

Aging Out of the Foster Care System: Challenges and Opportunities for the State of Michigan

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to report on the status of foster care transition support for young people who age out of foster care in the state of Michigan. This study was conducted by the MSU School of Social Work with support from the MSU Institute for Public Policy and Social Research through the State of Michigan Applied Public Policy Research Program. The report will provide an overview of the challenges facing youth and a number of considerations for public policy. The social and economic consequences of failing to support these vulnerable youth are sufficiently significant to command the attention of legislators, other policymakers, social service providers, educators, and the general public even in this tight budgetary time.

The findings from this study demonstrate that Michigan, like the rest of the nation, continues to see increases in the number of youth entering foster care and in the number of young people transitioning out of foster care. Efforts to support foster care transition have increased, however negative life outcomes in areas such as education level, employment, wage levels, homelessness and involvement with the criminal justice system continue for former foster care youth at levels considerably higher than the general population.

Included in this report are data illustrating the outcomes of those who transition out of foster care, a review of related literature on foster care transition, state-by-state comparison of programs and what they each provide to those who transition out of foster care, the words of those who have actually been in foster care, an overview of the federal Chafee legislation, and recommendations for improving services and responding to this significant policy challenge for the state of Michigan.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With rising numbers of youth in foster care, there are increasing numbers of youth also aging out of foster care. Although child welfare agencies have had an ongoing concern about the experiences and outcomes for these youth who transition out of care, in recent years more has been learned and new programs developed to assist this population.

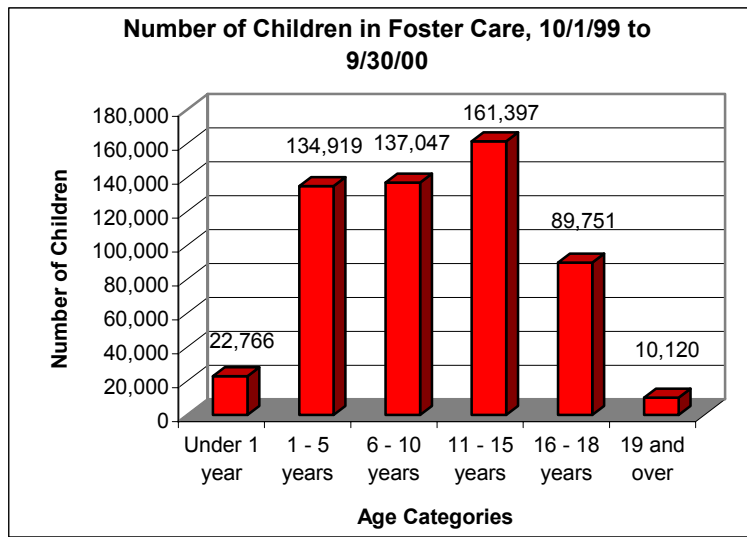
The studies of this population have been limited in size and scope but a consistent picture emerges: former foster care youth experience disproportionately high rates of homelessness, unemployment, and involvement with the criminal justice system. More likely to drop out of high school and less likely to attend college than other young people, these alumni of the foster care system face many challenges in addition to overcoming the abuse, neglect, and separation from family already experienced in the child welfare system.

In response to these needs, with federal support, states' efforts have expanded beyond traditional independent living programs to include a range of services and assistance supported by the federal Chafee law of 1999. A number of states have instituted tuition waiver and other financial assistance packages for former foster care youth to attend college. The programs developed in a number of states are presented in this report.

The challenge for the state of Michigan is similar to the challenge to other states: developing a comprehensive continuum of services for foster care youth that begins while they are in high school and continues past their discharge date from foster care. The development of a tuition assistance program that supports four years of college education and addresses the expenses beyond tuition is another area for exploration. The expenses associated with such programs would be offset by young people who are employed and meeting their potential contributions to society. In addition to financial needs, young people need information and encouragement to succeed as adults and fully enter into society.

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The foster care population in the United States continues to rise, reaching 556,000 in 2000. The graph illustrates that almost half of the youth in foster care are between the ages of 11 and 18, with 161,397 (29.0 %) between the ages of 11 and 15 years old and 89,751 (16.1 %) between the ages of 16 and 18 years old. They have a history of being abused and/or neglected by their families of origin, making them particularly vulnerable to negative social outcomes. They have been separated from family, and are essentially on their own in late adolescence. Given their history and the number of youth entering adulthood without adequate preparation, state and federal governments are grappling with how to address the issues facing these youth while at the same time being under significant budget constraints. A disturbing realization is that the bar chart can be viewed as a timeline, showing the approximate number of children who will be transitioning to adulthood who have been or are in foster care at the time they reach the age of majority. As a number of youth ages 6-15 grows older in foster care, the high number of youth with placement goals of "independent living" and subsequently aging out of foster care will continue to pose a significant challenge for the states.



Source: Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS)

The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data for fiscal year 2000 has some other disturbing facts:

- 85,593 children ages 11-15 entered foster care;
- 32,091 children ages 16-18 entered foster care;
- 56,617 children ages 16-18 exited care;
- 5,265 youth ages 19 and over exited care; and
- Only 51,000 of the 556,000 (9.2 %) of all children in public foster care were adopted.

Michigan's AFCARS data show that, in FY2000 there were 20,034 children in foster care on the last day of the fiscal year. Of those, 534 were in supervised independent living placements and 1,006 had a permanency goal of emancipation.

Several studies have been conducted that attempted to identify the problems and barriers faced by youth leaving foster care. Some studies have targeted specific programs that work with

these youth as they prepare to leave foster care or are transitioning to adulthood. These studies identified strategies and interventions that have been successful in assisting these youth as they attempt to navigate through their passage to adulthood. The results of several of these studies are included in the literature review section of this report.

The federal government’s primary source of assistance to the states for working with youth who are aging out of foster care is the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP). This legislation provides a block grant of funds for each state to develop programs that address the needs of youth aging out of care. Michigan has received federal funds from the CFCIP program and has submitted a plan for their use to the federal Agency for Children and Families. A comparison of eight states’, including Michigan’s, proposed implementation of the Chafee Program is provided in Section 5 of this report.

The purpose of this study is to present issues that face Michigan foster care youth as they head toward adulthood. The information is synthesized in the Summary and Conclusions section. The final section, Recommendations and Next Steps, provides suggestions for policy and procedural changes that can help Michigan’s former foster care youth become productive, self-sufficient citizens of the state.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To provide a context for the policy issues related to youth who age out of foster care, a literature review was conducted to locate studies that are relevant to the issues faced by policymakers and children’s services administrators in Michigan.

The literature reviewed in this section reflects the current issues pertaining to youth aging out of systems of care. In general, the literature identifies three components that have a direct impact on successful transition to adulthood: positive factors, negative factors and interventions.

Table 1: Factors Involved in Determining the Outcomes of Transitions to Adulthood

Pathways	Obstacles	Interventions Identified
Job skills and access to employment pathways Ability to manage money	Un- or under-employment Low earnings	Provide employment training Provide access to employment pathways and opportunities
Completion of at least a high school education with access to postsecondary education or vocational training or apprenticeships	Low education	Provide tuition assistance and support services that make educational, vocational, and apprenticeship opportunities more accessible
Ability to problem solve and make decisions Ability to use available resources Belief in the future Development of social competencies	Early pregnancy or fatherhood Encounters with the legal system Substance abuse Dependence on Public Assistance	Provide access to life skills and self-esteem building, and real-life practice opportunities
Relationships with caring adults	Returns to family from which was removed (family has not changed behaviors)	Provide access to mentors (caring adults)
High quality last placement	Homelessness Multiple moves in and out of the foster care system Unplanned exits from care	Provide access to transitional housing so the youth can practice skills in safe environments

Table 1 illustrates the types of factors that can have positive and negative impacts on youth as they transition to adulthood. The literature reviewed consistently identified education and employment as factors that can make or break a youth’s possibility of becoming self-sufficient. In addition, the presence of caring adults, be they formal or informal mentors, former foster parents or biological relatives, provides these youth with information, encouragement, and the

impetus to become self-sufficient. Conversely, the absence of these factors can lead to unemployment or underemployment, substance abuse, homelessness, early parenting, problems with the law, or dependence on public systems and supports.

In March 2002, Robert M. Goerge, Lucy Bilaver, Bong Joo Lee, Barbara Needell, Alan Brookhart, and William Jackman published a final report entitled *Employment Outcomes for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care*, under the auspices of the University of Chicago Chapin Hall Center for Children. The study was performed for the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation at the US Department of Health and Human Services. The purpose of the report was to provide information on employment outcomes of children exiting foster care near their 18th birthdays. Information was gathered pertaining to youth in California, Illinois and South Carolina. These states were chosen because of the availability of longitudinal administrative data. The study found that: youth aging out of foster care are underemployed; the patterns of employment vary by state; youth who do work begin to do so early; youth aging out of foster care have mean earnings below the poverty level; and youth aging out of foster care progress more slowly in the labor market than other youth.

The aging-out youth were found to have average incomes less than \$6,000. By comparison, the 1997 federal poverty level for a single adult was \$7,890. Although some of the youth returned to their families after emancipation, many are completely without support from any other source than government programs. Some states may provide youth who are still in school with room and board but this applies to very few of them. No earnings were reported for about 30 percent of youth aging out in Illinois, 23 percent in California, and 14 percent in South Carolina for the 13 quarters studied. During these quarters, none of the three states had more than 45 percent of these youth who had earnings. Likewise, youth were more apt to earn income for the first time during the four quarters prior to and the quarter of their 18th birthday than in the two years after that. The authors compared their data to that of the Current Population Survey. They found that youth aging out of care and youth who had been reunified with their families work less than those people of similar ages in the general population.

In 2000, Melissa Johnson-Reid and Richard P. Barth published *From Placement to Prison: The Path to Adolescent Incarceration from Child Welfare Supervised Foster Care or Group Care in Children and Youth Services Review*, 22(7), 493-516. This exploratory study in California looked at the likelihood of incarceration for serious/violent offenses among children with a history of foster care or group placement. The research question upon which the study was based asked “What aspects of foster and group care histories would increase or decrease the likelihood of later entry into the California Youth Authority (CYA) according to child characteristics and maltreatment?”

Cases were drawn from California foster care data among children born between 1970-1984 to coincide with typical age limits for entry to CYA between 1988-1996. The study sample was limited to school-age children. The study examined 79,139 children who had one spell in foster care after 1988; some 590 (.75 %) of whom later entered CYA. Data compared children in the sample from the State Department of Finance projections for 1994. A variety of prior conditions were analyzed: removal reason, foster care, placements, placement types, reasons for exit, and child demographics. Slightly over 7 per 1,000 school-aged children with at least one foster or group care placement later entered CYA. African-American individuals and those categorized as “others” had the highest rate of entry following foster care from age 15. Females made up a high proportion of prior foster children entering CYA (11 %) compared to males (4 %). The rate of entry is significantly higher for those who experienced probation placements. The strongest risk factors for later entry are: having an additional spell supervised by probation, placement between the ages of 12 and 15, and being male.

