Improving Economic Opportunities for Young People Served by the Foster Care System: Three Views of the Path to Independent Living
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Opportunities for Foster Care Youth in Transition: Three Views of the Path To Independent Living

March, 1998

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What are some of the things that might prevent you from reaching your hopes and dreams?

Nothing. I dream only of the possible. I am a fighter and I don’t stay on the ground for long. Every dream I have desired thus far I have made happen. Chin up. Bright smile. Strong motivation. And an undying desire to succeed.

19 year old male

Some of the obstacles I had to overcome to reach my college goals etc. were: I had to fight Children Services to stay in foster care to finish high school. I needed a year for my senior year. CSD refused to allow me to finish so I fought them and won. My foster father was not very supportive in my education, so for support I reached out to my teachers, counselors who were very supportive. The psychological abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse I had to begin to overcome. The abuse lead to deep depression and hospitalization however with the support from teachers, counselors and anti-depressants and substantial psychotherapy I have completed successfully my first term in College.

19 year old female

…I love to work and learn new things. I am very determined to reach my goals and never give up (Thanks to my very loving foster parents).

19 year old male

Quotes from survey of Youth Served by the Foster Care System
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Appendix C: Key Informant Questions
I. INTRODUCTION

This paper is intended to serve as a companion to the Background Paper, Improving Economic Opportunities for Young People Served by the Foster Care System. While the Background Paper provided a review of the most recent literature related to youth’s self-sufficiency at the point of leaving care and into the early adult years, the current paper presents survey responses from three different groups: 1.) youth who are currently or were formerly served by the foster care system; 2.) public and private agencies who provide transitional/Independent Living services; and 3.) key informants comprised of researchers, policy makers and service providers.

Several concerns prompted us to collect our own data. First, we were interested in obtaining information which was more current than what we learned from the literature review. Second, we hoped to fill in some of the knowledge gaps identified in the Background Paper, especially those relating to special education needs. Given the complexity of what it means to become successful after leaving the foster care system, we thought that gaining multiple perspectives would provide the most useful information from which to base a discussion of policy and programmatic changes. Recognizing the importance of youth input into transitional service practice, policy and training, we have woven the “voices of youth” throughout the following data presentation.

While each of the three surveys differed in scope, collectively they were designed to address the following issues:

- education and employment characteristics for youth in our samples;
- types and utilization of transition services offered by public and private agencies;
- perspectives of youth in care, service providers and key informants regarding barriers and service needs;
- views on most and least helpful program strategies;
- individual, program and systemic barriers faced by youth as they leave care; and
- public policy strategies.

II. METHODS

Before discussing the specifics of each of the samples and data collection approaches, it is important to remind the reader that the information described in this report was collected specifically to provide a framework and strategy for enhancing the economic opportunities of youth leaving care to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Casey Family Services and Casey Family Program. As their need for information was immediate, the data collection time frame covered three months, November, December, 1997 and January, 1998. Our approach, therefore, was to obtain as much useful information as possible in a short period of time as opposed to conducting a scientifically rigorous study.

A. Youth Survey

The 249 youth who completed the survey (referred to as the youth sample throughout the paper) were recruited by program staff from statewide Independent Living programs and private...
Youth completed a written survey comprised of both open-ended and closed-ended questions. The survey covered the following topic areas:

- demographic information (including parenthood), placement history and current placement information;
- educational status, support with educational issues (including seeking financial support), educational aspirations and barriers to those aspirations;
- employment experience, employment barriers, and employment aspirations; and
- sources of social support.

(See Appendix A for a copy of the survey.)

### B. Service Provider Survey

Surveys were sent to state and public child welfare Title IV-E Independent Living Coordinators in all fifty states and the District of Columbia, as well as a number of private agencies, hereafter referred to as the *agency-provider* sample. The list of private agencies was comprised of Casey Family Services, Casey Family Programs, and other private agencies identified by the National Resource Center for Youth Services.

The survey was modeled after the previous surveys conducted by the University of Oklahoma’s National Resource Center for Youth Services. It was designed to collect the following information regarding youth served during fiscal year 1996:

- characteristics of youth served;
- educational and vocational information about the youth in Independent Living/transitional services;
- employment information about the youth in services (including the use of assessment tools); and
- aftercare services and program evaluation.

(See Appendix B for a copy of this survey.)

