐ Unlikely
- ☐ Very unlikely
- ☐ Don't know

45. How likely is it that you'll turn to someone from your foster care agency for help with a personal problem?

- ☐ Very likely
- ☐ Likely
- ☐ Unlikely
- ☐ Very unlikely
- ☐ Don't know

46. How likely is it that you'll turn to someone from your foster care agency for help with an employment problem?

- ☐ Very likely
- ☐ Likely
- ☐ Unlikely
- ☐ Very unlikely
- ☐ Don't know

47. How likely is it that you'll turn to someone from your foster care agency for help with a family problem?

- ☐ Very likely
- ☐ Likely
- ☐ Unlikely
- ☐ Very unlikely
- ☐ Don't know

48. How likely is it that you'll turn to someone from your foster care agency for help with a housing problem?

□ Very likely

□ Likely

□ Unlikely

□ Very unlikely

□ Don't know

49. How likely is it that you'll turn to someone from your foster care agency for help with a health problem?

□ Very likely

□ Likely

□ Unlikely

□ Very unlikely

□ Don't know

50. How likely is it that you'll turn to someone from your foster care agency for help with some other problem?

□ Very likely

□ Likely

□ Unlikely

□ Very unlikely

□ Don't know

51. Thinking about your own personal hopes and goals for the future, are you very optimistic, fairly optimistic, not too optimistic or not at all optimistic?

□ Very optimistic

□ Fairly optimistic

□ Not too optimistic

□ Not at all optimistic

☐   Don't know

Thank you for answering these questions!

APPENDIX C

RESILIENCE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT MODULE (RYDM)

California Healthy Kids Survey

Section B

**Please mark on your answer sheets how you feel about
each of the following statements.**

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your *school*?

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
B1.	I feel close to people at this school.	A	B	C	D	E
B2.	I am happy to be at this school.	A	B	C	D	E
B3.	I feel like I am part of this school.	A	B	C	D	E
B4.	The teachers at this school treat students fairly.	A	B	C	D	E
B5.	I feel safe in my school.	A	B	C	D	E

**Next, mark how TRUE you feel the next statements are about
your SCHOOL and things you might do there.**

At my school, there is a teacher or some other adult…

		Not at All True	A Little True	Pretty Much True	Very Much True
B6.	Who really cares about me.	A	B	C	D
B7.	Who tells me when I do a good job.	A	B	C	D
B8.	Who notices when I'm not there.	A	B	C	D
B9.	Who always wants me to do my best.	A	B	C	D
B10.	Who listens to me when I have something to say.	A	B	C	D
B11.	Who believes that I will be a success.	A	B	C	D

At school…

		Not at All True	A Little True	Pretty Much True	Very Much True
B12.	I do interesting activities.	A	B	C	D
B13.	I help decide things like class activities or rules.	A	B	C	D
B14.	I do things that make a difference.	A	B	C	D

The next statements are about what might occur *outside your school or home*, such as in your NEIGHBORHOOD, COMMUNITY, or with an ADULT other than your parents or guardian.

Outside of my home and school, there is an adult…

		Not at All True	A Little True	Pretty Much True	Very Much True
B15.	Who really cares about me.	A	B	C	D
B16.	Who tells me when I do a good job.	A	B	C	D
B17.	Who notices when I am upset about something.	A	B	C	D
B18.	Who believes that I will be a success.	A	B	C	D
B19.	Who always wants me to do my best.	A	B	C	D
B20.	Whom I trust.	A	B	C	D

Outside of my home and school, I do these things…

		Not at All True	A Little True	Pretty Much True	Very Much True
B21.	I am part of clubs, sports teams, church/temple, or other group activities.	A	B	C	D
B22.	I am involved in music, art, literature, sports or a hobby.	A	B	C	D
B23.	I help other people.	A	B	C	D

How true do you feel these statements are about you personally?