Outcomes for Adolescents Using Runaway and Homeless Youth Services was published in the Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, 3(1), 79-96 by Sanna J. Thomson, David E. Pollio, and Lynda Bitner in 2000. This is an exploratory study, looking for relationships between the socio-demographic variables of runaway and homeless youth who used community services. The purpose of this study was to evaluate outcomes of services provided in St. Louis, Missouri. Seventy youth consented to participate following discharge from one of the three agencies for a three month period (November 1996 through January 1997). Of the participants, 48 percent were African American and the mean age was 14.8 with 54 percent attending school regularly, 23 percent sporadically, and five percent had graduated high school or completed a GED. The participants reported that 72 percent had their last permanent residences with parents or guardians, 16 percent with other relatives, three percent in foster care, three percent in residential treatment centers, five percent in group homes or transitional living facilities. No significant differences were found in school status, employment status, primary living situation, or number of days on the run between admission and three months post-discharge. The most notable finding was that youth returning home have a broad range of positive outcomes relative to youth discharged to other locations.

J. Curtis McMillen and Jayne Tucker published *The Status of Older Adolescents at Exit from Out-of-home Care*, Child Welfare, LXVII, 3, 339-360 in 1999. The study assesses the exit status of a sample of 252 randomly selected older youths leaving out-of-home care in Missouri. Information in the study included family problems, educational and employment status at discharge, involvement in independent skills classes, reason for release from custody, and whether the youth was a parent. Youths were leaving foster care through unplanned discharges, living with relatives at the time of release, and were leaving without jobs or without completing high school. The study showed that 33.4 percent of the participants completed high school, 5.6 percent had completed a GED, 45.2 percent left care without a job and without completing high school, and 20 percent of females left pregnant or as a parent. The most common living arrangement after care was with relatives. The second most common was on their own. Some 63 percent left care through unplanned exits. Youths who had fewer placements or who completed school had a higher probability of being employed. Those with fewer placements and without criminal or substance problems were more likely to leave in a planned way.

In 1999, the U.S. General Accounting Office published *Foster Care, Challenges in Helping Youth Live Independently: Statement of Cynthia Fagnoni before the Subcommittee on Human Resources, Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives*, which was the public testimony provided by the Director of Education, Workforce, and Income Security Issues, Health, Education, and Human Services Division. The report evaluated Independent Living Programming (ILP) that was an outcome of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993, which authorized \$70 million per year for states to implement ILPs. Testimony included information resulting from onsite visits to independent living programs in California, Maryland, New York, and Texas. Youth leaving foster care are going back home, being adopted, or living independently. The question was asked as to whether ILPs are preparing youth aging out of care to live independently. The report cited the findings of the Westat Study (1991), and others previously included in this literature review (Barth, 1990 and Courtney and Piliavin, 1998). The report emphasized the importance of evaluating programs to determine their outcomes.

The 1991 Westat study of 810 youth interviewed 2.5 to 4 years after they left care found that: 46 percent had not completed high school, 51 percent were unemployed, 62 percent had not maintained a job for at least a year, 40 percent were a cost to the community, 25 percent were homeless at least one night, and 42 percent had birthed or fathered a child.

Areas that were identified for improvement were: seeking out greater employment opportunities for youth; developing real-life practice opportunities or esteem-building experiences; developing employment pathways; providing more vocational opportunities and more apprenticeships (Texas offers statewide tuition waivers for all state-supported vocational, technical, and postsecondary schools); devising ways to link youth to potential employers; providing more life skills classes, mentoring programs; and transitional living homes for youth to practice skills and build self-worth.

Also in 1999, the U.S. General Accounting Office published *Foster Care, Effectiveness of Independent Living Services Unknown: Report to the Honorable Nancy L. Johnson, U.S. House of Representatives*. The report studied relevant literature, interviewed state and federal officials and experts in ILP, and 1998 annual ILP reports from the states to determine the effects of ILPs on the ability of youth to live independently. It was determined that the content and quality of the annual state reports varied and provided little information regarding program outcomes.

Recommendations were made to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) concerning the need to enhance HHS and state accountability for preparing youth for independent living. A contract was issued in 1998 to analyze ten years of annual state ILP reports to determine which states are producing good ILP outcomes. The University of Wisconsin Study results and the Westat Study results, previously reviewed in this literature review, were cited.

This report emphasizes the serious educational deficits, the lack of training, and preparedness for employment of foster care youth. Concern is also expressed regarding the dependence of youth on public assistance.

Table 2 provides an aggregation of the information on the specific services states reported to HHS in 1998.

Table 2: Specific Services Reported by State to HHS in 1998

Type of Services Reported by States in 1998	Number of States	Reported by Michigan
Specific Education Services		
High School or GED (example-tutoring)	26	
Vocational (may include testing or referral)	28	
Postsecondary (may include educational planning, assistance obtaining financial aid or college admission, or college testing preparation.	33	✓
Specific Employment Services		
Job Readiness (can include information on how to prepare for a job, such as resume preparation or job applications, or how to maintain employment)	28	
Job Search	25	
Job Training	9	✓
Job Placement	18	✓
Specific Daily Living Skills Training		
Money Management (can include instruction in budgeting or opening a bank or credit card account)	34	
Health and Safety (can include information about substance abuse, hygiene, parenting, first aid, and leisure)	34	✓
Locating and Maintaining Housing	33	
Food and Nutrition (can include information about how to shop for groceries or prepare and cook food)	21	
Community Resources (can include information about access to resources such as medical care, legal services transportation, and recreation)	29	✓
Career Planning	22	
Social Skills (can include activities to improve self-esteem, interpersonal relationships, problem solving, leadership, and sexual responsibility)	37	

Type of Services Reported by States in 1998	Number of States	Reported by Michigan
Specific Financial Assistance		
Stipends and Incentives (can include incentives for completing training or units of training in daily living skills)	23	
Education Tuition (includes tuition waivers or scholarships)	21	
Other Education Expenses (includes books, training materials, uniforms, college exam fees, and college application fees)	20	
Transportation Expenses (can include fares for buses, trains, or airplanes, gas for youths' automobiles)	20	✓
Start-up Assistance Items (includes utility deposits, or household items such as furniture, dishes, linens)	26	✓

Source: U.S. General Accounting Office, *Foster care, Effectiveness of Independent Living Services Unknown: Report to the Honorable Nancy L. Johnson, U.S. House of Representatives*

Although assistance is provided for education and employment services, states did not provide services that fully matched youths to appropriate employment pathways. Mentoring services were identified as one method of providing youth with a vocational role model and social support. Few state reports addressed the effectiveness of services and outcomes for youths. Some 29 states attempted to contact youth for follow-up; 4 states were successful and eight states provided copies of completed studies.

Three local studies were cited that showed the positive impact of ILP services and linked participation in ILP with improved education, housing, and other outcomes. Local studies occurred in Baltimore, Houston, and New York. The 1991 Westat Study was again cited as a national study that found that services provided by ILPs have the potential to improve outcomes for youth.

In 1999, Cheryl Boddy Oakman completed her doctoral dissertation at Bryn Mawr entitled *Readiness for Independent Living: A Multiple Case Study Analysis of Foster Care Youth*. (Illinois Department/Library, LaSalle University). Her work identifies the significant variables that contribute to readiness for independent living prior to the age of 21 and attempts to explore and understand the contextual conditions of a youth's environment. The study was conducted in Philadelphia with 23 youth who met criteria for inclusion in the sample from a list of the City of Philadelphia's Department of Human Services Family and Children's Tracking system. They were 15 years of age or over and in placement as of December 1995. Focused intensive interviews were conducted with the youth, their caretakers, social workers, life skills educators, service providers, mentors, relatives, and biological families as well as analysis of life history documents and case records. Youth were assessed as ready for independent living, dependent with potential, questionable readiness, or dependent and not ready. The number of youth who were ready for independent living at the age of 21 was far outweighed by the number of youth who appeared not to be ready, with three youth ready for independent living, eight youth dependent with potential, three youth questionable readiness, nine youth dependent and not ready. The three identified as ready had traumatic childhood experiences, as had all other participants, but battled adverse situations with strength and resilience. These youth were assessed to be socially competent, problem solvers, believed in a future, used resources, and had caring adults present.

Gerald P. Mallon's 1998 article, *Aftercare, Then What? Outcomes of an Independent Living Program*, *Child Welfare*, LXXVII(1), 61-78, evaluates the effectiveness of an independent living program and measures outcomes for the New York City independent living program operated by Green Chimneys Children's Services. The study follows 46 youth who were discharged between December 1987 and December 1994 and had been discharged for more than six months. Data

collection showed that 74 percent of the sample completed high school or a GED and eight of the 46 had some college education. Non-completion of school for African-American youths was 20 percent which is better than the non-completion of 24.5 percent reported by the Department of Education. The 74 percent completion is also more favorable than other reported graduation rates. Also, 72 percent had full-time employment at discharge, ten left without employment and eight of these ten left without completing high school or a GED.

In 1995, Mark E. Courtney, Irving Piliavin, and Andrew Grogan-Kaylor published *The Wisconsin Study of Youth Aging Out-of-home Care: A Portrait of Children About to Leave*, through the School of Social Work, University of Wisconsin at Madison. This is wave one of the Wisconsin Study, which examined the conditions of 157 youth in foster care as they were about to exit care between February and May 1995. They were 17 or 18 years old and had been in care for 18 months. Some 87 percent agreed with the statement that “foster parents have been a help to me” while 50 percent felt the same way toward social workers. Some 85 percent stated they were educated about personal health care, job seeking and decision-making. Some 90 percent were attending high schools, with less than half completing it by the close of the academic year 1994-1995. The majority of the youth desired to complete high school and enter and complete college, however, 30 percent had failed to complete a grade and almost 37 percent reported having been in a special education class. Scores on the Mental Health Inventory indicated that foster care youth may suffer more psychological distress than is typical for this age group.

Mark E. Courtney, Irving Piliavin, Andrew Grogan-Kaylor, and Ande Nesmith’s 1998 study, *Foster Care Transitions to Adulthood: Outcomes 12 to 18 months After Leaving Out-of-home Care*, was conducted under the auspices of the School of Social Work, University of Wisconsin at Madison. The study, which is Wave 2 of the Wisconsin Study, explores the experiences and adjustments of youth after they are discharged from foster care in the state of Wisconsin. Wave 1 looked at youth while residing in foster care between February and May 1995. Wave 2 focused on youth 12 to 18 months after exiting care in 1996 and 1997. The study follows 113 youth, which represents 80 percent of those interviewed in Wave 1. Eight percent of the males and 19 percent of the females had parented children in the intervening period. Some 55 percent of youth had completed high school, 37 percent had not, and nine percent had entered college. A quarter to a third of the youth reported their lack of preparedness in several skill areas: obtaining a job and managing money, securing housing, not being prepared to live on their own, getting health information, and parenting. A minority of participants experienced situations that were seriously dangerous to their well being and transition to independence. Twenty-five percent of the males and 15 percent of the females experienced some kind of serious physical and sexual victimization while 27 percent of the males and ten percent of the females were incarcerated at least once after discharge.