In total, 26 agencies responded to this survey. Fifty-eight percent were public agencies and 32 percent were private agencies. This sample represents information from 21 states, serving a total of 13,010 youth.
Completion of this survey was voluntary and those states which responded to the survey represent some of the more rural states in the country. The geographical distribution of states which responded to the survey included the following: Alabama, Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Hawaii, Idaho, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Mississippi, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Texas and West Virginia.

C. Key Informant Survey

Eleven individuals from public and private agencies, university research organizations, and national policy organizations comprise the key informant sample. These people were selected based on their research or direct experience with youth in care and Independent Living programs. The key informant survey addressed the following areas:

- barriers to self-sufficiency for youth in care;
- characteristics of effective programs/interventions; and
- public policy changes.

(See Appendix C for a copy of these questions.)

III. BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS AND FOSTER CARE HISTORY

A. Demographic Characteristics of the Youth Sample

Examining the demographic and placement characteristics of the youth sample indicates that it represents a range of youth. As shown in Chart 1, 60 percent of the sample is female.

Chart 1
Youth Survey: Gender Distribution
(N=249)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows the race/ethnicity of the youth, with 42 percent of sample comprised of white youth, 57 percent minority, with 1 percent missing. Of the minority youth; one-quarter (24.1 percent) are African American, 4 percent are Hispanic, 8 percent are Native American, and 7 percent are Asian Pacific Islander. Thirteen percent of the sample reported other types of ethnicity, approximately half of which were mixed including African American/ Native American, and Caucasian/ African American.

Table 1
Youth Survey: Race/Ethnicity Distribution
(N=249)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Pacific Islander</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Chart 2, over half of the youth in the sample are 16 or 17 years old. Therefore, most of the results pertain to young people who are preparing to leave care. A smaller, though respectable, percentage of this sample have reached the age of emancipation.

Chart 2
Youth Survey: Age Distribution of Youth
(N=249)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16-17</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-19</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
B. Placement History of Youth Sample

At the time of the survey, youth were residing in a range of settings. As shown in Chart 3, nearly half (43.8 percent) of the sample were living in non-relative foster homes. An additional 17.3 percent were residing in group homes and 8.4 percent were in a residential home. Four percent were in a transitional living home and 9.2 percent maintained their own apartments.
As shown in Chart 4, one-third of the overall sample were relatively recent entrants into the foster care system.

Chart 4
Youth Survey: Time in Years Since First Entry into Foster Care

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Chart 5 describes the mean number of placements experienced by youth based on the number of years they have spent in foster care.

Chart 5
Youth Survey: Number of Placements by Time in Foster Care

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On average, youth in this sample experienced 4.7 different placements. However, it should be noted that the range in number of placements was large, with some youth having only one placement and others having as many as 25 placements. Looking at the relationship between the number of years since youth entered the foster care system and their average number of placements, recent entrants have experienced, on average, two to three different placements. In contrast, youth who entered the foster care system over eleven years ago have experienced eight placements, on average.
IV. EDUCATIONAL AND EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS

As illustrated in the Background Paper literature review, attempts to document important educational and employment information about youth as they leave foster care have been limited by small samples and the restriction of samples to specific geographic areas.

While our survey information is in no way an effort to correct previous methodological issues, we attempt to use two different samples, the youth sample and the youth as profiled in the agency-provider sample, to understand how young people in care are faring with respect to education and employment.

A. Education

A summary of high school educational outcomes for the youth survey can be found in Chart 6.

![Chart 6: Youth Survey: Summary of Educational Outcomes (N=249)](chart6.png)

Based on the youth survey results, 87 percent of the sample state that they are currently enrolled in school. Nearly half are juniors and seniors in high school. Eighty-seven percent see completion of high school as a goal. The youth listed the following as some of the ways to help reach their goal of high school completion:

- focus on work;
• attend school daily;
• study hard;
• get good grades;
• obtain support from others;
• positive outlook; and
• determination/perseverance.

When asked what youth could do for themselves to increase their likelihood of educational and economic success as they prepare to leave care, key informants most often described completing education, participating in assessments and career exploration and developing advocacy and job seeking skills. Other examples included working, developing recreational and leisure activities, seeking out tutoring and other educational assistance as well as seeking out supportive people, saving money and completing driver’s education.

Slightly less than one-quarter of the youth survey sample reported that they were enrolled in special education classes during the past five years and one-quarter take advantage of tutoring services. Nearly one-third are enrolled in college preparatory classes. However, 14 percent report that they prefer to complete a GED rather than completing high school. Reasons for wanting to complete a GED included “wanting to get out earlier, it is easier and catch-up”.

