

Needs Assessment of Emancipating Foster Youth in Lucas County, Ohio

Final Report

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Submitted to
The Oswald Supporting Organization of the Toledo Community Foundation
and
The Stranahan Foundation

October 28, 2008



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Acknowledgements

I would first like to acknowledge members of the research team who contributed mightily to both the design and implementation of this study:

Amy Galvan¹, Karen Betz¹, Gwenn DeLong¹
Keith Robinson², Mike Hiltman², Deonte Moss², Marjorie Turner²
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Next, I would like to express our appreciation to the emancipating youth who participated in the focus groups, and to the program directors at the public and private youth-serving agencies/programs who participated in the service provider survey.

Darlene Skinner, President of the Ohio Independent Living Association (OHILA), Crystal Ward Allen, Executive Director of the Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO), and William Meezan (Dean) and Celeste Burke (Associate Dean for Research and Faculty Development) of the College of Social Work at Ohio State University provided encouragement and support to the author in developing the accepted proposal to conduct this study. The College of Social Work further provided in-kind support for the implementation of this study.

Arlene Jones and Shawn Jones assisted with the youth focus groups, with reimbursement from PCSAO for effort and mileage associated therewith. Lisa Dickson, Communications Chair of the Ohio Chapter of Foster Care Alumni of America assisted in identifying promising practice models and resources mentioned in the Introduction section of this report.

Diana Theiss agreed to serve as the on-site institution review board administrator at Lucas County Children Services for this project. Robert Franklin, Manager of the LCCS Community Development Department provided useful comments on a draft presentation of the findings and recommendations reported herein. And this project would not have been possible without the strong support of LCCS Director Dean Sparks, who also provided insightful comments on the draft presentation.

Finally, this project would not have been possible without the generous financial support of The Oswald Supporting Organization of the Toledo Community Foundation and The Stranahan Foundation.

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Executive Summary

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October 28, 2008

Background

The Oswald Supporting Organization of the Toledo Community Foundation, with assistance from the Stranahan Foundation, commissioned this independent living needs assessment of youth in Lucas County to help inform future service-oriented requests for proposals to help emancipating youth attain self-sufficiency.

Methods

The needs assessment included four components: 1) a review of the literature; 2) an analysis of Lucas County Childrens Services (LCCS) Independent Living Program (ILP) and Post-emancipation Program (PEP) administrative data; 3) focus groups with current and emancipated foster youth; and, 4) a survey of public and private agency service providers. The literature review focused on previous studies documenting the social problems facing emancipated foster youth, evaluating the effectiveness of independent living programs, identifying promising independent living practices, summarizing the results from a previous independent living needs assessment study conducted in Ohio, and identifying themes reported from previous focus group studies.

LCCS case records were reviewed for three groups of youth: 1) seventy-two current foster youth who were enrolled in the ILP on January 1, 2008; 2) one hundred and eight ILP youth who emancipated from care during the two-year period January 1, 2005 through December 31, 2007; and, 3) forty-three emancipated youth who received PEP services during the two-year period January 1, 2006 through December 31, 2007. Note that all foster youth ages 16 and above are enrolled into the ILP, whereas participation in the PEP is voluntary for young adults who emancipated from the ILP.

Five focus groups were conducted with a total of 31 youth, including one group of nine ILP youth placed in foster care homes, two groups with nine ILP youth placed in treatment homes, one group with eight PEP young adults, and one group with five emancipated young adults who had not received PEP services. Focus group themes were identified during debriefing sessions immediately following each group, with illustrative quotations obtained from transcripts of each session. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, per the research protocol approved by the Ohio State University Institutional Review Board. Participants received a \$25 gift card and bus tokens or parking validation.

Finally, a survey of 88 public and private agencies/programs in Lucas County who were identified by ILP, PEP, and Foundation staff as serving emancipating youth was conducted during the period June through August 2008. Both web-based and paper-and-pencil versions of the survey were used, with 23 of 88 (26%) programs responding.

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Results

Literature review

A review of nine outcomes studies indicates, that between the ages of 19 and 21, the average employment rate for emancipated youth increased from 44% to 57%. More modest increases were found in average rates of 1) high school completion (59% to 63%); 2) receipt of public assistance receipt (27% to 33%); and, 3) literal homelessness (18% to 22%). The average incarceration rate also increased from 21% to 29%. Finally, the average birthrate among women increased from 28% to 50% between 19 and 21.

While the effectiveness of independent living services is largely unknown, several “promising practices” conceptual frameworks have been developed, most notably by the Casey Foundations and the Child Welfare League of America. Perhaps the most well-developed and promising area of independent living practice is adult and peer mentoring.

Administrative records review

At the time of emancipation, 54% of ILP youth had completed high school (diploma or GED), including 18% who were attending college. Thirty-one percent were employed, either part-time or full-time. And 2% were incarcerated. Two-thirds (67%) were rated by LCCS staff as having moderate to high mental health problems, and one-third (33%) were rated as having moderate to high substance abuse problems. Nearly a third (31%) of youth were reported as living in their own place, 28% were living with a relative, and 11% were living with friends. Fewer than one in twenty (4%) continued living with foster parents. The living arrangement of nearly one-in-four (24%) youth was either absent without leave (AWOL) or unknown, indicating that those youth had runaway from their last placement setting, placing them at risk for becoming homeless, becoming involved in prostitution or human trafficking, or other illegal activities. Finally, fewer than one-in-four (22%) of youth received PEP services immediately following emancipation (or discharge) from ILP, suggesting that the majority of emancipating ILP youth attempt to establish their independence without the support or assistance of formal aftercare programs.

Youth focus groups

Five themes were identified through the focus groups. First, a need for additional clothing was expressed. Next, the need to obtain a driver’s license and assistance in purchasing or leasing an affordable vehicle were mentioned. Third, the helpfulness and importance of community-based “hands-on” life skills training was expressed, particularly in the areas of personal finance (e.g., budgeting, paying bills, understanding credit). Next, youth perceived a lack of confidentiality when placed into a new foster home. Finally, the importance of fair and equal treatment of youth living in the home by foster parents was emphasized.

Two additional themes were observed by focus group facilitators. Most youth were looking forward to “getting out of the system” and to be free to make their own decisions in life, and thus were not much interested in receiving aftercare support or assistance from the county or community – at least not before living on their own for a year or two and experiencing some of the difficulties and challenges of attaining self-sufficiency as a young adult “flying solo”, with little to no parental support. Second, emancipated youth seemed largely unaware of available resources in the community.

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Provider survey

Service providers identified three types of independent living services as being most helpful and most needed: 1) life skills training, 2) housing, and 3) mentoring.

Recommendations

For Foundation Funders:

1. Provide funding for one full-time staff person at one community program to develop and coordinate a mentoring program for emancipated youth.
2. Provide seed monies for new micro loan program(s) for...
 - a) Purchasing a car
 - b) Attending college
 - c) Securing housing
 - d) Obtaining needed medical care
3. Convene a standing “youth in transition” workgroup of key stakeholder groups (including transitioning young adults) to assess youth needs, to identify and share resources, and to encourage inter-agency collaboration.
4. Host a bi-annual youth in transition conference to raise awareness of the unique needs of transitioning young adults and encourage inter-agency collaboration.
5. Provide support to expand programming for vulnerable youth, such as homeless/runaway youth at-risk for involvement in human trafficking.

For Lucas County Children Services:

6. Re-evaluate clothing voucher policy and clothing “inventory monitoring” process to ensure that each foster youth has an adequate supply of clothing.
7. Expand budgeting and financial planning module of IL skills curriculum.
8. Review confidentiality policies with foster parents.
9. Continue involvement of current and emancipated youth in foster parent trainings.

For Community Service Providers:

10. Assist emancipated youth to obtain their driver’s license, complete driver’s education, “shop” for affordable automobile insurance, and to acquire an affordable, safe, and reliable vehicle.
11. Provide extended support for emancipated youth until age 25, focusing on...
 - a) Emergency food/clothing/shelter
 - b) Coordination and oversight of mentoring by supportive adult(s)
 - c) Budgeting and financial management and accessing of available financial resources (e.g., financial aid for college or vocational training)
12. Establish “niche” service programs/interventions for special needs groups (e.g., homeless/runaway youth, youth with mental health or substance abuse problems).