J. Curtis McMillen, Gregory B. Rideout, Rachael H. Fisher, Jayne Tucker published *Independent Living Services: The View of Former Foster Care Youth in Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services*, 78, 471-479 in 1997. This study seeks to understand what a sample of 25 former foster care youth think about the independent living programs and the services that they had received through the Missouri Division of Family Services (DFS). These young adults, ages 18-23 years old, participated in independent living skills classes while in foster care. Several positive aspects of independent living programs were identified: reduces stigma and isolation, instructs in financial matters, helpfulness of skills classes, helpfulness of independent stipend. Their foster parents were seen as helpful, DFS caseworkers were not seen as helpful, independent living specialists were seen as helpful, alternative care was seen as intrusive, and leaving care was a tough transition.

In 1996, Mark E. Courtney and Richard P. Barth's article *Pathways of Older Adolescents Out of Foster Care: Implications for Independent Living Services*, *Social Work*, 41, 75-83, appeared. The study examines various ways that older adolescents leave foster care and the predictors of those exits. This article studies the final discharge outcomes for an exit cohort of 2,653 foster youth in California who had experienced a final discharge from foster care between July 1, 1991 and December 31, 1992. They were at least 17 years of age at exit and had spent at least 18 months in foster care. A striking finding of this analysis is that 16.8 percent of youths, regardless of race or gender, who have already spent 18 months in care would eventually be placed with 'family.' Over four-fifths of the youth returned to their biological family. This finding led the researchers to question whether some of these youth should have been removed in the first place or returned in a more-timely manner. It may be the case that long-term foster care residents who maintain ties to their families do better as adults than those who do not retain strong connections. Current child welfare casework practice often neglects the assessment and maintenance of kinship ties for long-term foster care residents. This study suggests that multiple moves in and out of the foster care system are linked to an increased likelihood of an unsuccessful outcome at exit from care. Youths who experienced failed reunifications appeared to remain unsettled. The number of placements while in care was not related to discharge outcome. Youths discharged from foster care after a longer stay function better than those who experienced relatively shorter stays. It appears that the longer the amounts of time youths spend in care, the less likely they are to go home to their families. A foster youth's final home while in foster care appears to be strongly associated with how he or she exits care. The study found that broadening the concept of permanency planning to incorporate a continuum of independent living services will involve redefining certain service delivery components and expanding some resources. It asserted that this realignment should include kinship, stability of foster care experience, time spent in foster care and type of placement at discharge from care.

Richard P. Barth's 1990 article, *On their own: The experiences of youth after foster care* in *Child and Adolescent Social Work*, 7(5), 419-440, is a descriptive study that assesses the current experiences and situations of former foster care youth. The purpose of the study was to increase knowledge in order to recommend policy to facilitate the transition of foster care youth to independence. The study followed 55 San Francisco Bay Area youth who had left foster care one year prior to the study and who were at least 16 years old at the time of emancipation. Interviews sought to identify strategies and successes in coping with the stressors foster care youth faced. The mean age of participants was 21 years. Mean age of entry into the foster care system was 12 and mean age for leaving was 17.6. On the average, youth lived in three foster care homes. The longest placement was forty months and was most often not with a relative. Some 75 percent of the participants were employed, 87 percent began work before they left foster care, and 29 percent indicated that lack of education/skills was the greatest barrier to obtaining the work they wanted. Some 53 percent had serious money problems and 33 percent had done something illegal to get money. Eighty-nine percent reported contact with their foster family after leaving care and 65 percent reported contact with their birth family while in care.

Some 55 percent of the youth left care without a high school degree. The 43 percent who had completed high school at the time of leaving care had continued with further education or training. All together, 73 percent went on to further training or school. Most youth indicated no life skills training while in care or since. Sixty-two percent of the youth had health or medical coverage. Overall, they rated foster care experiences between neutral and "somewhat" good. Fifty-six percent reported using street drugs at the time of the interview, 31 percent had been arrested, and 26 percent had spent time in jail or prison. Forty-five percent reported that it was somewhat harder for youth who had been in foster care to live on their own. Twenty-nine percent reported

having no home or were moving every week or so. On the average, youth lived in six places since emancipation, with one youth in as many as sixty places. Sixty-four percent had worries about running out of money for food. One-hundred percent had high depression scores. Forty-seven percent had been on Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) or general assistance. Results of this study show that foster care youth need a comprehensive program to prepare them for emancipation includes educational counseling and tutoring. It also asserts that foster care youth who are continuing into higher education should also be eligible to remain in state care until the age of 21 and the state should provide stipends for educational needs.

Randall K. Davis and Christi T. Barrett's 2000 article, *Bridges for Former Systems Youths in Families in Society*, 81(5), 538-542, considered youths aging out of the foster care system in Detroit, and acknowledged there are few supports in place after the age of 19 to assist youth with this transition. The Bridges toward Responsible Adulthood (BTRA) is a transition program for youth aging out of care that started in 1997 and was implemented by Starr Commonwealth. Between June 1998 and May 1999, 95 youth were served who were single parents; the average age was 20, most of who were from the greater Detroit metro area. Once young people leave BTRA, they participate in face-to-face interviews at three, six, and twelve-month intervals. The response rate is between 60 percent and 66 percent. A comparison between three and six-month follow-ups provided the following information:

Ninety percent of the 32 youth contacted were employed full-time three months after the program compared with a 100 percent of the 15 youth contacted 6 months after. The average hourly rate of pay three months after was \$7.50; average rate of pay at six months was \$9.71. Three months after BTRA, 76 percent of the youth were either partially or fully financially responsible for their living arrangements; at six months, all 15 participants who were contacted were fully responsible. Eighty-six percent of the 32 youth contacted three months after BTRA were not at risk of homelessness; at six months, 89 percent of the 15 youth contacted (16%) indicated the same. Three months after BTRA, 84 percent reported living arrangements were adequate; at six months, 91 percent contacted reported the same. Eighty percent, regardless of time, had transportation to work, sufficient money, were healthy, and had adequate clothes and furnishings. One out of 17 women either at three or six months was pregnant. Ninety-five percent of the young people revealed no official evidence of court jurisdiction thus demonstrating successful outcomes for the small number of youth who were contacted.

In summary, in recent years there have been a number of articles and reports addressing youth transitioning out of foster care. These studies detail the challenges that these youth face and the responses by agencies and governments. Although valuable, the financial management and basic skills associated with traditional independent living programs are not enough. Young adults enter a complex world that requires navigation skills, emotional maturity, interpersonal skills, and social skills. The support of caring adults and mentors and sufficient confidence to proceed are also essential qualities of resiliency identified in interviews with former foster care youth. Although the majority of foster care youth want to go to college, only a small percentage makes it into postsecondary education. The next section will address some of the supports and issues related to acquiring an advanced education that correlates with future employment and income levels.

POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION OPTIONS

Education opens doors to many types of careers. Youth who have been in foster care face more barriers to accessing postsecondary education opportunities than most other youth. The most obvious barrier is financial. Families usually assist their children with tuition, housing, co-signing loans, completing applications, campus visit tours, reference books, and professional

counselors. Youth in care often do not have access to this type of assistance. They most likely do not have the option of 'living at home' while going to school locally. They do not have a credit history upon which to rely for loans.

Most youth who have been in foster care lack knowledge about their options once they graduate from high school. They often do not know where to turn to get information about financial aid programs available to them and how to complete applications to maximize their chances of success. Youth who do not have relationships with adults who can expose them to a wide range of career options and who can counsel them on the types of education and training required to attain their goals are at an obvious disadvantage. They can become frustrated or disillusioned with trying to obtain information while also maintaining their daily activities.

One problem with the current types of financial aid is that in many states, they are not well publicized because they are from private scholarships or are small-scale public programs. Unless the foster care youth is connected to someone who has extensive knowledge of financial aid sources, procedures and eligibility criteria, there is a distinct possibility that the youth will bypass postsecondary education because he or she will assume there is no way to pay for it. In states such as Kentucky, which has a generous financial aid package for foster care youth, there is more of a chance that guidance counselors, independent living program staff, case workers, and foster parents are aware of the programs and can direct the youth to apply to them.

Youth can succeed when provided with the right tools. For example, Adam Cornell of Seattle, Washington, did not think about going to college until his best friends and a favorite teacher convinced him that he could succeed. Cornell states, "College is not something people talk to foster children about. They don't grow up with that cultural expectation." Mr. Cornell graduated from Georgetown University and Lewis and Clark College Law School. He was a law clerk at the Juvenile Rights Project in Portland where he helped author legislation to provide free tuition for Oregon foster children who go to state schools.¹

Another foster care youth, Alfred Perez of Contra Costa County, California, lived in eleven group homes in four years. His independent living program helped him apply to college. Mr. Perez states, "I only applied because I knew there were dorms on campus and I knew if I got in, I would have somewhere to live. I was so afraid of being homeless." Mr. Perez credits his independent living program for its support as he applied to schools. The program provided information to the schools to make them aware of Mr. Perez's history in foster care and made sure he was able to receive "the full benefits of financial aid." He used a Pell Grant to pay for much of his tuition and a job as a resident assistant took care of housing. He also had scholarships from a local non-profit organization and the county human services department for youth in transition. Mr. Perez received a Bachelors degree in Social Work from San Jose State University and is currently studying in the Masters of Social Work program at the University of Michigan.

In Michigan, there is no statewide program that specifically targets the postsecondary education of foster care youth; however, they have access to the Tuition Incentive Program (TIP). TIP targets youth who have been Medicaid eligible for 24 months of a 36 consecutive month period. TIP pays tuition and mandatory fees at participating colleges in pursuit of an Associate's degree or certificate (Phase I). It also pays \$500 per semester/\$400 per term up to a maximum of \$2,000 in pursuit of a Bachelor's degree (Phase II). Students must apply prior to high school graduation or GED completion and may apply as early as the sixth grade. They must be less than 20 years old at the time they graduate from high school or complete their GED. TIP must be combined with any other financial aid for which the student qualifies. TIP does not pay for college application fees and must be used in Michigan.

As a frame of reference, 2002-2003 tuition at Michigan State University is \$179.75 per credit hour for freshman and sophomores and \$200.50 for juniors and seniors and matriculation

fees are \$354 per semester for students enrolled in more than four credit hours (\$290 for four or fewer). The MSU estimated cost of attending in academic year 2002-2003 was \$13,572 which includes tuition, housing, meals, books and supplies. TIP award amounts have not increased since 1991 although tuition rates have increased substantially. TIP's first year of making tuition payments was in 1988-1989 when it paid approximately \$800,000. It doubled in 1989-1990 to \$1.5 million. TIP payments made to colleges in 1999-2000 were approximately \$3 million and rose to \$5 million in 2000-2001. The number of TIP awards for 1999-2000 was 2,951, for 2000-2001 there were 3,474 awards, and for 2001-2002 there were 4,285 awards.

Table 3 provides tuition assistance information for the eight Midwestern states examined in this study. Only two of the states, Kentucky and Minnesota, have a mechanism for granting tuition waivers. In Minnesota, the university presidents have the authority to waive tuition for youth under the age of 21 who have been under the custody of the Department of Human Services; after that, the youth can petition for continuation of the waiver until they complete their programs. In Kentucky, tuition assistance to committed youth from the Cabinet for Families and Children pays for direct school expenses such as tuition, room, books, and fees, as well as clothing and incidentals. The Kentucky tuition waiver began in 2001 and allows students who are, or who have been, in custody of either the Kentucky Cabinet for Families and Children or the Kentucky Department of Juvenile Justice to apply to have tuition and mandatory student fees waived.