Nearly half of the youth sample revealed that they were involved in extra-curricular activities. Such activities included athletics, music, cheerleading, dance, drama, peer mediation, cultural heritage clubs (e.g., Black Culture Club, Mexican American Youth Alliance), and ROTC.

As shown in Chart 7, fully 93 percent of the youth sample expect to obtain some form of post-secondary education.
For the majority (66 percent), this means college. Other avenues of post secondary schooling include: vocational/technical (6 percent), military programs (6 percent), combination of college and military (6 percent), Job Corp (3.2 percent) and a combination of college and vocational school.

While 93 percent expressed the desire to attend post secondary school, only 58 percent reported that they had a means to pay for their education. The most commonly mentioned methods of payment included Casey Family Program and Casey Family Services, state departments of human services, athletic scholarships, military, federal student grants (e.g., PELL grant) and loans, money from savings, work-study and employment while in school.

However, 72 percent reported that someone had indeed explained to them how to seek financial support for continued education. As shown in Chart 8, for half of the youth, a social worker had discussed financial assistance, followed by a foster parent, teacher, group home staff and mentors.
The agency-provider sample supplied additional information about the youth in their programs. Among the 13,010 youth served by the 26 agencies, based on data from providers, estimates of educational delay ranged from 40 percent of the caseload being one year delayed to 4 percent of the caseload being four or more years delayed.

Based on data from 20 providers, estimates of the percent of youth in special education ranged from 3-40 percent of the youth in their programs.

Based on data from 11 providers, 693 of 8,874 youth left care with high school diplomas in FY 1996. Based on data from data from 8 states, 114 of 4,854 youth left care in FY 1996 with GEDs.

B. Employment

For the majority of the youth sample, the question regarding employment means employment while in high school as only 6 percent had graduated at the time of the survey. As shown in Chart 9, 79 percent of the youth have had some job experience, with one-third of the sample currently employed. The majority of those who are currently employed hold part-time jobs at fast food restaurants (e.g., McDonalds) or discount stores (e.g., Walmart).
We asked youth who had done so why they left any previous jobs. Though the range of responses varied widely, some common themes stood out such as the following:

- seasonal employment;
- moved away from area;
- work schedule conflicted with school hours;
- better job opportunity;
- fired from job;
- conflict with boss; and
- transportation problems.

Most of the youth have talked with at least one person about a career. As shown in Chart 10, youth reported that social workers were the most likely to have spoken with them about future careers, followed by a friend and their foster parent.
V. BARRIERS AND SERVICE NEEDS

Youth, agency-providers and key informants identified multiple barriers youth face to economic and educational opportunity. Such barriers can be categorized into four areas: educational, employment, social/personal/emotional and system barriers.

A. Educational Barriers

Despite the fact that youth acknowledged a great deal of support regarding information about financial aid and having someone to check their homework, over half of the youth noted that there were some challenges they experienced in school. These challenges include:

- difficulty with specific subjects, especially math;
- fitting in with their peers;
- difficulty getting along with peers;
- poor or inconsistent study habits;
- being stigmatized as a “foster care youth” by teachers and students; and
- attention problems.

One youth expressed, “Sometimes being in foster care makes me feel different and new people I meet wonder why I don’t live with my parents.”

We also asked youth, “As a youth in foster care what three things could made your educational experience different/better.” Youth named the following:

- going to different or better schools;
- more support from foster parents (e.g., help with checking of homework, stressing the value of school);
- post-high school financial support; and
- stop moving from place to place.

In contrast, about one-fourth of the youth sample reported that their experience did not need improvement. As one youth put it, “I don’t feel that youth in foster care are all that different in thoughts about education than kids in general.”

Many of the key informants also focused on specific barriers encountered in the area of education. One key informant described the barriers caused by the educational and welfare systems’ lack of commitment to retraining for jobs for the 21st century. Additionally, another informant cited youths’ unrealistic educational outcomes, for example, a 17 year old who is currently listed as a high school Freshman who aspires to obtain a high school diploma. Another example of unrealistic educational expectations was evident in the youth survey information presented above. While 66 percent of the youth survey reported wanting to go to college, only 30
percent were enrolled in college prep classes. Finally, the lack of appropriate additional support such as tutoring, to allow youth in care to catch up is described, by key informants, as a barrier.

