

Foster Youth : Emancipation into Society

Are youth prepared once they 'age out' of the foster care system?

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Abstract

An emancipated youth is a child that has reached the maximum age of 18 in the foster system and is no longer a ward of the state. In various cases some foster youth can stay in the system until the age of 21, if necessary, but as a general rule, 18 is the year most youth age out of the system.

In most cases children are placed in foster care by a child protective case worker when it has been determined that a child is unsafe to remain at home due to various risks. These risks include neglect, maltreatment or physical and sexual abuse. Children who have been in the foster care system are more likely to exhibit high levels of emotional and behavioral problems.

It is not unlikely that during a youth's time in the foster care system, they will have been to various foster or group home placements, as well as having been a part of various school systems. Research and statistics show that a successful transition to adulthood is often seen as very difficult for youth whom have endured time in the foster care system.

The important question is, "Are foster care youth prepared for living on their own, once they have emancipated from the foster care system?" The youth that, 'age out' of the system do not receive the adequate training and resources to prepare them for life on their own. Research that has been conducted shows everything that youth are lacking, but there has been little research or follow up on why youth are not receiving the adequate services before emancipation. The research shows what youth need to maintain a sustainable lifestyle, but why are youth not receiving the adequate training and resources to allow them to leave the system and ready for life on their own?

Essentially, the inadequate availability of resources leads to homelessness in the first weeks of leaving the foster care system, as well as incarceration, substance abuse and pregnancy.

In most cases youth emancipate from the system at 18 years of age and many have nowhere to turn to and little support or access to any form of help. The goal of this research and project is to determine, whether or not youth are prepared for life on their own as they leave the foster care system; determining what youth need to achieve economic sustainability, financial literacy, job attainment and a safe living environment.

Community Profile

I. Community Context

Orange County, California is a diverse city located approximately 45 miles south of Los Angeles. It is a city that is a donor city and gives more of its income to other communities, yet has many thriving industries. Twenty miles north of Orange County is the largest port in the nation known as the Port of Los Angeles as well as the Port of Long Beach and Port of San Pedro. The cruise ships arrive each day and depart from the Port of Long Beach, allowing for many local community members to attain employment within the city limits.

Orange County has 11 public universities and nine private, which are non-satellite and Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), accredited institutions.¹

The county is comprised of various ethnic groups to include: 2.1% Black or African-American, 68.3% Caucasian, 30.8% Hispanic/Latino, 14.9% Asian population and small percentages of American/Indian/Alaska Natives, along with Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander.²

The gender makeup of Orange County is dispersed evenly with males accounting for 49.8% of the population and females consisting of 50.2%.³ The two most widely spoken languages are English and Spanish with English being the predominant language used in public school systems, but since there is a large Hispanic population Spanish can be heard quite often in stores and in

¹ California Post Secondary Education Commission: Website: <http://egov.ocgov.com>

² 2000 Census Bureau. <http://censtats.census.gov/data/CA/05006059.pdf>

³ U.S. Census of the Bureau, Census 2000

neighborhoods. Other languages in Orange County include Indo-European, Asian and Pacific Island languages.

Additionally, documentation by the 2000 Census Bureau shows that the socioeconomic status of Orange County has a median family income to be \$58,820.

This median family income reported in 2000 applies to a family with an average household of 3.0 persons. Therefore, this rate is lower than average, as the high cost of living in California needs to be taken into consideration. ⁴

For the number of people that have been accounted for in Orange County, there is certainly no shortage of restaurants, businesses, and employers. The employers that make up Orange County consist of: The Walt Disney Company, County of Orange, University of California, Irvine, Boeing Company, and Albertsons Grocery stores.⁵ A statistics report in 2000 stated the population in Orange County to be 2,846,289 people.⁶ Orange County's quality of life is appealing to many, with the beach so close and the mountains within a 2.0 hours drive. The median age of residents living in Orange County is 33.3 years of age. The interesting piece to the comfortable Orange County lifestyle is that there are many youth in foster care in Orange County and many youth whom are in foster care and later end up on the streets after emancipation at the age of 18.

There are many entities that make up the foster care system and so many people are quick to point fingers and place blame on each other. What many people don't realize is there are policies and rules in place, that don't easily allow for change to occur overnight. One shocking

⁴ U.S. Census of the Bureau, Census 2000

⁵ O.C Business Journal Book of Lists 2002).

⁶ U.S. Census of the Bureau, Census 2000

statistic determined by the Children’s Advocacy Institute is that, “foster care alumni experience post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at a level that is five times that of the general population.”⁷ This information is quite profound when you compare that of the foster care alumni at 21.5%, which exceeds the levels of PTSD experienced by war veterans. This is just a fraction of the problems with foster youth that communities face. Mental health is one of the more prevalent issues facing foster youth due to bouncing around the system from one home to the next, causing for a lack of stability. As a result, the issues with foster youth and emancipation date back to the early 1900’s and it can be seen that the government and social services agency have come along way. In order for change to happen, it is imminent that both government and communities work together. A hearing held nearly ten years ago is one example that policies are being put in place, so emancipated youth can have a much smoother transition into society.

On May 13, 1999 the 106 Congress, First Session conducted a hearing before the Subcommittee on Human Resources on Foster Care Independent Living. “Members of the Subcommittee are especially interested in comments on whether States should be required to have programs for youths leaving foster care that provide services to both adolescents still in school and young adults who have left school up to age 21; whether the major goals of State programs should be to prepare adolescents for work or for post-secondary education or both; whether States should be required to help these young adults pay for health care; whether penalties should be imposed on States for violating Federal rules; and the types of program evaluation that should be used to determine the impacts of State programs.”⁸

In 1999 a study was conducted by Mark E. Courtney, Assistant Professor at the School of Social Work and Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin-Madison. The

⁷ Children’s Advocacy Institute, p.18

study, “followed 141 youth while they were in care, and we have been able to follow about 80 percent of them, or 113, for about 12 to 18 months after they have left the system.”⁹

As a result of the study the findings and feedback from the youth showed, a sample percentage of sample members reporting that foster youth had been trained in any given area was 76 percent. Less than one fifth of the youth had received any job training, participated in a mock job interview, were instructed how to apply for public assistance, received help finding a job, or help obtaining housing, personal health records, or health insurance, which is essential for youth in the foster system. The information also indicated that, “over one-quarter of the former foster youth felt either not at all, or not very well prepared in a number of important areas including getting a job, managing money, obtaining housing, knowledge of community resources, parenting, and living on one’s own.”¹⁰

As noted in this hearing and was very troubling to find out is that many youth in the foster care system whom had already ‘aged out’ of the system, believed they could go back to the system and get help. Since this case took place in 1999, Legislation and policies for foster youth emancipating from the system has gained widespread recognition, nationally as well as in Washington D.C. at the nations capital.

As a result, nearly 10 years later, the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act was put into place in November 2008. The historic legislation is focused on improving the state of foster care throughout the nation. One of the bills put into place is the HR 6893 Bill. California is already ahead, but state and local levels have yet to confirm the specifics of the bill in individual states. The bill is slated to, “help hundreds of thousands of children and

⁸ Subcommittee on Human Resources, Foster Care Independent Living. Serial 106-22, p.3.

⁹ Subcommittee on Human Resources, Foster Care Independent Living. Serial 106-22, p.23.

¹⁰ Subcommittee on Human Resources, Foster Care Independent Living. Serial 106-22, p.25.

youth in foster care by promoting permanent families for them through relative guardianship and adoption and improving education and health care.”¹¹ This bill is vital for helping promote dependency for youth whom have emancipated from the foster care system. This bill will, “help youth who turn 18 in foster care without permanent families to remain in care, at state option, to age 19, 20 or 21 with continued federal support to increase their opportunities for success as they transition to adulthood.”¹² This legislation in addition to the Congressional Hearing in 1999 is another sign that shows that implementation of policy is becoming more important.

Community Needs Assessment

Many foster care youth are faced with educational challenges that mainstream children don’t normally experience in their teen years. In Orange County during the 2007/08 school year, the total enrollment of 503,492 children recorded attended public schools. Of these children enrolled in public school 40% of the children in the public school system were receiving free lunches. This is an indicator of poverty in Orange County. The increase in food costs and various services in the United States has been a direct contribution to this increase in youth receiving free lunch.¹³ As of April 2008 55% of the population were of Hispanic or Latino heritage.

Of the youth in the system there was 37 % of the population that were 0-5 years old and 31%, 13-18 years of age and all were in out of home care. One part of home care included 54%

¹¹ CASA Advocate News, Orange County

¹² CASA Advocate News, Orange County

¹³ Ngyuen, L, 2008.

residing with parents or relatives. This included a 30% increase of adoptive placements.¹⁴ Foster care youth tend not to graduate from high school nor go onto college. It was reported in 1998, “that 11% of young people drop out of high school before graduation. Urban areas have a higher dropout rate.”¹⁵ Results vary, but after conducting a survey with the help of Orangewood Children’s Foundation, most youth whom were dependents of the court system at some point in their lives, felt they were unprepared to emancipate and live on their own without some sort of support system in place.

Overall, of the seven surveys I received back from both male and females, five of the seven youth felt they were unprepared for emancipation and didn’t know how difficult the ‘real world’ would be on their own. Despite, the youth’s unpreparedness to life after emancipation, mostly all of them have been using a support program that they were provided with once out of the court systems. The findings were that the majority of youth interviewed, were all part of an Independent Living Program (ILP) or have been at one time.

II. Problem Analysis- Accomplishments in the field

A high number of foster youth whom have emancipated from the foster care system are not able to support themselves, with a lack of affordable housing, familial support, completed education, job training, health and mental or counseling services. As a result of non-functioning youth after emancipation they face many hardships to include; homelessness, incarceration, pregnancy, lack of self-esteem, confidence and non- availability of necessary material resources.

¹⁴ Ngyuen, L, 2008.

This all connects to youth not receiving pre-emancipation services upon leaving the foster care system. California has one of the highest numbers of youth in the foster care system nationwide. (Table 1, See Appendix)

It is important that youth face a smooth transition when emancipating from the foster care system, also known to many as ‘aging out’. The need to prepare foster care youth for independent living is more important than most community members realize. The need to enhance education, employment, financial literacy and general daily living skills for emancipated youth is vital to change the statistics to deter youth from facing recidivism. There needs to be expanded opportunities for youth to achieve self-sufficiency while under the patronage of the public child welfare agency.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services the long- term goal is that there are, “ three hundred and twenty-seven thousand (327,000) children who will be adopted with public child welfare involvement between the 2003 and 2008 fiscal year.”¹⁶

The lack of support for young adults emancipating out of the system, shows an “estimated 20,000 will ‘age out’ of the U.S. foster care system. Facing nowhere to go, many of these teens are literally left to fend for themselves on the streets. As most youth do not have extended families to turn to, a high percentage end up homeless or end up facing incarceration after emancipation. According to a new study, “being homeless for an average of a month after leaving the foster care system is associated with worse care access, but not worse health.”¹⁷

California has more children in foster care than any other state in the country. Sadly, the number of African American and Latin youth in the foster care system continues to be disproportionate

¹⁵ McWhirter, 1998.