		Not at All True	A Little True	Pretty Much True	Very Much True
B24.	I have goals and plans for the future.	A	B	C	D
B25.	I plan to graduate from high school.	A	B	C	D
B26.	I plan to go to college or some other school after high school.	A	B	C	D
B27.	I know where to go for help with a problem.	A	B	C	D
B28.	I try to work out problems by talking or writing about them.	A	B	C	D
B29.	I can work out my problems.	A	B	C	D
B30.	I can do most things if I try.	A	B	C	D
B31.	I can work with someone who has different opinions than mine.	A	B	C	D
B32.	There are many things that I do well.	A	B	C	D
B33.	I feel bad when someone gets their feelings hurt.	A	B	C	D
B34.	I try to understand what other people go through.	A	B	C	D
B35.	When I need help, I find someone to talk with.	A	B	C	D
B36.	I enjoy working together with other students my age.	A	B	C	D
B37.	I stand up for myself without putting others down.	A	B	C	D
B38.	I try to understand how other people feel and think.	A	B	C	D
B39.	There is a purpose to my life.	A	B	C	D
B40.	I understand my moods and feelings.	A	B	C	D
B41.	I understand why I do what I do.	A	B	C	D

How true are these statements about your FRIENDS?

I have a friend about my own age…

		Not at All True	A Little True	Pretty Much True	Very Much True
B42.	Who really cares about me.	A	B	C	D
B43.	Who talks with me about my problems.	A	B	C	D
B44.	Who helps me when I'm having a hard time.	A	B	C	D

My friends…

		Not at All True	A Little True	Pretty Much True	Very Much True
B45.	Get into a lot of trouble.	A	B	C	D
B46.	Try to do what is right.	A	B	C	D
B47.	Do well in school.	A	B	C	D

**How true are these statements about your HOME or
the ADULTS WITH WHOM YOU LIVE?**

In my home, there is a parent or some other adult…

		Not at All True	A Little True	Pretty Much True	Very Much True
B48.	Who expects me to follow the rules.	A	B	C	D
B49.	Who is interested in my schoolwork.	A	B	C	D
B50.	Who believes that I will be a success.	A	B	C	D
B51.	Who talks with me about my problems.	A	B	C	D
B52.	Who always wants me to do my best.	A	B	C	D
B53.	Who listens to me when I have something to say.	A	B	C	D

At home…

		Not at All True	A Little True	Pretty Much True	Very Much True
B54.	I do fun things or go fun places with my parents or other adults.	A	B	C	D
B55.	I do things that make a difference.	A	B	C	D
B56.	I help make decisions with my family.	A	B	C	D

APPENDIX D

MEDICAL OUTCOMES STUDY: SOCIAL SUPPORT SURVEY INSTRUMENT

People sometimes look to others for companionship, assistance, or other types of support. How often is each of the following kinds of support available to you if you need it? Circle one number on each line.

	None of the time	A little of the time	Some of the time	Most of the time	All of the time
Emotional/informational support					
Someone you can count on to listen to you when you need to talk	1	2	3	4	5
Someone to give you information to help you understand a situation	1	2	3	4	5
Someone to give you good advice about a crisis	1	2	3	4	5
Someone to confide in or talk to about yourself or your problems	1	2	3	4	5
Someone whose advice you really want	1	2	3	4	5
Someone to share your most private worries and fears with	1	2	3	4	5
Someone to turn to for suggestions about how to deal with a personal problem	1	2	3	4	5
Someone who understands your problems	1	2	3	4	5
Tangible support					
Someone to help you if you were confined to bed	1	2	3	4	5
Someone to take you to the doctor if you needed it	1	2	3	4	5
Someone to prepare your meals if you were unable to do it yourself	1	2	3	4	5
Someone to help with daily chores if you were sick	1	2	3	4	5
Affectionate support					
Someone who shows you love and affection	1	2	3	4	5
Someone to love and make you feel wanted	1	2	3	4	5
Someone who hugs you	1	2	3	4	5
Positive social interaction					
Someone to have a good time with	1	2	3	4	5
Someone to get together with for	1	2	3	4	5

relaxation					
Someone to do something enjoyable with	1	2	3	4	5
Additional item					
Someone to do things with to help you get your mind off things	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX E

YOUTH INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Youth Interview

What are your educational plans after you leave foster care?