B. Employment Barriers

One-third (34.1 percent) of the youth sample reported that they had experienced difficulties finding a job. For those youth, Chart 11 illustrates the most predominant barriers experienced by the 85 youth who reported difficulties in regards to employment.
Clearly, the most significant problem for youth is transportation to get to work. As noted in the previous section, many youth reported that lack of reliable transportation prompted them to leave their jobs. Youth also noted that lack of jobs in their geographic area made it difficult to find employment. The majority of the sample youth reside in rural areas. Agency staff from rural areas supported this point, noting that the number of jobs in rural areas, especially on reservations, was half that of their urban counterparts. Youth also reported that their lack of job experience was a barrier. One-quarter of the youth said they could not find a job they liked. Only twenty percent of the youth felt that lack of job skills and lack of education were obstacles to finding employment.

We also asked the 26 agency-provider staff to identify the most significant barriers experienced by the caseloads they serve. As shown in Chart 12, the 26 agency-providers also noted transportation as one of the most important barriers.
Chart 12

Agency-Provider Survey:
Barriers to Employment According to Service Providers

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In contrast to the youth, however, agency-providers saw lack of job skills and lack of job experience as significant a barrier as transportation. Agency-providers reported that lack of child care for parenting youth and the lack of personal contacts also prohibited youth from finding and sustaining employment.

In addition, when agency staff were asked what barriers they have seen youth in their programs experience after they leave care, the following issues which are related to obtaining and sustaining employment emerged:

- scarcity of affordable housing;
- lack of flexible jobs which allow youth to deal with special needs; and
- unavailability of health care.

Key informants also describe inadequate job opportunities, lack of child care and inadequate job seeking skills as the three most important employment barriers facing youth leaving the foster care system.
C. Social/ Personal/ Emotional Barriers

Most key informants described social and personal/emotional issues as one of the most significant barriers facing youth as they prepare to leave foster care. Many of those barriers cited include the absence of a support system like church, community groups, or hobbies as well as an absence of positive peer and adult role models. These youths have often not developed socialization skills and have had little contact with the private world. Unlike youth who have parents or other relatives to fall back on, youth in care have no “safety net” to rely on when things get rough in their first few years as adults. This in combination with their own personal issues such as fear, loneliness, negative peer influences, unresolved family problems and denial of their own situation, can create barriers to success.

Agency-providers echoed many of the same issues:

- lack of maturity and personal development;
- lack of personal support networks;
- unresolved emotional issues with family and past;
- poor self-image; and
- permanent mental health problems.

D. System Barriers

Finally, key informants have identified significant systems barriers facing older youth as they prepare to leave foster care. The most prevalent systems barrier identified is the lack of commitment to Independent Living for the youth by state agencies. This is evidenced by insufficient training for those working with the Independent Living population as well as an unwillingness to face the challenges presented in educating and training young adults for jobs in the 21st century.

In addition, one key informant described the artificial nature of the child welfare system’s decision that an eighteen-year-old is emotionally ready to survive on his or her own. Given the current trend for young people to fall back on their parents more than once in their early to mid-twenties, this expectation is unrealistic for any child and especially for a child who has experienced the emotional trauma of abuse and family separation.

VI. PROGRAMS AND SUPPORTS

In this section we rely on the key informant and agency-provider surveys to highlight key transitional program components. When asked to give examples of programs and supports that increase the likelihood of successful transitions for older youth preparing to leave care, key informants most often cited mentoring programs, housing programs or subsidies, experiential learning programs and life skills training. The concept that one competent, caring adult can make a difference in a child’s life has been uniformly accepted in the literature (See Background Paper).
Additionally, these key informants discussed the need for programs that begin early and phase young people into Independent Living progressively.

A. Mentoring Programs

Connecting foster youth with a cross-section of community citizens can do much to offset a tendency to become overly dependent on experts and professionals for answers to societal problems. Having a mentor prior to leaving care is important, but sustaining a mentor relationship after leaving placement may be vital to the well-being of many foster youth. Mech and Rycraft (1995) collected information on 29 mentoring programs located in 15 states. Mentor sites were selected for inclusion if three criteria were met:

1. the program was designed to serve adolescents in foster care;
2. the program was operational for at least 12 months prior to the site visit; and,
3. the program provided access to information on mentor-mentee characteristics.