¹⁶ Website: (<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs>)

¹⁷ Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)

in comparison to the African American and Latino population ratios”¹⁸

Unfortunately, “emancipation represents failure in the public child welfare system to find permanent homes for children who have been in its care.”¹⁹ Even once youth are placed in foster care, it doesn’t guarantee stability which causes more problems for the children, families and the social workers assigned to cases. This is where the idea of family reunification and preservation comes into place and it should be the responsibility of the state and community agencies to work on reunifying youth with their parents or kin. Family reunification is one of the most important factors in placing youth in foster care. Unfortunately, there are so many cases that parents fate of reunifying with their children are decided by a judge and social workers documentation or lack thereof. Many times social workers have 30 or more cases to work on at any given time, parents don’t always win the cases they fight. As a result, children fall through the cracks and may end up in foster care for much of their childhood.

It is not easy to find foster families for youth still part of the system, if one can imagine how difficult it is to find a home for a youth that is ‘aging out’ of the system, let alone teach them the necessary skills to function in society as mainstream adults. After foster care the option of Independent Living Programs is available, (ILP) but many youth don’t take advantage or are aware of the resources that are available to them. Interviewing a supervisor from the Orangewood Children’s Foundation has helped provide input as to what these teens deal with on a daily basis. The information gathered from the interview has also helped identify the key parts as to what is available to teens after life in the foster care system.

¹⁸ Shirley Hawkins. August 6, 2006 Foster Care, A Disproportionate number of African Americans

In addition to the interview conducted at Orangewood Children's Foundation another model was looked at and analyzed to compare to the youth leaving the system. An interview with the Executive Director of Orange County Conservation Corps (OCCC), provided an insight on a program based in Orange County, California. The program focuses on working with at-risk youth ages 18-24 years of age whom have not graduated from high school and generally have a history of ending up in the system, based on their lack of education and minimal schooling. The program provides employment, training and educational programs that build self-sufficiency. The jobs assigned to the youth are generally jobs that are for the greater good for conservation of the community.

In order to obtain employment it isn't an easy task for emancipated youth or youth with criminal pasts to find jobs that will pay them livable wages. With the high cost of living in California former foster youth's lack of education or work experience doesn't allow them to make much more than minimum wage. As of this report in 2009, minimum wage in the State of California was \$8.00 per hour. According to a recent report by the Children's Advocacy Institute, a minimum wage worker would need to work 92 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, to meet the requirements to afford a studio apartment in California. The other option would be an emancipated youth would have to make at least \$15.48 per hour at a 40-hour per week job, 52 weeks a year.²⁰ Studies showed that in 1997, nearly 12 years ago, that former foster youth earned an average of \$6,000 a year, which at the time was far below the poverty line of \$7,890. As a result of the lack of livable wages it is essential for youth emancipating to have options of transitional housing resources.²¹

¹⁹ Retrieved August 3, 2008 AFCARS Website

²⁰ Children's Advocacy Institute (p.11)

²¹ Children's Advocacy Institute, San Diego School of Law

As you will see through this report, findings are based on research, key informants along with factual information from a variety of resources to include, internet, books, magazine, print articles and social networking blog sights. Professionals in the field of social sciences dealing with youth emancipation have also helped contribute to this project.

Project Target Community

This project intends to address youth aged 15-19 years old whom are on their way to aging out of the foster care system, otherwise known as emancipation. The purpose of this study is also to determine if youth have been adequately prepared to live independently, once having aged out of the system. Additionally, surveys and research will examine if foster children have been affected by the following: the number of years spent in the foster system, number of placements and the types of preparation children have gone through once emancipated from the system.

The National Foster Care Reporting System (AFCARS), reported that as of September 30, 2001 there were 542,000 children nationwide in the U.S. foster care system. In Los Angeles County alone there are 23,000 children in foster care. Every two minutes a child enters the foster system. Other information states that almost half of foster children spend at least two years in the foster care system, and nearly 20 percent wait five or more years for a safe and permanent family.”²²

III. Literature Review

²² Website: <http://www.fostercaremonth.org>

Literature of problem, cause and effects

According to theorists there has been years of study why humans act the way they do in certain social situations. One theorist that has studied humans and their social norms is Pierre Bourdieu. Pierre Bourdieu is most recognized for studying social fields, capital structures and focusing on culture and how cultural competencies legitimizes social differences.

In the book, “The Sociology of Economic Life,” the writing reveals Bourdieu’s focus on social, economic and cultural capital. The book begins to discuss cultural capital and it’s existence in three forms. “ The embodied state, that is in the form of long lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc), which are the trace or revitalization of theories or critiques of these theories, problematic, etc, and in the institutionalized state, a form of objectification that must be set apart because, as will be seen in the case of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital that it is presumed to guarantee.”²³

Bourdieu’s theoretical hypothesis with this cultural argument,” made it possible to explain the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from the different social classes by relating academic success, that is, the specific profits that children from the different classes and class fractions can obtain in the academic market, to the distribution of cultural capital between the classes and class fractions.²⁴

This leads to show the understanding how emancipated youth fit into the social realm of Bourdieu’s theory of explanation. He refers to the sociological thoughts as social field, capital

²³ Granovetter, M, Swedberg,R, (2001). Westview Press. The Sociology of Economic Life. P.98-99.

and habitus. Bourdieu states, “Habitus is adopted through upbringing and education. This ‘habitus’ concept means on the individual level, “a system of acquired dispositions functioning on the practical level as categories of perception and assessment, as well as being the organizing principles of action.”²⁵ So as a researcher, the question I pose is, how would emancipated youth be viewed through Bourdieu’s studies of social norms of upbringing and education? Arguably so, Bourdieu, “argues that the struggle for social distinction is a fundamental dimension of all social life.”²⁶

Therefore, the struggles that emancipated youth face during their lives are similar to the way sociologist Pierre Bourdieu discusses social hierarchy’s in his research and throughout his work. An astounding piece of research that resonated from Bourdieu’s research was his mention of social space.

His book, “Distinction” goes into more detail, but he shows that, “social distances are equivalent to social distances.”²⁷ He talks about how his research and his findings connect with the research conducted in the past year working with the emancipated youth. “All human actions take place in social fields, which are arenas for the struggle of the resources. Individuals, institutions, and other agents try to distinguish themselves from others, and acquire capital which is useful or valuable on the arena.”²⁸

Bourdieu goes onto explain that there is a hierarchal format in modern societies. Those hierarchy’s consist of economic and cultural symbolics. The economic piece could be classified

²⁴ Granovetter, M, Swedberg,R, (2001). Westview Press. The Sociology of Economic Life. P.98-99.

²⁵ Bourdieu, P, (1930-2002), Website: <http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/bourd.htm>.

²⁶ Refer to Footnote 25

²⁷ Refer to Footnote 25

²⁸ Refer to Footnote 25

by power and money or anything involving capital demands. The second part of the hierarchy being cultural symbolic which Bourdieu goes onto explain that a person's status is determined by how much, "cultural or symbolic capital one possesses."²⁹

The meaning of all the theoretical analysis by Bourdieu simply states that societies are used to some form of capitalism, either social or cultural capital. One person may consider being wealthy a way of social acceptance, while the next person may feel they are culturally rich, by what they have experience in their lifetimes. Emancipated youth may never experience social or cultural capital in their lifetimes, as their lives are filled with instability and constant moves from one family to the next.

The social capital aspect could be described as being socially inept to having networks of friends, relationships while in school, such as a significant other, attending prom or a school dance and even as complex as learning how to drive. By learning how to drive, a youth would also be able to apply for a job, become a volunteer, and eventually apply to college or a trade school which would all contribute to the economic capital Bourdieu wrote about. The instability of places a child in the foster system allows for little to no economic or cultural symbolism. If an economic and cultural symbolism were to be used to describe the foster care system and what youth face, it would have to be one of small amounts of economic capital, mostly controlled by others (ie. Foster parents, state agencies or governments), or the cultural capital would consist of the culture of the foster care system and how it is it's own entity.

Emancipated youth don't usually fall into the social and economic category that Bourdieu may refer to, but they do fall in a social and economic category of their own. Emancipated youth and foster youth fall into a social category categorized under the court system. Each youth has a

²⁹ Refer to Footnote 25

unique story to tell and as a researcher I had the opportunity to learn about a few youth who each fit into a social category of their own. Bourdieu neglects to mention how arts and culture has been incorporated into how emancipated youth succeed as young adults.

In addition to Bourdieu's theories Paulo Freire has been an influence to the oppression and the social sciences. His books and studies relate to that of the emancipated youth and the turmoil they face when in the foster system. In Freire's book, "Pedagogy of Hope," he talks about his works from Pedagogy of the Oppressed. His mention of Education and Culture are thought provoking. He stated, "Never does an event, a fact, a deed, a gesture, of rage or love, a poem, a painting, a song, a book, have only reason behind it. In fact a deed, a gesture, a poem, a painting, a song, a book are always wrapped in thick wrappers. They have been touched by manifold whys. Only some of these are close enough to the event of the creation to be visible as whys."³⁰

Freire's quote about these constant things all being, "wrapped in thick wrappers," really connects to emancipated youth and their experiences. What many people don't understand or take the time to understand is why emancipated youth have the characteristics they do. The characteristics are fostered over the time emancipated youth spent their lives in the foster care system and endured so much. Characteristics can include mental health issues, anger, neglect, sadness. Then there are those youth like one that was interviewed that made it out of the system successfully. The youth are all wrapped in thick wrappers and it could take years of unwrapping and unfolding the experiences they have had throughout their time in foster care to emancipation. To think that most of these young adults live in anywhere between 5-10 foster home placements all before they are 18 years of age can be damaging. It creates distrust among the youth and

³⁰ Freire,P. Barr, R. (2004) Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed.

unwrapping the ‘thick wrapper,’ isn’t always easy. This is where it is important to incorporate arts and culture into their lives. Art can be used as a way to express their feelings, as an art form, or even as a form of therapy. Art and culture should be available at an early age, which may help youth express their turmoil instead of suppressing their feelings throughout their childhood years until they reach emancipation. Once youth reach emancipation it may be too late to mediate and help them get over the years spent in foster care.