What are your plans for employment after you leave foster care?

Where do you plan to live when you leave foster care?

Who developed your plan? Were you involved?

How likely is it that you will have contact with your biological family members after you leave foster care? Please explain.

       VERY LIKELY
        LIKELY
       UNLIKELY
       VERY UNLIKELY
       DON'T KNOW
       OTHER: _____

How likely is it that you will depend on your biological family members for financial help after you leave foster care? Please explain.

       VERY LIKELY
        LIKELY
       UNLIKELY
       VERY UNLIKELY
       DON'T KNOW
       OTHER: _____

How likely is it that you will depend of your biological family members for emotional support after you leave foster care? Please explain.

       VERY LIKELY
        LIKELY
       UNLIKELY
       VERY UNLIKELY
       DON'T KNOW
       OTHER: _____

If you had the choice to stay in foster care until you were 21 years old, would you stay? Why or why not?

What do you think teens your age need to know to live on their own?

What do teens need to know about employment?

       Interpersonal skills?

       Housing?

       Health?

       planning for the future?

       Money management?

Do you think foster care prepares you to live on your own? Why or why not?

What do you expect to learn in PAL classes?

What do you hope/want to learn in PAL classes?

Who or what provides you the most support in your life? What type of support is it?

Do you think the support you have now will be the same or different after you leave foster care?

What things worry you the most?

What helps you get through hard times or stressful situation?

What two or three words or phrases best describe your experience in foster care?

What advice would you like to give to other teens in foster care?

What advice would you like to give PAL trainers? To case workers?

What advice would you like to give foster parents?

Is there anything you would like to tell me about the PAL program or your experience in the PAL classes?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about yourself?

PREPARATION FOR ADULT LIVING (PAL) STAFF SURVEY

PAL Staff Survey

Please answer the following questions about PAL life skills classes and youth open to you in the PAL stage as best you can. There are no right or wrong answers. I am only interested in your perceptions and opinions. You may type or hand-write your responses.

When you have completed the survey, please print your survey and mail to:

1. Which of the following best describes the region in which you work?

_____ Predominantly Urban

_____ Predominantly Rural

_____ Equally Urban and Rural

2. How long have you been working in your current position? _____Years _____ Months

3. What is your educational background? (Please complete all that apply)

____ Bachelors Degree: Major:

____ Masters   Degree: Field:

____ Ph.D.   Degree: Field :

____ Other   Please specify:

4. What experience or training do you have in working with youth transitioning from foster care?

5. What is the current number of youth open to you in the PAL stage? _____

6. Some youth might not complete PAL life skills classes once they have started. Please RANK order the following, beginning with "1" for the reason which happens most often. Use each number only once.

_____ Youth moves to another placement

_____ Youth is reunified with biological family members

_____ Youth is adopted

_____ Youth chooses to stop attending classes

_____ Youth lacks transportation to and from classes

_____ Other (please explain): _____

7. Please estimate the number of youth you continue to have contact with after the PAL stage is closed. _____

8. What are the strengths of teens in foster care?

9. What is the greatest challenge faced by youth preparing to leave foster care? Why is this the greatest challenge?

10. What are the strengths of PAL life skills courses?

11. Please RANK order which parts of the PAL <u>course content</u> appear to be most useful to youth. (i.e. "1" for part that is most useful, "2" for next most useful, etc.).

_____ Personal and Interpersonal Skills

_____ Job Skills

_____ Housing and Transportation

_____ Health

_____ Planning for the future

_____ Money Management

_____ Other: Please specify: _____

12. Please RANK order which parts of the PAL <u>life skills curriculum</u> should be revised or improved. (Please list ideas for improvement or comments in the space to the right of each item).