The results and recommendations of this study are largely consistent with those of the previous statewide needs assessment reported in 2000, and with two previous foster youth focus group studies published within the past decade. Moreover, presentations of these findings and recommendations at three statewide forums during the month of October, 2008 were generally affirmed by foster youth and helping professionals. Thus, the findings and recommendations presented herein may extend beyond Lucas County.

Introduction

Every year nearly 25,000 foster youth emancipate from foster care in the United States (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration on Children and Families [ACF], 2008a), including nearly 1,300 young people in Ohio (Public Children Services Association [PCSAO], 2008). These youth face a number of challenges, including completing high school, coping with mental illness and substance abuse, attaining health insurance, finding employment and earning a living wage, and securing stable housing (Cook et al., 1991; Courtney et al., 2001; Courtney et al., 2007; Dworsky, 2005; Pecora et al., 2006a; Pecora et al., 2006b).

In response to early reports of the challenges facing former foster youth (e.g., Festinger, 1983), Congress created the Title IV-E Independent Living Program which provided states with funds that they could use to prepare their foster youth for the transition to adulthood beginning in 1986. That program was replaced by the John Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) in 1999 as part of the Foster Care Independence Act (FCIA). The FCIA provides states with a maximum of \$140-million each year that can be used to provide independent living services to foster youth still in care (generally 15-17 years of age) and post-emancipation services to former foster youth (generally 18-21 years of age). In 2002, another \$60-million in federal funding was added for a post-secondary education and training voucher (ETV) program.

Current and former foster youth in Ohio benefit from those funds. In 2007, Ohio received \$4.5-million in CFCIP funding, and \$1.5-million in ETV funding (Administration for Children and Families [ACF], 2008). Moreover, the State of Ohio allocated an additional \$2.5-million of its Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds to counties in 2007 for independent living services (Ohio Department of Job and Family Services [ODJFS], 2007). Despite the large amounts of money being spent, little is known about the types of independent living services being provided to current and former foster youth by each of Ohio's 88 county-administered public children services agencies (PCSAs).

In 1999, the Ohio Department of Human Services (now ODJFS) commissioned the Institute of Applied Research to identify existing IL programs and to assess the IL service needs of emancipating foster youth. As part of that study, Loman and Siegel (2000) reviewed the salient literature, examined the availability of IL services in 81 counties, analyzed data from the administrative records of a representative sample of 475 older foster youth, and conducted interviews with 91 current foster youth and 66 former foster youth who had emancipated.

Given the many different types of independent living services that counties can provide, as well as the variation in community resources across the state's rural, suburban and urban counties, a strong case may be made for conducting county-specific independent living needs assessments to improve service provision and to foster inter-agency collaboration among child-serving agencies that support and assist emancipating foster youth and young adults.

The purpose of this study was to better understand the needs of emancipating foster youth in Lucas County (Toledo), where 34 youth emancipated in 2005 (Public Children's Services Association, 2008). The three specific aims of the study were to: 1) describe the characteristics of emancipating foster youth in Lucas County; 2) identify independent living services currently available in Lucas County; and 3) make recommendations for enhancing currently available services and addressing unmet needs as perceived by current and former foster youth as well as by service providers. The methodology mirrors the one developed by Loman and Siegel, except that focus groups were used in lieu of individual interviews with youth.

Literature Review

A brief review of the literature was conducted to answer four questions pertaining to the purpose and aims of this study. First, how prevalent are some of the major social problems facing emancipating youth? The answer to this question demonstrates the general need for assistance/support for emancipating youth in general. Next, are independent living programs and services effective in ameliorating said problems? If certain services have been found to be effective, then that may inform the development of policy and programmatic recommendations for further assisting emancipating youth. Relatedly, what "best practice" models of independent living services should be used to inform future program development in Lucas County? Fourth, what were the key findings and recommendations of the statewide needs assessment conducted in Ohio in 2000? That study provides perhaps the single most relevant point of reference and comparison for the current study. Finally, what previous themes have been identified from focus groups with emancipating foster youth? The answer to this question may be helpful in interpreting the focus group themes presented by the youth in Lucas County.

Foster youth outcomes

Research on the outcomes of youth emancipating from foster care has consistently found that this population faces a number of significant challenges during the transition to adulthood in the areas of educational attainment, gainful employment, housing, family formation and criminal justice system involvement (Barth (1990); Blome (1997); Cook (1994); Courtney (2005); Courtney (2007); Courtney (2008b); Daining (2007); Fowler (2006); Georgiades (2005); Lindsey (1999); Mallon (1998); McMillen (1999); Mech (1999); Scannapieco (1995); Reilly (2003)). While prevalence estimates vary across studies and age groups, between the ages of 19 and 21 the average employment rate for emancipated youth increase from 44% to 57% (Table 1). More modest increases are found in average rates of 1) high school completion (59% to 63%); 2) receipt of public assistance receipt (27% to 33%); and, 3) literal homelessness (18% to 22%). The average incarceration rate increases from 21% to 29% between the ages of 19 and 21, whereas the average birthrate among women increases far more dramatically from 28% to 50% during this two-year period (Table 1).

Effects of independent living services on foster youth outcomes

Very little is known about the effects of independent living services on foster youth outcomes (GAO, 1999). As Collins (2001), Montgomery et al. (2006) and Naccarato & DeLorenzo (2008) have noted, the few evaluations that have been conducted have serious methodological problems that limit their utility for demonstrating program effectiveness. Such problems include: examination of specific agency programs, which generally involve small sample sizes, non-probability sampling, and retrospective data collection. Also, comparison groups are often missing, or when included, tend to differ with IL treatment groups on various baseline characteristics. Additional limitations include variations in ILP designs, reliance on self-report data, a lack of information on program delivery, and non-standard measurement of outcomes.

In contrast to earlier evaluation studies that were subject to many of the methodological weaknesses identified above, the first two of four rigorous experimental evaluations of specific IL service models being conducted by the Urban Institute and the Chapin Hall Center for Children and the National Opinion Research Center of the University of Chicago, as part of the Multi-Site Chafee Evaluation, were recently completed. The two IL service models evaluated included a tutorial/mentoring model (ACF, 2008c) and an IL skills training model (ACF, 2008d), both operating out of Los Angeles County, California. No significant difference were found on any of the outcomes examined between youth participating in either of these two programs and those youth receiving other usually available independent living services provided by the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services. Results from the remaining two rigorous IL evaluations are forthcoming.

Best practices frameworks or guides

While the effectiveness of IL services has yet to be empirically demonstrated, a number of “best practices” frameworks or guides have been developed to inform the growth and expansion and to enhance the quality of IL services. Two recent literature reviews provide empirically-based IL practice recommendations. Naccarato & DeLorenzo (2008) provided 28 practice implications for social workers and other helping professionals working with emancipating youth, based upon the findings of the 19 IL outcomes studies they reviewed. The housing recommendations included developing 1) transitional living programs, 2) long-term relationships with supportive adults capable of providing emergency housing, 3) relationships with local Section 8 landlords to secure apartments for emancipating youth, and 4) partnerships with local housing providers to develop range of housing options for youth leaving care. Educational attainment recommendations included: 1) noting whether teachers are expecting less achievement from foster youth; 2) increasing monitoring of daily school performance by case workers, foster parents, and birth parents; 3) considering more carefully and mitigating the impact of school disruption when contemplating a change of placement; 4) encouraging youth to obtain a high school diploma, not just a GED, and to continue on to

college; 5) increasing access for foster youth to educational services and tutoring; and, 6) forging closer connections between schools and child welfare agencies in monitoring the educational progress of youth. Employment recommendations included: 1) include actual employment in employment training programs; 2) develop agreements with employers to provide youth with easy access to employment opportunities; and, 3) create "real world" applications of ILP vocational training while youth are still in care.

Barth and colleagues (in-press) recommend supervised independent living and independent life skills as two "promising practices" for adolescents in out-of-home care settings – a level 3 in their 6-level evidence-based practices framework, ranging from 1 (well-supported, effective practice) to 6 (concerning practice).

