EMPA Capstones   Student Scholarship

Spring 3-2-2019

As Assessment of Foster Youth Aging Out of Care Preparedness to Avoid Homelessness

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Submitted by

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March 2, 2019

Table of Contents

Abstract

The foster care system is in place to care for the nation's children that do not have any capable of caring for them. However, foster care can be a hard life when faced with multiple placements, separation from siblings, mental health illnesses and substandard education due to attending multiple schools; these examples are just the tip of the iceberg as to what youth in foster care face. The journey from adolescence to adulthood can be difficult for the most stable child, image this journey for a youth aging out foster care. To support the youth aging out of care Independent Living Programs (ILPs) offer courses to promote and support their independence and ultimately help them avoid homelessness. Unfortunately, a homeless problem does exist among youth aging out of care. This study will examine the ILPs, interview key informants and volunteers, and obtain feedback from the most important people in this process – former and current foster youth currently enrolled an ILP.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Approximately 26,000 youth who "age out" of foster care at the age of 18 each year in the United States face significant challenges in meeting their needs for health care, education, employment, housing, and emotional support (NCSL, 2017). The trauma experienced by these youth place them at risk of becoming homeless when they age out of care. The Independent Living Program (ILP) was authorized by the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (Public Law 106-169). The intent of the Act is to provide programs to prepare youth aging out of care the life skills to survive independently. The ILP provides training, services, and benefits to assist current and former foster youth in achieving self-sufficiency prior to, and after leaving, the foster care system.   In California, each county has the flexibility to design services to meet a wide range of individual needs and circumstances, and to coordinate services with other Federal and State agencies engaged in similar activities. The population interviewed for this study are current and foster children between the ages of 16-20, Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteers, an Independent Living Program Coordinator, and a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Director. throughout the various counties in California.

Background History

This research paper investigates and focuses on the correlation between services provided through The Independent Living Programs in California and aged out foster youth's abilities to secure and maintain adequate and safe housing, preventing homelessness. Youth are eligible for ILP services from age 16 to the day before their 21st birthday, provided one of the following criteria is met:

- The youth was/is in foster care at any time from their 16th to their 19th birthday

- The youth was placed in out-of-home care by a tribe or tribal organization between their 16th and 19th birthdays

- The youth is a former dependent who entered into a kinship guardianship at any age and is receiving/received Kinship Guardianship Assistance Payments (Kin-GAP) between the ages of 16 and 18.

- The youth is a former dependent who entered into a Non-Related Legal Guardianship (NRLG) after attaining age 8 and is receiving/received permanent placement services

The transition from adolescence is not a one size fits all journey for foster children, take in account, each individual youth's components of their transition plan must be specific to their needs. Research highlights generally poor outcomes for youth in foster care during the transition to adulthood. Research also suggests that there are distinct subgroups of youth: some who fare well and others who encounter many challenges. Youths' diverse experiences and needs suggest that we should consider how well services are targeted to these needs when engaging in program development and evaluation. Our conceptual framework (figure 1) informs program development and evaluation efforts. The model takes into account trauma from maltreatment and subsequent experiences in care that may make the transition to adulthood more difficult for youth in foster care than for other young people. However, it also highlights that like all youth, youth in foster care approach the transition to adulthood with many individual characteristics and experiences that influence their ability to transition successfully. This implies that services should be tailored to meet each youth's individual needs rather than provided uniformly to all youth in care (McDaniel, 2014).
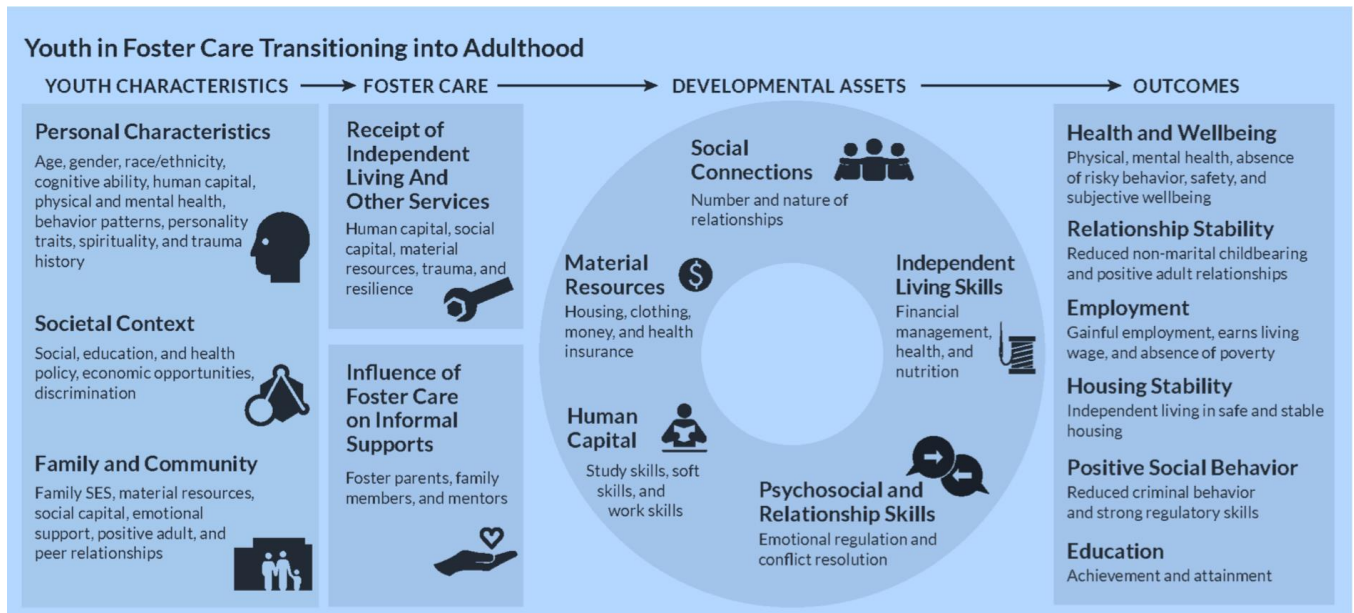
Figure 1

The Independent Living Skills program is one component in preparing foster youth to age out of care. While each county has the flexibility to manage their program based off the needs of their clients the minimum services offered are assistance in academic and employment issues, access to community resources and referrals, and connect with family finding and permanency services. In addition to these "drop in" services, the ILSP also provide a wide array of scheduled community and skill-building activities.

Research Questions

Main Research Question: Are Youth Aging Out of Foster Care in California Prepared to Avoid Homelessness?

Sub Question 1: Is there a need for life skills-based courses and training for youth aging out of care to avoid homelessness?

Sub Question 2: Are the life skills-based courses and training being effectively used?

Sub Question 3: What are the barriers that prevent aged out foster youth from obtaining permanent housing in Northern California once they age out of care?

These questions were designed specifically to obtain information from subject matter experts managing and supervising these programs. It is well established by scholars and practitioners that the target audience for this program may have inherent obstacles for successful completion that are separate from the administration of the program. The final analysis may reveal that the skills taught in these programs need to be introduced at a much younger age and reinforced thought the youth's life.   In this regard the ILP can viewed as a capstone program of life skills taught throughout the youth's life in foster care. The final analysis will prove or disprove the researcher intuition.

Operational Terms and Definitions

Aged-Out: The term "aging out" refers to children within a state's foster care system who are still in the system when they reach the age of majority or when they have graduated from high school. Children who have "aged out" have not found permanency with an adoptive family, become adopted, or reunified with their birth families—they have not been able to return to their biological parents.

Independent Living Program (ILP) v. Independent Living Skills Program (ILSP): These terms will be used interchangeably throughout this case study. Throughout the research gathered the terms were used interchangeably while still referring to the same program.

Homelessness: Homelessness is the circumstance when people are without a permanent

dwelling, such as a house or apartment. People who are homeless are most often unable to

acquire and maintain regular, safe, secure and adequate housing due to a lack of, or a steady

income.

Scope and Limitations

　　　　Though the scope of the research is focused on California counties, the research covers

geographic areas throughout the United States to gather data regarding challenges and successes

in the ILPs effectiveness to assist in preventing homelessness for aged out foster youth across the

United States. The objectives, which include getting answers to research questions, will focus on

insight from the experts in order to learn about the ILPs as it relates to preparing former foster

youth avoid homelessness.

Purpose of the Study

　　　　The purpose of the study is to evaluate if the Independent Living Skills Programs offer

the courses needed for aged out youth to become self-sufficient. Also, the examination of the

program should reveal any collateral issues, such as lack of participation, out dated practices, or

lack of support.

Significance of the Study

　　　　Nationwide approximately, 25,000 youth age out of care, many without the skills or

resources to mature into productive adults. The lack of preparation for youth aging out of care to

be self-sufficient to obtain permanent housing is both a disservice to the youth and continued

responsibility for society. The roller coaster of social service and public aide is difficult to get

off of if one does not have adequate skills to be self-sufficient. This study is not just significant

to the foster care system, because these youth will move from one system to the next without the

proper preparation. The inadequacies in the foster care system has lasting effects for both the

youth and the public. This study will provide information regarding homeless directly from the

former and current foster youth. This study will offer a snapshot into the observations, opinions

and expert testimonies of those that are in the system or work closely with foster youth.