Many of the laws formerly enacted or being enacted as well as the research is showing that these young adults are not well prepared to be on their own at 18 years of age. The average age a child leaves their parents home is between the ages of 21-26 years old. This age range relates to the conventional teen that is not a ward of the state.

This project is based on the theory that youth whom are emancipating out of the system are not prepared for life on their own and do not have the adequate skills or available resources necessary to live on their own. Many theorists have reported similar findings. Being homeless for an average of one month after leaving the foster care system is associated with worse care access, but not worse health, according to a new study.”³¹

In 2004, Risa a young woman faced what so many youth face upon emancipation. “Risa encountered difficulties that many former foster youth face: renting an apartment with no parent to co-sign a lease; finding money for a security deposit; getting to work and school in Los Angeles without a car. With no family to fall back on, Risa had to make it alone. On June 5, 2004 Risa was found murdered, shot to death next to the car that was her home.”³²

Risa Bejarano’s story is one of millions that occur throughout our nation, young adults, left at 18 with limited income and limited familial relationships to support them. Frequent moves for

³¹ Department of Health and Human Services

these youth disrupt a time in these young teens life that is vital to their emotional stability. Friendships are broken in addition to any school and community connections these youths may have established. “Constantly changing circumstances and lack of positive relationships with caring adults lead to feelings of abandonment and loss of control, as well as hostile, “acting out” behavior. As a result, foster youth are likely to have special physical and mental health needs.”³³

A nationally renowned foundation that helps youth in their quest to independence is, The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. Their mission, “is to help youth in foster care make successful transitions to adulthood.” The Jim Casey Family Programs organization fundamentally strives for the essentials that foster youth need to successfully emancipate from the foster care system. They are committed to paving the way to self-sufficiency. The goals they have set for the year 2020 include; 1. Education, 2. Employment and 3. Mental Health components. The educational component includes, “Improving success in early childhood education for all children in care, increase the high school graduation rate for youth in care and increase the number of youth who earn two- and four- year vocational or college degrees.”³⁴ The employment component includes, “Increasing employment experiences for youth in foster care and those who have transitioned out of care, combine traditional employment and training programs with support services such as counseling, mentoring and peer support, childcare and transportation assistance.”³⁵ Lastly, the mental healthcare component is essential for many of youth in foster care as well as during pre and post-emancipation. “Increasing access to mental health services for youth while they are in foster care, increase the age range of eligibility for health insurance coverage to age 25 (or at a minimum to age 21) for alumni of foster care and

³² Farrell, 2004

³³ State Legislatures, November 2004

³⁴ Retrieved March 9, 2009. www.casey.org

most importantly, decrease the incidence of mental health disorders among youth in foster care.”³⁶

A key informant for Casey Family services was able to provide an insight on her experiences working with the organization as an Educational Liaison. From experience the key informant noted how important it is that youth that have interest in pursuing education, are aware of all aspects. The educational liaison stated that, “many times youth enroll in courses and are put on, “academic probation if they don’t withdraw properly from classes.” (Casey Family Services-Anonymous) When asked how youth find out about the services offered by the Casey Organization, the liaison said, “Prior to 18 years old DCFS let’s the youth know about what services are available which include, transitional living, Independent Living Programs (ILP) as well as any services that are available for youth transitioning out of foster care.” (Casey Family Services- Representative) It is important to also note the successes for the youth that do emancipate from foster care and successfully achieve self-sufficiency, as well as a college education. “As wards of the state, children in California’s foster care system may have had many “homes” by the time they reach the age of 18, but their encounters with counselors and social workers rarely provide the stability and lasting relationships, let alone the college readiness that other students their age take for granted.” In the article, They Did It, Nine emancipated youth who became part of the Guardian Scholars program at Cal State Fullerton achieved what only a mere 2% of emancipated youth accomplish, a college degree. Additionally, Casey Family Programs has established a program known as Opportunity Passport™ which is a pilot program being implemented in various states throughout the United States. The focus of the program is to help youth establish a Debit Account, Individual

³⁵ Retrieved March 9, 2009. www.casey.org

Development Account (IDA), along with establishing ‘Door Openers,’ to help the youth gain employment. Understanding financial literacy is just one piece that is difficult to come to terms with for the youth in foster care, but even more difficult is the idea of opening a bank account when many times youth lack a permanent address. As a result, youth rely on the idea of check cashing, which many youth do not realize, charge very high fees. This tax could ironically be referred to as a poverty tax, as it strives to keep the lower income communities where they are at, as they lack the financial education to become users of banks. The amount of money that could be saved in check cashes fees each year could contribute to a small fortune. The financial literacy aspect of teaching youth how to open a debit account will enable them to obtain cash, deposit or cash checks, as well as learn how to use a banking institution. As a result, this will allow them to manage money on a daily basis.

In addition youth whom are turning 18 and leaving the foster care system are more vulnerable to poor social and economic outcomes as they enter into adulthood. This research along with speaking with key informants shows that youth do not consistently access pre-emption services or trainings before they emancipate. According to an article, study and surveys, conducted by Self Magazine in March 2009, “Numerous studies link unplanned births with economic hardship and interrupted education. A 2003 study in *Social Problems* found that women who were single when they had their first child are between 2 and 2.7 times more likely to live in poverty, even after controlling for race, family, background, age education and employment status.”³⁷ This study directly links the importance of health education and unplanned pregnancies to emancipated youth. Statistics from the National Campaign to Prevent

³⁶ Retrieved March 9, 2009. www.casey.org

³⁷ Self Magazine, March 2009

Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy states, “ Two out of every three teen mothers never finish high school, half of all teen mothers are on welfare and eight out of ten father’s don’t marry the teen mother.”³⁸ Another shocking statistic by the, ‘National Campaign,’ states that, “The United States has the highest rate of teen pregnancy in the developed world.”³⁹ According to the Alan Guttmacher Institute, in 2000, 113,000 teens aged 15-19 years old became pregnant in the state of California. This information is a clear indicator that health education is vital for all young teens, especially teens emancipating out of the system, whom statistics show are more susceptible to teen pregnancy.

A recent article from the Orange County Register discussed the amount that taxpayers are spending on teenage pregnancy. Orange County (O.C.) accounts for the 4th highest teen pregnancy in the state of California. The Public Health Institute reported that a rise in teen births in 2006, cost taxpayers in California nearly \$61 billion. Statewide in California, an estimated \$1.71 billion cost a year, resulted from a portion of increased placement in foster care.⁴⁰

The more health education emancipated teens receive the better the chances they face to avoid unwanted pregnancies and relying on welfare.

In the publication about at risk youth, J. Jeffries McWhirter traces an image of youth and their vulnerability to society and their risks of facing problems in the future of their development. So many youth are at risk at falling by the wayside and society does not always know the fundamentals to deal with the issues. Students with low-income, unskilled, low-education family

³⁸ National Campaign Website

³⁹ National Campaign Website

⁴⁰ Walker, Orange County Register Newspaper

backgrounds are about twice as likely to drop out of school as students are from affluent families.⁴¹

To support this idea, author Caroline Reid, “focuses on the prioritization of education and notes that many children that live in low-income and minority households and communities fail to graduate from high school nor earn a college degree. As noted in this article it is important to know that in 2005, nearly 13 millions (17.6%) of people under the age of 18 were living in poverty.”⁴² Poverty, financial literacy and housing are all interwoven in the theme of Community Economic Development. Author Mihailo Temali, discusses the importance of CED and the placement they have in communities and organizations.

According to Mihailo Temali, Community Economic Development (CED) focuses on four Pivot-Point Strategies. As a result, these strategies assist families and communities by impacting them economically. The four points include: Commercial district, micro-businesses, workforce development and job opportunities.

Having researched emancipated youth and their history upon leaving the foster care system it could be argued that Temali is missing a key component to his four pivotal strategies. This ‘fifth’ component that is essential for foster youth leaving the foster care system is housing.

Based on the findings and research conducted over the last 16 months it is essential that youth emancipating out of the system are given the resources to find housing or a possible transitional housing transfer programs. As previously stated it is vital that youth leave the system with the necessary resources to be able to sustain a life on their own, but the research shows the high percentage of youth end up homeless once they emancipate from the system. As a result youth must have the resources in place to avoid ending up as another statistic. Due to the

⁴¹ McWhirter, J, 1998

complexity of foster youth and the instability they endure, they must obtain mental health care, financial literacy, proper education along with a stable housing and living environment.

The focus of CED is important to know that CED not only focuses on the four pivot point strategies, but it focuses on these two vital facets of information; “(1) Improve the economic situation of local residents (disposable income and assets) and local businesses (profitability and growth); and (2) Enhance the community’s quality of life as a whole (appearance, safety, networks, gathering places, and sense of positive momentum.”⁴³ It is important to focus on the idea of youth leaving the foster care system and where they fit into this equation?

In order to address this issue, foster youth need to know they have a safe haven to call home and for most of their lives this isn’t the case. The situation can be even more daunting for youth leaving the foster care system at the age of 18, as they don’t have a safety network in place and in many situations their gathering places are on the streets. This is where the disconnect from Temali’s four strategies shifts focus on the idea that housing needs to be a key strategy for this population that needs to be addressed. Along with housing it is essential that youth in foster care are not only provided a safe home to live in while in foster care, but the resources to learn how to fend for themselves long before they have to emancipate. The opportunity was given to conduct an interview with a young man named Victor who is now 23 years old. He is a high school and college graduate. Victor completed the Guardian Scholars program in 2008 at California State Fullerton. Victor may be part of the low number of youth who go onto graduate high school as well as college, but a stable childhood in the foster system was what helped Victor as well as his own personal academic excellence and achievement. Victor is unlike so many

⁴² (Reid, Volume 2)

youth in foster care because he had stability during some of his time in the foster system. This is what he felt was another part that contributed to his success. He said, “ I had the same friends throughout elementary, middle and high school and I went to the number one rated high school in Orange County.”

However, life wasn't always stable as Victor entered foster care at age three and was moved ten times from the age of three until eleven years old. This is when things changed for Victor. He was assigned to a group home in Orange County and had the good fortune to spend seven years in that same group home. He felt the caring social worker and staff workers at the group home contributed to his success and goal of attending college and graduating. He now is giving back to so many foster youth whom have endured a life without stable parents and as he said, “ I felt like an orphan.” (Key informant: Victor 4/9/09)

It is easy to say to a young child, okay now it is time you learn responsibility, but the research has yet to show how it really is when you take an ordinary child out of a ‘normal’ and stable family life. Imagine taking a child out of their home at the tender age of 18 years old and placing them out on the street to survive. This scenario is similar to a child aging out of the system, yet in most cases, they have suffered some sort of abuse, be it, emotional or physical and has a lot more to deal with. This is the situation foster youth face everyday when told they must leave the home they have known or various homes they have known to call, ‘home.’