The "It's My Life" conceptual framework for emancipating foster youth developed by Casey Family Programs (2001) provides perhaps the most comprehensive "road-map" for the development, provision, and evaluation of IL services and programs. It includes twelve statements of success for youth in transition, four general practice recommendations, seven life domains (with specific practice recommendations provided for each domain), and seven outcome indicators. The Canadian Child Welfare League has adapted the Casey "domains" framework to create its own "bridge" framework consisting of a base, seven pillars, and a bridge from life in care to adulthood for emancipating youth (Reid & Dudding, 2006).

The Child Welfare League of America has developed its own "standards of excellence" for transition, IL, and self-sufficiency (TILSS) services, which includes eight core elements of positive youth development in TILSS programs (CWLA, 2005). These standards include a framework for the provision of TILSS services, the process of identifying and addressing TILSS needs as part of a youth service system, the organization and administration of TILSS services, types of TILSS services, and transitional living arrangements and options.

The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, formed in 2001, is a collaboration between Casey Family Programs and The Annie E. Casey Foundation which seeks to implement its "Theory of Change" for creating and expanding opportunities for emancipating foster youth at the community-level in ten demonstration sites (JCYOI, 2008). The "Opportunity Passport" is the centerpiece of the Initiative's work, which consists of three related components: a personal debit account, a matched savings account (known also as an Individual Development Account), locally determined "door openers" intended to facilitate youths' access to postsecondary educational and vocational training resources.

Casey Family Services and The National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning have developed a permanence framework (CFS, 2004). This framework proposes six key components of successfully identifying and supporting permanent family relationships for young people in out-of-home care. First, empower young people to be fully involved partners in directing their own permanency planning and decision-making. Second, empower a wide range of individuals to participate in

permanency planning. Third, consider a full range of permanency options in a timely and continuous way. Fourth, continuously and concurrently employ a comprehensive range of recruitment options. Fifth, provide services and supports to provide every opportunity for youth and their families to attain physical, emotional, and legal permanence. And sixth, enhance inter-agency collaboration and encourage youth and family engagement, both during and after placement.

The Youth Transition Funders Group (YTFG) is a national network of grant makers whose mission is to assist vulnerable youth successfully transition to adulthood by the age of 25. Specific target populations include foster youth, those who have dropped-out of school, and delinquent youth. The YTFG Foster Care Work Group created a strategic plan in 2004 which focused on economic success, and included five critical components of a comprehensive approach for helping emancipating youth to develop the knowledge and skills to become economically successful. Included is an “investment work plan” theory of change, which consists of five interrelated strategies for establishing economic self-sufficiency, which include: 1) advocating and supporting educational attainment; 2) facilitating access to workforce development; 3) providing financial literacy education; 4) encouraging savings and asset development; and, 5) creating entrepreneurship opportunities.

Finally, The Finance Project has identified and profiled 38 innovative programs for youth in transition which are operating in 17 different states (FP, 2008). Included are eight entrepreneurship training and/or business incubator programs, six vocational training and workforce development programs, four matched savings programs (i.e., individual development accounts), six life skills training programs (including financial literacy and personal finance curricula), two higher education support programs, one homeless youth program, a “one-stop” resource center for transitioning youth, and six inter-agency collaboration programs. The collaboration programs include statewide collaborations, a collaboration involving a six-county region, and a single county collaborative. The single county collaborative program, the Chatham-Savannah Youth Futures Authority (YFA) began in 1987, and “...brings together community stakeholders to address issues relevant to children, youth, and families in Chatham County, Georgia. This collaborative is composed of representatives from city, county, and state government; the board of education; more than 20 health and human service agencies with a focus on children, youth, and families; the United Way; and area businesses. As a long-running community initiative, YFA must take steps to build and maintain stakeholder buy-in and engagement. YFA convenes, for example, an annual community summit to strengthen and expand partnership efforts to address issues facing children, youth, and families. The community summit includes a “Vision Awards” presentation to recognize individuals and entities contributing to the betterment of local youth and families (FP, 2008; Chatham-Savannah Youth Futures Authority Initiative Description).”

A list of internet resources providing additional information on independent living models of practice, policy, and research may be found in Appendix A.

Focus group studies of emancipating/emancipated foster youth

Two previously published studies have utilized focus groups to solicit feedback from emancipating or emancipated foster youth. McMillen et. al. (1997) conducted four, 90-minute focus groups with a total of 25 emancipated youth in two urban areas (St. Louis and Kansas City) and in two rural areas of Missouri. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 23 years (average of 21 years of age), and had been out of care an average of 2 years at the time of the focus group. Each group was recorded and transcribed. Nine themes emerged from their analysis of focus group transcripts. Youth viewed supportive and caring foster homes as being extremely helpful in transitioning out of foster care. Life skills classes and independent living stipends were also viewed as being helpful. Independent living specialists were viewed as being very helpful, in contrast to general children services caseworkers who were viewed as not helpful in preparing for emancipation. Participation in independent living activities appeared to lessen feelings of isolation and stigmatization among foster youth. Youth valued financial skills training, and expressed a desire for additional training and information pertaining to finances. Finally, these older foster youth viewed being in care intrusive and difficult to tolerate.

More recently, Scannapieco and colleagues (2007) conducted six focus groups with a total of 72 foster parents, child welfare workers, and foster youth -- including 24 youth currently in care and 9 emancipated youth. The first of three broad themes identified was *youth-focused practice*. This included issues such as respect for individual foster youth, youth involvement in case planning and decision-making, customization of case plans to meet the individual needs of youth, and youth awareness of events impacting their lives. The second theme identified was *collaboration and better communication*. This theme characterized communication challenges experienced between child welfare caseworkers, foster parents, and foster youth. Two realities discussed as contributing to the challenge of sharing accurate, consistent information among these three stakeholder groups were high rates of turn-over among caseworkers and multiple foster home placements. The proposed solution to the lack of communication problem was increased collaboration among these three stakeholder groups, and the assignment of one person responsible for overseeing and facilitating such collaboration. The final theme identified was *unmet needs and permanent connections*. This included the need for additional "hands-on" skills training from foster parents, a better understanding of their own health and mental health needs, and educational advocacy were among the more commonly expressed needs. Other, more customized, needs expressed included things such as money, safe housing and bus passes. Establishing a relationship with a support person or network after leaving care was also identified as a critical unmet need; rather than achieving independence, the need for interdependence to successfully navigate through early adulthood was emphasized by focus group participants.

Ohio Independent Living Needs Assessment

The statewide administrative records review conducted by Loman and Siegel (2000) of current foster youth ages 16 and older and former youth who had emancipated from care within the prior three years and who were 16 years of age or older at the time of emancipation found that 44% of the youth had moderate to severe mental health problems, and that 30% of youth had a current or past substance abuse problem. One quarter of the female foster youth had given birth to a child. Life skills assessments had been conducted for 72% of youths, two thirds (69%) of whom were reported as participating in life skills training. Forty-one percent of the youth had completed high school at the time of leaving care.

Interviews with current foster youth emphasized the importance of adults, such as family members and schoolteachers, in acquiring independent living training, in contrast life skills classes and training emphasized by children services caseworkers. While youth were generally satisfied with their current living situations (i.e., non-relative foster care for 66% of the current youth interviewed), little thought appeared to be given to their forthcoming transition to independent living, rather a general confidence that such a transition would be possible after completing high school. Forty-one percent of youth had jobs at the time of the interview.

Interviews with youth who had emancipated from care, many did not feel completely competent in six important areas: finding a place to live or an apartment, managing money, finding out about job and skills training, planning for a future career, and knowledge of parenting and children. For example, over half (53%) said they had been unprepared to live on their own at the time of discharge. Forty-two percent of emancipated youth lived with relatives, 14% with former foster parents, 14% with roommates (sometimes at school), and 15% with a boyfriend or girlfriend. Nearly half (47%) indicated that the hardest thing about living on their own involved finances, including having enough money, budgeting and spending money wisely, and paying bills. Foster parents were the most frequently admired adults in life for both current and emancipated youth (25% and 54%, respectively). Over half (53%) of the emancipated youth interviewed had not completed high school when discharged from foster care. The proportion of youths who had dropped-out of school was three times higher among those discharged prior to completing high school. Two-thirds of emancipated youth were working at the time of the interview. Fewer than 10% of emancipated youth reported earnings of between \$10,000-\$15,000 during the previous year, while a majority earned less than \$5,000. Over a third (35%) reported having no medical insurance, and 23% reported being unable to get medical care when they needed it, due to the expense of medical treatment and/or their loss of Medicaid.