Expected Impact of the Research

I anticipate that my research will reveal that the professionals and volunteers involved

with the foster youth are concerned about the youth's futures and desire more, different, or better

training to prepare them for aging out of care. This assumption is based off the fact that there is

an actual homeless problem among aged out foster youth, therefore the it is vital to examine,

what can be done to keep this from occurring. This research study will be important because it

will test if the current policies regarding the ILPs are the most efficient and effective.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

The focus of this study was to evaluate whether or not Independent Living Programs provide the skills to prevent homelessness in former foster children throughout the state of California. The main research question investigated for this study is as follow: Are youth aging out to foster care in California prepared to prevent homelessness? The examination of this question led to a review of scholarly work and practitioners' studies on the following themes: (1) an overview of the Independent Living Programs; (2) barriers associated with foster youth obtaining safe adequate housing after they leave foster care; and (3) an examination of the homeless rate among former foster children.

Overview of Independent Living Programs

The federal government recognizes that older youth in foster care and those aging out are vulnerable to negative outcomes and may ultimately return to the care of the state as adults, either through the public welfare, criminal justice, or other systems. Under the federal foster care program, states may seek reimbursement for youth to remain in care up to the age of 21. In addition, the federal foster care program has protections in place to ensure that older youth in care have a written case plan that addresses the programs and services they need in making the transition, among other provisions. Separately, the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) provides mandatory funding for independent living services and supports (until age 21) to youth (1) who will likely age out of foster care without reunifying with their parents, being adopted, or being placed with relatives or other guardians; (2) youth who aged out between the ages of 18 and 21; and (3) youth age 16 or older who left foster care for kinship

guardianship or adoption. Independent living services are intended to assist youth prepare for

adulthood (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2017).

For most adolescents, an eighteenth birthday and the transition to adulthood is a long-

awaited milestone. It is a time of change, a time of growth, a time of new-found independence,

and most importantly a time of celebration. The youth can exercise the right to vote, enlist in the

military, and sign legal documents. Yet even while these youth acquire the legal trappings and

rights associated with adulthood, our society wisely recognizes that adolescents on the cusp of

adulthood continue to need family guidance, support, and encouragement. Few of us would turn

our emerging adult child out on the street with no job, no fiscal backing, no place to sleep at

night, and minimal life skills. Few of us would strip away any adult anchor in the life of an

eighteen-year-old and leave her alone as she faces the challenges of transitioning to adulthood.

Few of us would leave our eighteen-year-old with nowhere to turn and no one to call when the

inevitable difficulties of young adulthood arise. Yet, for our most vulnerable youth--the abused

and neglected children we undertake to raise when we bring them into foster care--this scenario

plays out time and again.   Every year close to 25,000 youth age out of our nation's foster care

system and come face to face with the cold, hard realities of adulthood--completely

alone. Without the anchor of a family, former foster youth disproportionately join the ranks of

the homeless, incarcerated, and unemployed (Krinsky, 2010).   The emerging adulthood

demographic includes those aging out of the foster care system as well, this group as a whole

tends to require family support for a longer period of time compared to past generations. Foster

children often do not have family support which can prove to be problematic in achieving a

successful transition. Many adolescents are still enrolled in high school at the age of 18 years

old. The expectation for an 18-year-old, especially one that does not have a safety net to fall

back on, to become independent at the age of 18 in not realistic. The ILP provides a life skills curriculum for those transitioning out of the foster care system.

The statistics surrounding the aged out foster youth's lack of ability and resources to care for themselves and be self-sufficient once they age out of care can be quite alarming. The alarming statistics should prompt an examination of the processes in place by states to prepare these youth for successful independence once they age out of care. (Trejos-Castillo, 2015) According to the National Foster Care Coalition (2013), by the end of 2012 there were 400,540 youth in foster care, from which 26,286 youth emancipated from the foster system to live on their own. A great proportion of them are not able to access extended care services (e.g., medical services, housing) due to the state not providing those services once youth age out of care. The U.S. Administration for Children and Families reports that within two to three years after aging out of foster care at age 18, approximately 51% of youth will lack employment, about 25% will become homeless and incarcerated, and most of them will be at higher risk to become a single parent (Krinsky, 2010). Additional official data provides evidence that foster youth are among the most vulnerable populations for homeless and financial hardship, placing them at a greater risk for economic instability as well as poor physical, emotional, and mental health outcomes (Children's Defense Fund, 2014; Dworsky & Hall, 2013).

There are various components to foster youth aging out of care. However, the planning leading up to the youth's transition is critical. A goal is the foster care system is to work towards permanence for the youth; whether that permanence is back in the home with their parents, with extended family or a new adoptive home. However, due to the uncertainties of permanence the adults and social workers in the youth's life should continue to work on a transition place in

concert with the permanence plan.   Transitional planning is distinct and separate from

permanency planning. Transitional planning is a major component of a child's preparation for

adulthood, and it addresses housing, health, education, and employment. Transitional planning

can be used in conjunction with Independent Living Planning (ILP). Federal law, under 42

U.S.C.A. § 675(1)(G), requires a case plan to include a plan for educational stability. This

provision seeks to improve a child's school performance by requiring the agency to assess, for

each foster care placement, the appropriateness of a proposed educational setting and proximity

of that placement to the foster home. It also requires that the state child-welfare agency

coordinate with appropriate local agencies to ensure that, whenever possible, a child remains in

the same school where he or she was in attendance prior to being placed into foster care. If it is

not possible to remain in the same school (say, because doing so would not be in the child's best

interest), then the law requires not only prompt enrollment in a new school, but also prompt

transfer of school records. This law is especially important because foster children are less likely

to earn diplomas than non-foster youth. Any educational help goes a long way (Macfarlane,

2013).

Barriers Associated with Obtaining Safe and Adequate Housing After Leaving Foster Care

Young people who are making the transition to adulthood benefit from stable housing as

they pursue education and vocational opportunities and master tasks related to economic

independence (Berzin et al. 2011). However, youth who have emancipated from foster care face

a unique set of barriers to independence related to their backgrounds and histories with the child

welfare system. Of the many challenges that these young people face, accessing and maintaining

affordable and safe housing is critical, how- ever many experience significant housing instability

and homelessness.   Youth who exit the foster care system without having achieved a permanent

placement are typically referred to as ''emancipated foster youth'' or ''aged-out youth'' in order to distinguish them from the more general group of ''former foster youth.'' In this paper, the former two terms will be used interchangeably. The body of research on emancipated foster youth is sparse compared to the vast literature on foster care more broadly, and existing literature has primarily focused on documenting and describing the numerous challenges associated with emancipation (Collins and Ward 2011) (Curry and Abrams, 2014). Aged-out youth face challenges that their peer groups are not exposed too. These challenges make it more difficult for them to transition from care to independence. The research related to the well-being of foster children after their departure from foster care is not developed. The emphasis appears to be on the immediate needs of children as opposed to their long-term life plan. This lack of research makes it difficult to access the groups readiness for independence upon departure from foster care.

The combination of the vulnerable developmental stage of emerging adulthood, combined with the risk factors inherent in foster care, lead emerging adults who age out of foster care to experience multiple poor outcomes. Emerging adults are documented to have poor outcomes when compared to peers, including those in other high-risk groups (i.e. poverty, violence) (Courtney and Heuring 2005; Courtney et al. 2004; Pecora et al. 2005, 2006). Research has consistently documented that emerging adults transitioning from foster care into adulthood experience deficits in achieving milestones associated with a successful transition to adulthood. These deficits include difficulties in the areas of health, mental health, education, employment, housing, and relationships (Gomez, 2015). The author examined the aged-out youth's perceived helplessness. The psychological effects of the foster care system are long lasting and deeply rooted, for some can become a barrier with obtaining employment and

eventually a permanent home. Although, services may be available to help transition to self-sufficiency, the fear of being alone can be debilitating causing them to feel helpless and not be an active participant in their own survival.

Garrett (2018), there are a number of physical and practical needs for youth aging out of the child welfare system. The most important are housing and work, so that youth are able to care for their most basic needs and do not become homeless. This may also include food, healthcare, mental health services, childcare, and funds available for emergencies. As the eight participants suggested, information on local community resources should be provided to youth before or upon discharge. Some suggested making in-person introductions so that youth have will have the opportunity to present themselves to these resources. This may make it more likely that a young person would utilize these services if they are comfortable approaching the location and workers involved. These are simple starting needs, but youth need much more help in addition. Foster youth aging out of care may require a level of hand holding in order to obtain the services and support that is available to them. Merely, giving them a phone number or website is a very watered down approach to development of their life skills. Considering the needs of this demographic a more aggressive approach to development is required.

Won (2008), foster youth have more complex social relationships than youth who live with their parents. Besides birth parents, foster parents or group home staff are actively involved in youth's lives after the placement in out-of-home care. Long-term placement with foster families can provide "the continuity of substitute parent figures and an opportunity for deeper relationships" and thereby help youth to recover from dysfunctional relationships with their birth families. The social relationships of foster youth can have great impact on their ability to obtain

stable housing. Being able to cohabitate with someone else may be necessary for some former foster children dependent upon their ability to afford to live alone after aging out of care.