_____ Personal and Interpersonal Skills _____

_____ Job Skills   _____

_____ Housing and Transportation   _____

_____ Health   _____

_____ Planning for the future   _____

_____ Money Management   _____

_____ Other: Please specify: _____

13. If improvements or revisions are needed, how can these be implemented?

14. What is your biggest challenge as a DFPS / PAL staff? Why?

15. Is there anything you would change about your job / role?

16. Please rate the overall usefulness of PAL life skills classes to youth:

1	2	3	4	5
Not Useful		Somewhat Useful		Very Useful

17. How prepared for independent living are youth after they complete the PAL life skills course?

1	2	3	4	5
Not Prepared		Somewhat Prepared		Completely Prepared

18. Is there anything else you would like to say about youth in foster care, about PAL classes, or about your role as a PAL Coordinator?

Thank you for completing this survey!

APPENDIX G

ANSELL-CASEY LIFE SKILLS ASSESSMENT – IV

Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment
Youth Level 4
(Version 4.0)

Instructions: These questions will ask you about what you know and can do. Try to answer all the questions.

<u>Demographics</u>

1**. I am:** ˌ Male   ˌ Female

2**. My current age (years): _____**

3**. My grade in school:**

ˌ 1st grade
ˌ 2nd grade
ˌ 3rd grade
ˌ 4th grade
ˌ 5th grade
ˌ 6th grade
ˌ 7th grade
ˌ 8th grade
ˌ 9th grade
ˌ 10th grade
ˌ 11th grade
ˌ 12th grade
ˌ Trade school
ˌ In college
ˌ Not in school
ˌ Other

4**. My race/ethnicity? (Please choose all that apply)**

ˌ American Indian or Alaskan Native
ˌ Asian Indian
ˌ Black, African-American
ˌ Chinese
ˌ Filipino
ˌ Guamanian or Chamorro
ˌ Hispanic/Latino/Spanish
ˌ Japanese
ˌ Korean
ˌ Native Hawaiian
ˌ Other Asian
ˌ Other Pacific Islander
ˌ Other Race: _____
ˌ Samoan
ˌ Vietnamese
ˌ White

5**. My primary race/ethnicity? (Please choose only one)**

ˌ American Indian or Alaskan Native
ˌ Asian Indian

225

Black, African-American
Chinese
Filipino
Guamanian or Chamorro
Hispanic/Latino/Spanish
Japanese
Korean
Native Hawaiian
Other Asian
Other Pacific Islander
Other Race: _____
Samoan
Vietnamese
White

6. **If you are American Indian, Native American, or Alaska Native, please write the name of your Tribal or Community Affiliation on the line below.**

7**. Postal (zip) code of your home address (for research purposes):_____**

8**. Which answer best describes your current living situation:**

- On my own (alone or shared housing)
- With my birth (biological) parents
- With my birth (biological) mother or father
- With my adoptive parent(s)
- With my foster parent(s) who is/are unrelated to me
- With relatives (not foster care)
- With relatives who are also my foster parents
- In a group home or residential facility
- In a juvenile detention or corrections facility
- With a friend's family (not foster care)
- At a shelter or emergency housing
- With my spouse, or partner, or boyfriend or girlfriend
- Other

9**. How many years have you been in this living situation? _____**
10**. I have a Social Security number:**
- Yes   - No

11**. I have a copy of my birth certificate:**
- Yes   - No

12**. I have a photo ID:**
- Yes   - No

13**. When completing this assessment, I am at the following location:**

- Employment or vocational agency
- Youth/family community service agency
- School library, classroom, or computer room
- Public Library
- Foster care agency
- Recreation facility (like YMCA, Boys/Girls Club)
- Where I live
- University
- Church, synagogue, temple, mosque or religious facility
- Juvenile detention or correction facility

Knowledge and Behavior Items

Please circle the number (1, 2 or 3) that describes you best:

	Not like me	Somewhat like me	Very much like me
Career Planning			
1. I have used school resources to investigate different types of employment	1	2	3
2. I discuss education plans with teachers, employer, or counselors	1	2	3
3. I know of resources in the community that provide tutoring	1	2	3
4. I have explored work-related internships	1	2	3
5. I read to improve my work skills	1	2	3
6. I know the education required for the work I am interested in doing	1	2	3
7. I sometimes read materials to further my knowledge in a specific area	1	2	3
8. I have a career plan	1	2	3
9. I can find financial aid resources to further my education	1	2	3
10. I can name two reasons why personal contacts can be important in finding a job	1	2	3
11. I know where to find information about job-training	1	2	3
12. I can explain the difference between assertive and aggressive behavior	1	2	3
13. I can demonstrate two positive ways for dealing with discrimination	1	2	3
Daily Living			
1. I plan nutritious meals	1	2	3
2. I evaluate my diet for nutritional balance	1	2	3
3. I eat a variety of healthy foods each day	1	2	3
4. I think about how what I eat impacts my health	1	2	3