Table 3: Comparison of Tuition Payment Programs for Youth Who are, or have been, in Care

Program Elements	Michigan	Wisconsin	Nebraska	Kentucky	Illinois	Iowa	Ohio	Minnesota
Tuition Waiver State	No	No	No	Yes Program (described in previous narrative)	No	No	No	Yes Program (described in previous narrative)
Scholarships, Tuition Payment and Other Programs	Tuition Incentive Program (described in previous narrative)	\$100,000 scholarship fund given on a one-time-only basis	Independent Living program assists with some costs such as rent, while a ward or former ward pursues college but does not assist with tuition		48 scholarships per year awarded by DFS. Scholarships are up to 4 years of tuition and academic fee for state universities in Illinois, with a \$445 monthly stipend and medical card	\$300,000 scholarship fund, piloting 20 grants to youth between \$2,000 and \$4,000	Some counties levy funds to assist youth. Counties are required to explore and then coordinate services with other community resources such as grants and scholarships	

Sources: National Resource Center for Youth Services, College of Continuing Education; University of Oklahoma, staff from Office of the System Advocate, Nebraska health and Human Services System; staff from Ohio Department of Job and Family Services.

Pell Grants are the only federal aid that students do not have to repay. Most foster care youth should be eligible for these grants which are based on need. Most independent living programs, regardless of whether they offer other state-sponsored assistance, encourage the youth to apply for Pell Grants. For the 2002-2003 award year, the Pell Grants can provide full-time students with up to \$4,000. They can be used for tuition and school-related expenses such as dormitory fees, books and campus food plans. At 2002-2003 rates, tuition and matriculation fees for a baccalaureate degree at Michigan State University consisting of 120 hours would cost \$25,647 of which very low-income students could qualify for as much as \$16,000 in Pell Grants. Three states, Georgia, Louisiana, and Missouri, cover a youth's educational expenses that are not

paid for by the Pell Grant. The aging-out youth should also be eligible for Stafford Loans, depending on whether they have income.ⁱⁱ

A barrier to financial aid can be the completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FASFA) which is required for all federal financial aid programs. The FASFA is complicated and uses terms like ‘orphan’ or ‘ward of the court’ with which the youth might not identify, in which case they could miss out on some aid for which they are eligible. However, the youth can seek assistance to complete the application.

The *High School Counselor’s Handbook for 2003-2004 Federal Student Aid* published by the Department of Education includes a section on opportunities for disadvantaged students. It states that "recent studies show that students and parents from low-income families are less likely to be informed about student financial aid than those from relatively well-off families." It attempts to dispel four commonly held myths pertaining to financial aid:

- There isn’t enough financial aid for students like me;
- Only students with good grades get financial aid – most federal programs do not consider grades but look for satisfactory academic progress;
- You have to be a minority to get financial aid – federal awards are based on financial need not minority status. The FASFA does not even collect this information; and
- Millions of dollars in scholarships go unclaimed/unawarded each year so I’ll get some of that money. I won’t need government help – the majority of postsecondary student aid comes from the federal government. The FASFA is an important first step for any student. Some states and institutions award aid based on FASFA information.

The Handbook includes a table of unemployment rates based on educational achievement. The information in Table 4 presents a clear picture of the advantages of postsecondary education. It demonstrates that both employment levels and earnings increase with the level of education.

Table 4: Unemployment and Earnings for Fulltime Workers Age 25 and Over by Educational Status

Education Attained	Unemployment Rate in 2000	Average Earnings in 2000
Less than a high school diploma	6.4 %	\$22,152
High school graduate, no college	3.5 %	\$30,680
Some college, no degree	2.9 %	\$35,880
Associate degree	2.3 %	\$36,660
Bachelor’s degree	1.8 %	\$53,248
Master’s degree	1.6 %	\$61,048
Doctorate	.9 %	\$73,320
Professional degree	.9 %	\$83,304

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, unpublished data.

The Handbook also has information about federal government early-intervention programs under the Department of Education’s TRIO programs. These programs are designed to prepare disadvantaged students to be able to enter and complete postsecondary education. These programs include: Upward Bound, Talent Search, Student Support Services, and Educational Opportunity Centers. In addition, to the TRIO programs, the GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) Program was created in 1998 to ‘encourage low-income students to have high expectations, stay in school, study hard, and take the

right courses to prepare for college.ⁱⁱⁱ These are all programs for which youth aging out of foster care should qualify.

Ten states – Alabama, Delaware, Iowa, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oregon, South Dakota, and Wisconsin – offer scholarships to foster youth who have successfully completed their secondary education and wish to pursue further schooling. The financial benefits vary from \$500 per year to full tuition. Some of the scholarships are competitive, some are limited in number and others are available to any foster youth who qualifies. Other states offer limited, case-by-case assistance for special training and short-term vocational courses.

Fifteen states including California, Oregon, Texas, Florida, Massachusetts, and Virginia, currently have postsecondary education available through tuition waivers. In this study, Kentucky is an example of a concerted effort by a state to provide a whole package – tuition, housing, and ancillary expenses. Other states offer scholarships, albeit small ones or very few of them, to youth in foster care.

California has the Higher Education Outreach and Assistance Act for Emancipated Foster Youth that provides a variety of other supports for youth. The governing boards of all state universities and community colleges are charged with expanding access and retention programs directed at emancipated foster youth. They are to accommodate unusual housing needs, provide technical assistance and advice to campuses to improve outreach and delivery of services and track retention of emancipated foster youth. Other state organizations work to publicize opportunities and services.

Another example of a state tuition waiver is the Massachusetts Educational Financial Aid Proposal for Adoptive and Foster Children passed June 20, 2000. It provides state college tuition waivers for Department of Social Services (DSS) foster and adoptive youth. It expands higher education financial assistance to *current* DSS foster children by providing 50 percent of the cost of attendance at a state school. To be eligible for expanded financial aid, a foster child must meet all of the following requirements: the youth is a current foster child who was placed in the custody of the State through a Care and Protection Petition; the youth is age 24 or under; the youth has been in the custody of the State for at least one full year; the youth contributes to his/her educational costs through enrollment in a work-study program; and the youth attends college full time.

U.S. Public Law 107-133, signed January 17, 2002, reauthorizes and amends the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Act. One of the provisions of the law authorizes \$60 million annually under the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) for vouchers for youth in foster care to attend an institution of higher education. Through CFCIP, states can provide up to \$5,000 per year to eligible youth to pay for attendance at accredited public or private colleges, universities or vocational training institutions until the youth reaches age 23.

Since a large number of former foster care youth receive public assistance, studies that examine the ability to access postsecondary education for recipients of assistance can be used as a means of gaining insights into the barriers these youth experience when they attempt to further their educations. In fact, major avenues of support for the youth are the Family Independence Program (FIP) and Work First. A study entitled, *Access and Barriers to Postsecondary Education Under Michigan's Welfare to Work Policies*, was published by the Coalition for Independence Through Education (CFITE) in February 2002.^{iv} The report states that "research overwhelmingly demonstrates that postsecondary education is the most effective way for a low-income person to become self-sufficient through long-term employment and thus secure her family's well being."

The report cites a survey conducted in 2001 of parents who attended postsecondary education while receiving assistance. The summarized results of the survey show that Michigan's Work First participants experience:

- A lack of encouragement for education from FIP workers and Work First staff;
- A negative impact on academic performance and parenting when parents attend postsecondary education while they must still meet work requirements;
- A lack of access to subsidized quality child care during the time spent in class and studying; and
- A lack of information about education opportunities.

Fewer than three percent of Work First participants are in approved education or training programs, which include remedial or basic education, GED, vocational programs and postsecondary education. Approval for education programs to replace some of the work requirements is difficult to obtain from case workers. Approval must be granted in order to access ancillary supports such as payment of some child care expenses. As was shown previously, many of the youth who have been in foster care parent a child while still quite young. The lack of access to affordable, quality child care presents a major barrier to advancing their education and ability to become self-sufficient.

Additional postsecondary information was provided in foster care, case management, and coordination. Workers conducted assessments of youth in each state to determine their educational needs and route them to the required services available in the particular area. The state plans mentioned various financial aid programs that are awarded to youth on a limited, competitive basis within each state.

VOICES OF MICHIGAN YOUTH

At present, very few foster youth go on to college. A number of youth who were formerly in foster care in Michigan were interviewed to gain an understanding of what the experience is like for them. They were asked to identify external and internal resources that allow them to overcome many of the barriers they encounter. A summary of the interviews shows that the results fall into two categories; external factors that effect the youth and internal factors that help or hinder their progress. The youths' own words are used to describe these factors and their impact on them. Individual interviews were conducted by Dr. Rosalind Folman with youth who were referred by child welfare agency personnel or identified in response to ads in college newspapers. All interviews were conducted in community settings in the fall of 2002 and early in 2003.

External factors

The former foster youth who were interviewed identified several external resources that have assisted them as they pursue their education and issues that presented barriers:

- Good School – For some of the youth, their school provided the environment to get them on a path toward college.

“Our school counselors would make sure we were taking all the right classes to make sure we would get into college. We had a career resource center in our high school where I can look up careers I was thinking about. The lady there would give you college applications. We had people coming from colleges to us. I knew the only way to make it and to have what I want is to go to college.”

- Special Teacher or Others with High Expectations – In addition to a good school, having someone identify that they are "college material" allows the youth to see themselves as capable of going to college.

“In my junior or senior year, my English teacher asked me if I thought about being a teacher. At that point, a light went off that questioned, just how smart are you?”

“My relatives had the expectation that I would go to college. Even the staff in my group home had the expectation that I would go to college. No one knew what I was studying, but all expected me to go to college.”

“My aunt and uncle (who were her foster parents) went to college. She’s a teacher. He’s an engineer. She would take me on college tours. I realized the only way to make it is to go to college.”

- Special Programs – Programs targeted at low-income or at-risk youth can be especially helpful.

“In my junior year, I learned about Upward Bound. That’s a federally funded program for poor kids with a goal to inform students about college. I heard about it from one of my classmates who were in the program. They really prepare students to enter into college.”

- Family Support – A commonality that emerged among current college students who grew up in care was the presence of an emotional support system when they aged out. For most of the youth, it was their birth families to which they turned when in need of comfort.

“My birth mother is the person I know is always going to like me. She lets me down all the time, but I know she’s always going to like me. She’s always there for emotional support if I need it. Or if I feel crappy or just want to bitch about something, I call my mom.”

- Financial Information – Supporting themselves while in college is a major issue for youth who aged out of care. It is reportedly the main reason for former foster youth to drop out of college. Being provided with the necessary information about available funding can mean the difference between planning and not planning to attend college and, once in college, between graduating and dropping out.

“I knew that I would be able to get scholarships because I was a foster kid. My foster parents always told me that. My school counselor in high school told me about FASFA. When I filled out FASFA, I don’t have to claim my foster parents, so for my income I just write zero. That’s how I get money to pay for tuition. The government tells the college how much I need and the college offers me scholarships to pay for tuition. Then I take out loans to pay for rent and books and living expenses.”