Stewart (2016), foster youth enter the child welfare system with a multitude of physical, mental, and emotional health issues. They exit the foster care system with the same or greater healthcare issues. Oftentimes, these issues are a direct consequence of the impoverished, abusive, neglectful, and stressful environments from which they were removed. Foster care can further exacerbate these issues on many levels, as separation from family and familiar environments culminating with stranger placement can be very stressful for most children. At times these issues are not addressed appropriately. They may be misdiagnosed, overlooked, or simply identified as behavioral problems. Thus, health- related issues can have significant impact on youth functioning and may continue throughout the duration in foster care and well into their adult lives, making the transition to adulthood even more arduous.   When children enter into the foster care system, legislators, social workers and caregivers gain a huge responsibility – to mold and shape these children into healthy and productive adults. Unfortunately, too often this is not the outcome of youth that enter foster care. A revamping of the understanding of the responsibilities of the legislators, social workers and caregivers is paramount.

The majority of children entering foster care have experienced multiple traumas, making this a vulnerable population with an increased risk for emotional and behavioral problems. A lack of trauma-informed care within the child welfare system tends to create additional traumatic experiences that cannot go unaddressed. Heightened awareness of the occurrence and impact of childhood trauma has drawn attention to the need for trauma-informed care, which has resulted in the development of trauma-focused practices and initiatives. However, the implementation of

such practices has only just begun. Successful dissemination and research of these services needs to become a priority within the child welfare system (Beyerlein, 2014). A significant need in the foster care system exists for foster parents, social workers and others involved in the child's case/life to be knowledgeable regarding the mental health diagnoses and treatment plans for children diagnosed with trauma and stress related conditions.

The housing crisis is affecting members across many different demographics. Young adults aging out of foster care are victims of this problem as well. According to Fowler (2017), a growing body of research links "aging out" of foster care with housing problems in the transition to adulthood Policymakers fear abrupt disruption of services at age 18 combined with chaotic family environments in the face of developmentally normative experimentation leave many vulnerable to homelessness. To prepare foster youth for the transition to adulthood, federal policy focuses on programs that train independent living skills. However, little evidence demonstrates benefit of these programs for foster youth transitioning into adulthood; moreover, no studies directly compare rates of homelessness among aged-out versus other at-risk young adults. The resulting evidence gap inhibits the development of effective and scalable prevention initiatives. The present study leverages nationally representative and prospective data to test how aging out contributes to risk for homelessness and whether programs and policies targeting the transition to adulthood mitigate the risk. Good data based on the challenges of the aging out youth are necessary to better met their needs.

Multiple placements affect a foster youth's feeling and need for permanence. The constant disruption of permanency in a child's life can make some of the most basic social skills difficult to develop. According to (Paul-Ward, 2009) children and adolescents in the foster care

system develop within challenging environments, such as group homes and multiple nonfamilial

households. These environments place children and adolescents at risk for multiple negative

consequences (Bernier, Ackerman, & Stovall-McClough, 2004; Kools, 1997). Studies conducted

over the past 20 years have repeatedly suggested that children in foster care experience severe

functional impairments—poor academic performance, emotional and behavioral problems, and

health-related problems (Hochstadt et al., 1987; Kools, 1997; Merdinger, Hines, Osterling, &

Wyatt, 2005; Reilly 2003; Simms & Halfon, 1994).

Foster youth in many situations gain independence overnight. Their transition often is

not incremental in comparison to a child that lives with his or her parents. The sudden

responsibilities of adulthood can be difficult, confusing, and riddled with pitfalls. Independent

Living Programs offer a form of support during this transition however the programs are

voluntary; leaving the decision to participate up to an adolescent who may not be able to see the

full benefit of participating in the program. (Lee, 2015) Foster youth who are

aging out of care are at a critical crossroads in their lives because they are

transitioning out of care and into adulthood simultaneously. These foster youth are making

choices about their adult commitments for the first time, choices that may affect the rest of their

lives. The transition to adulthood has been characterized as a period of freedom from social

norms and obligations to allow individuals the opportunity to explore possibilities before making

long-term commitments although this latitude may also heighten the risk of engagement in

criminal behaviors for some youth. Successful transitions into work, marriage, and parenting

have been associated with rerouting previously negative trajectories In contrast, a criminal

record has a lasting, negative impact on the lives of youths, and may interfere with their ability to

participate fully in society This study seeks to learn whether these high rates of involvement in

the juvenile justice system among youth aging out of care may increase their risk for engaging in

criminal activities in adulthood by initiating a process of social exclusion.

For many youth in the foster care system, foster care becomes the first of many systems

and social services program they will experience throughout their lifetime. This reality begs the

question, do foster youth ever really age out of care? For those that experience involvement with

social systems throughout their life, was their initial indoctrination during their stay in foster

care.   While research outside of child welfare has identified relationships between mental health

and substance abuse problems and justice system involvement, particularly during the transition

to adulthood (e.g., Davis, Banks, Fisher, & Grudzinskas, 2004; Pullmann, 2009; Rosenblatt,

Rosenblatt, & Biggs, 2000), there is little work focused on patterns of multiple system

involvement among youth aging out of care. Life course perspective is useful in considering the

importance of youths' other system involvement, as it posits that life outcomes are a function of

previous life circumstances, such that experiences and decisions at one stage shape subsequent

choices and experiences. A central component of life course perspective is that youths'

trajectories are shaped not only by individual characteristics, but also by their broader

experiences in families, communities, and systems (Horrocks, 2002). Thus, young people's

experiences in other systems are likely to affect their subsequent trajectories by influencing their

choices, opportunities, relationships, and resources. Further, their experiences in the child

welfare system are also likely to influence their life trajectories (Wade & Dixon, 2006).

Examining patterns of multiple system involvement among young people who have aged out of

the child welfare system, and how these patterns are related to their child welfare experiences,

can reveal important relationships among events that have occurred across the life course

(Shook, 2011).

The desire to feel safe and "belong" is a basic need that most foster children struggle with. While their home environment may have been dangerous or neglectful there may be more comfort or a sense of belonging in that environment as opposed to a new and safe environment. In spite of the abuse or neglect that they have already suffered, many foster children feel a tremendous sense of loss and abandonment at being separated from their biological families as well as the familiar surroundings of their schools and communities. Many view the separation as a form of punishment and blame themselves for it. As a result of such separation, foster youth may become withdrawn from their relationships and reluctant to engage in social activities that are a critical part of childhood and the maturation process. In addition to the emotional turmoil they have experienced, children in foster care suffer from higher instances of illnesses, fragmented health care, and delays in cognitive and academic functioning as a result of moving around so often. A recent nationwide study concluded that, "15–20% of foster families have problems in their home environment, family functioning, and parenting." There have also been numerous studies demonstrating that children in foster care frequently suffer physical and sexual abuse at the hands of their foster families.19 Clearly this does not bode well for an already fragile population of children (O'Donnell, 2010).

Examination of the Homeless Rate Among Former Foster Children

Batista (2014), in the Florida 2008 NYTD survey, only 14% of young adults aged 18-22 who were aging out of foster care had any job (part time, full time, temporary, or seasonal) in 2011, and in 2012 that statistic only increased to 19%. Of those who had jobs in 2012, only 4% worked full time. Of those who worked full or part time, 44.2% earned the Florida minimum wage of $7.25/hour or less. In this same sample, 11% were receiving social security payments,

47% were receiving public food assistance, and 9% were receiving government housing assistance. Foster youth aged out of care tend to require continuing and immediate assistance with necessities such as food and healthcare, further highlighting the difficulty of their transition to self-sufficiency.

An overwhelmingly number of former foster children experience difficulties transitioning from adolescence to adulthood. The incarceration rate in the United States is at an all-time high, making it necessary to examine any possible correlation between foster care and criminal behavior. Foster care and juvenile delinquency have also been linked. Courtney, Terao, and Bost (2004) surveyed children who will turn 18 in foster care in the Midwest and found that two-thirds of the boys and half of the girls had a history of delinquency. Jonson- Reid and Barth (2000a, 2000b) considered children in California and found a modest reduction in delinquency with in-home services compared to foster care placement. Meanwhile, Doyle (2007) finds that children on the margin of foster care placement in Cook County, Illinois (which includes the City of Chicago) were more likely to enter the juvenile delinquency system if they were placed in foster care (Doyle, 2007).

Many children living in homeless situations in the U.S. have temporary stays in foster care, and both populations suffer disproportionately higher rates of physical, psychological and social difficulties compared with other children. However, very little is known about which specific interventions achieve the best outcomes for children in these overlapping transitional living situations (Zlotnick, C., Tam, T. and Zerger, S. 2012). The physical, psychological and social difficulties created by residing in foster care, can and do in many circumstances affect the

youth on into adulthood. The research on how stays in foster care affect youth is still somewhat limited.

Aged out foster children's plight with homelessness is magnified for the LGBTQ community of foster children. Oftentimes, social workers have a hard time finding a placement that is good fit; a placement that is support and understanding. Due to the difficulties in finding an appropriate placement, the risk of a new demographic of homeless youth is emerging. LGBTQ youth have a higher average number of foster care placements and are more likely to be living in a group home. They also reported being treated less well by the child welfare system, were more likely to have been hospitalized for emotional reasons at some point in their lifetime, and were more likely to have been homeless at some point in their life. The significance of these findings is supported by previous scholarship that has linked multiple placements, mental health concerns, homelessness, and placements in group homes are barriers to permanency faced by all youth, and LGBTQ youth in particular (Wilson, 2015).