Mech and Rycraft (1995) identified five categories of mentor program models:

1. Transitional Life-Skills Mentors;
2. Cultural Empowerment Mentors;
3. Corporate/Business Mentors;
4. Mentors for Young Parents; and,
5. Mentor Homes.

Transitional Life-Skills Mentors: try to provide mentees with social support, friendship, and to serve as role models. Mentors are expected to facilitate the acquisition of Independent Living skills, and to assist mentees to develop tangible and intangible life skills. Emphasis is placed on forming a relationship that cultivates a community connection for youths that is sustained during their transition to independence. Eighty percent of the sites surveyed use a transitional life-skills model.

Cultural Empowerment Mentors: youth from a minority cultural or ethnic group are matched with adult members from the same group. The rationale for cultural empowerment mentoring is that minority status groups are recipients of negative societal messages, and that a positive role model from their minority group can have a beneficial influence on mentee identity. Two examples of programs are Rites of Passage at Don Bosco Hall in Detroit, MI (for African American youth) and the Big Siblings Program, in West Hollywood, CA (for gay/lesbian youth).

Corporate/Business Mentors: matches older foster adolescents with mentors from the private sector/business community. Corporate mentoring programs recruit businesses that are ready, willing, and able to hire foster teens. Participating businesses agree to provide jobs, to monitor work experience, and to offer career development employment opportunities for mentees who successfully complete a prescribed program. The model is exemplified by the Missouri Mentoring Partnership, located in St. Louis.

Mentors for Young Parents: matches experienced mothers with young pregnant or parenting teens. Mentors share their child rearing experiences and try to help young mothers develop responsibility, confidence, and a positive orientation toward raising children. Emphasis is placed on guiding young parents toward self-sufficiency. Mentoring Mothers, part of the Summit County Children Services in Akron, Ohio was founded in 1987 and currently (1994) has 25 active members.
**Mentor Homes**: places four to six adolescents in a home with an adult mentor. The mentor is in residence and is responsible for guiding the activities of youths in terms of education, employment, and community involvement. *Wolverine Human Services* program in Michigan is an example of this program type. Mentors are typically college or university students who attend classes during the day. Mentors teach and model Independent Living skills such as grocery shopping, laundry, cooking and housekeeping.

Most mentoring programs expect mentors to devote an average of 10 hours per month to their mentees. Mentors generally receive few, if any, incentives. The majority of programs have extensive requirements including a police background check. Most programs also require participation in some form of training, and many require attendance at monthly mentor support sessions. Three basic supervision models exist:

1. phone calls between program coordinators and mentors,
2. activity logs that are maintained by mentors, and
3. in person meetings with mentors and mentees.

**B. Phased-In Continuum of Services**

Based on Westat’s national evaluation of Independent Living programs, Cook asserts that the concept of independent-living services is two-fold; comprising both a philosophical approach to delivering services and the specific resources that lead to achieving a successful transition to independence. Cook’s continuum of Independent Living preparation is presented in the following table and description.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informal Learning</th>
<th>Formal Learning</th>
<th>Supervised Practice Living</th>
<th>Self-Sufficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Phase 1: Informal Learning**: Basic living skills are acquired informally by observing family members and repeating their methods or techniques, and through trial and error. New skills are often introduced when daily living requires it.

**Phase 2: Formal Learning**: Basic living skills are taught through formal instruction and formalized activities. For many young people, formal instruction is part of an educational program or extracurricular activity. Often, someone outside the family is providing the instruction, and it may occur individually or in groups.

**Phase 3: Supervised Practice Living**: This learning is primarily experiential. The double line at the midpoint of the continuum model indicates that the young person is no longer living with adults who are responsible for parenting and now lives in some type of supervised Independent Living situation. This situation provides the opportunity for the youth to practice all of the skills that have been learned both formally and informally.

**Phase 4: Self-sufficiency**: The young person is living independently without the benefit of a safety net. The young person is viewed as an adult and expected to pay his or her own way and develop and maintain support structures.
For many young people in the general population, there is no pressure to move into Phase 3 or Phase 4. Many young people choose, for a variety of reasons, to delay moving away from home until they are well past the age of majority. This is not an available option for most youth in the foster care system.