Finally, public and private agency independent living program staff identified the following “top six” service needs for emancipating foster youth: 1) decision-making/communication; 2) financial planning; 3) daily living skills training; 4) development of positive self-esteem; 5) health care planning; and, 6) securing/maintaining a job.

Administrative Records Review

Method

Lucas County Children Services ILP client roster and emancipation tracking sheets were examined for three samples of youth: 1) all 72 foster youth between the ages of 16 and 18 who were currently enrolled in the Independent Living Program (ILP) as of 1/1/08; 2) all 108 former foster youth who had emancipated from the ILP program during the prior 3 years (i.e., from 1/1/05-12/31/07); and, 3) a sub-group of 43 emancipated ILP youth who had received Post-emancipation (PE) services during the 2-year period 1/1/06-12/31/07. The client roster and emancipation tracking sheets list current and former ILP clients and provide information about their demographic characteristics, clinical issues, foster home placements, and outcomes at discharge. Daniel Memorial Institute Independent Living Needs Assessment data for a fourth group of all 96 ILP youth who were assessed during the prior seven years (i.e., 2000-2007) were also examined.

Results

Current ILP Clients. Descriptive information about the 72 current Lucas County ILP clients is presented in Table 2. A slight majority were female and African-Americans comprised the largest racial/ethnic group. Their mean age was 16.9 years old and more than were in grades nine or ten. Most were currently placed in a Gaining Independence for Teens (GIFT) or treatment foster home.

Former ILP Clients. Table 3 shows that at time they were discharged from ILP, more than a third of these former ILP clients had completed high school, less than a third were employed, and less than a third were living in their own place. Nevertheless, just over one fifth had received post-emancipation services.

Post-Emancipation Services Clients. The characteristics of the PE service clients at program entry are shown in Table 4. Nearly all were 18 to 20 years old, and hence, within the first two years of aging out. Less than half had completed high school, and only 30% were employed. More than 40% were receiving public assistance, just half were stably housed and a significant minority was uninsured. On a more positive note, most did report having a support system as well as access to vital documents. The three most common reasons cited for seeking PE services were help with education, housing and employment. Other frequently mentioned problems were medical, mental health and financial.

Daniel Memorial Institute Independent Living Needs Assessment. As Table 5 indicates, at least two thirds of the youth whose independent living skill needs had been assessed since 2000 needed training in the areas of money management/consumer awareness, job seeking skills, transportation, legal skills, and knowledge of community resources by contrast, less than one quarter need training in the areas of healthcare planning, housekeeping, job maintenance skills, or food management.

Focus Groups

Method

Current and former foster youth were selected from three client rosters: 1) current ILP clients (both general and treatment foster homes); 2) PE clients served within the past two years; and, 3) emancipated ILP clients within the past three years who had not received PE services. Each list was alphabetized and every other youth was selected. This resulted in a sample of 33 current ILP clients (17 in general foster homes 16 in treatment foster homes, 21 PE clients, and 32 emancipated youth who had not received PE services.

All of these youth were invited to participate from one of five focus groups that were conducted during the seven-week period 5/21/08 to 7/9/08. Three of the groups were for the current foster youth (one for the youth placed in general foster homes and two for those placed in treatment foster homes) and two of the groups were for the emancipated youth (one for PE clients and another with those who had not received PE services).

ILP and PE staff recruited the focus group participants. Response rates were 53% for the current foster youth in general foster homes, 56% for the current foster youth in treatment foster homes, 38% for the PE clients and 16% for the emancipated youth who did not receive PE services.

Focus groups were scheduled for Wednesday afternoons, from either 2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. or 4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m., and were held in a foster parent training room in a building adjacent to LCCS administrative offices in downtown Toledo. Pizza and soft drinks were served at the beginning of each group meeting. Participants were paid \$25 (in the form of a Meijer's gift card) at the end of the meeting. Written informed consent was obtained from all 31 focus group participants (18 current foster youth and 13 emancipated youth), in accordance with the research procedures approved by the Ohio State University Institutional Review Board. All sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed.

The sessions were moderated by an experienced clinical psychologist, community service provider, adoptive parent, and foster parent trainer recommended by LCCS staff. An MSW graduate student wrote participant comments on poster paper, and the author took notes and observed participants' behaviors and interactions during each session.

Three open-ended questions were asked during each focus group:

- How do you feel about aging-out of care within the next few months (current foster youth) or how has life been since aging-out of care (emancipated youth)?
- What are your plans for the future?
- What do you currently need to help you accomplish your goals?

The first two questions were designed to open-up the group discussion and to direct the discussion to the third and central question. This focus on perceived needs was similar to the approach used by McMillen et al. (1997) who studied views of independent living services among recently emancipated foster youth in Missouri.

Immediately following each session, the moderator, MSW student and author met to identify emergent themes of two types: participants' expressed views and observed behaviors. Between five and ten total themes were generally identified for each session. Transcripts were then reviewed a month or so later by the MSW graduate student to find illustrative quotations for each of the themes.

Results

The expressed and observed themes that emerged from the focus groups were consistent with those previously identified by McMillen (1999) and Scannapieco (2007).

Expressed themes. Five expressed themes emerged from the focus groups. The first was a need for clothing vouchers with a higher face value that could be redeemed in a greater number and variety of stores. This theme is reflected in the following quotations:

- “It depends where it’s (voucher) at. Because see you can be at Value City with some Value City clothes, but they be trying to send you to Meijer and Target all the high (price) places where you ain’t going to get that many outfits.”
- “They make sure you have clothes but they don’t make sure we have enough. They like give us \$100. What are we going to get with \$100? Are we going to wear the same three outfits?”
- “Give us vouchers to more stores. Go to the mall.”
- “CSB didn’t give me a voucher until my son turned two months. I said what was he supposed to wear for two months? My foster mom before my baby was born had to go out and spend \$250 on clothes for my baby.”
- “And then I don’t like that they say we only need three pairs of clothes for school. Three pairs of uniforms for school. I feel that we need enough to last through the week.”
- “We need more vouchers..after we emancipate too. ‘Cause like me going to college, you can’t afford to buy clothes.”

The second was a need for assistance obtaining their driver’s license, and access to an automobile. Illustrative quotations related to this theme include the following:

- “I think we should be able to at least try to go get our license. At least prove that we can do it.”
- “I think that they should provide like vehicles for people that are mature, that have been doing good in a foster home and that plans on attending college so they don’t have a hard time trying to find a way to get to college, get to work, get back home and end up having to choose to drop out of school or quit their job.”

- “I feel like if your foster parents give you permission to have a car and they say that they’ll put you on their insurance, we should be able to.”
- “I’d say they should help people with driver’s license. We have nobody to help us - to teach us to drive.”
- “I think that the agency should have like a car buy program for their graduation kids. You know the kids that graduate with either a GED or high school diploma.”
- “Like a little program where they get some donated cars or something you know that work and are safe and like the kid has to pay \$100 a month for it or just pay for the insurance or just something like that. Make sure they have to earn it “

The third theme expressed by focus group participants was a need for home-based IL skills training provided by their foster parent(s) rather than skills training that is classroom-based. Focus group participants were especially interested in receiving more “hands-on” training in the areas of budgeting and financial management. The following quotations illustrate this theme:

- “I’m learning different ways on how to take care of your bills and stuff and know how she does it with all her money orders. She pays everything on time. She teaches me to like live within your means and not outside your means. Don’t live too big, too large or you’ll be struggling. Just live comfortable and you can be happy living comfortably.”
- “Show me the ropes. How to manage my own. Give me a little bit to do (around the house).”
- “Explain what you have to do to keep your medical benefits or whatever you have. Have them (FP’s) sit down and explain it.”
- “I think it’s going to be hard at first because I’m not used to being on my own and havin’ to pay all these bills and doing all of that on my own.”
- “Like taking out a loan and all that kind of stuff...’cause I don’t think you can ever know enough about that. I think that there is always something that you don’t know.”
- “My foster dad told me a lot of stuff that I wouldn’t actually know when it comes to actually staying in a house, owning a house, and renting stuff like cars.”