In order to adequately examine the problem of aged out foster children's level of preparation for independence once they age out care, it is important to address the availability of resources they have access to; this includes access to their social workers. (Klee, 1997) Caseworker turnover is at a critical level. An American Public Welfare Association national survey of child-welfare agencies found that "services were limited and generally involved managing, rather than treating, families and their abused or neglected children" (U.S. GAO, 1995, p. 18). Almost all states have reported difficulties in recruiting and retaining caseworkers because of salary issues, high caseloads, and burnout. Further, the supply of foster parents also falls significantly below the need because of the poor image of foster care, inferior pay, and inadequate support services for increasingly demanding care (U.S. GAO, 1995).

Chapter 3 – Research Methodology

Research Objective

The objective of this study was to determine whether the life skills learned from Independent Living Programs (ILPs) lead aged out foster youth to permanent housing. Three over-arching questions were used as a basis for development of the survey tools and for the discussions regarding aged out foster youth preparedness for independence.   First, I was interested in determining if there is an actual need for life skills-based courses and training for youth aging out of care. This question was a foundational question and should be examined at the beginning of the study to determine if there is even a need for the study.

Second, once it is established that there is a need for the life-skills based training, it is necessary to address whether or not the program is being utilized effectively by its' stakeholders. The use level of the program can procedure a faulty cause and effect concerning the effectiveness of the program. Therefore, it is vital to know if the program is being effectively used. Also, examining the effectiveness of this program can lead to suggested improvements or recognition of best practices if appropriate.

Finally, this study will examine what, if any barriers exist to aged out homeless youth obtaining and maintaining permanent housing in Northern California. The possibility of additional barriers outside the control of ILPs may exist; the existence of any barriers can make disrupt the success of the life skills learned through the ILP. Also, the identification of any additional barriers may have influence on the ILP curriculum; when administer programs that promote growth and development is it vital to be abreast of any roadblocks that may exist.

Research Assumptions

The researcher assumes that the data will reveal that the ILPs provide valuable information and skills to assist foster youth to be self-sufficient; however, the courses should be offered or even mandatory at a much younger age. The two-year timeframe between eligibility for the program is a very short timeframe, especially taking into consideration that attendance is voluntary. The researcher also assumes that the principles and skills learned at the ILP need to reinforced by an adult in the youth's life.

Data Collection Plan

Primary data collected through Survey #1, solicited to aged out foster youth in Solano County, California on Feb 4-15, 2019. The researcher surveyed participants in-person at the Solano County Independent Living Program (ILP) at the ILP office. Survey #1, consisted of six questions. Primary data collected through Survey #2, was an electronic survey disseminated via the Nextdoor application and through CASA county offices throughout Northern California (Solano, Sacramento, Fresno) on Feb 4-15, 2019. Survey #2 consisted of seven questions. The researcher deployed two surveys because it is vital to this study to examine the perspectives from both the stakeholders (aged-out foster youth) point of view and volunteer subject matter expert's (CASA) point of view.

All participants involved in data collection were selected based on their direct involvement with aged out foster youth. The first survey was created in order to gain insight on the housing situations and opinions on an ILP I created a six- question survey for youth enrolled in an ILP. The decision to conduct a paper survey was made due to the accessibility of the target audience. The researcher did not have access to target audience email information or a means to send a survey out electronic survey to the target audience; due to ILP confidentially rules was not

able to gain personal information in order to deploy the survey electronically. Participants were advised not to include their name. The demographic information included was gender and age.

The second survey was created to gather information from Court Appointed Special Advocate volunteers regarding the youth that they mentor. The CASAs were used as a conduit to gather this information because the identity of the youth in the CASA program is confidential. use in the CASA program is confidential. The CASA surveys were conducted by using the electronic survey application Allcounted. The Allcounted survey link was sent out by the Sacramento County, Solano County and Fresno/Madera Counties CASA offices to their volunteers for participation.

Lastly, the structured interviews were conducted with both participants over the telephone, this interview method was conducive to interviewees being able to answer fixed questions and to offer additional subject matter expert opinions. The Independent Living Program Coordinator's input to this study was vital due to his institutional knowledge on the ILPs. The Court Appointed Special Advocate Program Manager's contribution to this study was vital due role her direct involvement with foster children; many for their entire stay in foster care.   The methodology used for this research encompasses primary research and secondary insight.

Internal Validity and External Validity

To ensure the internal validity of the research project, the surveys were disseminated throughout several counties in Northern California in order to get a feedback from a wide population sampling. Participants of the surveys were asked not to provide identifiable information, such as names. The only demographic information requested in the surveys were age and gender of the survey participants. The name and associated responses of the subject

matter experts will remain confidential and have been withheld from the contents of this study.

California is experiencing homelessness among aged out foster youth at a rate similar to many

other states. The results of this study could prove beneficial for external validity for other states

experiencing similar rates of homelessness among this demographic. Independent Living

Programs and Court Appointed Special Advocates could benefit from the feedback from the

stakeholder by re-directing programs, resources and mentorship based on the requested needs of

aged out foster youth.

Independent and Dependent Variable

Programs exist to assist foster children aging out of care to be prepared to obtain

permanent housing once they have aged out. However, the question of adequacy of the current

programs is relevant. The dependent variable for this research study is the aged out foster

youth's desire and motivation to obtain permanent housing once they age out of care.

The three independent variables are: 1) Barriers 2) Independent Life-Skill Training, and

3) Employment. Many foster children experience a level of trauma that can impact their ability

to progress into a productive adult. Also, for many foster children multiple placements cause a

detrimental interruption in their education, leaving them deficient in academic areas that would

assist with being able to permanent housing. Independent Life-Skill Training programs must

meet the needs of it's user and not merely exist, a curriculum based on the current and emergent

needs of the participants is vital to the participant's successful completion and ultimate goal of

obtaining permanent housing. Participant's ability to obtain employment is the foundation of

maintaining permanent.

Research Limitations

   A significant research limitation was the time constraint imposed for the collection of data. The projected was completed within the eight-week period, however more time would have allowed for more in-depth analysis of collected data and the opportunity to solicit answers to more counties throughout California.

Chapter 4 – Results and Findings

Objectives:

Many foster children decide to leave the foster care systems as soon as they reach the age of 18. However, as in many families, an 18-year old is not financially, mentally, or emotionally prepared to take on the responsibilities that come with independence. The stark difference between an 18-year old with family ties and an 18-year old former foster youth embracing independence at such a young age is the existence of a safety net. The majority of 18-year old former foster youth don't have a familial safety net to return to if they are unable to obtain housing once they leave care, this harsh reality leaves them vulnerable to homelessness.

Research Questions:

The main research question examined in this study is: are youth aging out of foster care in Northern California prepared to avoid homelessness? The sub-questions examined were:

Sub Question 1: Is there a need for life skills-based courses and training for youth aging out of care to avoid homelessness?

Sub Question 2: Are the life skills-based courses and training being effectively used?

Sub Question 3: What are the barriers that prevent aged out foster youth from obtaining permanent housing in Northern California?

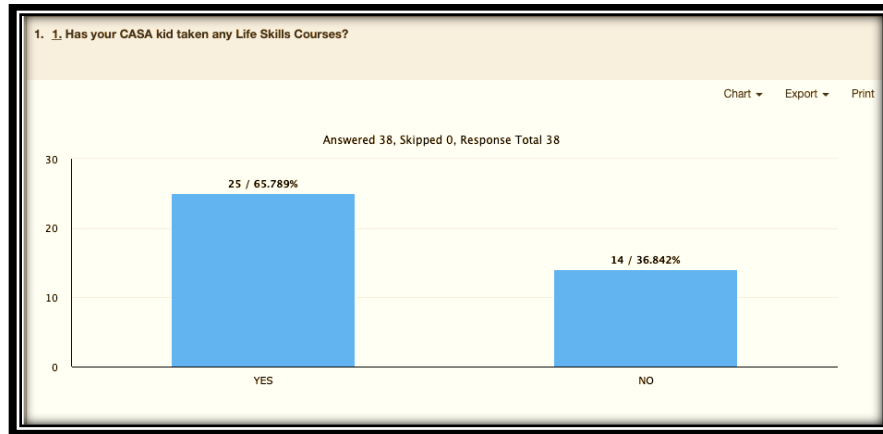**Primary Data:**

Survey I Results:

Target Audience: CASA Volunteers with youth over the age of 15

Delivery Method: Allcounted Electronic Application (www.allcounted.com)

Questions: 7

Participants: 38

**Q1: Has your CASA kid taken any Life Skills Courses?**

Results Q1: CASAs surveyed for this study reported that almost 66% (25 youth) of their youth have taken some type of life skills course. CASAs reported almost 37% (14 youth) have not taken any type of life skills course to support their self-sufficiency once they age out of care. It is important to note that the survey results report that 38 participants answered the question; 0 skipped the question; total: 38. However, the chart represents answers from 39 participants. This could have occurred due to a technological glitch in the electronic survey or due to participant error. The researcher believes that this is not a significant error in data collection and does not sway the results of the survey question. This survey question is vital to the study as it serves as baseline to examine what percentage of the sampled population has engaged in life skills courses. The CASA volunteers were used as a conduit to gain information regarding their CASA youth due to the level confidentiality and identity protection afforded to CASA youth.