Independent-living services are those programs and services that have an identifiable method for teaching both the tangible and intangible skills. Child welfare agencies could provide services to meet the needs of youth in care at each level of the continuum of preparation for independence. The continuum of services, based on Cook’s (1988) four phases is presented in the table below.
### Table 3. Cook’s Model: Continuum of Services*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 Informal Learning</th>
<th>2 Formal Learning</th>
<th>3 Supervised Practice Living</th>
<th>4 self-sufficiency (Aftercare)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Training of staff and foster parents to encourage independent-living skills and decision making.</td>
<td>1 Basic skills training provided through simulation laboratories, interactive videos, contacts with private agencies, public agency staff, foster parents, volunteers and group home and residential treatment programs. Includes the tangible and intangible skills.</td>
<td>1. Apartment living with agency staff on premises.</td>
<td>1. Scholarship programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Out-of-home placement (foster homes, residential treatment programs that have incorporated informal independent-living concepts in their daily living arrangements.</td>
<td>2. Employment training through interagency agreements with Employment and Training, Job Training Partnership Act, Vocational Rehab., Job Corps, contracts with private providers and community volunteers. Services include career awareness, obtaining a job, maintaining a job, and on the job training.</td>
<td>2. Apartment living without agency staff on premises. Agency leased Youth selected and leased Boarding house House sharing Apartment.</td>
<td>2. Drop-in centers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Education services through interagency agreements with departments of education, contracts with private providers and individuals. Services include tutoring, assessments, GED prep, scholarships and SAT prep.</td>
<td>3. Host homes.</td>
<td>3. Volunteer Programs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Counseling provided through contracts with private providers, public agency staff, and community mental health agencies. Topics covered include self-esteem, transitioning separation, parenting and peer support.</td>
<td>4. Follow-up Services.</td>
<td>5. Stipends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Teen conferences ranging from a one day workshop to a weekend. Include teaching of basic skills, career awareness, and developing peer support. These programs may be provided through public agency subsidy programs or through residential treatment programs or group homes.</td>
<td></td>
<td>6. Support services (e.g. counseling, locating and leasing apartments.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Other special services including developing life books, programs from teen parents, and developing community resource guides for workers/teens.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* some group homes and residential treatment programs have incorporated all four service areas in one program.
C. Transitional Support and Subsidies

We asked the agency-providers to provide information about the number of youth who receive transitional services and to describe the types of transitional assistance in place in their agency or state.

Table 4. Agency-Provider Survey: Number of Title IV-E Eligible Youth by State (N= 26 agencies)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State (type of respondents)</th>
<th># of Respondents *</th>
<th># IV-E Eligible Youth</th>
<th># IV-E Eligible Youth Served</th>
<th>% IV-E Eligible Youth Served</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama (private agency)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona (private agency)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado (state)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,385</td>
<td>740</td>
<td>53.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut (private agency)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii (private agency)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho (state, private)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>46.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana (state)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2,189</td>
<td>1,222</td>
<td>55.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine (state, private agency)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>778</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland (state)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,821</td>
<td>1,801</td>
<td>98.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi (state)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>504</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>65.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada (state)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>490</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico (state)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>75.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina (county)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,104</td>
<td>1,104</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota (state)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>94.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio (private)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>229%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma (state)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,106</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon (state, private)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2,248</td>
<td>1,109</td>
<td>49.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island (private)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota (state, 2 private)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>107%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas (state)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3,183</td>
<td>3,183</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia (state)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>911</td>
<td>1,074</td>
<td>117%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Multiple organizations generally represent the state office and private organizations.

In addition to Title IV-E funding, half of the agencies (state Independent Living programs) responding to the survey receive supplemental funds. As shown in Chart 13, these funds are used for a variety of transitional services, most notably to subsidize living costs and to assist with start-up costs for foster care youth moving into apartments.

Chart 13
Agency-Provider Survey: Ways Title IV-E Supplemental Funds Are Spent

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One-third of the agencies use the supplemental funds for special projects such as trips and formal clothing while one-quarter use such funds for reunions for youth. Only four agencies use the supplemental funds for services for overage youth.

Nineteen of the 26 agencies offer financial assistance for higher education. Financial assistance is used for a variety of purposes. As shown in Chart 14, in 81 percent of the 26 agencies, youth may use these funds to pay for post-secondary schooling and in 70 percent these funds may be used to pay for vocational training.
Chart 14
Agency-Provider Survey:
Types of Educational Supports for Which Financial Assistance May Be Used

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In addition to the above mentioned financial assistance for education, 21 of the 26 provider agencies (81 percent) reported that public and private scholarships were available for the youth they serve. In almost all of the agencies (92 percent), Title IV-E funds could be used to pay for tutoring.