The fourth theme involved the confidentiality of their foster placement packet information. Focus group participants were particularly concerned about others in the foster home having access to the packet or the information it contained, as illustrated by the following quotations:

- “Your foster parents should be more confidential about that because like they bring their children there. And they have their children readin’ all your personal stuff, they treat you differently.”
- “That packet...they (FPs) should lock it up.”
- “It should be a rule like shouldn’t be allowed to talk about any of our information to anybody else.”

- “That’s none of our business. Let us get to know the child for ourselves. If the child wants to disclose all that information let them do that. But you don’t go we’re about to get a girl or a boy that’s been molested by his family and the sister has been molested by his family.”

Finally, some youth complained of unfair and/or unequal treatment by their foster parents relative to biological children or other foster children in the home. Quotations reflecting this theme include:

- “When I was in a foster home, my foster dad he took me everywhere he went. We went to trips to Miami. I felt more like a part. You know what I’m saying? I feel like when you give foster care that you want to help out their situation. You want to make them feel loved.”
- “She didn’t look at us like foster children. When she would introduce us to people and that’s what made me feel close to her. She wouldn’t introduce us as this is my foster child. These are my girls. These are my children. And when people introduce you as that’s their child no matter that you didn’t give birth to them or whatever that made you feel like okay, these people really sincerely care about me.”
- “She was supposed to go at the end of May to get me a bunch of clothes for summer; she didn’t even do that. She had the girl with her that always ran away so she couldn’t do nothing for me. Half the time I just feel like I’m being pushed to the back burner and I gotta watch everyone else get what they want before I could.”
- “I think that every foster home should treat everybody equal.”

Observed themes. In addition to the five themes that focus group participants directly expressed, several other themes were also observed. First, participants had generally positive views of pre-emancipation IL classes. They found some of the teaching/lesson material interesting, liked receiving stipends for attending, and enjoyed the opportunities for socialization that they provided. Second, participants generally lacked awareness of community resources. Only two or three of the more than 20 community programs identified through the provider survey (see below) were ever mentioned by participants while sharing their post-emancipation experiences and discussing their current needs. Finally, participants exhibited what might best be described as an “aversion” to rules as well as a need for power and control. Most of the current foster youth seemed anxious to be “out from under” the thumb (control) of “CSB” or the agency, and most of the emancipated youth participants seemed reluctant to seek assistance from the agency, or any other community service provider, for that matter, despite often troubling circumstances. The strong drive to “do for oneself” was especially apparent among emancipated youth participants.

Service Provider Survey

Method

During a two-hour research team meeting in April 2008, LCCS and Toledo Community Foundation staff identified 83 public and private agency service providers believed to serve emancipating youth and young adults in transition in the greater Toledo area. Both specialized IL programs and general service providers were represented in what was believed to be a fairly comprehensive list of service providers. Staff also provided contact information for each of those programs, including point of contact, address, phone, and email address, when known. The MSW student then called programs with missing contact information to fill-in as much information as possible.

The URL for a web-based version of the survey was emailed to the point of contact for each program in early June 2008, along with a cover letter from the Toledo Community Foundation requesting for surveys to be completed within 30 days. Printed versions of the survey were also sent. Due to lower than expected response by providers, the survey deadline was extended an additional 30 days, and Foundation staff called many of the non-responding providers and requested that the survey be completed. A total of 23 surveys were completed, representing a final response rate of 28%.

Results

Availability of services. Table 6 shows the specific IL services these providers reported. Across all 23 respondents, the most commonly provided IL services were secondary education support, budgeting, health education, family support, and mentoring. Conversely, the least available services were financial support for housing, financial support for college, other financial support, driving assistance, and legal assistance.

Service provider views. Table 7 presents information about the perceived helpfulness of various IL services as well as gaps in IL service provision. The four types of IL services providers identified as being most helpful to emancipating youth were life skills training, housing assistance, academic support/tutoring, and mentoring. By contrast, the six most commonly identified IL service gaps or unmet needs were planning for transitions from youth to adult systems, after care services, affordable housing, “hands-on” IL skills training, mentoring and structured transitional housing. Thus, life skills training, housing assistance, and mentoring were viewed as both the most helpful IL services and the IL services for which there was the greatest unmet need.

Service providers offered several suggestions to foundations interested in ameliorating the challenges faced by emancipating youth. These recommendations are also listed in Table 7, and included:

- Assemble a larger system of key stakeholders with an interest in assisting emancipating youth.
- Help emancipating youth obtain their driver’s license, and possibly auto insurance and/or an automobile.

- Expand services for other vulnerable youth populations, such as runaway/homeless youth at-risk of human trafficking.
- Identify and share information about the unique needs of and existing services for emancipating youth.
- Extend IL skills training/classes to youth after they have emancipated from care.
- Provide start-up funding for model programs.
- Provide training and technical assistance to agencies interested in serving this population.

Discussion

At present, the published literature is helpful in providing prevalence estimates for common problems/challenges facing emancipated foster youth (e.g., dropping-out of high school, unemployment, homelessness), the effects of IL services on foster youth outcomes remains largely unknown. The review of administrative records for IL and Post-emancipation program clients found that approximately 35 youth emancipate each year in Lucas County, and that only one in five emancipated youth return to LCCS for post-emancipation services (up through age 21).

The focus group provided some explanations for why so few emancipated youth return to LCCS for assistance post-emancipation. First, the youth expressed a strong desire to get away from the agency and be free of its rules and restrictions. Second, they indicated a strong determination to “make it on their own” during the first year or two after aging-out of care. And third, youth generally lacked awareness of available resources at the times when assistance is needed. Thus, while LCCS appears to be meeting most of the needs of foster youth pre-emancipation, that is no longer true after youth age out of care. Instead, meeting the post-emancipation needs of former foster youth tends to fall onto private community providers.

Both current and emancipated youth find IL classes helpful, particularly in the area of budgeting and financial management. In addition to instruction, such classes provide important socialization and normalization opportunities. Youth seemed to find life in foster care difficult to tolerate, and most looked forward to emancipation when they would be free from the litany of rules and restrictions placed upon them by their foster parents, caseworkers, other adults. However, most youth currently in care appear to underestimate the expenses and responsibilities associated with living independently, and have done very little concrete planning for attaining their short-term goals. This desire for greater control over their own lives was further reflected in the criticism made by several youth of the “cookie-cutter” approach to case planning and inflexibility on the part of both foster parents and caseworkers. Finally, the importance of establishing permanent connections with supportive adults was expressed by many focus group participants, both to assist with applied life skills training at home and for on-going support (both emotional and with concrete needs) post-emancipation.

Current foster youth (ages 16-17) tended to focus more on material needs (e.g., clothing), socialization and normalization needs (e.g., IL classes, driving), emotional needs (e.g., being treated fairly, having a caring foster parent and caseworker), and increasing their own decision-making. In contrast, emancipated youth (ages 18-24) were much more focused on their need for employment and vocational training as well as the “heavy” responsibilities of daily life. Many were struggling to balance work, school, intimate relationships and caregiving responsibilities.

Noticeably absent from focus group discussions with emancipated youth was the need for supportive or transitional housing – a topic of considerable attention among helping professionals and advocates for emancipating youth. The survey of service providers revealed that they are most interested in expanding programming for emancipated youth in the areas of IL skills training, mentoring and housing assistance. The first two areas are consistent with what youth said during the focus groups. That is, youth clearly desired additional IL skills training, particularly involving budgeting and financial management and wanted to have a relationship with a concerned adult who could help them navigate the early adulthood years. In contrast, the development of supportive or transitional housing may not be a good avenue to pursue at this time, given the lack of perceived need for such assistance among emancipated youth. However, it is likely that if homeless and unstably housed youth were more represented among focus group participants, that the perceived need for housing assistance may have been greater.