**Q2: If yes, through which source?**
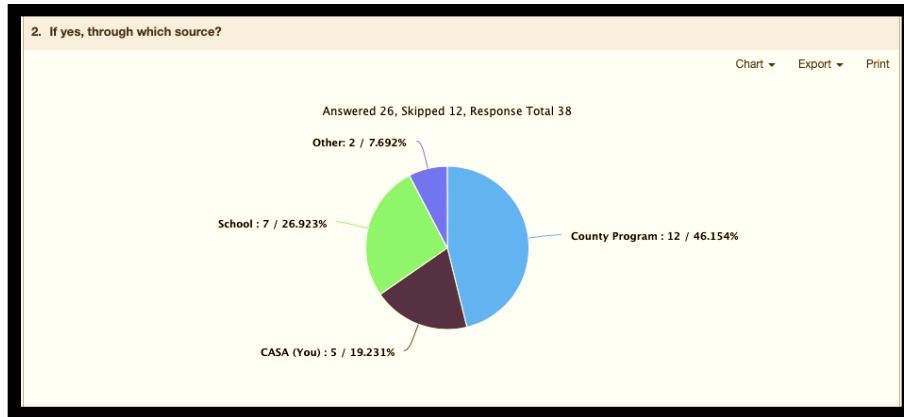
Results Q2: Of the youth that have received some form of life skills training, the

majority (46.15%) received the training through a county sponsored program. Each county

absorbs the responsibility to prepare its' foster youth for self-sufficiency. The role of a CASA

volunteer is very fluid and their responsibilities to a CASA youth is not scripted, therefore any

life skills training was not mandated, rather initiated due to the particular needs of the youth.

Schools provide life skills and self-sufficiency as a part of a curriculum for all students and do

not necessarily provide guidance based on the particular challenges, needs and desires for foster

youth. While the CASAs and schools provided training for almost 53% of the youth, it is

important to foot stomp that the county maintains the overall responsibility to prepare its' foster

youth.

**Q3: What type of course (s) (mark all that apply)?**
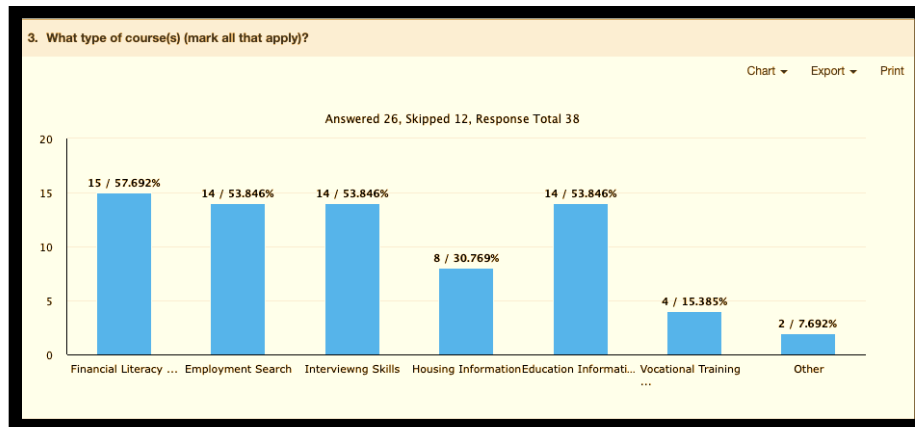
Result Q3: The premise of this study is to examine whether or not aged out foster

children are prepared to prevent homelessness when they age out of care. Their ability to

prevent homelessness is dependent upon many factors; those factors being their ability to obtain

employment, successfully budgeting their income, housing information and education. This

survey question was posed to the CASA volunteers based on the youth's need to obtain those

foundational skills. The participants were requested to mark all courses that apply. The survey

results show that most attended courses were attended by 54%-57% participants; representing

14-15 participants: financial literacy, employment search, interviewing skills, and educational

information. A course on housing information was attended by only 31% of the participants,

representing 4 out of 38 participants.

Q4: Does your CASA kid have a plan for housing once they age out of care?
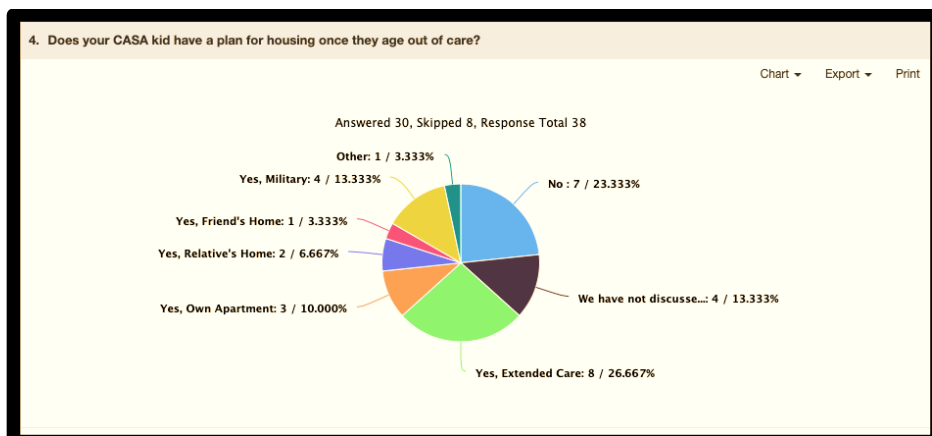
Result Q4: This question was answered by 30 CASA volunteers and skipped by 8 CASA volunteers. Of the 30 responses it appears that 64% (19) of youth have a plan for housing when they age out of care. The remaining 36% (11) either do not have a plan or the plan has not been discussed with their CASA volunteer. However, for those that do have a plan 27% (8) plan to enter into the Extended Foster Care Program. The Extended Foster Care Program is a product of Assembly Bill (AB) 12, the bill allows foster care for eligible youth to extend beyond the age 18 up to age 21. Eligible foster youth are designated as non-minor dependents (NMDs). This data is of note because the youth are voluntarily planning to stay in foster care as an NMD, despite the stigma that is often associated with the foster care system. The Extended Foster Care Program is a transitional program that was created to facilitate the youth's transition to independence.

Q5: Has your CASA kid experienced homelessness between the ages of 15-21? If so, for how long?
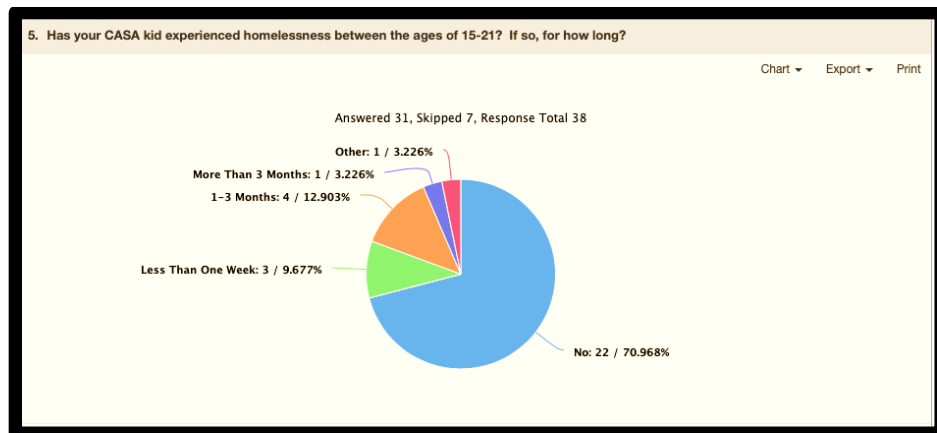
Result Q5: This answer indicates that among the sampling group there has not been a high rate of homelessness; 70% (22) have not experienced homelessness between the ages of 15-21 and 3% (1) has experienced homelessness for more than three months. In total, approximately 30% (9) have experienced some form of homelessness between the ages of 15-21.

Q6. What do you consider the best age for foster children to be introduced to life skills/self-sufficiency information/courses?
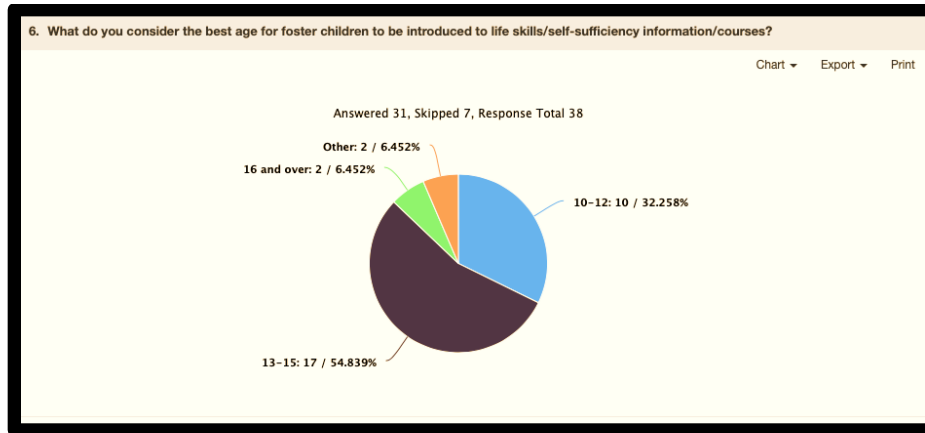
Results Q6: CASA volunteers were asked their opinion regarding the best age for foster children to be introduced to life skills and self-sufficiency information courses. The majority of the respondents, approximately 55% (17) believe that these courses should be introduced to the youth between the ages of 13-15. Only 6% (2) believe the courses should be introduced to youth at 16 and over. 6% (2) of the respondents provided "other" responses; one respondent stated the courses should be introduced to the youth at the at of 5; the second "other" respondent opined that the courses should be introduced when the youth enters foster care and the skills learned should be testable.