“If I have a money problem now, I don’t know where I’d go. I can’t have a money problem. I don’t have a back up plan. This is it. If my car dies or if I have a big medical expense, I’m finished. That’s why I have a budget. That’s why I’m conscious of how much everything costs. It can’t go wrong.”

“At my college, there is no one I could turn to and I wasn’t getting any information about financial help that would lead me to believe that there is someone who would help. I even called back to my agency and asked, ‘do you guys have any suggestions to help me.’ They said no. I called my FIA worker and that didn’t help. She said I was 18 and on my own now. I was just a smart-mouthed kid to her. I thought I would get more help from FIA than my agency, but it was the same. When the case is done, the worker is done with it and they move on.”

“Nobody explained the financial stuff to me. No one explained the work/study money to me. I thought if I worked it was my money. I didn’t know it was supposed to go for my tuition. So I spent it. I felt I earned it, so I spend it. So I was kicked out of school and my dorm. I didn’t have any place to stay. I needed someone to help me. There was nothing set up, nothing at the school and no kind of family support so I had to beg my way back into school. I cried for two weeks to get into school. Then I took out another loan to get back into school.”

- Encouragement and Support – Some of the youth expressed frustration with the level of encouragement and support they received from the adults in their lives. “The group home staff didn’t value school. They couldn’t help you with your homework. They didn’t encourage you to get a tutor. I felt like I was on my own. Most of the staff didn’t go to college.” “The teachers didn’t help at my high school. The expectation was you go to college, but no one told me what to do.”

Internal Factors

The former foster youth identified several internal resources that have assisted them as they pursued their education as well as those that were hindrances:

- Motivation and Goal Setting – This was one of the most important factors for the former foster youth. Some knew what they wanted and knew they needed college to attain it.

“I am here to be an art major and you can’t really do much without an art degree. I have to have more training to do better.”

“I just made a goal for myself that I wanted to continue my education because I didn’t want to be in poverty my whole life...Nothing stopped me because I always had that goal that when I become successful that I’m going to help my biological family.”

- Effective Coping – Several youth spoke of coping strategies that were effective in helping to overcome some of the stressors in care and go on to college.

“Some foster parents would say to me that I’m never going to make it even though I was doing well in school. I would just ignore them and go to my room and read a book. I was determined to prove them wrong. I was determined to be the best that I could be.”

“I was in denial about my eye disease. I said I was going to be like regular students and be in regular classes. I felt that I could just do anything I put my mind to. I’m not special ed. I can learn quickly and fast. I just need to be up close to see my work. I catch on quick. I’m an auditory learner. You tell me. I got it.”

- Past Successes – For some of the youth, school was a respite from the many stressors that came with being in care.

“School came sort of easy. Well, it was easier than having to deal with the people, any people, residents, staff, and my family.”

“I knew it was going to be hard living on my own but I always made it. I never totally failed at anything.”

“I always like to shine in school. I was on the honor roll. I was on the swim team. I tried out for lots of activities. I won the French award.”

- Inability to Reach Out for Help – The need for school administrators to be proactive is often essential for helping youth formerly in care. These youth are often afraid to seek out guidance and information concerning their financial problems for fear someone might find out they have been in foster care. Also, many foster youth have been repeatedly betrayed by the adults in their lives and do not trust adults, which makes them very reluctant to seek assistance of any kind. However, there are those who learn to advocate for their own needs.

“I didn’t ask to see anyone for help because the agency really soured me on people helping me. Then, when I was 16, I found my own therapist but at 18 and no longer getting health care, she dropped me. So my trust really went down. I don’t trust anyone.”

“If I need help with anything, I immediately find out where I can get help. I go to professors, tutors, study groups, any one out there who can help me with my problems.”

“I really don’t want to deal with the agency. Whether they can help me with my education, which I doubt, but no one has brought it up. No one has asked me what I’m going to do when I turn 18, planning nothing. If they don’t care, I don’t need them to care. I’m not begging them to care about my situation. It’s whatever.”

“I don’t need help from anyone. I’m going to do this on my own. I don’t think I’d reach out to no one.”

“If you tell people that you’re in foster care, they have a different outlook on you. They feel foster kids are supposed to be bad. Not supposed to carry yourself with respect. That’s not me. I respect myself. I don’t want anyone feeling sorry for me. I don’t feel sorry for myself. I don’t need it.”

“When teachers find out I’m in foster care, they feel sorry for me. I wish they didn’t know.”

- Transition from Total System Control to Total Freedom – Many former foster youth never learned to negotiate or even to make decisions on their own. Until they age out of care, they are under the total control of foster care rules and regulations with decisions about every aspect of their lives made by case workers and the court. Foster youth do not have

the opportunity to learn the logistics of managing their lives. Then upon emancipation, they are suddenly on their own with no resources to handle their new independence.

“Group homes have structured time. After school, you have an hour for homework, an hour to eat, an hour for some planned activity to get rid of your excess energy and then you prepare for the next day. So I went from no responsibility for my life to having to look out for myself, planning a schedule for time to do homework, choosing courses, balancing a budget. All of a sudden when they suddenly released me, I had to plan every aspect of my day and how to make sure I accomplished what I needed to do.”

JOHN H. CHAFEE FOSTER CARE INDEPENDENCE PROGRAM

U.S. Public Law 106-169 was passed in December 1999. The law amends Title IV-E of the Social Security Act "to provide states with more funding and greater flexibility in carrying out programs designed to help children make the transition from foster care to self-sufficiency, and for other purposes." Section 477 of the law is the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP).^v This section targets children who, in all probability, will remain in foster care until they reach age 18, at which time they are no longer eligible for foster care and related services. The law recognizes the problems faced by children who have few natural supports available to them. Section 101 (a) states that about 20,000 adolescents leave foster care each year and that many of them have difficulty transitioning to adulthood. Homelessness, non-marital childbearing, poverty, delinquent or criminal behavior, and being the targets of crime and physical assault are cited as issues for these adolescents.

The Chafee Foster Care Independence Program was funded at \$140 million in fiscal years 2001, 2002 and 2003. The average state grant is \$2.7 million with the amount of grants ranging from \$500,000 (New Hampshire) to \$26.8 million (California). All 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico are eligible to receive CFCIP grants. In FY 2001, 52 grants were made and it is assumed the same number will be made for FY 2002 and FY 2003. Michigan's FY 2001 grant was \$6.1 million. The grants are based on a formula. Each state is allotted an amount derived from a ratio of the number of children it has in foster care to the total number of children in foster care in all states (reported to AFCARS). The federal government pays 80 percent of the total amount of the funds, less any penalties, up to the amount of CFCIP funds allotted to the state. The state must provide the remaining 20 percent in matching contributions.

The purpose of the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program is to provide: "financial, housing, counseling, employment, education, and other appropriate support and services to former foster care recipients between 19 and 21 years of age to complement their own efforts to achieve self-sufficiency and to assure that program participants recognize and accept their personal responsibility for preparing for, and then making, the transition from adolescence to adulthood."

States applied for Chafee funds by presenting state plans designed to meet the six requirements stipulated by the law. These requirements are:

- Design and deliver programs to achieve the purposes of the law;
- Ensure all political subdivisions of the state are served by the program;
- Ensure programs serve children of various ages and stages of achieving independence;
- Involve public and private sectors in helping the adolescents;

- Use objective criteria to determine eligibility for benefits and services and ensure fair and equitable treatment of recipients; and
- Cooperate in national evaluations of the effects of the programs.

Implementation of Chafee

This portion of the study assesses the implementation of the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program in eight Midwestern states: Michigan, Wisconsin, Nebraska, Kentucky, Illinois, Iowa, Ohio, and Minnesota. Since programs such as this are dynamic with changes being made quite frequently, the analysis looks at the state plans submitted to the federal government to provide a point in time assessment of their plans and activities. The study identifies key program elements common to several states as well as those that are unique to a specific state. This case study shows how these eight states interpreted the law to benefit the foster care youth in their states as they reach the age of majority.

A caution must be made regarding whether the program elements listed are provided in a specific state. Identification of a program element offered as a Chafee service is based on what was included in the state plans. A state might offer some of these elements under other programs and hence would not have included them in its State Plan. For example, employment services in Michigan for youth aging out of foster care are mostly provided under the auspices of Work First. Since Work First is paid for with other sources of funds, those services might not be reported in the state plan but are none-the-less available to the youth.

To put this study in perspective, Table 5 provides information regarding the number of children in foster care for each state. It also provides the amount of the CFCIP grant awarded in FY 2001.

Table 5: Number of Children in Foster Care on the Last Day of FY 2000 and the FY 2001 Amount of CFCIP Grants

	Michigan	Wisconsin	Nebraska	Kentucky	Illinois	Iowa	Ohio	Minnesota
Number of children in foster care (AFCARS)	20,034	10,148	5,674	6,152	33,125	5,068	20,365	8,530
Amount of CFCIP Grant (NRCYS)	\$6,109,567	\$2,380,832	\$1,293,213	\$1,332,019	\$9,413,899	\$1,134,717	\$4,693,625	\$2,102,991

Transition to Self-sufficiency

The transition to self-sufficiency for youth who are aging out of foster care involves assistance with accessing semi-independent and independent living arrangements. The mobilization into these living arrangements involves a partnership between the youth and the programs designed to provide the skills and tools necessary for them to live independent, productive adult lives. Table 6 lists program elements that have been identified among the eight states as key components to assist youth with the transition to self-sufficiency.

Table 6: Chafee Program Elements 2001-2004, Transition to Self-sufficiency

Program Elements	Michigan	Wisconsin	Nebraska	Kentucky	Illinois	Iowa	Ohio	Minnesota
Conduct assessment of skills and needs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Develop transition plans based on assessments	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Youth involvement in transition planning	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Training child care workers	✓	✓	✓	✓	*	✓	✓	✓
Training foster care parents and other care givers to work with youth on transition skills	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Program Elements	Michigan	Wisconsin	Nebraska	Kentucky	Illinois	Iowa	Ohio	Minnesota
Using foster care parents to train other foster care parents	*	*	*	✓	*	✓	*	*
Standardized training curriculum	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Follow up on transition status	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	*
Youth involved in local and state planning activities	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Collaboration with the state foster care parent association	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Media campaign regarding the expansion of transition services	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	*	✓
Case finding of youth likely to remain in FC until age 18	*	*	*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Independent Living Services and Supports information packet provided to all youth while in care	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	*

Source: 2001-2004 State Plans
 * state plans did not specify specific service

Employment Preparation

The services are in Table 7 provided to youth through various private and public agencies. When all other resources have been exhausted, Chafee funds are used.

Table 7: Chafee Program Elements 2001-2004, Employment Preparation

Program Elements	Michigan	Wisconsin	Nebraska	Kentucky	Illinois	Iowa	Ohio	Minnesota
Employment Enhancement Programs for Youth	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
• basic and remedial education	✓	*	*	✓	✓	*	✓	✓
• job readiness/work maturity skills	✓	✓	*	✓	✓	✓	✓	*
• on-the-job-training	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
• job search assistance	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Source: 2001-2004 State Plans
 *state plans did not specify the specific service

Many of the state plans discussed collaborative partnerships with a variety of agencies as a means to strengthen and increase employment enhancement programs for youth who have aged, or are in the process of aging, out of the foster care system.