Before discussing more specific recommendations, it is important to note some of the study’s methodological limitations. First, due to time and cost constraints, the views of two important stakeholder groups – foster parents and foundation staff – were excluded from consideration. Only the views of emancipating youth and service provider program directors (including LCCS IL and PE programs) were examined. Next, the validity of administrative LCCS client data is unknown, particularly for the more subjective indicators such as the level of mental health and substance abuse problems. Third, a relatively rudimentary approach was used to analyze the qualitative data from the focus groups. More rigorous analytical methods of deriving emergent themes from the transcript texts, which often include the use of inter-rater reliability measures to confirm the validity of said themes, may have yielded different results. Finally, the external validity, or generalizability, is limited due to relatively low participation rates among foster youth (although those invited were randomly selected from their respective client groups) and a low response rate among service providers (despite multiple requests to complete the survey). Also, the geographic area examined, Lucas County, is only one of 88 counties within Ohio.

Recommendations

The recommendations which follow are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or views of other research team members, LCCS, The Oswald Supporting Organization of the Toledo Community Foundation, or the Stranahan Foundation.

Recommendations were developed using three guiding principles: youth-focused, limited resources, and collectivism. *Youth-focused* denotes placing more weight on the perceived needs expressed by the youth and on observations of the youth during the focus groups, than on administrative data or service provider program director views. It is for this reason, for example, that the development and/or expansion of transitional housing does not appear among these recommendations. It was not a need expressed by the youth during the focus groups. *Limited resources* acknowledges that in light of the currently troubling economic conditions and assuming that any expansion of programming for emancipating youth will likely be funded by relatively scarce and mostly private (philanthropic) funds, that recommendations should be more modest in scope. Finally, *collectivism* reflects this author's belief that the needs of emancipating youth are too great for any single agency or program to bear individually, and so these needs are more likely to be addressed the greater the number of agencies/programs involved and the greater the level of collaboration that is employed among involved agencies/programs.

Foundation Funders

Recommendation #1: Provide on-going salary funding for one full-time staff person at one community program to develop and coordinate a mentoring program for emancipated young adults ages 18-25, where volunteer mentors could provide on-going, as-needed IL skills training post-emancipation.

Rationale: This recommendation integrates two types of IL services of greatest shared interest between youth and providers; namely, IL skills training and mentoring. Different types of mentors include: 1) transitional life-skills mentors, 2) cultural empowerment mentors, 3) corporate/business mentors, 4) mentors for young parents, and 5) mentor homes (Mech, 1995). Also, five specific mentoring models of practice include: 1) Fostering Health Connections Through Peer Mentoring (developed by the Child Welfare League of American); 2) In My Shoes, 3) Mentoring USA, 4) Virtual Mentoring Program (developed by Orphan Foundation of America), and 5) Transitioning Teens Program (Dickson, 2008). Thus, several types of mentoring relationships and existing models of practice exist which could be examined further to determine which particular type or model might best meet the specific needs and circumstances of emancipating youth in Lucas County.

Recommendation #2: Provide seed monies for new micro loan program(s) for...

- i) Purchasing a car (18-25 yrs.);
- ii) Attending college or vocational training program, supplementing and extending the Chafee Educational and Training Voucher (ETV) Program (22-25 yrs.);
- iii) Securing housing (18-25 yrs.); and/or,
- iv) Obtaining needed medical or dental care, supplementing and extending Medicaid (22-25 yrs.)

Rationale: Well-managed, culturally sensitive micro loan programs have been used by humanitarian organizations to assist impoverished, vulnerable populations around the world. For example, the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus and his Grameen Bank, has "...enabled millions of Bangladeshis, almost all women, to buy everything from cows to cell phones in order to start and run their own businesses (National Geographic News, 2006)." Yunus founded the bank in 1976 by lending \$27 of his own money to 42 women in a rural village who had a business making bamboo furniture. Since then, the bank has made an estimated \$5.7 billion in loans (averaging \$200 per loan) to more than 6 million people in Bangladesh, 96% of them women. "Repayment is driven by social pressure. Loan recipients are placed in groups of five. Members can only apply for future loans once the group catches up on some of its outstanding debts. That system encourages social responsibility and has a repayment rate in excess of 98 percent, the bank says." Yunus and Grameen Bank is not alone: according to the 2005 State of the Microcredit Summit Report, by the end of 2004, some 3,200 micro-credit institutions reported reaching more than 92 million clients throughout the world. With the current "credit crunch" operating in today's conventional commercial banks, it will be harder than ever for recently emancipated youth to obtain a loan through conventional means to purchase a car, attend college, obtain funds needed to move into and furnish an apartment, or to pay for unexpected out-of-pocket medical or dental expenses. Thus, further exploration of establishing a micro loan program for emancipated youth, funded through a foundation seed grant funds, in partnership with a community service provider interested in developing and administering such a program is indicated.

Recommendation #3: Provide support to expand programming for vulnerable youth, such as homeless/runaway youth at-risk for involvement in human trafficking (ages 15-25).

Rationale: At the time of aging-out of care (or being discharged from the child welfare system), an alarming 20-45% of foster youth during the period 2005-2007 were classified as "AWOL" or whereabouts "Unknown/other". Thus, a significant proportion of emancipating foster youth are likely homeless/runaway youth and therefore vulnerable to becoming ensnared into prostitution, human trafficking, and other social ills befalling young adults who are homeless. These may be the neediest, most at-risk, and most difficult to locate emancipating foster youth. Thus, expanded outreach and engagement programming is indicated.

Recommendation #4: Convene “youth in transition” workgroup of key stakeholder groups (including transitioning young adults) to regularly assess needs, identify and share resources, and to encourage inter-agency collaboration.

Rationale: Foundation funders are perhaps in the best position to facilitate the development of a community-wide coalition of stakeholders seeking to assist emancipating foster youth. LCCS’s primary mandate and focus on protecting current foster youth, and emancipating youth’s general disdain for the agency, suggest to this author that it is not the ideal convener of a community-wide coalition/movement. Neither is any single service provider likely large or influential enough to “summon” a meeting of its service provider peers. Foundation funders, on the other hand, carry both the influence and may serve a unique community organizing, technical assistance, and information sharing role among emancipating foster youth-serving agencies within Lucas County. This “convening” role is what at least some of the service providers surveyed recommended and requested of the Foundation funders. It is also a role which several larger foundations have served across the nation, and so it is likely that the Foundation Funders could obtain some technical assistance from its larger peer institutions as to how best to proceed along these lines (see Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 2001; Youth Transition Funders Group (YTTFG) Foster Care Work Group, 2004).

Note that collaboration and strategic partnership with local workforce investment area 9 (Lucas County) may be a particularly beneficial avenue to explore for assisting emancipated youth in the important area of employment training and career development (<http://jfs.ohio.gov/workforce/localboard/index.stm>). Once formed, this community-wide coalition could also participate in current legislative reform advocacy effort led by the Ohio Association of Child Caring Agencies (OACCA) (<http://www.oacca.org/>) at the state level, including calls for 1) tuition waivers at public colleges and universities in Ohio for emancipated youth, and 2) assumption of liability at the state level making it easier for current foster youth to obtain a driver’s license and to complete driver’s education before emancipating from care.

Recommendation #5: Host bi-annual youth in transition conference to raise awareness of the unique needs of transitioning young adults, sustain community support, and encourage inter-agency collaboration.

Rationale: Same as #4 above.

Recommendation #6: Re-evaluate clothing voucher policy and clothing “inventory monitoring” process to ensure that each foster youth has an adequate supply of clothing.

Rationale: The one material need expressed among current foster youth focus group participants was for increased clothing vouchers. In response to this expressed need, the agency is advised to review and to re-assess its current policy of a) providing youth with an initial clothing voucher of \$600 at the time of entering care, b) followed by the provision of additional clothing vouchers thereafter on an as-needed basis, with c) the expectation and understanding that foster parents will purchase clothing for the youth in their care using a portion of their per diem reimbursement rates of \$50 to \$100, as d) clothing inventories are regularly monitored by caseworkers during their monthly home visits throughout youths’ time in care.

Recommendation #7: Expand budgeting and financial planning module of IL skills curriculum.