Foster is defined as, (1) “To bring up; nurture; (2) To promote the growth and development of; (3) To nurse; to cherish. Foster defined adjectively (1) Providing parental care and nurture to children not related through legal or blood ties; (2) Receiving parental care and nurture from

⁴³ Temali, M. p. 3

those not related to one through legal or blood ties.”⁴⁴ It is important to understand the importance of foster care and how it relates to children who have been in the foster care system for a long period of time, as well as the youth who are on the verge of emancipating from the system.

Foster care has been designed to be a temporary service until permanency occurs or a child can be placed in a familial setting. “These familial settings include (1) licensed family foster care; (2) Orange County community based care; (3) placements that can take siblings; and (4) caregivers willing to take on special challenges presented by teenagers. As a result, more children have to be placed in Foster Family Agencies (FFA) and group home placements outside Orange County, often at increased support costs.”⁴⁵

According to research and statistics, there is a direct link between communities and government organizations for foster care. It is essential that foster care agencies, the state and government team up to create policies. There have been policies in place in California but many policies that have been put into writing at a state and government level have been denied once they move to the Senate. Many policies are not only denied, but they may not be supported and monitored to find out how successful they are. The policies that were denied in 2006 would certainly help strengthen the economy by decreasing the recidivism rate for youth who end up back in the system, when they could be successfully contributing to society, if given the proper tools to do so. These policies include: “Senate Bill 2489 (Leno), which would have provided foster youth with financial assistance and other support necessary to complete college, Assembly Bill 2709 (Maze), which would have expanded existing hiring preferences to include foster youth, Senate Bill 1289 (Cedillo), which would have allowed foster youth to stay in their

⁴⁴ Retrieved 3/5/09 from Website: www.thefreedictionary.com

placement voluntarily until age 21, as long as they participate in an ILP and are furthering their education, Assembly Bill 1983 (Bass), which would have extended foster care services voluntarily to youth from age 18 to 24, Assembly Bill 2284 (Jones), which would have ensured automatic Medi-Cal eligibility for early emancipated youth.”⁴⁶ All of these policies are detrimental to change the future of foster care. The current bills that are waiting to be approved have been in the pipeline since 2007 and consist of, Assembly Bill 149, which would require counties to provide software programs for youth to be able to connect to their families, Assembly Bill -172 would require the Department of Social Services to create an early educational pilot for foster parents and youth and lastly Assembly Bill 638 requires foster youth in the juvenile system to receive case management, permanent planning and Independent Living Programs. It is important to note that there are also funds attached to various bills and the most recent funding that was proposed is more than \$82 million in the budget and \$50 million in the Housing Bond for foster youth.

Additionally, it is important to understand the policies associated with California Statutes. “California, like all states, received federal foster care funds from Title IV-B and Title IV- E of the Social Security Act.” Under state law these provisions allow for the use of funds for foster care up to age 21 or the age of majority. California like many states considers 18 to be the age of ‘majority’ and have statutes authorizing the foster care system to terminate foster care. Therefore, it is important to understand that these rules and laws are determined specifically at the state level and that youth emancipation occurs at age 18 and disallows foster care benefits between the ages of 19 and 21. To put numbers in perspective, “between July 2004 and June

⁴⁵ Orange County Social Services Agency

⁴⁶ California Wellness Foundation Report

2005, at least 4,255 California foster youth left the foster care system because of emancipation, with the vast majority of them being cut loose at age 18.”⁴⁷

Therefore, as a researcher it is suggested that states and federal initiatives be taken to provide the necessary training and model for youth. Another state directive that needs to be geared towards assisting foster youth and standing behind them is by properly allocating the Foster Care Independence Act Funds. (FCIA) FCIA are funds allocated on a state level and the funds are administered by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) within the Department of Health and Human Services. “States must submit multi-year plans detailing how they will comply with and implement FCIA, how the funds will be spent, and how the program will be evaluated. States must also submit annual reports to ACF.”⁴⁸ This initiative is important, however, states have not made efforts to assess the performance of ILP programs. The FCIA may require states to conduct evaluations to determine the effectiveness of ILP programs, the fifth element of CED incorporation to having emancipated youth transition successfully into adulthood, post emancipation. At the time of the California Foundation report from Health and Human Services, a progress report showed that out of, “90 annual progress reports reviewed, 52 did not include dates that could be used to evaluate program effectiveness.”⁴⁹

California has its own rules and the different counties, 58 in total, develop and administer their own independent living services. This is where disparities occur at the California state level. As reported, by the Children’s Advocacy Institute an example of the disparities is (1) in Trinity County, where a meager amount of \$350 per month is allocated for room and board for

⁴⁷ California Wellness Foundation Report, p. 5

⁴⁸ California Wellness Foundation Report, p.5

⁴⁹ California Wellness Foundation Report, p.5

up to six months after dependency is terminated and (2) a county like Amador County doesn't provide a housing program for former foster youth. Now concentrating on the federal level, there are negative aspects that sometimes inhibit a former foster youth's ability to achieve self-sufficiency. In the state of Washington, "*State of Department of Social and Health Services v. Keffeler*, the U.S. Supreme Court held that a state may take a foster child's Social Security benefits away from him/her in order to reimburse the state for the child's foster care costs."⁵⁰ As a result, although states voluntarily assume the role of parent for foster children, it is allowed under federal law to take monies rightfully due these children to help pay for their care."⁵¹ A vital recommendation that Ms. Karen Bass and her constituency has been working on is extending funding to emancipated youth beyond 18 years old, as mentioned in this report. On a policy level, the only exception to this rule is, "Section 11403, which allows foster youth to remain in care until age 19 when they will not be able to complete high school by age 18."⁵² If the youth is not able to complete their schooling by age 19, the court has the right to legally terminate jurisdiction. As a researcher stressing the importance of education among youth in foster care, it is a hard pressing fact to know that the state law does not prevent California, the voluntary parent, from literally telling a youth emancipating, here is the street and you are no longer eligible to finish your schooling to achieve a high school diploma or GED.

The governmental response to foster youth needs to focus on pointing out the problems and fixing them. There are endless statistics that show that youth who are in foster care end up homeless or incarcerated. To interrupt and end this cycle, the government must work with all agencies nationwide to come to a consensus to end the high rate of recidivism, homelessness and

⁵⁰ The California Wellness Foundation Report, p.6

⁵¹ The California Foundation Wellness Report, p.6

poverty for our youth. Community based organizations (CBO), must find ways to collaborate and come up with solutions. To support this ‘failure’ of the foster care system, many advocates for foster children are quick to blame the system. In the end it comes down to the point that it is not just the system’s fault, but our state and city agencies that must create a system and stop blaming the social system. The ideal situation would allow for public, private and non-profit partnerships to occur so it wouldn’t be only the fault of the system when youth aren’t prepared for life post-emancipation.

America, a movie that had its worldwide television release on February 28, 2009 depicts the cycle of abuse and the real life situation of one youth’s journey to emancipation. A 17 year- old boy is put into the foster care system and then reaches the age of 18 to emancipate from the system. As this movie was released it was evident from all the media on the Lifetime network that sensitive information would arise. Currently, there are very few movies dealing with youth emancipation.

The new communication tool in popular culture is blogging, emailing and texting and the movie America has allowed users to blog online about the movie. This has led to candid information from foster care parents whom have had their own personal experiences. Getting involved in the blogging on the Lifetime Network’s website proved beneficial to this thesis work and research process. Having the opportunity as a researcher to interact with many foster parents, it is recommended that state, public, private ad non-profit agencies get together to discuss and hold conferences, discussions and meetings to see what is really happening within foster homes. So many foster homes are reported as inadequate, but if all agencies work together there won’t be stories like the movie, ‘America,’ was based on.

⁵² Bass, K and Beall, J. December 2008

One mother has come too close to the foster system and mentioned her grief with social services along with her experiences. *“My son was bounced around from place to place, each time he was making progress they moved him.” – Anonymous in NJ*

Not only did this mother have problems as a foster child and later a foster mother, but now her biological son fits into the category that many foster children face while experiencing time in system and post emancipation.

She told me, *“My older son broke into summer homes in a resort town to have a place to sleep, he now has a criminal record, no education, no medication and no means to support himself. He hates me and his brother and he will not even speak to us.” (Anonymous email 2/28/09)*

Another account came from a mother who chose to foster a young girl in New Hampshire. Her experience wasn't horrible, but she faced issues that so many foster families face. She stated in her e-mail, *“I remember once though that a case worker changed the visit times (extended it by an hour) and didn't tell me. I was so worried that something had happened and of course on the weekends you can call an on-call case worker, but not the one for your case. Case workers are so overloaded with cases too that it's no wonder they forget sometimes. The turn over rates are really high too.” (Anonymous Foster Mom, NH)*

Another interesting fact that many foster youth face while in the system is the constant struggle with visitation by their parents or family members. Many times the visits are inconsistent based upon some major issues that the parents face. The same foster mother talked about her experience about being a foster parent and how the situation personally affected her. *“I think the hardest part of being a foster mom is dealing with the birth parents to tell you the truth. Each case is different of course, but as a mom myself I find it hard that people still choose*

to lead a life where they lose their children. Of course I understand certain circumstances like job loss or homelessness, but drug addiction affects a lot of the parents whose children end up in the system.” (Anonymous Foster Mom, NH)

It is important to know that states and federal policymakers are trying to work the issues out of foster youth’s unpreparedness, but it isn’t coming soon enough or fast enough. However, a bill that was enacted ten years ago as of the date of this publication and states, “State and federal policymakers are responding to a growing body of research that indicates youths leaving foster care are among the country’s most vulnerable young people. In 1999, Congress enacted the John C. Chaffee Foster Care Independence Program, which doubles funding to states to create and expand independent living services to former foster youths up to age 21.”⁵³

In addition to the survey conducted for this project, the 14th annual Report on Conditions of Children in Orange County, 2008 found trends among emancipated youth. This trend elapsed over a time period of seven years. “The number of emancipation services cases increased 12.1% from a monthly average of 1,586 youth in 2000/01 to 1,778 in 2006/07. The monthly average of youth served has fluctuated from a low of 1,586 in 2000/01 to a high of 1,872 in 2003/04 in the past seven years. The average of youth served has decreased by 1.6% in the last year from 1,807 in 2005/06 to 1,778 in 2006/07.” In regards to these findings as well as program outcomes that were conducted, there is a direct correlation to youth and what is needed to succeed. Program outcomes for client progress, shows that youth who completed high school or received a GED, enrolled in college and youth who obtained employment is a number far lower than any type of services offered to youth. This direct correlation in outcomes shows that youth are not receiving all of the adequate life skills to be working adults in society upon emancipation. Therefore,

⁵³Farrell, F (2004/October/November)

according to the research, youth need to be taught skills at an early age and throughout the time they are a part of a group or foster home. Foster parents need to be the one's to teach youth how to cook, obtain a bank account, accept responsibility and eventually when approaching emancipation how to obtain stable housing such as a transitional housing or ILP program.