- Michigan provides a summer employment program through Michigan Works! which is located in every county and provides employment and educational training services for youth 14-19 years of age.
- The Nebraska state plan addressed collaborative partnerships with the Workforce Development Youth Councils and the Job Corp Labor programs as well as Vocational Rehab, Youth Build, State Department of Education, School to Work and various public and private agencies. Preparation for Adult Living Specialists (PALS) in assist youth with setting employment-related goals and are responsible for conducting the assessments needed to place the youth in appropriate settings based on their needs and goals.
- Kentucky coordinates services with Comprehensive Family Services, Cabinet for Families and Children, and the Department for Juvenile Justice to assure that the training needs of youth is met to obtain desirable employment. Kentucky's state plan discussed partnerships with School to Work, Welfare to Work, and the Work Investment Board.

- Illinois' state plan describes the collaboration with the Departments of Employment and Commerce and Community to assist hundreds of youth with obtaining employment. Youth Employment Coordinators of Illinois assist the youth with obtaining jobs and resources within the state as well as facilitating communication among the various agencies involved in providing services to youth. Illinois has a partnership with the Alternative Schools Network that aids in finding secure job placements for eligible youth.
- Iowa's state plan discussed its collaborative relationships with the following agencies; Iowa Workforce Development, College Student Aid Commission, and the Youth Development Committee. Iowa's state plan addressed the importance of continued relations with school to work programs as a means to support youth willing to obtain employment.
- Ohio employs Public Children Service Agencies to assist youth with obtaining the skills necessary for employment and providing the assessments needed for accessing the appropriate services.

Postsecondary Training and Education Preparation

Foster care, case management, and coordination workers conduct assessments of youth in each state to determine their educational needs and route them to the required services available in the particular area. The state plans mentioned various financial aid programs that are awarded to youth on a limited, competitive basis within each state.

Table 8: Chafee Program Elements 2001-2004, Postsecondary Training and Education Preparation

Program Elements	Michigan	Wisconsin	Nebraska	Kentucky	Illinois	Iowa	Ohio	Minnesota
Financial Assistance	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
GED Preparation	✓	*	*	✓	✓	*	✓	✓
Tutoring	*	*	*	✓	✓	*	✓	*
Training (study skills)	✓	*	*	✓	✓	*	✓	✓

Source: 2001-2004 State Plans
 * state plans did not specify the specific service

Provision of Personal and Emotional Support

Each of the eight state plans addressed the importance of mentoring programs for youth as a means of providing support and encouraging interaction within the youth's community. The state plans also addressed the importance of expanding current mentoring programs and continuing to collaborate with various public and private agencies to provide as many appropriate support programs for youth as possible.

Table 9: Chafee Program Elements 2001-2004, Provision of Personal and Emotional Support

Program Elements	Michigan	Wisconsin	Nebraska	Kentucky	Illinois	Iowa	Ohio	Minnesota
Mentoring programs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Training programs for foster and adoptive parents to promote relationship building skills with youth	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Support groups for youth	*	*	*	✓	✓	✓	*	*
Assistance with obtaining community resources and support systems	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Source: 2001-2004 State Plans
 * state plans did not specify the specific service

Providing continued relationship-building training to foster and adoptive parents promotes healthy interactions with youth and helps youth feel connected within their communities. The state plans discussed the importance of promoting mentoring programs to attract caring adults within the communities to become foster care mentors.

Several state plans addressed specific programs used to promote supportive relationships for youth. Michigan and Nebraska use the Big Brothers/Big Sisters programs for youth. Nebraska discussed the referral program Parent Aide/Project Kids, which the state employs to match appropriate mentors with specific youth in a timely fashion. The Nebraska state plan stated that it will continue to employ mentoring programs built upon mutual interests of the adult mentor and youth, with a focus on skill coaching and job coaching.

Kentucky, Iowa, and Illinois have developed Youth Advisory Boards as a way for youth to discuss their concerns, interests, and questions with their peers. These groups promote interaction and friendships among youth. Illinois identified support groups, in addition to the Youth Advisory Board, such as the Youth in Care Network and the Rites of Passage Program for African American males. The Rites of Passage Program is Afrocentrically based and teaches the seven principles of Nguzo Saba as a living guide for African American males and promotes peer interaction.

Iowa is involved with the National Mentoring Partnership out of Washington D.C. and has hired staff specifically for mentoring programs. The Iowa state plan addressed the importance of providing youth with caring adults who are not receiving paychecks for their support of the youth. Iowa recognizes this as an important factor to consider when developing and promoting mentoring programs.

Ohio discussed involvement with outreach programs that have been developed to improve relationships with youth and their parents and assist with independent living arrangements. The Minnesota state plan discussed the Transitioning from Adolescence Project that has been developed to increase the effectiveness of services offered to youth.

Provision of Support and Services by Age Group

The state plans identified the importance of foster parents and child care providers implementing the services in Table 10 for the age groups of under 16 and 16-18. For the age group 18-20, support from caring adults was recognized as important; however, the focus was placed primarily on public and private agencies assisting the youth with implementing the required services and accessing resources within the community.

Table 10: Chafee Program Elements 2001-2004, Services by Age Group

Program Elements	Michigan	Wisconsin	Nebraska	Kentucky	Illinois	Iowa	Ohio	Minnesota
Under 16 years and 16-18 years	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
• life skills assessment								
• independent living skills curriculum	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
• independent living skills training for foster parents	*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
• access to community resources	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
• mentoring programs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
18-20 years	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
• Housing								
• Financial assistance	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Program Elements	Michigan	Wisconsin	Nebraska	Kentucky	Illinois	Iowa	Ohio	Minnesota
• Mental health services	✓	✓	*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
• Employment assistance	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
• Assistance obtaining higher education	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
• Mentoring	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
• Connections to community resources	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Source: 2001-2004 State Plans
 * state plans did not specify the specific service

Table 11: Chafee Program Elements 2001-2004, Provision of Support and Services, Ages 18 to 21

Program Elements	Michigan	Wisconsin	Nebraska	Kentucky	Illinois	Iowa	Ohio	Minnesota
Financial	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Housing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Counseling	✓	*	✓	✓	*	✓	*	✓
Employment	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	*	✓
Education	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	*	✓

Source: 2001-2004 State Plans
 * state plans did not specify the specific service

Michigan, Nebraska, Iowa, Ohio, and Minnesota specified in their state plans that not more than 30 percent of federally allocated funds would be used for room-and-board expenses. Wisconsin specified that not more than 25 percent of funding allocated would be spent on room-and-board expenses. Kentucky's state plan did not provide a specific percent to be spent on room and board.

Illinois' state plan discussed Youth in Transition grants of up to \$1,200 that are awarded to youth ages 18-21 based on an assessment of needs. Illinois also has Youth in Crisis grants that are awarded to homeless youth, or those in danger of being homeless, with a lifetime limit of \$5,000. Illinois has also attempted to create incentives for families to adopt older wards by providing \$3,000 to youth who are adopted between the ages of 14 and 18, in six monthly installments starting immediately after subsidies to the family end.

Collaboration with Public and Private Sectors

All of the state plans addressed collaboration with various private and public agencies necessary to provide adequate services to youth aging out of the foster care system. Many of the state plans provided a detailed list of the private and public agencies that assist in providing services to youth. Each of the state plans also discussed extensive involvement with various stakeholders and discussed meetings, forums, and seminars that have been conducted to promote programs that assist the youth to achieve self-sufficiency. Each of the state plans also addressed the importance of obtaining the youths' opinions regarding the services and programs that best suit their needs. Illinois, Kentucky, and Iowa have developed youth advisory boards composed of foster care youth. These advisory boards are intended to give foster care youth a voice in preparing and implementing the programs that will affect their lives.

Table 12: Chafee Program Elements 2001-2004, Use of Public and Private Sectors

Program Elements	Michigan	Wisconsin	Nebraska	Kentucky	Illinois	Iowa	Ohio	Minnesota
Public Sector	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Private Sector	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Program Elements	Michigan	Wisconsin	Nebraska	Kentucky	Illinois	Iowa	Ohio	Minnesota
Stakeholders	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Source: 2001-2004 State Plans

Benefit Eligibility

Each of the eight state plans discussed various criteria in regards to eligibility for Chafee services and how each state assures fair and equitable treatment of youth receiving those services. The following section summarizes the eligibility rules of each state and assurance of fair and equitable treatment.

Michigan

Every youth aged 14-20 who is, or has been, in a foster care placement through the state on or after their 14th birthday, is eligible for independent living services. Chafee program elements in Michigan include the following:

- Counseling – individual or group counseling through the Youth in Transition fund, if the sources are available.
- Homeless Services – assistance is provided to eligible youth with temporary housing. Those youth aged 18-21 may receive financial assistance such as first month’s rent and security deposit. Youth may also receive help in obtaining public assistance.
- Education Support – Youth may receive assistance to obtain a high school diploma or GED, assistance to apply for college or vocational education, assistance with financial aid, student loans, scholarships, tuition, books, and transportation.
- Employment Services and Job Related Supports – Assistance may be given with job skills such as training, interviewing skills and linking youth to the Michigan Works! program. Assistance is available for work-related items such as uniforms, tools, and transportation.
- Wages and Incentives – With program office approval, wages can be paid for youth who are beginning employment as an incentive for the employer to hire them. Incentives may be given in-kind or in cash to encourage participation on the part of the youth or to encourage employers.
- Training – is available for independent living skills (classes are offered and materials provided to assist in developing independent living skills), parenting, and employment.
- Mentorships – to develop long-term relationships with youth and caring adults.
- Supervised Independent Living Contracts – supervised living arrangement by a responsible adult who either lives in the home or is regularly available to monitor the youth.
- Closed Case Services – independent living services are provided to all youth who have been in foster care based on abuse or neglect after the age of 14 and after the case is closed, through the age of 20.

Michigan assures fair and equitable treatment by making all youth aged 14-20 eligible for independent living services regardless of their permanency plan. The plan states that all foster care workers must receive training to enhance their knowledge of assessing youth’s needs and ensuring that appropriate services are accessed. Services are monitored through periodic reviews of case records, service report forms, and payment authorization requests.

Wisconsin

Wisconsin’s state plan describes eligibility for Chafee services and independent living services as any “youth in out-of-home care who are aged 15 or older and for youth up to the age of

21 who were out in out-of-home care for at least six months and left care after the age of 17.” In Wisconsin, all youth aged 15 and over receive basic independent living services, permanency planning, assessment, and a service plan. Those youth aged 15-18, who are expected to remain in care for six months or more, are requested to have intensive independent living services. The focus for youth aged 18-21 who left care after the age of 17 is transitional housing services. This category of youth has a personal responsibility component in their plan.

Wisconsin assures fair and equitable treatment through regular monitoring of local agencies operating independent living programs and through regular meetings with independent living coordinators. The Department of Health and Family Services regional offices investigates complaints by clients and requires that independent living programs report their services progress and outcomes to this office.

Nebraska

Nebraska uses three primary strategies for transitioning youth to adulthood: preparation, transition, and independence. The state plan stated that assessments and planning tools need to be made more readily available to caregivers and use of PALS specialists needs to increase.

The state of Nebraska assures fair and equitable treatment through representative advisory committees that define the guideline criteria for services. The use of PALS specialists is an important factor for consistency of services for foster care youth and assuring fair and equitable treatment across agencies.