Q7. If you the power, funding, and other sources, what program would you modify, add, or delete to assist foster children aging out of care to ensure their ability to secure permanent housing?

Result Q7: Twenty-four participants provided answers to this question. The answers provided a plethora of opinions and suggestions by the CASA volunteers regarding policy changes, life skills training and housing. The responses are summarized into three reoccurring themes: 1) relationship/communication training are needed 2) drop in shelters for aged out youth

3) revise AB12 to start before the youth turns 18. While the respondents provided more opinions

and suggestions, the above identified themes were more prevalent throughout the responses.

Survey I Significant Findings:

The purpose of this study was to assess foster youth aging out of care preparedness to

avoid homelessness in Northern California. CASA volunteers were selected as participants for

Survey I to serve as a voice for foster youth. The independent living courses are not mandatory

for foster children to attend prior to aging out of care; responses to Q1 highlight that only 66% of

this sampling group have attended some form of life skills training. While each county

maintains responsibility for life skills training other sources do exist. Youth did participant in

alternate forms of training through school and CASA. Of the 26 participants (Q2) that engaged

in life skills training, 7 received training in an academic environment. It is unknown if in the

academic environment the life skills curriculum included training specific to the needs foster

youth. More than likely, the curriculum addressed the needs of the majority; youth in stable

family situations.

Q3 addresses the type and number of life skills training attended by the foster youth, the

survey provided seven choices: financial literacy, employment search, interviewing skills,

housing information, education information, vocational training, and other. All of the choices,

except the "other" category, were informational and for the development of hard skills.

Participants suggested in Q7 that foster youth be provided mandatory life skills courses that

extend beyond information and development of hard skills. The participants expressed the value

of including courses that serve to develop the youth emotionally and mentally; courses for

emotional intelligence, decision making, and relationship building were suggested. The

development of these skills is vital to a youth's transition to adulthood, however it appears that these types of courses are not included in traditional life skills programs.

Q4 explored the youth's plans for housing once they age out of care, of the 30 respondents, 11 either have not discussed a plan for future living situations or the youth does not have a plan. It is of note that 8 foster youth plan to continue in the foster care system by enrolling in an Extended Foster Care program. The Extended Foster Care program, allows youth to stay in foster care until the age of 21. While in Extended Foster Care the youth can live in their own apartment supervised or continue to live in a traditional foster care environment. Enrollees in this program must meet certain criteria: work at least 80 per month or be enrolled in an education program (high school or college). The utilization of the Extended Foster Care program by 27% of the sampling group shows that the program is being used by eligible. Although, the chart depicts that only 27% of respondent's plan on enrolling in the program; actually 42% (8 of 19 respondents) of the respondents with a plan for housing after aging out of care plan on enrolling or are already enrolled in this program.

The results of Q5 showed that 30% of the respondent's youth have experienced homelessness, this estimate is in line with the California's homelessness problem across all demographics. In the 2017 Housing and Urban Development Annual Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress the following Northern California counties ranked as Highest of Unsheltered People Experiencing Homelessness: Fresno/Madera, Santa Clara, Alameda counties. The cause of the youth's homelessness was not explored; the duration of the youth's homelessness was an element of this study because children in California may choose to extend in foster care up to the age of 21 to ensure stable housing, therefore lengthy bouts of

homelessness can be prevented or lessened up to the age of 21. The survey revealed that only

one respondent experienced homelessness for a lengthy period of three months or more.

It is inevitable that all foster youth will need to be self-sufficient at some point, the goal

of independent living programs is to prepare youth to be successful in their independence; part of

that success is obtaining an maintain permanent housing. Currently, the county sponsored

independent living skills program are for youth ages 16-21. Only 6% (2) of the respondent's for

Q6 agreed that 16 is the appropriate age for foster youth to engage in independent living courses.

are not allowed to enroll in county sponsored independent living. The remaining 94% opined

that training and courses should start at a younger age. When considering a traditional family

unit, the caregiver or parent does not typically start preparing their child for life at age 16, only

two years before he or she is considered and adult. It is typically an ongoing, deliberate, and life

long process. The answers from the respondents appear to imply that more of a deliberate and

long-term approach should be taken when the youth is in foster care.
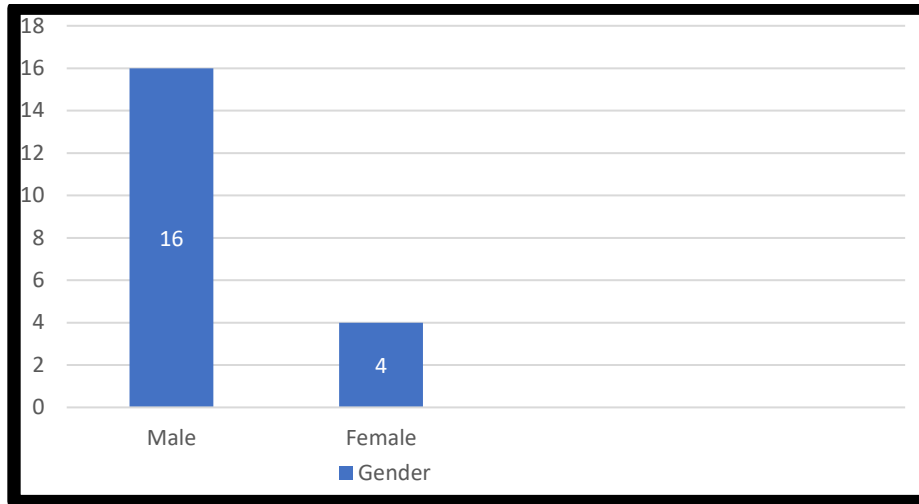
Survey II Results:

Target Audience: Foster Youth Enrolled in Solano County Independent Living Program

Delivery Method: Paper Surveys
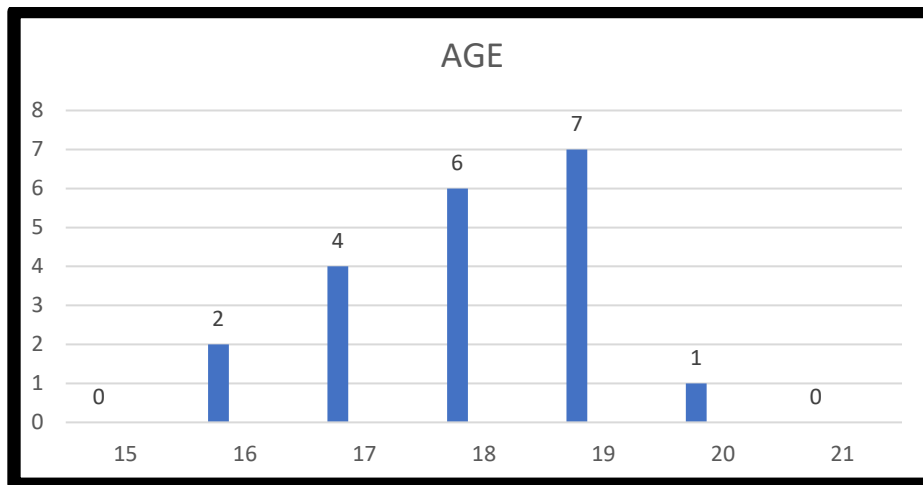
Questions: 6

Participants: 20

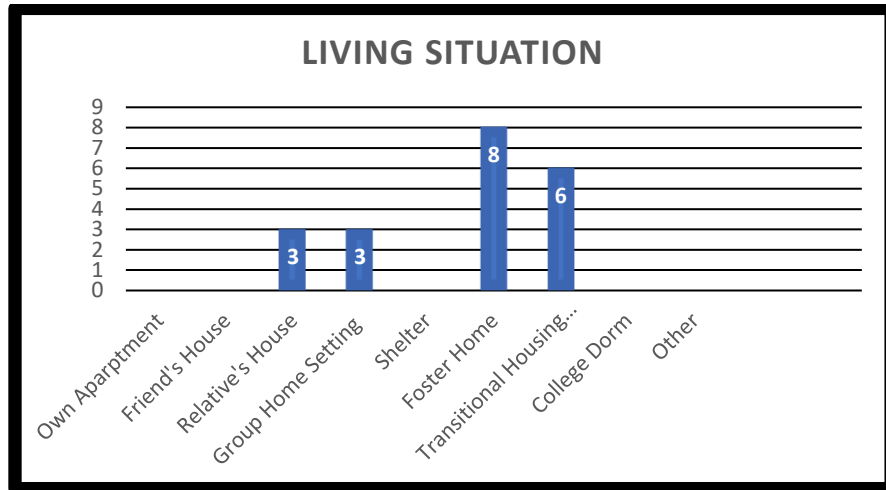**Q1: Gender**

    Results Q1: 16 male and 4 female youth participated in taking the survey.

Q2: Age

    Results Q2: Participants' ages range from 16-20 years old.