From 2001, 69 youth received either a high school diploma or GED and this number increased each year, with the exception of 2004-2005 and 2006-2007. One positive correlation from 2001-2007 shows that 81 youth have enrolled in college, increasing to 368 youth by 2007. The numbers have also steadily increased in youth who have obtained employment, but in regards to overall numbers and characteristics of youth accounted for in this study, the numbers should be a lot higher and reflect a higher level of job, college and career attainment.⁵⁴

Literature for help and solutions

Researching this topic shows that there are agencies available, but it cant be stressed enough that emancipated youth need to receive the proper training long before emancipating to know they have these resources available. From my research in Los Angeles and Orange Counties there are organizations and individuals conducting studies and research to help emancipated youth in their quest for reaching dependency from the courts. The California Youth Connection (CYC) agency has a board of members and volunteers that reaches out to youth. The interesting part about this organization is that, CYC members are actual, “current and former foster youth between the ages of 14-24 years of age. Any youth with a history in the

⁵⁴ Report on the Conditions of Children in Orange County, 2008, p.120.

foster care system (kinship care, relative care, guardianship, etc.) can be a member.”⁵⁵

Other models of successful programs that have impacted communities greatly include: Homeboy Industries, Ben and Jerry’s Foundation, along with the local social enterprise, Monkey Business in Fullerton, California. Ben and Jerry’s Foundation uses the triple bottom line theory. This term is new to the world of CED, but it incorporates financial profit, social community improvement as well as the environment. If we as members of society don’t protect our environment, it may cease to exist in the near future. Both of these social enterprise models have a micro-activity piece entwined. There is the idea of incorporating arts and culture into the model of business as well as also allowing a learning piece.

Ben and Jerry’s mission is to provide a social piece, product and economic piece and does this by incorporating the triple bottom line theory. Ben and Jerry’s has updated their website to maintain these values in 2009 and each mission is stated, “ Social: To operate the company in a way that actively recognizes the central role that business plays in society by initiating innovative ways to improve the quality of life locally, nationally and internationally. Product: To make, distribute and sell the finest quality all natural ice cream and euphoric concoctions with a continued commitment to incorporating wholesome, natural ingredients and promoting business practices that respect the Earth and the Environment, Economic: To operate the company on a sustainable financial basis of profitable growth, increasing value for our stakeholders and expanding opportunities for development and career growth for our employees.”⁵⁶ These three interrelated parts are critical to the company’s success and that they incorporate their mission and values into the communities they offer their products to.

An example of a social enterprise model that is a national model in relation to empowerment,

⁵⁵ Website: California Youth Connection, website:: www.calyouthconnection.org

jobs, self-attainment and help getting individuals off the streets is, Homeboy Industries. Homeboy Industries has been able to impact at risk-individuals, those formerly incarcerated or involved in gangs. The connection Homeboy has to this sort of population connects to the idea that many youth involved in the foster system at some point in their lives, have faced the idea of joining a gang, face a juvenile facility or incarceration. “Young people from over half of the region’s 1,100 known gangs seeking a way out through Homeboy. Thousands of young people have walked through the doors of Homeboy Industries looking for a second chance, and finding community. Gang affiliations are left outside as these young people work together, side-by-side, learning the mutual respect that comes from shared tasks and challenges. Homeboy became an independent nonprofit in August of 2001, and has since grown into a national model.”⁵⁷ Another great model, about 30 miles away from Homeboy Industries is a model focused on assisting emancipated youth in their quest for self-sufficiency.

Monkey Business, the social enterprise model blocks away from California State University, Fullerton focuses on financial literacy, teaches the responsibility of having a job as well as learning the value of customer service and attention to detail. The youth whom work at Monkey Business are artists and entrepreneurs by incorporating their skills to decorate the packaging that the business uses to sell their goods. Monkey Business also incorporates the triple bottom line by incorporating the environmental piece and offers a choice of organic coffees and teas as well as fair trade items. Additionally, there are many delectable food items on the menu that incorporate organic foods.

CED Incorporation

⁵⁶ Retrieved 3/25/09. www.benjerry.com

⁵⁷ Retrieved 3/28/09. www.homeboy-industries.org)

The big question to ask is what is the Return on Investment that the community receives from teaching emancipated youth? Second question is there any return on investment for all the money that is invested in these young adults? Thirdly, how much do we spend each year on the average child in the foster system, not including what happens to the youth when they never make it to self-sufficiency? In laments terms emancipated youth end up back in the system, incarcerated or on welfare.

According to the Select Committee Hearing of the California Legislature, there is “One shocking statistic that best explains how the system has failed them: over 70% of all California State Penitentiary inmates have spent time in the foster care system.”⁵⁸ This statistic shows that there is a direct correlation between juvenile delinquency and adult incarceration. In order to lower the statistics for foster youth recidivism rates, advocates must focus on more than just the social aspects of youth in the foster system. They must focus on youth while they are young and reachable. A child that is in the foster system and showing behavioral signs, poor grades, and acting out in class may be more than just a disruption to a classroom teacher. Youth mentor programs have proven to be very successful and organizations focusing on this, ‘ignored’, population have brought this to the attention of many.

In one organization serving Los Angeles and Orange County, they have been able to successfully show the positive reinforcement of mentoring youth outside the classroom. One success story that took place in Long Beach,” is that of a young man, now 19, went from being a kid from anger management issues on the bring of flunking out of school to being the first member of his family to graduate from high school.”⁵⁹ Edward was 14 when he was peered up with then 61 year-old Tim. This match was one that Tim didn’t ask for as he just wanted to help

⁵⁸ Retrieved 3/5/09. www.Everychildfoundation.org

with math, but after five years of determination and mentoring, Tim helped create a success story and became a life saver for Edward, now 19 and Tim age 66. This success story is one that is proof that with a person to stand beside them, at-risk or emancipated youth can graduate high school and go on to attend college. Power 4 Youth is an organization that works on mentoring at-risk youth to help focus on keeping these youth off the streets in the classroom.

There are ways to invest in these youth and research is stating what programs are available, but the statistics show a very low success rate. For example, the National Association for Student and Financial Aid Administrators (N.A.S.F.A.A) states that, “ Every year an estimated 25,000 youth age out of the foster care system nationwide. These students come from every culture, race and background. Yet they share one common characteristic: they leave foster care without a family or support structure to help them make the transition into adulthood. While 70% of foster youth say they want to attend college, only 10% actually do and only 4% go on to obtain a two- or four- year degree.”⁶⁰ With this piece of information, it can be determined that youth do acquire some skills and support to learn to be responsible adults, but the success stories and low rates of graduation from college and any other educational programs shows there are pieces missing.

Foster care is a serious subject as the discussion of human capital is at the forefront. Human capital is a very delicate subject, but foster youth are human beings who are nearly 18 years old and considered to be children of the state. We as citizens and their ‘parents’ need to see that they strive and succeed in society. According to theorists, Courtney and Piliavin, they found that, “In 1998, that 32% of former foster youth require some kind of public assistance following

⁵⁹ Press-Telegram Newspaper. February 14, 2009

⁶⁰ Website: Retrieved on December 24, 2008:

<http://www.nasfaa.org/publications/2008/cachafee011708.html>

emancipation.” This statistic is a national view point. A successful national model is the Guardian Scholars program, which originated in Orange County at University of California, Fullerton. As of 2003, 93 students entered their program and had eight of those students successfully graduate. If percentages are taken into account, this percentage accounts for .08 % of the 93 students whom entered into the program. These statistics are just a portion of the 255-300 youth whom emancipate from the system in Orange County. If there are approximately 300 youth leaving the foster care system each year in Orange County alone, why is it that only 93 of them entered into the Guardian Scholars program? Where are the statistics on the other youth whom have left the system? These statistics show that it is vital for social service and CBO’s to track where the youth end up after emancipation.

According to research done by theorist Irving Piliavin and others, they have found that, “academic performance is associated with adult employment and socioeconomic status. It was found that the youth discharged from foster family homes do better than those from group settings, and adoptees do better than foster children.”⁶¹

In 2009 it has been reported on the internet and in the news that there is overcrowding in jails and juvenile facilities. An unfortunate example of the overcrowding in county jails occurred on March 30, 2009. The men’s Central jail is just one example in Los Angeles County of the ‘horrific’ conditions that detainees must face while being incarcerated. The downtown, “Los Angeles facility, was constructed in 1963, was built on a linear model meant to house 3,323 prisoners. The jail housed as many as 6,500 people recently, and now has approximately 4,500 prisoners.”⁶² was looking into closing the jail as it costs the county more than \$250 million a year. The effect the institution has on tax payers wallets is \$50,000 per year to house inmates.

⁶¹ Piliavin, p.2

Therefore, it is crucial we focus on providing foster youth with essential tools to emancipate out of the foster care system successfully and be able to adjust to society, without ending up in a crowded jail or homeless.

In order to help ease the transition for youth in foster care to self-dependency, it is crucial that Orange County and surrounding communities in California track and nurture where emancipated youth are going and help them avoid ending up in on the streets, incarcerated or on welfare. The youth must know they have a place to turn to. As this information is highlighted, a professor at the University of California, Riverside, was awarded a grant by the John and Dora Haynes Foundation in March 2009 to conduct a three-year study. “The study will be the first developmental investigations in the United States aimed at determining how teens aging out of foster care make the transition to independence. The study will focus on 185 teens emancipating from foster care in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles and Orange Counties.”⁶³ Professor Tuppett Yates from University California, Riverside, will be the principal investigator in this study. She mentioned critical points that, “There are services available, but the problem is, these kids typically don’t use them because they don’t know how to use them/and or because they don’t have the experience of what it means to be cared for.”⁶⁴

The article also reiterates various statistics and denotes, “California accounts for nearly 15 percent of the 500,000-plus youth in foster care in the United States- more than 72,000 children and teens. In 2007, more than half of California’s foster children lived in Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino counties.

This study should be the used to determine the disconnect between counties around Orange

⁶² The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). Saad, p.1

⁶³ Retrieved March 23, 2009, UC Riverside website

⁶⁴ UC Riverside Newsroom article

County. The fact that there are adequate programs in place for the local foster youth in Orange County, such as the Guardian Scholars program, then why are there higher numbers of youth leaving foster care in Los Angeles County?