	Not like me	Somewhat like me	Very much like me
5. I look at calories and fat content on product labels	1	2	3
6. I eat some vegetables each day	1	2	3
7. I use a shopping list at the grocery store	1	2	3
8. I compare prices to get the best value	1	2	3
9. I clean kitchen equipment after meal preparation	1	2	3
10. I can make meals using a recipe	1	2	3
11. I follow the directions on cleaning products	1	2	3
12. I check clothing-care directions when doing laundry	1	2	3
13. I use good table manners	1	2	3
Housing and Money Management			
1. I can calculate the costs of car ownership (e.g., registration, maintenance)	1	2	3
2. I can describe how to monitor a checking account balance	1	2	3
3. I can describe how to develop a good credit rating	1	2	3
4. I can name three disadvantages of purchasing with credit	1	2	3
5. I know the typical fee charged for ATM transactions	1	2	3
6. I understand what is covered by liability car insurance	1	2	3
7. I know where to find tax information on a pay stub	1	2	3
8. I know how to find out about my credit rating	1	2	3
9. I can calculate housing start-up costs (e.g., application fee, security deposit)	1	2	3
10. I know where in my community one can get help for completing tax returns	1	2	3

	Not like me	Somewhat like me	Very much like me
11. I know the advantages and disadvantages of buying from "rent-to-own" stores	1	2	3
12. I know what information is asked for in an apartment rental application	1	2	3
13. I balance my bank statement regularly	1	2	3
14. I can use an Automatic Teller Machine (ATM)	1	2	3
15. I understand the consequences of breaking a lease	1	2	3
16. I can explain the benefits of having homeowner or renter's insurance	1	2	3
17. I have completed an income tax form	1	2	3
18. I plan for the expenses that I must pay each month	1	2	3
19. I can name two ways to invest money	1	2	3
20. I can identify two ways to put money into savings	1	2	3
21. I keep a record when I pay bills	1	2	3
22. I can complete a money order	1	2	3
23. I can get to an appointment by myself, even if I have not been to that location before	1	2	3
24. I can describe two or more ways to search for housing	1	2	3
25. I know the necessary steps for getting a driver's license	1	2	3
26. I can compare housing choices based on cleanliness and costs	1	2	3
27. I have developed a budget	1	2	3
28. I compute discounts, for example, how much a $12.90 item would cost after a 15% discount	1	2	3
29. I know the consequences of driving without insurance	1	2	3

Please mark the best answer for each of the following questions:
Career Planning

1. Which of the following is an award of money that a qualified undergraduate student does not need to repay?

A. An e-studentloan.com award
B. A Federal Pell Grant
C. A Sallie Mae grant
D. A Nellie Mae grant

2. What is the most important reason why personal contacts are important in finding a job?

A. Personal contacts can hire you themselves
B. Personal contacts may know of good job openings that might fit you
C. Personal contacts may know the job market better than you
D. All of the above

3. Which of the following should not appear on a resume?

A. Your name and address
B. Your e-mail address and phone number
C. Your age and race
D. Your work and education experience

Daily Living

4. If you buy milk that has a label stating that "best used by September 15th," this means…?

A. You need to use the product by September 1st
B. You need to use the product by September 15th
C. You need to buy the product by September 15th
D. You need to use the product by October 1st

5. A recipe requires you to add "4 tsp. of flour." How much flour should you add?

    A. 4 cups
    B. 4 eyedropper drops
    C. 4 tablespoons
    D. 4 teaspoons

6. To get the best prices at the grocery store, you should…?

    A. Shop when you are hungry
    B. Take a grocery list and compare prices on the items you want to buy
    C. Buy only the products that are on sale, no matter what they are
    D. Buy only enough for what you plan to eat that day

Housing & Money Management
7. All taxable income, less IRS allowable adjustments to income, is called…?