Q3: Which best describes your living situation (circle one)?

LIVING SITUATION

Results Q3: The majority (8) of the participants reside in a foster home.   Of note, none of the participants are currently homeless or living in a shelter. Also, none of the participants live self-sufficiently in their own apartment or house. The 20 participants are still dependent on someone or the foster care system to help them afford stable housing; 14 of the participants are over the age of 18.

Q4: How many places have you lived in in the last 12 months (circle one)?

 # Places Lived in the Last 12 Months
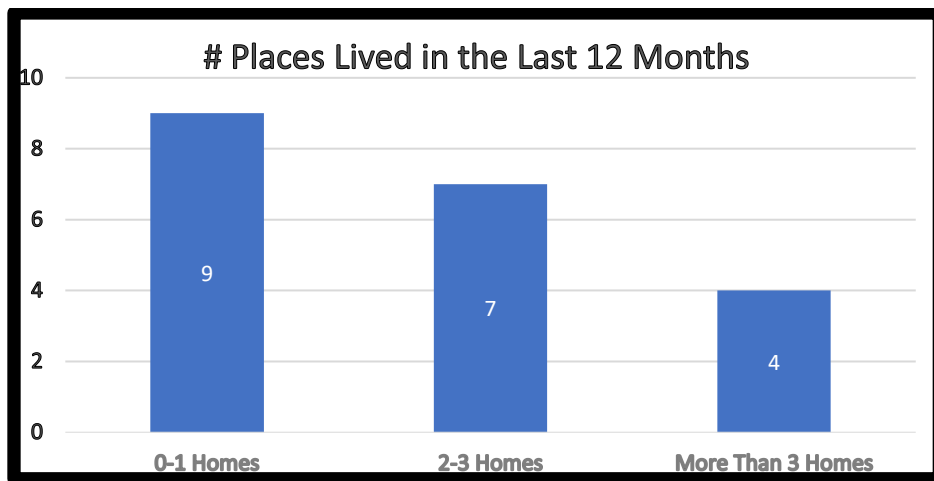
Results Q4: The majority of the participants (9) have maintained stable or near stable housing by residing in 0-1 locations within the last 12 months. In the last 12 months 4 of the
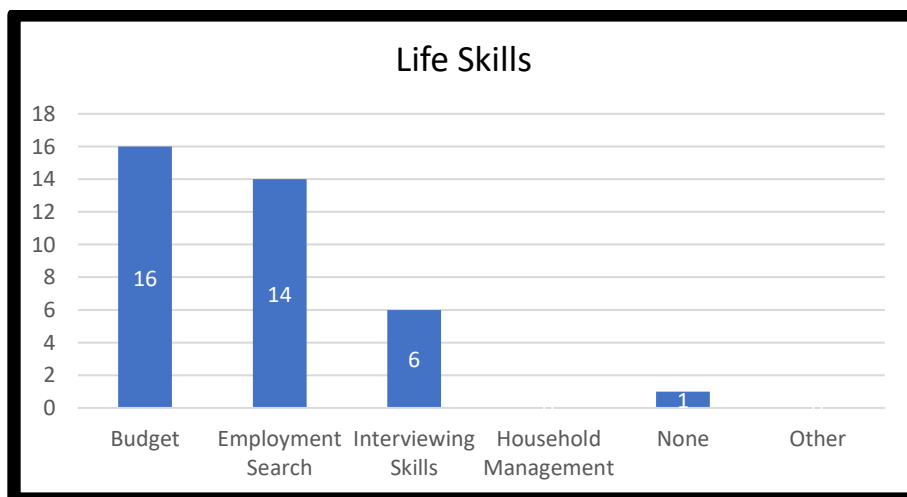
participants have experienced an unstable housing situation by residing in more than 3 homes in

the past 12 months.

Q5: If you have experienced homelessness in the last 12 months – for how long?

Homelessness w/i Last 12 Months

N/A	10
1 Night	
Less Than One Week	2
1-3 Months	6
More Than 3 Months	2

Results Q5: Half (10) of the participants have experienced some form of homelessness

within the last 12 months ranging from less than one week to more than three months.

**Q6: What skills are you learning in the ILP that will ultimately help you obtain/maintain
permanent housing once you leave the program?**

Life Skills

Budget	16
Employment Search	14
Interviewing Skills	6
Household Management	
None	1
Other	

Results Q6: The Independent Living Programs provide "drop in" life skills

activities/courses, as well structure group courses and one-on-one counseling geared towards the

individual needs of the youth. The majority (16) of the youth identified budgeting as a life skill

they consider necessary to avoid homelessness. In fact, all of the life skills that the youth

identified as life skills necessary to prevent homelessness are those skills required to earn money:

employment search and interviewing skills. The youth did not identify household management

as a life skill they are learning. Of note, this question allowed the youths to add additional life

skills in the "other" section; one (1) youth identified "none" and did not add any additional life

skills that he or she is learning.

Survey II Significant Findings:

For the purposes of this study it was important to survey the opinions of the foster youth

aging out of care. The six-question survey served as a snapshot into their experiences with

homelessness, engagement in the independent living skills program, and their preparedness to

avoid homelessness in the future. The responses from the survey did not produce any unknown

or unexplored issues regarding foster youth's stability or lack thereof. The number of home

placements (Q4) reported was not unusual, as foster children may and do experience multiple

placements during their stay in foster care for various reasons, not necessarily the fault of the

foster youth. While multiple home placements is not unusual, it is important to note, that theses

placements occurred within a 12 month timeframe; 7 of the 20 respondents experienced 2-3

placements within a 12 month period; and 4 of the 20 respondents experienced 3 or more

placements in a 12 month period. Housing instability for older foster youth is a relevant issue as

supported by the respondent's answers.

As identified in Survey I, the life skills that the youth are taught are centered around hard

skills, budgeting, employment search and interviewing skills. The youth did not add any

additional life skills that they thought were relevant to ensuring their ability to secure and

maintain permanent housing once they age out of care, other than the skill acquired to find

employment.

Interviews:

For the purposes of this study I conducted two interviews. The interviewees will be

referred to R1 and R2 in order to fully reveal their candid responses without any consequence to

them in their professional setting.

R1: An Independent Living Skills Coordinator Results and Findings: R1 revealed

that in his county approximately 300 youth are eligible for the program, however less than 75

youth actively participate in the program. The youth are no longer eligible to participate in the

program at 21. While some youth may want to participate in the program, barrier to participation

include: transportation, caregiver encouragement, and lack of motivation. R1 opines that he feels

youth have difficulty obtaining and maintaining housing due lack of the youth's lack of maturity

and preparation, additional factors include cost of living, available housing, and education to

requirements to obtain employment for a livable income.

R1 was asked if he had the power of funding and other resources, what would he modify,

add or delete from the ILP program to enhance participants ability to secure permanent and safe

housing once they age out of care? He responded, "if I had the power and funding I would

transform ILP into a program that pays youth a livable (part time after school and possibly

weekend hours) wage to gain the information, job skills, and life skills needed to obtain a

meaningful position and live comfortably upon graduating from high school. Youth would meet

certain objectives and goals to be promoted to youth supervisor or youth management positions

that would also increase their wages." R1 also comments on the enrollment process; according to R1 the current enrollment is process is lengthy and the provide more and better useful information.

R1 concluded the interview by stating that he feels if youth took full advantage of the services that the program has to offer that he feels they would be ahead of their peers in terms of readiness for independence; approximately 25% of the youth fully participate in the program and they are receiving a substantial benefit from the program. R1 stated that the foster youth he works with does not like to referred to as foster youth, instead just "youth." R1 lack of participation in the program is due to the youth's desire to be a "normal youth", and participating in ILP is not a "normal youth" activity.

R2: A Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Director Results and Findings:

R2's CASA program currently has 30 youth enrolled over the age of 15. In R2s opinion and through reports from her CASA volunteers, the ILPs are bag of mixed results. CASAs have observed some of their youth thriving under the program, while others barely participate and do not reap the intended benefits of the program. It is unknow if the disinterest is due to program design or lack of interest from the youth. R2 believes that foster children should be involved in some form of self-sufficiency programs once they enter the foster care system. Once a child enters the foster care system the goal is reunification with their family, if appropriate, however the harsh reality is that some children never return to their families and become the responsibility of their child welfare programs.

While the CASA program does not provide emergent services for housing, they do help the youth advocate for themselves to obtain emergency housing if necessary. The CASA often

provides a support system that is akin to a parent or guardian because their desire to be in the child's life is not based on pay or employment opportunities. CASAs are nonpaid volunteers that usually visit and interact with the youth more than their assigned social worker.

R2 was asked if she had the power of funding and other resources, what would he modify, add or delete from the ILP program to enhance participants ability to secure permanent and safe housing once they age out of care? I would develop a Model Living Community that consisted of the county obtaining and transforming a dormitory or hotel like building that housed transitional youth on the 3rd floor, grandparents caring for their grandchildren as foster children on the 2nd floor, and services such as mental health, wellness, and dental on the 1st floor. This purpose of this model is to support and house some of the most vulnerable people in the foster care system. The model also includes a farmer's market on the property. Transitional youth are often at a crossroad between adolescence and adulthood, and require additional support, so the onsite support agencies would allow accessibility to those programs. One of the goals of the foster care system is to keep youth with a family member, as to not total disrupt the youth's family connections. Grandparents often step up to this task, but may need an extra level of support; this living community model would provide that onsite support.