According to, The Community College Foundation (TCCF), Youth Development Services (YDS), “50% of emancipated youth in Los Angeles will end up homeless, 51% of the youth will be homeless within two to four years, about 32% of the youth that ‘age out,’ of foster care are from Los Angeles County and shockingly enough for the youth fortunate enough to attend college, between one to five percent of foster youth graduate from college.”⁶⁵

The majority of youth who age out or emancipate from foster care at age 18, the outlook is grim. “National statistics show that within 18 months, 50% have not graduated from high school and are unemployed, a third end up in jail and a quarter become homeless.”⁶⁶

According to the Jim Casey Foundation, in 2003, approximately 4,000 youth emancipated from the foster care system in California. Of those 4,000 youth, 255-300 youth emancipate in Orange County annually.⁶⁷

To support these statistics a model that was looked at is Orange County Conservation Corps. This model allows for at-risk adults to enter into a state funded program that allows for youth to attend school and work for minimum wage. The success rate of the young adults that stay in the program and receive either their GED or their high school diploma is at 30%. There are all races represented in the program with a higher rate of Latinos and African American with Caucasian and Asians making up the least of the youth in the program. Other applicants may not stay in the program for an extended period of time due to the structure, which they may have had during a

⁶⁵ The Community College Foundation Website

⁶⁶Website: Retrieved on February 14, 2009 www.casaoc.org

⁶⁷ Orange County Social Services Website

period of incarceration. The young adults that do stay in the program may understand the mindset of the program. The mindset and direct correlation to the idea that once they turn 24 they may not ever be able to receive their high school diploma in this setting, as they age out from OCCC just like emancipated youth age out of the foster care system.

The conservation corps program is a positive model to take from and a similar model within the foster care system could extract vital information from the OCCC corps. It is mind boggling that there are various programs for juveniles or formerly incarcerated individuals, but there are fewer intermediary programs to help decrease the amount of juvenile delinquency among emancipated youth. A disturbing fact that was reported by the Washington Post, noted that, “In California, the percentage of children who never make it past the fourth-grade reading level is used to help gauge the number of future prison beds to fund.”⁶⁸ An example of a program in the state of Florida, that is focused on helping ex-offenders regroup and get back into mainstream society is called Advocate 4 Justice. This group, “lobbies lawmakers to reinstate federal parole-particularly for nonviolent drug offenders.”⁶⁹ One ex-offender that is using the Advocate 4 Justice services is, Vikki Hankins. She has had the misfortune of being released during the worst economic time since the Depression and she has had real problems finding jobs. Advocate 4 Justice has helped her by working for them doing administrative work and, “In exchange, the group helps pay her weekly motel bills and some basics such as toiletries and clothing. Still, she hasn’t made enough for a car or a down payment on an apartment rental.”⁷⁰ This program in Florida which has some of the toughest criminal offender laws, nationwide, would be a great program model to offer youth whom have emancipated from the system. If this program was

⁶⁸ Washington Post, July 6, 2004

⁶⁹ Associated Press, Gainesville Sun, p.1

⁷⁰ Associated Press, Gainesville Sun, p.2

created in the state of California or on a national level, but focused on emancipated youth, then maybe there would be hope for youth leaving the system, similar to offenders leaving years of state funded shelter and food in jail. A shocking statistic that was reported by the Federal Bureau of Justice Statistics states that, “2.3 million people in the U.S. are held in jails, state lockups or federal facilities”⁷¹ If organizations such as the one’s working with emancipated youth focused on youth at an age younger than 18, it would be beneficial in the long run, as many youth offenders eventually are the same offenders who contribute to the high recidivism rates in jails. Therefore, society needs to focus on youth before they emancipate out of the system, the government wouldn’t have to spend nearly \$50 billion on offenders behind bars.

A redefinition of success needs to come from the youth involved in secondary programs as well as emancipated youth. Emancipated youth and youth who have just left the system from being incarcerated, may have a different view on what success is. To redefine success there needs to be a set of basic tools that these young adults need to acquire before they encounter society. Society is not always accepting of youth who may have been in a juvenile facility during their childhood or even after incarceration and then need a place to go once they are released from the system. Important questions need to be asked when discussing where emancipated youth fit into society. They must first learn the life skills that any other child learns while growing up in a loving and supportive familial environment.

The CED structure needs to establish many important factors for these youth in order to increase positive outcomes post-emancipation. A safe and stable housing environment, job opportunities, job training, self-awareness, workforce development, managing and saving money, and more importantly educational programs as well as post-secondary options, post

⁷¹ Associated Press, Gainesville Sun, p. 2

emancipation are critical for youth whom are leaving the system. A successful and sustainable model is now being used for former inmates in Oakland, California. The model is called Project Choice. "Project Choice provides intensive post-release services and supervision to young Oakland parolees. Project Choice currently provides an array of services including employment training, adult education, mental health and substance abuse treatment, and intensive supervision for parolees returning to their communities."⁷²

Emancipation and foster youth are a very important topic to Los Angeles, California's Speaker of the House, Ms. Karen Bass. Most recently Ms. Bass has advocated for a bill to protect youth 'aging out,' of the foster system until the age of 21. Many former foster youth showed their support at the State Capitol one Sunday in March along with leaders from around California in support of Assembly Bill 12 AB 12. The bill, "would require the department to amend its foster care state plan required under specified federal law, to extend AFDC-FC benefits, Commencing October 1, 2010, to specific individual up to 21 years of age, in accordance with a designated provision of federal law."⁷³

"This bill would be a major asset for foster youth of California and any child in the system that is approaching emancipation. The report, California's Fostering Connections to Success Act and the Costs and Benefits of Extending Foster Care to 21, chronicled the positive outcomes experienced by youth who were allowed to remain in care past the age of 18 in Illinois, versus those who exited the system at 18 in Wisconsin and Iowa.

The report finds that among those youth who remain in care until age 21, they are three times more likely to enroll in college, 65% less likely to have been arrested, and there is a 38%

⁷² Associated Press, Gainesville Sun, p. 2

⁷³ California Legislature- 2009- 10 Regular Session

reduction in the risk of teen pregnancy.”⁷⁴ More importantly the bill is sponsored by the following organizations; the Alliance for Child and Family Services California Youth Connection, the Children’s Law Center of Los Angeles, the County Welfare Directors Association of California, the John Burton Foundation for Children Without Homes, the Judicial Council of California, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) State Council and the Youth Law Center. California would join other states on supporting it’s foster youth until the tender age of 21, allowing more time for youth to achieve self dependency and gain the knowledge and skills to be on their own, further their education, or face the transition that youth have to endure at such a young age.

IV. Project Design Logic Model

The long-term outcome for emancipated youth is to ensure that youth in Orange County are prepared for emancipation before they, ‘age out’ of the system. Ensuring the basic needs of youth are met to include, housing, job stability, financial literacy, proper health care and support are vital for youth to stay off the streets. These necessities will help deter youth from ending up back in the system. The theory of change that can be applied focus on preparation and training for long term outcomes. This focus needs to happen long before youth emancipate which will help decrease the amount of youth who leave the system unprepared.

The first interim outcome is to increase ability to available programs & support systems from government & Non-profit Organization’s(NPO) for former foster youth. All of this needs to occur at least a year or two before the youth are to emancipate from the system, so they have a better idea on what to expect. Secondly, the more important of the two outcomes is to decrease

delinquent behavior among youth once emancipated from the system. (homelessness, drug use, pregnancy, etc.) By training youth and helping overcome these conditions, it will aid in helping youth sustain from becoming part of the cycle of ending up back in the system. Youth also need to accept more responsibility as young adults. They need to do this by being taught the responsibilities while in the foster care system. Many foster homes are not able to enforce rules with youth in the foster system, such as household chores, so it is important that youth learn these rules while in a foster care or group home setting.

With the proper guidance and support youth will be able to emancipate as independent adults and have already learned the essential skills to enter an ILP program or function on their own. Youth need to be aware of what organizations are able to provide them with help and what services are available to them. As a result this will help decrease the percentage of youth whom end up on the streets, participate in illegal substance abuse, along with lower the pregnancy rates of emancipated youth.

A high number of foster care youth are non-functioning adults and the cause of this is a result of the lack of skills and knowledge they are provided to function when emancipating from the system. Providing youth the support and guidance such as a Court Appointed Special Advocate, also known as guardian ad litem, or mentor will also help with sustaining youth to stay off the streets or help them refrain from getting into further troubles.

In addition to providing youth with a support system it is essential that they are able to function and develop the fundamental skills to be as productive as teenagers who must emancipate at the tender age of 18. Youth need to receive essential training to approach the real world with strength and dignity, as so many youth lose both by being put in foster care, as they

⁷⁴ Retrieved 3/31/09 Website: www.californiaprogressreport.com

feel like they are unwanted at times or not cared about. So many foster youth do not get a chance to have their own rights of passage at 18, that the average child, outside of the foster system may experience. A middle school graduation, prom, cotillion or any other passage that makes them feel like they are becoming a adult on their way to high school graduation or even college. This right of passage also comes from the familial unit. As the research has shown when youth are taken out of the care of their loves ones, mother, father, aunt or uncle, they face uncertainty in the foster care system. So many parents lose their children to neglect, but the line of neglect and poverty may be more present in this era than ever. A hotel is not considered a safe haven to bring up a child. Therefore, if given the circumstances a child will be removed from their parents care, if they cannot maintain proper housing or employment. This is where it is important in the logic model and process to help parents or kin to establish a lifestyle where reunification occurs. There has been little evidence that keeping a child in the foster system allows for them to grow and nourish, like they would being with a family member that is fighting to be reunited with their child.

According to, Table 1 (See Appendix) the inputs youth need to have and lack most, are self-esteem, self-worth, self-determination. In support of this there is a strategy that is stated from an article, on preventing school failure and lists the components that youth need. The components include daily life skills, career explorations and self- help. Along with these skills youth could benefit from the use of social and vocational skills. In what capacity do these youth need these skills to survive on their own? The lack of affordable housing, especially in the state of California contributes to the lack of stability the emancipated youth face post-emancipation.