Kentucky

Kentucky conducts assessments of each foster care youth to determine the child’s level of functioning so independent living services will meet the child’s needs. Youth aged 12-15 are eligible for “soft skills” training by their foster parents or providers. Youth aged 16-17 are eligible to receive formal and experiential independent living skills training, based on their skill level, from an independent living coordinator. Youth aged 18-21 on extended commitment are eligible for all benefits they were entitled to prior to the age of 18. In addition, they can receive assistance with higher education, job training and referrals, transitional living, mentors, and referrals to community agencies to assist with self-sufficiency. Youth in the 18-21 category need to develop specific plans and goals and show progress towards these goals to be eligible for further assistance.

Kentucky assures fair and equitable treatment through assessing each youth’s level of functioning. Independent living skills are tailored to fit the youth’s needs based on their age and developmental abilities. Documentation is required of all service providers and caregivers to record the youth’s progress and needs. All individuals receiving services are informed of their rights and grievance procedures.

Illinois

Illinois requires that, by the age of 14, all foster care youth receive a life-skills assessment. Illinois provides housing advocacy for both current and former wards of the state until their 21st birthday, however, former wards are not eligible for room-and-board subsidies. Financial assistance is limited to emancipated youth who demonstrate the ability to maintain their independence once grants have been exhausted. Youth in Transition services are made available to those who have aged out of care. Adoption/guardianship independence facilitation grants are available for youth who are adopted or moved to guardianship between the ages of 14 and 18, in lieu of room-and-board financial assistance and youth in transition services. The Project SRIVE and the Alternative School Network, that were developed to assist youth who have dropped out of high school, are available to wards 14 and older in the Chicago-area only.

Illinois assures fair and equitable treatment through conducting a universal life-skills assessment of all youth beginning at the age of 14. The state also provides grants and financial assistance statewide on an even basis. The state plan stated that making all youth eligible for life-skills assessments, regardless of their permanency goal, helps assure fair and equitable treatment.

Iowa

Iowa requires transition planning for all youth aged 16 and older. This age group is described as “prioritized.” Youth under the age of 16 are served on a case-by-case basis. The Iowa Aftercare program serves youth 18 and older who were in foster care at the age of 17 and have been for at least the past year. The youth in this category must participate in developing a plan, obtaining employment or attending school. All other resources must be exhausted before using these services. Financial assistance depends on the availability of funds.

Iowa assures fair and equitable treatment through the establishment of objective criteria to determine eligibility for benefits and services. Iowa also discussed statewide training in regards to Chafee criteria to ensure understanding among necessary parties (foster parents, caregivers, agency staff, and juvenile court services).

Ohio

For youth aged 16-18, services will be made available that help them prepare for self-sufficiency. A life-skills assessment at the age of 16 is conducted to provide the youth with appropriate services. Youth aged 18-21 receive services and support that complement their efforts to attain adult self-sufficiency. An assessment is conducted to evaluate current needs and determine the range of services that need to be provided. Room and board assistance is only offered to youth falling under this age category.

Ohio assures fair and equitable treatment by following the requirements of the Ohio Administrative Code and monitoring human service agencies grievance procedures. All youth are provided copies of the grievance procedures. Ohio has developed an ongoing monitoring and evaluation process used to monitor the strengths and needs of the system over time. This process includes a mechanism for corrective action and in-house and individual evaluations to assess success, quality, and the costs and benefits of programs.

Minnesota

Minnesota defines eligibility criteria as youth ages 14-21 who currently are, or were, previously in out-of-home care after their 14th birthday and youth whose placement is, or was, approved by a county social service agency, juvenile or tribal court.

Minnesota assures fair and equitable treatment through the establishment of clear policies that describe the criteria for services, regular training of foster care parents, caregivers, and staff, and through policies that incorporate the requirements of the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act of 1994. The plan stated that Minnesota does not base eligibility requirements in terms of placement status or geography and develops plans with the youth beginning at age 14 up to the age of 21. Careful efforts are made to fund non-profit agencies statewide to conduct outreach and serve youth ages 18-21.

Health Care Coverage

The state plans of Michigan, Iowa, and Minnesota discussed health care coverage options for youth. Michigan’s state plan discussed three health care coverage plans available to youth before reaching their 21st birthday. They are:

- MI Child – serves youth up to age 19 at 200 % of the poverty level;

- Medicaid Q – serves youth up to age 21, there is an income test but it may be helpful in times of high medical costs after a spend down; and
- Medicaid L – serves low income clients who are pregnant or parenting a child up to the first year of child’s life.

Iowa’s state plan discussed the health care options available to foster care youth. They are:

- Child Medical Assistance Program – the youth must be under 21 and pass income guidelines;
- Mothers and Children – the youth must be under 19 and pass income guidelines;
- Medicaid for Employed People with Disabilities – must be under the age of 65, considered disabled by SSI criteria and pass income guidelines; and
- Medically Needy – youth must be under the age of 21 and pass income guidelines.

Minnesota’s state plan discussed an insurance program called Minnesota Care that is a subsidized health care program for low-income individuals without medical insurance. Minnesota Care is funded by enrollee premiums, statewide tax, and federal funding. The Minnesota state plan stated that the highest Minnesota Care income level for youth 18-21 without children was \$1,151 while Medicaid’s highest income level was \$482 per month.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Chafee Foster Care Independence Program

Although nothing can replace the benefits derived from being a member of a stable nurturing family and community, there are supports and services that can be provided. Some of these include:

- Employment Assistance
- Educational Assistance
- Life-skills Training
- Mentoring
- Counseling
- Linkages to Community Resources
- Preventative Health Care and Health Insurance
- Collaboration Among Services

The state plans addressed the need to provide foster care youth with these services and supports. In every state, an assessment of foster care youth is required before services can be offered and coordinated. Each state plan discussed the importance of involving youth in the development of their plans, encouraging them to take an active role in implementing their goals, and accessing necessary resources. A variety of states employ Youth Advisory Committees that allow the foster care youth to discuss their concerns and interests regarding the system and to meet other youth in similar life situations.

An important aspect discussed in the state plans is the importance of providing mentoring programs to youth to orient them toward the community and caring adults. Iowa’s state plan notes that foster care youth need adults in their lives who demonstrate caring and are not getting paid for their involvement. Foster care youth need to feel that they are valued members of society. The caring adults in their lives, whether they are mentors, foster parents, case workers, or friends, need to help the youth feel connected and able to access resources that benefit their lives.

Education is an essential element to future employment success. Each state offers an assortment of programs designed to assist the youth with completing high school or obtaining a GED. Each state also has programs that connect the youth to employment-related programs that suit their career or school interests. Some states offer limited financial assistance and provide grants to youth interested in attending college (Table 5 and Table 6).

Each state plan discussed the importance of preparing youth, particularly youth in the age category 18-21, for independent living through a variety of programs designed to teach the skills necessary to adapt to the adult world and manage a household. Skills mentioned in the state plans were household management, budgeting, work and education preparation, tutoring, and effective communication.

Foster care youth represent a vulnerable population that requires consistent and effective services to address their unique needs. Each of the state plans discussed the importance of providing these individualized and consistent services to promote self-sufficiency among foster care youth. The services offered may vary from state to state, but the purpose of providing support and guidance is consistent.

Other Reviewed Sources

Chief among the services and supports required for self-sufficiency are promotion of education, employment skills and pathways, and life skills. These form the three sides of the triangle of success. In the preponderance of cases, meaningful, stable, well-paid employment is inextricably linked to education and training beyond a high school diploma. The ability to keep a job depends on the application of life skills. The ability to find a good job often depends on networking, which in turn relies on being a part of a group, either formal or informal.

In Michigan, there is no state postsecondary program that specifically targets foster care youth. This means that the youth must ferret out potential sources of funding while they prepare for independence. Given that the daily need for food and shelter takes precedence over the long-term goal of acquiring more education, it is little wonder that so few youth pursue higher learning. Add to this the fact that postsecondary education might not be a 'cultural expectation' for these youth, that a fair proportion of them become parents while still in their teens, and that they may be encouraged to take low-wage jobs with little or no prospect for advancement or long-term employment.

Stable, well-paid employment is available to those who have marketable job skills. Job skills can be gained through vocational training or apprenticeships in addition to postsecondary education. Once again, the ability to be involved in these types of opportunities is linked to the availability of resources that allow the youth to be dedicated to learning. This means support for housing, food, transportation, and ancillary expenses in addition to tuition assistance are crucial.

The study conducted by the Coalition for Independence Through Education (CFITE) in February 2002 includes an extensive cost-benefit analysis of the impact on people with low incomes when they have marketable job skills, obtained through education and job training. The study estimates that the state would save a considerable amount of money for support that is *not* paid out as low-income wage earners become self-sufficient. For example, the state would save \$6,696 (FY2000 data) annually in Child Day Care assistance per child in care. Other examples of services no longer required are Medicaid and MICHild enrollment, food stamps, and energy assistance. In addition, workers with higher wages are revenue producers to the state when they pay taxes.

The study cites FIA data that show there are approximately 4,300 Family Independence Program (FIP) recipients enrolled in postsecondary education. Once these students complete school, they should no longer depend on FIP, Child Day Care, or Medicaid. Data from the

Michigan Occupational Information System demonstrates that the average starting salary for surveyed student parents who completed two- or four-year degrees is \$31,251, with a range of \$20,800 to \$50,000. Michigan gains additional tax revenue from these higher incomes. For example, an average household income of \$31,000 contributes three times more in state tax revenues as households with incomes of \$14,000. Parents leaving the FIP Work First program have an average of \$14,000 in earned income. This information is consistent with the unpublished data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics in *Table 4: Unemployment and Earnings for Fulltime Workers Age 25 and Over by Educational Status*. The table shows that employment levels increase with the level of education, thus providing another tangible benefit to the state.

A tuition waiver should be viewed as a relatively short-term investment with rapid opportunities for returns on the funds expended. If, as shown previously, the average salary for youth completing degree programs is approximately \$31,000 and the average salary for those who go through Work First is \$14,000, the annual difference is \$17,000. Since postsecondary education increases employability, wage ranges, and employment rates, the youth would be paying taxes in addition to not using entitlements and means-based services. Higher education levels can mitigate some risk factors such as early parenting, substance abuse, and trouble with the legal system that studies show affects the youth.

The third side of the triangle of success is life skills. These are things most adults take for granted: how to look for and apply for a job, open a checking account, establish credit, live within a budget, fill out a tax form, make sound decisions and constructively solve problems. Add to these the social skills it takes to meet people and develop positive relationships and the self-esteem to think that someone will find you worthy of hiring or befriending. These skills are not intuitive; they must be learned. Although many adults have had a lifetime to hone these skills, youth who have experienced the stressors related to the child welfare system may not have been exposed to them in such a way that they have been able to acquire these basic life skills. Several of the studies in the literature review give examples of local programs that have had success teaching life skills to their program participants.