Chapter 5 – Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Homelessness in California is a problem across all demographics, foster youth aging out of care represent an at-risk population for homelessness. As identified in Survey II, Q4 and Q5, foster youth experience multiple placements and homelessness. The participants in Survey II represent a small sampling of 20 participants; 10 participants experienced homelessness between one week three months in the last 12 months; and 11 participants have lived in 2 or more homes in the last 12 months. The results of Survey II, Q4 and Q5 demonstrate housing instability among foster children based off of the sampling group.   The Independent Living Programs (ILPs) provide training, services, and benefits to assist current and former foster youth in achieving self-sufficiency prior to, and after leaving the foster care system; ILPs aim to develop the skills foster youth need to obtain and maintain stable housing. As demonstrated by survey results and the overall tone of the comments provided by the key informants, there are active county sponsored programs in place to teach youth aging out of foster care life skills to promote independence; and to ultimately help the youth avoid homelessness once they age of out foster care. However, the programs are underutilized and may not cover some of the critical elements of development needed to assist youth through the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

The results of Survey I and the key informant interviews revealed there is a lack of active participation in the ILP programs. Survey I, Q2 showed only 12 of 26 respondents reported that their youth is learning life skills through a county sponsored program. The remaining youth are receiving training from other sources. The ILP staff training and program curriculum are specific to the needs of foster youth aging out of care, so while the youth may receive training

from an alternate source, the training may be deficient in providing information and developing

the skills specific to the needs of foster youth. Also, both key informants expressed sentiments

pertaining to the number of program participants in contrast to the number of "active" program

participants. Key informant, R1 reported that approximately 25% of the program enrollees

actively participate in the program.

CASA volunteers play a significant role in a foster youth's growth and development.

CASA volunteers are usually the only constant in a foster youth's life, while a youth may move

from home placement to home placement their CASA volunteer typically does not change.

Therefore, CASA volunteers are in a unique position due to their personal relationship with the

youth to help prepare them for self-sufficiency. The CASA volunteers identified the need for

ILP services that support emotional and mental development in Survey I. The ILPs services can

include courses related to health, however the CASA volunteers identified this type of training as

a need for foster youth aging out of care. Due to each county's flexibility to design their services

as they see fit for their population perhaps course related to mental and emotional health need to

be reviewed. The CASA volunteers should not act as a replacement for ILP services, instead as

an additional source of information and support. Finally, youth are eligible for the ILP between

the ages of 16-21. Survey I revealed that the participants opined that youth should engage in life

skills training well before the age of 16.   Introducing youth to life skills training at a younger

age is a smart decision due to some of the instabilities in a foster child's life.

Recommendations

Foster youth become each county's responsibility, the responsibility extends beyond

ensuring the youth are fed, clothed, and housed. The county has a responsibility to prepare youth

in their care to be self-sufficient once they age out of care. The data retrieved from the surveys and key informant interviews prompted three recommendations from the researcher:

1. Create an Independent Living Program Youth Advisory Board: The surveys and key informant interviews revealed that there is a lack of participation in the ILP. Creating a youth advisory board can produce valuable feedback from the program directors from the program participants. Each county has the latitude to design their program based on the participants needs. Allowing a youth to have a seat at the table and be a voice for the youth can perhaps identify the reasons for low participation. Also, peer to peer influence can boost the visibility of the program and the highlight the benefits derived from the program.

2. Require youth at age 16 to attend at least one ILP class every three months until their 18th birthday; after their 18th birthday participation becomes voluntary. As in many families, parents require their children to attend programs or classes that further their development and growth. The ILP provides training in critical areas of life skills that will perhaps boost the youth's ability to be self-sufficient and avoid homelessness once they age out of care.

3. California is one of the most expensive states for rent in the United States. When youth age out of care, initially their earning potential is not adequate to comfortably afford rent. Youth would benefit from job placement assistance within the ILP. The ILP teaming with local companies to provide internships for program participants can be a twofold benefit 1) participants earn wages 2) participants are exposed to working in a professional environment and the expectations of working in a professional environment.

4.   Create a formal program for foster youth under the age of 16 to learn life skill to

   promote independence. Due to CASAs firsthand interaction with foster youth, the

   CASA organization may be the best organization to create and facilitate a voluntary

   program to teach foster youth under the age of 16 life skills to prepare them for

   independence. Once the youth turn 16, they will transfer to the formal ILP managed

   by the county. CASAs may also be the best organization to conduct this program

   because CASA's are volunteers, therefore there would not be a significant cost

   associated with standing up a program for youth under 16.

Future Research Opportunities

This study discussed foster youth's preparedness to avoid homelessness once they age out

of care. The study identified the Independent Living Program as the voluntary program managed

by each county to prepare foster youth for independence. The study also discussed the CASA

program and their involvement in the foster youths' lives. A collateral area of future research is

the comparison between California's former foster youth homeless population and that of

another state with a low rate of homelessness for this population. The comparison with another

state could produce some lessons learned and best practices in how California can best combat

their aged out foster youth homeless problem.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Questions for Independent Living Coordinator

My name is Colleen Blake-Harris and I am completing my Executive Master degree in Public Administration at Golden Gate University. I am also a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) for Solano County. I am inviting you to participate in a brief interview for my research project on "Independent Living Programs (ILPs) – Impact on Preventing Homelessness Amongst Aged Out Foster Youth." I'd like to get your professional perspectives on ILPs.

This interview should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Your answers will be kept confidential and anonymous and will be used by me only for the purpose of completing my degree. Your input is invaluable to my research topic.   Thank you in advance for participating and for helping complete my research study. I have included my telephone number and I am available to speak to you at your convenience.

Interview Questions:

1) What is the utilization level of your agency's program services?

2) What is the participant program completion rate?

3) When do you think foster children should be able to attend programs to increase their life skill levels?

4) What do you consider the best age for foster children to be introduced to ILP principles?

5) What are the barriers that prevent participants from completing IL programs?

6) What do you consider the main reason or obstacle that impacts a participant's ability to secure permanent housing?

7) What, if any, emergent services are provided by your agency to obtain emergency housing for homeless foster youth?

8) What outside agencies, if any, does your agency collaborate to assist participants obtain housing?

9) Does your county track the number of homeless foster youth?

10) If you were had the power and funding and other resources, what would you modify, add or delete from your program to enhance participants secure permanent, safe housing once they age out of foster care?

11) Would you like to add anything?

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions for Court Appointed Special Advocate Manager

My name is Colleen Blake-Harris and I am completing my Executive Master degree in Public Administration at Golden Gate University. I am also a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) for Solano County. I am inviting you to participate in a brief interview for my research project on "Independent Living Programs (ILPs) – Impact on Preventing Homelessness Amongst Aged Out Foster Youth." I'd like to get your professional perspectives on ILPs.

This interview should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Your answers will be kept confidential and anonymous and will be used by me only for the purpose of completing my degree. Your input is invaluable to my research topic.   Thank you in advance for participating and for helping complete my research study. I have included my telephone number and I am available to speak to you at your convenience.

Interview Questions:

1) What is the utilization level of your agency's program services?

2) How many CASA youth are eligible to participate in the ILP?

3) When do you think foster children should be able to attend programs to increase their life skill levels?

4) What do you consider the best age for foster children to be introduced to ILP principles?

5) What are the barriers that prevent participants from completing IL programs?

6) What do you consider the main reason or obstacle that impacts a participant's ability to secure permanent housing?

7) What, if any, emergent services are provided by your agency to obtain emergency housing for homeless foster youth?

8) What outside agencies, if any, does your agency collaborate to assist participants obtain housing?

9) Does your county track the number of homeless foster youth?

10) If you were had the power and funding and other resources, what would you modify, add or delete from your program to enhance participants secure permanent, safe housing once they age out of foster care?

11) Would you like to add anything?

APPENDIX C

Survey for Independent Living Skills Program Participants

My name is Colleen Blake-Harris and I am completing my Executive Master degree in Public Administration at Golden Gate University. I am also a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) for Solano County. I am inviting you to participate in a brief interview for my research project on "Independent Living Programs (ILPs) – Impact on Preventing Homelessness Amongst Aged Out Foster Youth." I'd like to get your perspective.

This survey should take approximately 5 minutes to complete. Your answers will be kept confidential and anonymous and will be used by me only for the purpose of completing my degree. Your input is invaluable to my research topic.   I appreciate you time and your willingness to complete this survey. Thank you in advance for participating and for helping me complete my research study. I have included my telephone number and I am available to speak to you at your convenience.

Survey

1. Gender_____   **2. Age** _____

3. Which Best Describes Your Living Situation (circle one)?
        Own Apartment
        Friend's Home
        Relative's Home
        Group Setting
        Shelter
        College Dorm
        Other: _____

4. How Many Places Have You Lived In The Last 12 Months (circle one)?

        0-1
        2-3
        More than 3

5. If You Have Ever Experienced Homelessness – For How Long (circle one):
        N/A
        1 Night
        Less Than One Week
        1-3 Months
        More Than 3 Months

6. What Skills You Are Learning In The ILP That Will Help You Obtain Permanent Housing (circle all that apply)?

Budget
Job Search
Interviewing
Household Management
Other: _____