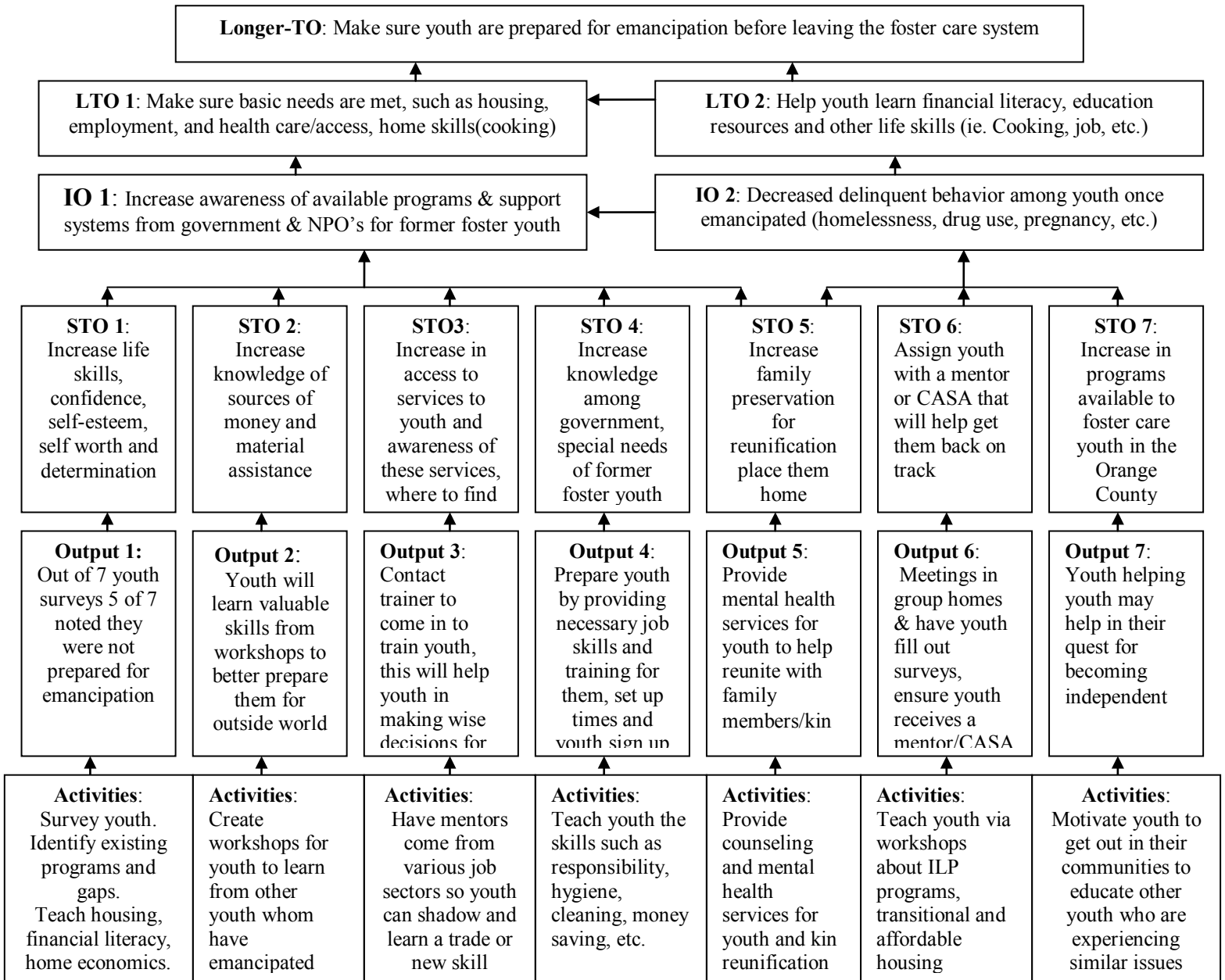
The youth could benefit from family planning, daily life skills, along with proper academics and schooling to help them graduate high school and move forward onto a trade school,

university or full time job. Additionally, it is important youth achieve some type of stability while in the foster care system. Whether this stability comes from a foster home or familial unit, stability is key for youth to maintain a path for staying in school and maintaining relationships with their friends and schools. Permanent homes or adoptive homes are stability that youth need to see, not only at a young age, but as teenagers. More adoptions for youth in the foster care system, will help decrease the numbers of children being cared for by the state. Every time a child moves to a new foster or group home, the more disruption occurs for the child. This may trigger bad behavior as the child thinks they can get away with acting out at the new school or home. According to the Casey Foundation, “over 70% of foster youth say they want to attend college,” but how can this become reality when a child is continuously moved from one placement to the next. As a result their classes, friends and most importantly grades and credits are affected.

A long- term outcome that has been looked at by Congress is increasing the age of emancipation from the foster care system. The average young adult does not leave their parents house until they are between the ages of 21-26 years old. According to the Orange County Register, the average cost for a child living at home in Orange County is \$759.00 a month.⁷⁵ As the researcher if this were to be multiplied by months, it costs on average \$9,108 to raise a child in just one year alone. With legislation and proof of research this could become a Long Term Outcome (LTO). In regards to the age increase California is working on working with Congress to increase the age of youth receiving aid from 18 to 21 years of age, so this is a move in the right direction.

⁷⁵ Walker, T. (May 2008)

Project Logic Model



V. Methodology and Implementation Plan

Project Beneficiaries

The focus of this project intends to address youth ages 15-18 years old, but more importantly it focuses on youth whom are most at risk. The youth most at risk include those who are emancipating from the foster care system.

This project intends to seek out the programs that are available to youth in Orange County. Its focus is to ensure that youth have the accessibility to many programs and resources to transition smoothly out of the foster care system onto adulthood.

The Department of Children and Family Services reports that in Los Angeles County, there is a total of 17,658 youth in out of home placements. There are 1,856 youth whom are 18 years and older and receiving child and welfare services. A reported 22,278 youth have been assigned to out of home placements. Of these youth 1,566 have been placed in foster homes in Los Angeles County.⁷⁶ It is important to decipher from this project which youth in Orange County are accessing services available to them. The hope is to clarify there are youth that are reaching out and using services in Orange County and determine what programs could be used more efficiently as well as become more effective in the lives of these youth.

The local community is affected if youth emancipate from the system and aren't able to succeed on their own and maintain a stable lifestyle. As a result, the community pays through tax dollars, that generally support the state and federal institutions. The social system must provide places for juvenile and adult offenders, but this can be avoided by having to send youth to prisons, if we start from the problem. Youth who end up living a criminal lifestyle, usually have spent some time in the foster system during their young lives. To support this fact a shocking statistic was discovered by the Select Committee Hearing of California's Legislature in

May 2006.⁷⁷ An alarming statistic that is one of many signs that shows the system has failed emancipated youth is, “over 70% of all State Penitentiary inmates have spent time in the foster care system.” The more youth whom end up either homeless or incarcerated directly affects an increase citizens tax dollars. If ILP Programs are not successfully teaching America’s youth to become responsible adults in society it becomes a spiral effect. There is a direct correlation between foster care and incarceration rates. This is where Orangewood Children’s Foundation and their work in the community are vital to the success of emancipated youth. Orangewood Foundation and other programs that are in place in Orange County and Los Angeles must work together to change the fact that in Los Angeles alone there are 30,000 foster youth whom we parent and the amount spent on those youth has reached upwards of \$4.5 billion per year, just to helping the families. Lastly, Los Angeles County has one in ten foster youth in the entire United States and this accounts for the highest number of youth in foster care, more than any other county.

The information and statistics show the correlations between juveniles not receiving the proper care, skills and training which ends up resulting in a negative impact on the youth. The disturbing information released from the Children’s Law Center of Los Angeles states, “nearly 100 times a day a child will be removed from his or her home and placed in foster care. Even more disturbing is that, “the total number of foster youth in our state is greater than the total enrollment of our three largest universities and has tripled over the last 20 years.”⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Department of Children and Families, July 2008

⁷⁷ Retrieved January 10, 2009

<http://www.ballantinesbiz.com/everychild/emancipatingfosteryouthstatistics.htm>

⁷⁸ Children’s Law Center of Los Angeles Website

Project Staff

The staff for this project include; staff from the Orangewood Children's Foundation whom have acted as key informants in the process. Other key informants include the youth whom have filled out confidential surveys in their quest to address the issues and problems they have faced being dependants of the court system. Additionally, a member from Casey Family Services has contributed to this report, a graduate from the Guardian Scholars Program at California State Fullerton and employees from The Monkey Business Social Enterprise in Fullerton, California.

Stakeholders

The stakeholders in this project are the youth themselves as this study is one step closer to helping provide the information to help provide them youth with successful resources towards self-sufficiency, success and sustainability. In addition school personnel, town officials, health care providers and law enforcement officers are stakeholders. We as community members are also important stakeholders whose tax dollars goes toward youth in the system. In addition the mentors, like California Youth's connection members, whom were former foster youth, as they are the voices who address current problems in the foster care system.

Roles, Tasks and Responsibilities

The roles, tasks and responsibilities have yet to be clearly defined, but there will be a planning committee to help plan any events, meetings or gatherings that are arranged. The planning committee will also help educate the community of any new findings and information that are coming up.

Project Beneficiaries

The project beneficiaries are the youth whom are benefitting from this project. Their roles and responsibilities are to follow up on any services needed. They are to access any type of service and programming necessary for their benefit. The other beneficiaries of this project include the local community, tax payers, ILP Programs, Orangewood Children's Foundation, foster home and group homes along with the court system. All of these people and organizations benefit in some way, whether it is physical results or socially responsible for the outcome of the youth.

Service Providers: The service providers that have been identified in helping youth are The Orangewood's Children's Foundation. Orangewood Children's Foundation plays an instrumental role in the lives of foster youth along with emancipated youth. They provide various key components to making sure youth do not end back on the streets after emancipation. They provide many programs that help guide youth in the right direction to self-reliance, responsibility and financial assistance. The programs that they provide include: The Children's Trust Fund, Guardian Scholars Program, Independent Living Program (ILP), Independent Living Coach Program, Orangewood Resource Center, Rising Tide Communities(ILP), Peer Mentor Program, California Youth Connection, Mentor Programs along with FACT Family Resource Centers. All of these programs are geared towards helping youth between the ages of 0-18 years old and their families.

The most important programs for emancipated youth include the Children's Trust Fund , Guardian Scholars Program, ILP Program to include Rising Tides Living Community and the

availability of the Orangewood Resource Center. All of these resources provide an outlet for youth to get advice, counseling and resources to help them become part of the adult community.

Key informants: These are the people who have committed their time to being a participant in an interview and can include, current foster youth, emancipated youth, parents, teachers, executive directors of organizations working with troubled youth or youth having been a part of the foster system. Along with these informants, educators working with this population have contributed to this report. Other key informants include two mother's who both been involved with the foster system, by fostering children. Both mother's have shared their personal experiences for this project.

Key Stakeholder's: The stakeholders are the emancipated youth as they are the ones this report is focused on. Additionally, social services plays a major role in this research as they provide for the youth in and out of the foster system. The courts, group homes, foster homes and providers like the Orangewood Children's Foundation are key stakeholders. They are very important in the contribution to the youth succeeding beyond their emancipation.