Intrinsic in this discussion is that youth must have a belief in their own futures. Many youth in foster care grow up being forced to live in the moment, with no impetus to develop long-term goals. For many of them, their predominant concern is wondering whether their placement will end. A new placement causes them to move into a different living situation and possibly attend a new school with the concomitant problems of adapting to a new curriculum and dealing with new peers. It is easy to see why, when "wondering when the next shoe will drop," planning for the future is not high on a survival list. It is imperative that youth that will be aging out of foster care be given the message that they have a future, and that it can be a rewarding one.

As is evident from the interviews with former foster care youth in Michigan who attended college, their environment plays a large role in their success. Environmental factors include the knowledge, assistance and encouragement of their foster parents or group home staff; the quality of their school experience; being thought of as special and encouraged by an adult they respect such as a teacher; being linked to special educational programs that target low-income youth; and being provided with the information they need to make informed decisions.

For these youth, considering themselves to be valued members of their communities is essential. This can be accomplished by establishing connections with employers and supportive organizations such as service or faith-based groups. It can occur through informal relationships with relatives, mentors, neighbors, and other supportive adults.

The number of youth in Michigan in independent living programs at the end of fiscal 2000 was 534. This report has identified a rather extensive and intensive set of services that can help these youth become contributing members of their communities. The population to which the

services would be provided is relatively small, especially compared to the benefits that accrue to both the individuals and society. The state has been given responsibility for these children because of serious problems in their families. In determining the future continuum of care for youth transitioning out of the system into the adult world, decision makers should remember that the state has a continuing moral, if not a legal, responsibility for their well being.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Chafee Foster Care Independence Program

Each state studied requires that an assessment of the youth be completed before services can be accessed. State plans did not provide specific criteria used in the assessments such as what the programs look for in services to be rendered to the youth. The importance of experienced foster parents and caring adults was discussed throughout the state plans. The need for additional training to increase the pool of qualified mentors and foster parents was stressed. A more descriptive explanation of the training offered and required for foster parents, mentors, and care givers is needed as well as time frames for when the training needs to occur. A more detailed description of the training required would promote better coordination of services and input from interested parties regarding how training can be improved to better suit the youths needs.

There is high turnover among foster care workers and a shortage of qualified foster parents available. This creates difficulties for foster care youth in need of services. Ways in which child welfare agencies are addressing these issues should be identified in the plans. Plans should address case loads and responsibilities of foster care workers to ensure continuity of care. In reviewing the state plans it is difficult to determine the effort programs are making to coordinate services, however, each plan makes it clear that collaboration among agencies involved in the youth's life is important.

For youth to receive appropriate mental and physical health care, health care coverage is needed. According to the state plans, not every state could guarantee that youth between the ages of 18-21 would qualify for Medicaid or other coverage. States need to assure all foster care youth who have aged out of the system access to health care coverage through Medicaid or some other form of state-funded care if the youth does not have employment-based coverage.

Other Reviewed Sources

To enable youth to achieve their potential as state citizens and to avoid negative outcomes for these vulnerable youth, cost effective strategies to teach life and employment skills, and provide employment and educational opportunities are required. The State of Michigan has an opportunity to implement several strategies (in no particular order) that will improve the long-term outcomes for youth aging out of foster care:

- Increase Access to Life Skills and Employment Training available to all youth aging out of care, either through specialized services to youth in foster care placements who will be aging out of services or through community-based programs. Foster parents can receive additional training and support that enables them to teach their foster youth life skills. Community-based life-skills training programs should be funded and youth with permanency planning goals of independent living should be referred to them in a timely manner.
- Increase Access to Funding for Postsecondary Education and Skilled Professions Training through not only funding for the programs themselves but through living assistance. Implement a statewide program, such as a tuition waiver for state universities, which is accessible to youth and well known to case workers, high school guidance counselors, and independent living program staff. Access to tuition funds should be based on academic

performance and financial need to assure that funds are well spent. When combined with other education funds available through federal and private sources, the tuition waiver could be the means for Michigan's foster care youth to finally surmount the barriers to attaining postsecondary education. Youth need special guidance to work through the maze of career choices, postsecondary program possibilities, and admissions and financial aid applications. Creating access to the federal and other programs that offer early intervention for at-risk, low-income, youth would provide some of these services.

- Train Family Independence Program Workers and Work First Staff to implement Michigan's Public Act 102 of 1999, Section 303(12) directive to "establish clear joint guidelines (between the Department of Career Development and the Family Independence Agency) on the eligibility of participants for post-employment training support and how training/education hours can be applied toward federal work participation requirements." Workers should be trained to promote training opportunities that result in positive, long-term gains for the state when recipients move to stable economic and social self-sufficiency.
- Improve Access to Employment Pathways by ensuring youth have access to employment opportunities. It is often said that to find a good job, it is not only what you know but who you know. In that respect, it is beneficial to develop pathways for the youth through mentoring relationships, local service organizations, or special job fairs where businesses would recruit youth who are aging out of foster care. They would then be less disadvantaged by not growing up in a "traditional" environment where networking and connections are more common.
- Standardized, Comprehensive Assessment of Each Youth Who Will Potentially Age out of Foster Care. The assessments will determine what types of life skills training, counseling, postsecondary education, job-skill training, mentoring, and community linkages the youth will need to successfully transition out of care. This assures that service plans target the specific needs of each youth, or are more extensive in some regions than others.
- Access to Health Care through Coverage is vital to self-sufficiency. As one of the youth in the Voices from Michigan section stated, she would be financially ruined by a large medical bill. Preventive health care, early intervention, and trips to the doctor's office rather than the emergency room are better for the individual as well as Michigan as a whole.
- Recruit and Train Foster Parents as vital partners in the preparation of youth for transitioning to the world of work and/or postsecondary education. As a sense of self-worth and self-confidence are crucial aspects of preparing for a successful future, foster parents have a crucial role in encouraging and supporting the youth in their care. In addition to providing relevant information, the commitment and positive regard of the foster parent is essential in helping youth in foster care imagine a successful future and in reinforcing positive messages that correlate with success. For youth to successfully transition from foster care, the support of foster parents builds resiliency factors that can underpin the young persons' hopes and actions for the future. In some cases, foster parents should be encouraged to have a continuing, appropriate role in a young person's life.
- Train and Support Foster Care and Group Home Staff Members to Provide Information and Encouragement for transitioning youth. Similar to foster parents, caseworkers have an important role in providing relevant and timely information to youth and providing significant encouragement and support for future work and education. Constant worker turnover, lack of knowledge about programs, and lack of quality time with youth

undermines the caseworker's ability to significantly assist youth in her/his care. Caseworkers need to be equipped for and realize the significant role they can play in the lives of youth in care. This support might include introducing youth in care to alumni of the foster care system who can share their experiences and advice to aid in navigating this transition out of care.

Implementation Strategies

Many of these recommendations will require interagency cooperation to achieve their goals. Each recommendation identified includes a range of tasks and deliverables. Some of the recommendations will require changes at the state level while others will have an impact on how local entities and communities work with youth aging out of care. The cost of additional services (such as expanded tuition support) or enhancement of services (foster parent and caseworker training) need to be weighed against the societal cost of young people who are not employed, underemployed, or enter state-supported systems as adults.

Access to Funding for Postsecondary Education and Skilled Professions Training

Postsecondary education refers to training in skilled professions and apprenticeships in skilled trades as well as college educations. While considering the experiences of these youth and the range of responses to their needs, there should be a particular focus on aspiring to and attaining postsecondary education. As stated by Kweisi Mfume at the 2001 MSU Martin Luther King, Jr., celebration, "Education is a bridge over troubled water. Education is not a guarantee to success, but a precondition to survival." Linking youth to appropriate training and educational opportunities should be a priority. Consequently, the following issues will need to be considered:

- How to disseminate information to high school counselors and other staff about programs and financial assistance available to former foster care youth;
- How to encourage youth to prepare themselves for postsecondary education;
- Locating and using federal funds, and expanding state and other sources of funds;
- Methods to link the youth to appropriate programs; and
- The outcomes desired and the ability to assess them.

Monitoring Progress toward Goals

There is a paucity of centralized data regarding services provided to youth aging out of foster care and what happens to youth after they leave the child welfare system. Assessment and evaluation of the processes and outcomes of programs or interventions identified in the implementation strategy should be conducted to assure that:

- Youth are individually assessed to determine what services and supports they require to have a successful transition;
- Youth who are appropriate for the programs are being referred to them in a timely manner;
- The programs develop and revise individualized service plans that meet the identified and emerging needs of the youth;
- The services are provided in conjunction with the service plans and are effective at producing the intended outcomes based on objective measures;
- Assess workers' understanding of the state's policies through surveys and interviews with workers, youth, and independent living program staff.
- A longitudinal study of youth who have aged out of foster care could be conducted. The study would examine outcomes of youth in relation to the types of services they received

and external factors such as the age they entered foster care, the number of times they exited and re-entered the system of care, and demographic factors;^{vi}

- Conduct a longitudinal study of youth who have used postsecondary education and/or vocational training funds. The study would examine program completion rates, employment rates, types of employment, earned income, benefits related to employment such as health insurance and pensions, and community activities; and
- Use information gathered from the studies to determine whether services for youth aging out of foster care are adequate or could be changed to enhance their effectiveness.

The policies, procedures and monitoring mechanisms should be in place that will assure that the goals of assisting youth as they age out of foster care to become productive citizens will have become a permanent part of Michigan's child welfare system.

NOTES

1. Newberger, Julee, *From Foster Care to College Life*, Connect for Kids, October 30, 2002.
2. Stafford Loans are the Department's major form of self-help aid for students. Depending on the school, Stafford Loans may be made either through the Federal Direct Student Loan (Direct Loan) Program or through the Federal Family Education Loan (FFEL) Program. Under the Direct Loan Program, the funds are lent by the U.S. government. Under the FFEL Program, the funds are lent from a private lender (a bank, credit union, or other lender that participates in the FFEL Program). Direct and FFEL Stafford Loans are either subsidized or unsubsidized. A **subsidized** loan is awarded on the basis of financial need. Students will not be charged any interest before beginning repayment or during authorized periods of deferment. The federal government "subsidizes" the interest during these periods. An **unsubsidized** loan is not awarded on the basis of need. Interest is charged from the time the loan is disbursed until it is paid in full. If the interest accumulates, it will be **capitalized** -- that is, the interest will be added to the principal amount of the loan and additional interest will be based upon the higher amount.
3. Source: http://www.ed.gov/prog_info/SFA/StudentGuide/2001-2/directandffel.html.
4. More information about the TRIO Programs can be found at www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/HEP/trio and www.trioprogams.org. GEAR UP information is located at www.ed.gov/gearup.
5. February 2002, *Access and Barriers to Postsecondary Education Under Michigan's Welfare to Work Policies*. The report was researched and written by the Coalition For Independence Through Education (CFITE), and organization of Michigan educators, researchers, advocates, student parents, college administrators and other who advocate for welfare recipients' access to college. The report is available from the University of Michigan Center for the Education of Women.
6. A summary of the Chafee bill is provided by the Child Welfare League of America at <http://www.cwla.org/advocacy/indivhr3443.htm>. Please contact Dr. Gary Anderson at gary.anderson@ssc.msu.edu for more information.
7. See factors identified in the Literature Review.

Copies of the MSU Applied Public Policy Research Program reports are available in Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF) online at [www.ippsr.msu.edu/Applied Research](http://www.ippsr.msu.edu/Applied%20Research).



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