Rationale: Both current foster youth and emancipated youth expressed strong interest in receiving additional life skills training in this area. Perhaps a year-long, calendar year based budgeting life skills training module could be added whereby a portion of youth stipend accounts could be made available to youth currently in care to provide additional “hands-on” budgeting training under the supervision of IL staff and/or life skills trainers. For emancipated youth, more extensive financial planning is needed, including opening and the use of checking and savings accounts, prudent use of credit cards and short-term loans, an orientation to credit scores, and application for financial aid for college and/or post-secondary vocational training.

Recommendation #8: Review confidentiality policies with foster parents, both initially during pre-service trainings and during in-service trainings, and establish or enhance procedures for monitoring compliance with confidentiality rules during the first 90 days of a foster youth’s placement into a foster care home.

Rationale: Adjusting to a new foster home placement is difficult enough for youth, without having others in the home “knowing all of their business” coming into their new home. Focus group participants felt strongly that far too much of their personal information is routinely and widely shared by foster parents among adults and other youth living in the home, and with foster parents’ family members, friends, acquaintances, etc. outside of the home. This makes it difficult for youth to “start fresh” in a new placement, in cases where their personal information and histories are widely shared, and at times, gossiped about.

Recommendation #9: Continue to involve current and emancipated foster youth in foster parent pre-service and in-service trainings to encourage foster parents to be sensitive and responsive to youths’ material, emotional, social, physical, and educational needs.

Rationale: Involving youth as an integral part of foster parent trainings is perhaps the best way to encourage youth-focused practice among foster parents. The Institute for Human Services (IHS) (<http://www.ihs-trainet.com/training.htm>) is currently developing a statewide training certification program for current and foster youth, which may serve as a resource for the agency for developing leadership skills and employment training among its youth, while potentially enhancing the quality of future foster parent trainings.

Community Service Providers

Recommendation #10: Assist emancipated youth to obtain their driver’s license, complete driver’s education, “shop” for affordable automobile insurance, and to lease/ purchase a safe and reliable vehicle.

Rationale: Until such time that state legislation is passed exempting LCCS and foster parents from the financial liability accompanying driving, the vast majority of foster youth will continue to be unable to obtain their driver’s license until they emancipate from care. Given the importance of driving and having a car in establishing one’s independence, particularly for those living, attending school, or working outside of core urban areas served by public transportation, this is perhaps the greatest unmet need among emancipating foster youth which could be addressed by community agencies.

Recommendation #11: Provide extended support for emancipated youth to age 25, focusing on...

- i) Emergency food/clothing/shelter assistance;
- ii) Coordination and oversight of mentoring by supportive adult(s); and
- iii) “Hands-on” budgeting and financial management/assistance and accessing of available financial resources (e.g., financial aid for college or vocational training)

Rationale: Among intact families, parents give their children an estimated \$38,000 between the ages of 18 and 34 – about \$2,200 per year – to supplement wages, pay for college tuition, help with housing costs, etc. (Schoeni and Ross, 2005, as cited in CRS, 2008). Parents also provide housing and non-material assistance such as advice and connections to other caring adults in the community. In the absence of such parental support, emancipated foster youth are left largely to “fend for themselves”, and to rely upon family and friends, and community agencies/services available for young adults, which generally are quite limited. The three targeted services recommended above would help meet the most basic needs, critically important mentoring needs, and financial skills training needs of emancipated foster youth when such needs are unable to be met by relatives or friends.

Recommendation #12: Establish “niche” service programs/interventions for special needs groups (e.g., homeless/runaway/trafficked youth, delinquent youth).

Rationale: The specialized needs of “AWOL” youth and delinquent youth are not well addressed by the child welfare system, and thus are more appropriately addressed by specialized community programs, for both current and emancipated foster youth.

The results and recommendations of this study are largely consistent with those of the previous statewide needs assessment reported in 2000, and with two previous foster youth focus group studies published within the past decade. Moreover, presentations of these findings and recommendations at three statewide forums during the month of October, 2008, were generally affirmed by foster youth and helping professionals. Thus, the findings and recommendations presented herein may extend beyond Lucas County.

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Table 1. Estimated rates of social conditions and challenges facing emancipating foster youth
 (Weighted averages across data sources, with total number of youth included in the denominator of each computed estimate shown in parentheses)

Social condition or challenge	Age of youth				
	18 years ^a	19 years ^b	20 years ^c	21 years ^d	22 years ^e
Completed high school (diploma or GED)	37% (n=284)	59% (n=1,148)	75% (n=338)	63% (n=1,765)	76% (n=267)
Working (part or full-time)	39% (n=284)	44% (n=1,148)	60% (n=167)	57% (n=1,765)	52% (n=100)
Receiving public assistance	72% (n=32)	27% (n=1,148)	31% (n=167)	33% (n=1,719)	(no data)
Experienced homelessness	53% (n=32)	18% (n=1,148)	24% (n=646)	22% (n=1,719)	28% (n=100)
Incarcerated	(no data)	21% (n=603)	41% (n=100)	29% (n=909)	33% (n=100)
Given birth to a child (among females)	15% (n=252)	28% (n=1,014)	38% (n=67)	50% (n=854)	71% (n=100)

Data sources:

^a Lindsey (1999); McMillen (1999)

^b Scannapieco (1995); Lindsey (1999); Courtney (2005); Courtney (2008b)

^c Mech (1999); Reilly (2003); Georgiades (2005)

^d Barth (1990); Cook (1994); Mallon (1998); Fowler (2006); Courtney (2007)

^e Blome (1997); Daining (2007)

Table 2. Characteristics of Lucas County Independent Living Program clients ages 16 and over, as of 1/1/08 (n=72)

	%	N
Demographic characteristics		
Gender (Female)	53	38
Minor mother	15	11
Race		
African-American	53	38
Hispanic	6	4
Caucasian	42	30
Age		
16	36	26
17	44	32
18	13	9
19	6	4
20	1	1
Educational status		
9 th	28	20
10 th	25	18
11 th	15	11
12 th	11	8
GED	14	10
HS Diploma	4	3
Dropped out	1	1
Placement setting		
GIFT foster homes	43	31
Treatment homes	43	31
Kinship homes	6	4
AWOL	8	6
Mental health problems		
None	1	1
Low	51	37
Moderate	36	26
High	11	8
Substance abuse problems		
None	10	7
Low	71	51
Moderate	17	12
High	1	1

Table 3. Characteristics of youth who aged-out of care from 2005-2007 (n=108)

	%	N
Demographic and clinical characteristics		
Race	2	2
African-American	57	62
Hispanic	2	2
Caucasian	39	42
Gender (Female)	58	63
Mental health needs		
Low	34	37
Moderate	39	42
High	23	25
Substance abuse needs		
Low	65	70
Moderate	19	20
High	12	13
Treatment outcomes at discharge		
Completed high school (diploma or GED)	36	39
Attending high school	23	25
Attending college	18	19
Employed (full or part-time)	31	34
Incarcerated	2	2
Living in own place	31	34
Other living arrangement		
Relative	28	30
Friend	11	12
Foster home	4	4
Unknown/other	24	28
AWOL	19	21
Participation in Post-Emancipation Program		
Yes	22	24
No	78	84

Table 4. Description of LCCS Post-emancipation clients, 2006-2007 (n=43)

	%	N
Demographic characteristics		
Age		
18	46.5	20
19	14.0	6
20	34.9	15
21	2.3	1
22	2.3	1
Race		
Black	55.8	24
Hispanic	4.7	2
White	37.2	16
Bi-racial	2.3	1
Gender (Female)	60.5	26
Highest grade completed		
9	4.7	2
10	11.6	5
11	32.6	14
12	44.2	19
13	2.3	1
Unknown	4.7	2
Presenting problems (at intake)		
Education/GED	62.8	27
Housing	58.1	25
Employment	48.8	21
Medical	34.9	15
Mental health	30.2	13
Finance	27.9	12
Transportation	4.7	2
Substance abuse	2.3	1
Mental retardation/developmental disability	2.3	1
Domestic violence	2.3	1
Physical disability	2.3	1
Other	20.9	9
Resources available to clients (at intake)		
Photo ID	83.7	36
Support system	83.7	36
Birth certificate	79.1	34
Social security card	76.7	33
Library card	62.8	27
Medical insurance	55.8	24
Dental insurance	55.8	24
Stable housing	51.2	22
Registered to vote	48.8	21
Completed high school	48.8	21
Source of Income	46.5	20
Public assistance	41.9	18