    A. Net income (NI)
    B. Adjusted Gross Income (AGI)
    C. FICA
    D. Annual Percentage Yield (APY)

8. A large extra payment that may be charged at the end of a loan or lease is called…?

    A. A surprise payment
    B. A Balloon Payment
    C. An amortization
    D. An Adjustable Rate Mortgage (ARM)

9. The period of time between the date a loan payment is due and when it is late is called?

    A. A grace period
    B. Float time
    C. Index
    D. Liability on an account

Self Care
10. Which of the following blood-alcohol levels is defined as legally drunk in all of the United States?

    A. .08 or more
    B. .06
    C. .04
    D. .02

11. If you have a severe sharp pain on the right side of your abdomen, you should…?

    A. Ignore it; it is probably indigestion
    B. Pay close attention to it; it may be appendicitis
    C. Lay down until it goes away
    D. Eat something because this means you are hungry

12. If a woman missed her period, starts to have an enlarged abdomen, and experiences some nausea and vomiting, what is very likely true about her?

    A. She may have the flu
    B. She may have a venereal disease
    C. She may be pregnant
    D. She may need to see a psychotherapist

Social Relationships
13. The most important ingredient to a successful personal relationship is?

    A. Sex
    B. Financial wealth
    C. Trust
    D. Humor

14. What is the ideal number of close friends to have?

    A. 1
    B. 2
    C. 3
    D. None of the above; the ideal number varies from person to person

15. If someone you know worships differently than you, you should?

    A. Avoid them
    B. Think you are better than they are
    C. Respect them as much as anyone else
    D. Try to make them your best friend

Work Life
16. This helps you to remember to carry out all necessary job tasks, tackle the most important ones first, and not get stressed out by unimportant tasks:

    A. A to-do list
    B. A desk calendar
    C. A calculator
    D. A diary

17. A job application will probably ask for the following:

    A. Your name
    B. Your social security number
    C. Your proof of eligibility to work in the country
    D. All of the above

18. If a job ad says "must be a self-starter," this means that you will probably?

    A. Have a great deal of direction from your supervisor
    B. Have very little direction from your supervisor
    C. Be doing direct sales
    D. Be doing a great deal of planning and forecasting in your job

Extra Items
19. When you're hired to a new job, you usually?

    A. Will have probationary status
    B. Will get retirement benefits
    C. Will get a raise within the first two weeks
    D. Will get a vacation within the first 3 months

20. The best way to clean a wool sweater is to?

    A. Machine wash it in hot water, with mild detergent
    B. Machine wash it in cold water, with regular detergent
    C. Take it to a dry cleaner or hang it to air out
    D. Hand wash it in hot water, with regular detergent

21. If you eat a steady diet of fast food, you will probably?
    A. Forget how to cook
    B. Have more time to do things you'd rather do
    C. Have more friends
    D. Gain weight

FINAL SURVEY – YOUTH

<u>Final Survey - Youth</u>

Please answer the following questions about the PAL classes. There is no right or wrong answer. I am only interested in your opinions and beliefs.

Now that you have completed PAL classes, has your plan for your future changed at all?

(Circle one)   Yes   No

If yes, how did it change?

_____

_____

If yes, did it change because of something you learned in PAL classes?

(Circle one)   Yes   No

Please circle the number that shows how much you think each class topic area will be helpful to you in the future:

       Interpersonal Skills
      1   2   3   4   5
   Not at all   Somewhat   Very
   helpful   helpful   helpful

       Job Skills
      1   2   3   4   5
   Not at all   Somewhat   Very
   helpful   helpful   helpful

       Housing and Transportation
      1   2   3   4   5
   Not at all   Somewhat   Very
   helpful   helpful   helpful

       Health
      1   2   3   4   5
   Not at all   Somewhat   Very
   helpful   helpful   helpful

       Money Management
      1   2   3   4   5
   Not at all   Somewhat   Very
   helpful   helpful   helpful

Planning for the future

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all helpful		Somewhat helpful		Very helpful

Please circle the number that shows how well you think the PAL trainer taught each class topic area.