With respect to employment support, we asked provider agencies which types of employment services their youth utilize. (See Chart 15.)

Chart 15
Agency-Provider Survey: Employment Services Used by Programs

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According to agency-provider staff, Job Corps and state and county employment services are used most frequently. In contrast, private businesses are the least connected to helping youth in care.

A central concern raised by several of the key informants was the need to use assessments to help match youth with skills. Only half of the provider agencies (48 percent) reported that youth are matched with jobs based on their life skills and/or vocational assessments. The most frequently mentioned assessment tools include the following:

- Daniel Memorial Institute, Inc., Independent Living Assessment Life Skills;
- Ansel Casey Life Skills Assessment (ACLSA); and
- Career Exploratory Inventory.

For youth who are employed, agencies handle youth’s earnings in a variety of ways. However, nearly 60 percent of the 26 agencies reported that youth are required to purchase personal items, pay toward housing or contribute to a savings program.

VII. PUBLIC POLICY STRATEGIES

Key informants described several public policy changes that should occur to improve the educational or economic opportunities for youth as they leave foster care. Youth were asked to describe three things that could be done to change the foster care system. These suggestions fell into three general areas: federal mandates; program level changes; and employment and educational reforms.

A. Federal Mandates

Several key informants suggested changes in the age limitations for federal reimbursement. Recognizing that many young people today are not prepared, emotionally or financially, to be on their own before age 23, there should be flexibility to allow young people to continue to receive financial support and services beyond age 18 and even beyond age 21.
Broader systemic changes suggested by the key informants we spoke with include more flexibility of Independent Living funds including allowing private agencies to access Title IV-E funds directly and allowing programs to serve young people with a variety of needs. Additionally, more funds should be allocated for housing, perhaps with savings from welfare reform. Independent Living programs should be encouraged to integrate with school to work programs and there should be a federal mandate to evaluate current Independent Living programs.

B. Program Reforms

In order to help young people understand the challenges that they will be facing when they are on their own, they should be better prepared and should be given a second chance if their initial efforts fail. This can be accomplished in several ways. First, young people should be allowed to “try out” Independent Living before they will be forced to do so. Transitional living or the ability to live independently while still in care should be allowed and even encouraged. One theme that emerged in key informant interviews was that youth in foster care should be focusing on Independent Living skills at an earlier age, including being assessed as early as age 14.

A second chance fund could give youth in care the same type of safety net that young people with family support often get. This fund would provide low or no interest loans for young people who need additional assistance after leaving foster care. Another strategy would be to provide for other needs such as housing, insurance or other support services that may be required in the first few years that young adults are on their own.

Other suggestions from key informants include requiring that Independent Living coordinators be permanent full time positions in all states and that agencies be required to have youth participate in all levels of program planning and evaluation. Additionally, mentors could be utilized to help guide and support youth in care beyond their participation within the state foster care system. Finally, it was suggested that Independent Living services should be privatized.

Youth survey respondents were asked to describe three things that could be done to change the foster care system. Over one-fourth of the youth responded that there should be more respect for children, many stating that they would “treat foster kids as if they were normal,” allowing young people to have a say in what will happen to them. Nearly one-fourth of the youth people described the need to improve screening and training of foster parents and to “make sure all foster care children are well treated.” Between 10 and 15 percent of youth described the following:

- there should be more freedom for foster youth, “allow them to go outside to demonstrate good behavior in the community;”
- more training and better hiring practices for caseworkers: “I would hire social workers who encourage and those who care;”
- more financial assistance for such things as clothes, housing, heat and food - “give all clients that are leaving $5,000 for the bank;” and,
- more social workers with lower caseloads.

Other responses included more visitation with biological families, siblings and more financial assistance to foster parents. Less than 10 percent of the youth either did not know or would not change anything about the current system. Finally, programs to encourage either foster
homes or others who are trained to provide continuing supports for the young person through and after the transition.

C. Employment and Educational Reforms

According to key informants, efforts should be made to encourage private sector businesses to provide meaningful employment for former foster youth. Additionally, college tuition waivers or scholarship programs could provide the necessary financial support to get young people through college or vocational school. Key informants also noted the need for introducing education and employment readiness at earlier ages.

Key informants advocated educational tutoring and encouragement so that youth in care will graduate from high school with appropriate grade level proficiencies in math, reading and writing. One key informant suggested that programs ensure that youth do not leave care without a certain literacy level.