	%	N
Bank account	39.5	17
Resume	39.5	17
Employment	30.2	13
Driver's license	23.3	10
Registered for draft	20.9	9
<hr/>		
Special needs (at intake)		
Unaddressed mental health issues	18.6	8
Criminal justice involvement	16.3	7
Unaddressed substance abuse problems	4.7	2

Table 5. Daniel Memorial Independent Living Needs Assessment Scores, 2000-2007 (n=96)

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	S.D.
Overall	96	13	92	68.5	13.9
Sub-scale					
Healthcare Planning	93	27	100	82.4	13.4
Housekeeping	92	0	100	78.0	21.8
Job Maintenance Skills	92	22	100	74.6	18.6
Food Management	94	0	100	74.5	21.7
Education Planning	92	0	100	72.2	24.4
Personal Appearance and Hygiene	94	0	100	70.8	17.5
Interpersonal Skills	88	0	100	69.4	25.5
Housing	82	0	100	68.3	26.8
Emergency/ Safety	91	14	100	68.2	22.2
Money Mgmt./Consumer Awareness	96	13	100	63.3	21.2
Job Seeking Skills	92	13	100	62.5	18.3
Transportation	92	0	100	61.7	24.6
Legal Skills	85	14	100	61.1	18.6
Community Resources	91	0	100	59.1	24.9

Table 6. Independent living/transitional youth services and programs survey respondents

	Services provided *																				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
County providers																					
LCCS Independent Living	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
LCCS Post Emancipation	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Glass City Academy			1	1	1				1		1					1					
Toledo-Lucas County Health Department									1								1				
Lucas County Dept. Job & Family Services			1			1															
LCCS ILP-contract providers																					
Aurora Gonzalez-Expect Respect	1	1	1		1		1	1	1	1	1	1									1
YMCA-Youth Opportunities Program (YOP)			1	1	1	1	1		1	1	1						1				
Aurora Project, Inc			1	1			1	1	1			1						1			1
Dr. Larry Hamme (Unison Behavioral Health Group)	1	1					1	1	1	1											
Community providers																					
Neighborhood Properties	1		1	1	1		1	1			1	1	1	1				1	1		1
Connecting Point	1		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1								1	1		1
Cherry Street Mission Ministries			1				1	1		1	1			1	1	1	1				1
Harbor Behavioral Healthcare		1			1	1	1		1	1						1	1				1
Open Dorr FRC				1	1		1			1											1
Toledo Area Ministries-Second Chance		1	1							1	1										
James C. Caldwell Community Center			1				1			1											
Maumee Valley Habitat for Humanity							1	1					1								
YMCA/JCC of Greater Toledo			1		1						1										
House of Emmanuel, Inc.		1									1										
American Red Cross of Greater Toledo									1	1											
East Toledo Family Center										1											
Frederick Douglass Community Assoc.						1															
The Salvation Army of Northwest Ohio											1										

* 1 IL assessment; 2 Transition planning; 3 Secondary education support; 4 Higher education support; 5 Career exploration; 6 Vocational training; 7 Budgeting; 8 Housing education; 9 Health education; 10 Family support; 11 Mentoring; 12 Supervised IL housing; 13 Housing financial support; 14 College financial support; 15 Other financial support; 16 Physical health; 17 MH/SA treatment; 18 Vital documents; 19 Legal assistance; 20 Public benefits application; and, 21 Driving assistance.

Table 7. Summary of service provider responses to open-ended questions

Thinking now about the services your agency provides, which do you feel are most helpful to your emancipating or emancipated foster youth clients?	N
Life skills	5
Housing assistance	4
Academic support/tutor	3
Mentoring	3
Aftercare support	2
Budgeting/money management	2
Case management	2
Mental health services	2
Prenatal, infant healthcare	2
Primary health, dental care	2
Substance abuse treatment and maintenance	2
Advocacy with LCCS & courts	1
Child care	1
Clothing	1
Continuum of services	1
Education retention	1
Emergency shelter	1
Employment preparation/training	1
Food	1
GED programs	1
Home-based services	1
Parent education	1
Post-secondary education	1
Public assistance	1
Self-esteem promotion	1
Sexual health care	1
Stable, supportive environment	1
Specific programs mentioned:	N
Financial Literacy Program	1
Intensive School Retention Program	1
Second Chance Safe House	1
YMCA/Jewish Community Center Early Education. & Afterschool Advantage	1
Youth Opportunity Program	1
What are the current gaps in services for emancipating foster youth in Lucas County?	N
Transition planning youth/foster to adult systems	4
After care services	3
Affordable housing	2
Emancipation preparation	2
Mentoring	2
Structured transitional housing	2
Childcare for teen parents with special needs children	1
Employment opportunities	1
Housing for delinquent youth	1
Representative payee program	1

Post-emancipation IL skills training (18-24 year-old's)	1
Service provider education regarding special needs of emancipating youth	1
Services enhancing mental health and spiritual strengths	1
Services for trafficked/traumatized youth	1
What can the Toledo Community Foundation do to help emancipating foster youth attain self-sufficiency?	N
Assemble larger system of key stakeholders to address needs of emancipating youth	2
Driver's license/automobile services	2
Expand services for youth at-risk or victims of trafficking	2
Identify and share info. on unique needs and existing services for emancipating youth	2
Post-emancipation IL skills training/classes	2
Provide start-up funding for model programs	2
Provide training and technical assistance to agencies interested in serving this population	2
Advocate with courts for alternative sentencing for delinquent youth to receive treatment	1
Assist with transportation for youth to get to appointments, employment, etc.	1
Continue to fund local agencies to better serve clients	1
Develop linkages between children and adults	1
Funding for housing and educational grant information	1
Funding to long-term care facilities to decrease staff turn-over	1
Help establish collaborative child care program for teens with disabilities	1
Help establish long-term community of support for emancipating(ed) youth	1
Identify and fund unmet needs for transition services	1
Legal services	1
Long-term mentoring	1
Provide funding for case management	1
Provide transition funding to serve youth whose cases have been closed by LCCS	1
Transitional housing for 1-2 yrs. post-emancipation	1

Appendix A. National and state organizations advocating and assisting emancipating foster youth

National Organizations and Resources	
Annie E. Casey Foundation	http://www.aecf.org
Casey Family Programs	http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications
Center for Adolescent Health & the Law	http://www.cahl.org
Chapin Hall Center for Children (University of Chicago)	http://www.chapinhall.org
Child Welfare League of America	http://www.cwla.org
Children and Family Research Center (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)	http://cfrcwww.social.uiuc.edu/pubsandreports.htm
Daniel Memorial Institute	http://www.danielmemorial.org/sites/web/store/product.cfm
FosterClub	http://www.fyi3.com/fyi3/index.cfm
Foster Care Alumni of America	http://fostercarealumni.org
FKids Are Waiting-Pew Commission	http://www.kidsarewaiting.org
National Child Welfare Resource Center for Youth Services (Oklahoma University)	http://www.nrcys.ou.edu
National Foster Care Coalition	http://www.nationalfostercare.org
National Independent Living Association	http://www.nilausa.org
National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning (Hunter College, City University of New York)	http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/statistics.html
Orphan Foundation of America	http://orphan.org/index.php
Urban Institute	http://www.urban.org/children/index.cfm
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children & Families	http://www.acf.hhs.gov
State Organizations and Resources	
Foster Care Alumni of America (FCAA) Ohio Chapter	http://ohiofostercarealumni.blogspot.com
Ohio Association of Child Caring Agencies (OACCA)	http://www.oacca.org
Ohio Independent Living Association (OHILA)	http://www.ohila.org
Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) Office for Children and Families	http://jfs.ohio.gov/ocf/index.stm
Ohio Department of Mental Health Transition-Aged Youth (TAY) Workgroup	http://www.mh.state.oh.us/kids/kidsnewsletter/sepoct2007.pdf http://www.ohioactcenter.org/transition.html
Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO)	http://www.pcsao.org
Statewide IL “yellow-pages”	http://changingtheodds.wikispaces.com

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