How well did the PAL Life Skills Trainer teach you *Interpersonal Skills*?

1	2	3	4	5
Not well		Somewhat well		Very well

How well did the PAL Life Skills Trainer teach you *Job Skills*?

1	2	3	4	5
Not well		Somewhat well		Very well

How well did the PAL Life Skills Trainer teach you about *Housing and Transportation*?

1	2	3	4	5
Not well		Somewhat well		Very well

How well did the PAL Life Skills Trainer teach you about *Health*?

1	2	3	4	5
Not well		Somewhat well		Very well

How well did the PAL Life Skills Trainer teach you about *Money Management*?

1	2	3	4	5
Not well		Somewhat well		Very well

How well did the PAL Life Skills Trainer teach you about *Planning for the future*?

1	2	3	4	5
Not well		Somewhat well		Very well

Which topics should have been discussed <u>more</u> in PAL classes? (check all that apply)

____ Interpersonal Skills
____ Job Skills
____ Housing and Transportation
____ Health
____ Money Management
____ Planning for the Future

Which topics should have been discussed <u>less</u> in PAL classes? (check all that apply)

____ Interpersonal Skills
____ Job Skills
____ Housing and Transportation
____ Health
____ Money Management

____   Planning for the Future

What ideas do you have to improve PAL classes? (check all that apply)

____   More field trips
____   More practice in real life settings
____   Change class time / place
____   More guest speakers
____   Other (please write in): _____

Do you think the PAL classes prepared you to live on your own?

(Circle one)   Yes   No

How prepared for do you feel to live on your own, out of the "system"?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all		Somewhat		Very
Prepared		Prepared		Prepared

What did you like about the PAL classes?

_____
_____
_____
_____

What did you NOT like about the PAL classes?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Have you heard of "Circle of Support" meetings?

(Circle one)   Yes   No   Don't Know

If you answered "Yes" to the question above, please answer the remaining questions. If you answered "No" or "Don't Know", you do not have to answer the remaining questions.

Have you participated in a Circle of Support meeting?

(Circle one)   Yes   No   Don't Know

Who participated in the meeting with you? (Check all that apply)

____   Caseworker
____   CASA worker

```
____   PAL Coordinator
____   Biological Mother
____   Biological Father
____   Siblings
____   Other family members such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.
____   Other (please write in): _____
```

For each of the following statements, circle whether you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree:

I was free to voice my opinion in the Circle of Support meeting.

> Strongly Agree
> Agree
> Neither Agree nor Disagree (neutral)
> Disagree
> Strongly Disagree

I was involved in developing a plan for my future.

> Strongly Agree
> Agree
> Neither Agree nor Disagree (neutral)
> Disagree
> Strongly Disagree

I agree with the final plan that was developed.

> Strongly Agree
> Agree
> Neither Agree nor Disagree (neutral)
> Disagree
> Strongly Disagree

The Circle of Support meeting was helpful to me.

> Strongly Agree
> Agree
> Neither Agree nor Disagree (neutral)
> Disagree
> Strongly Disagree

I liked having my family members present in the meeting.

> Strongly Agree
> Agree
> Neither Agree nor Disagree (neutral)
> Disagree
> Strongly Disagree

My family was involved in developing my plan.

     Strongly Agree
     Agree
     Neither Agree nor Disagree (neutral)
     Disagree
     Strongly Disagree

I believe my family will support me in carrying out my plan.

     Strongly Agree
     Agree
     Neither Agree nor Disagree (neutral)
     Disagree
     Strongly Disagree

I liked the Circle of Support meeting.

     Strongly Agree
     Agree
     Neither Agree nor Disagree (neutral)
     Disagree
     Strongly Disagree

Is there anything else you would like to say about yourself, about the PAL classes, or about the foster care system?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Thank you for completing this survey!

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Vita

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