Another key stakeholder that is identified in this project is the social enterprise Monkey Business. Monkey Business is a social enterprise model in Fullerton, CA and it teaches the ideals of employment, financial literacy, along with responsibility to newly emancipated youth. The youth are able to seek employment by working at the café owned and operated by Hart Community Homes. Hart Community homes is a group home for boys ages 13-18 years old. Monkey Business also employs females, but due to the association with Hart Community Home it also employs the youth who age out of the group home atmosphere. The youth usually spend no more than a year working at Monkey Business and this becomes their stepping stone to

gaining experience in the job sector, which is a very important piece, so they do not end up back in the foster system.

Community Leaders: Community Leaders are able to report any findings and gather for meetings to collaborate on ways to help foster youth. Any community leaders that are actively involved in the community as well as anyone that has experience working with emancipated youth.

Short Term Outcome 1: Increase life skills, confidence Short Term Outcome 5: Talk to youth and hold meetings with youth to get their feedback of what they feel they need before Emancipation.																	
Activities	Month								Outcomes/ Outputs								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
Increase life skills, confidence, self-esteem																	So, youth can make Their own decisions and become independent of what the foster care system.
Identify gaps in existing programs.																	To identify what additional programs are needed
Increase preparedness of youth for emancipation																	Builds confidence and youth have a better feeling about the courts judicial system
Identify opportunities to expand and/or strengthen existing programs.																	To capitalize on existing programs and opportunities to create new programs.
Put together evaluations and surveys on what youth feel in programming.																	Increase families knowledge of services/ programs or activities for youth
Survey youth on finding out what programs they are using																	To see how successful the training sessions are for youth and whether or not to continue certain programs/make improvements

Short Term Outcome 2: : Increase knowledge of sources of financial literacy, job attainment, health education and various services towards self sufficiency.

Activities	Month								Outcomes/ Outputs								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
Create workshops for youth to learn from other youth whom have emancipated																	.Of the surveyed youth the majority of the teens were in home placements for only a few months
Survey youth.																	To see what they feel about the training and programs that they are introduced
Identify existing programs and gaps																	To strengthen programs and make them better for youth so they will want to continue to becoming independent
Create new programs or expand existing ones																	To strengthen programs and make them better for youth so they will want to continue to becoming independent
Introduce idea to youth via Group homes, etc.																	To allow youth opportunities to succeed and stay out of the court system
																	To see how they respond to conditions set forth for them and to increase variety among programs.

Short Term Outcome 3: Contact Trainer to Come into train youth

Activities	Month								Outcomes/ Outputs								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
Conduct monthly meetings where youth can collaborate with professionals as well as their peers to discuss issues																	Contact trainer to come in to train youth
Hold weekly sessions for youth to discuss issues or topics of concern																	To receive feedback from youth as well as engage them in stimulated conversation
Record findings from Weekly meetings																	To see if there is repeat members and the % of involvement
Help find jobs and tell them personal experiences to promote self worth																	Boosts their ego to go out and get something done
Implement project																	See how the community responds to all research done

Short Term Outcome 4: Increase knowledge among government, special needs of former foster youth
Short Term Outcome 6: Assign youth with a mentor or CASA that will help get them back on track

Activities	Month								Outcomes/ Outputs								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
Have youth list the problems they are having out on their own and then create a session to come up with ideas to work out																	Increase knowledge among government, special needs of former foster youth
Ensure youth whom are in foster care get the proper attention they need to ensure graduation and school attendance																	Assign youth with a mentor or CASA that will help get them back on track
Conduct a series of IQ tests to look for any sort of learning disabilities																	Determines whether or not youth have something deterring them or slowing them down to being successful
Identify and contract with trainers.																	Trainers to implement programs.
Record feedback from trainers																	To see progress
Conduct a survey																	Compare feedback from survey with actual youth outcomes and statistics

Short Term Outcome 7: Increase programs in Orange County and link them with other counties

Activities	Month								Outcomes/ Outputs							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Motivate youth to get out in their communities to educate other youth who are now going through what they went through prior to emancipation																Collect data from surveys to assess youths needs properly
Assess available programs currently in Orange County																Determine the availability of programs for youth in Orange County
Take a look at other programs in the surrounding Areas such as Orangewood Children's Foundation																Assess successful programs by surveying youth who use current programs in surrounding
Interview Other administrators in the CED field																This will help determine what works best
Put together data and Beach organizations																Receive feedback from professionals onto whether they feel it will be worth implementing
Implement programs.																Check status of new programs bi-monthly

VI. Monitoring Plan

Indicators

The key to Emancipated youth succeeding on their own is the success of the seven outputs from the logic model. For purpose of the project the outputs are considered to be indicators or benchmarks and will be used to test the results. Additionally, by interviewing youth whom have emancipated from the system and determining their sustainability will help paint a clear picture on what youth are lacking for sustainability after emancipation.

In addition to interviews the social enterprise model that will be used as an example is called Monkey Business. Monkey Business is a social enterprise model connected to Hart Community Homes, a home for boys in the foster system ages 13-18.

Output 1: 5 of 7 youth interviewed were not prepared prior to emancipation.

Output 2: Youth will learn valuable skills from workshops to better prepare for the real world.

Output 3: Contact trainer to prepare youth prior and post emancipation.

Output 4: Provide job training and classes for youth to learn skills prior to emancipation

Output 5: Provide mental health services for youth to help reunite with family or kin.

Output 6: Ensure youth are assigned a mentor or Court Appointed Special Advocate. (CASA)

Output 7: Youth helping youth whom have had similar experiences. (Cal. Youth Connection).

In addition to taking a look at the logic model it is key that a model be created for this project. Through the research and findings it is important to focus on the research noting that emancipated youth need to be taught pre-emancipation and post-emancipation successful ways to live on their own. Therefore, as a researcher the proposed model has been called the Foster Care Model Pre and Post-Emancipation.(FCMPPE) This model will include various steps that will be

allow youth to learn the essential training before they emancipate from the system starting at 14 years old. This model will be implemented in foster care homes, group homes and non-profit agencies. There will be trainers that will come in to teach these youth as well as have former and current foster youth, act as volunteers, who have maintained their own story of success. For example, a youth that was interviewed in this research process has graduated from the Guardian Scholars program at California State University Fullerton. He would be a great asset to this project and start off first as a volunteer, and once he has participated in the program as a volunteer, he and others who volunteer will be eligible for stipends. This is a train the trainer model. Youth teach each other the life skills necessary as previously mentioned in this research document, that current youth learned and other youth may have not learned during their time in foster care. Paid professionals will also be part of the training process to ensure youth receive the essential skills they need to emancipate out of the system.

Budget Summary

Budget

Item	Percent	Total
Personnel-Volunteer	70%	\$0
Contracts and Consultants	20%	\$50,000
Travel & Programming	1%	\$1,000
Supplies	1%	\$300
Miscellaneous	1%	\$200
Indirect Overhead	7%	\$500
	100%	\$52,000

VII. Evaluation Plan

The evaluation plan will occur over a period of time after this project is complete and will include various indicators and variables to do so. Throughout this project there have been various indicators and challenges. One of the challenges is accessing and speaking with emancipated youth. Over the time period I have been able to interview a series of youth whom all have graciously shared their personal experiences with me. Although, I have been fortunate to establish interviews with some youth, there has been difficulty to connect with other youth. One young lady had written me about a dozen times and we still were not able to establish a time to meet. As a result, the decision was made to move onto speaking with youth who are willing to share their story.

During the research in January 2009, an attempt was made to contact the young girl mentioned earlier, but she declined to answer emails. I decided to see if any of the youth I volunteered with at a nonprofit organization would be willing to sit down with me. One young lady, seventeen years old was willing to speak to me about her experience in the foster system. Natalie* was removed from her mother's residence because her mother was unstable to care for her due to methamphetamines use. When asking Natalie* about her experience in the foster system she told me it was a fairly positive experience. The issue with this was she was fortunate and hasn't been in the foster system for as long as most others her age. She was able to stay with a family friend as well, but the one thing Natalie felt was that she felt the system should be easier on the parents and children and listen to what they have to say. She felt, "sometimes they wouldn't listen to what I had to say or changed their mind even if my mom followed the rules. One interesting fact was that Natalie does not have a bank account and has never really been interested or understood why she needs one. I sat down with her to point out the reasons why it would be good to have a bank account. Her response, "I was so used to taking care of everyone

else that I don't want to grow up. Please keep in mind she is now 17 years old and eventually has to face being an adult, as legally at 18 she will be considered an adult.

Natalie* did learn by having a job she learned many invaluable lessons. She told me she learned, "responsibility, being on time, no calling in sick and how to count money better, by being a cashier." These lessons are key factors as to why youth need to learn responsibility before exiting the foster care system.

It is with honor that I talk about the young man whom I had a chance to interview on Friday April 10, 2009. A foster child in the system since the age of three, a case of neglect like 60% of all foster cases and Victor chose to never look back. The only thing that Victor looked back at was the fact he knew he had a drive and will to succeed and beat the odds. Victor spent eight years of his young life in and out of foster homes to successfully be placed in one loving group home in Orange County for seven years and eventually a loving foster home with his siblings. This stability allowed him to prosper and grow as well as maintain a core group of friends and classmates, contributing to his successes. It is with great pride and honor that I had the opportunity to spend two hours with Victor and learn his story. He is just one of half a million youth who have their story to share.

VIII. Evaluation variables and indicators

This emancipated project will evaluate the following indicators, as related to long term, intermediate and short term outcomes:

Long Term Outcome 1: LTO 1: Make sure basic needs are met, such as housing, employment, and health care access

Indicator(s): Find out the statistics of youth whom are meeting their basis needs and using ILP programs and accessing available jobs in Orange County versus Los Angeles County

Long Term Outcome 2: Expose at least 10-20 children to programs available to them before emancipation

Indicator(s): Number of youth using available services/signed up for training.

Intermediate Outcome 1: Increase ability to available programs & support systems from government & NPO's for former foster

Indicator(s): Have list fill out surveys as to what programs they are using

Intermediate Outcome 2: Decreased delinquent behavior among youth once emancipated (homelessness, drug use, pregnancy, etc.)

Indicator(s): Statistics showing the percentage of foster youth whom are homeless or on the streets has dropped

Short Term Outcome 1: Increase life skills, confidence and self-esteem

Indicator(s): Results known from surveys and or/ reports from CASA's, the child's mentor and/or foster family, ILP program once emancipated

Indicators: Hold monthly meetings for youth to meet with their peers, whether it is in a group home setting, ILP program facility, etc.

Short Term Outcome 2: Increase knowledge of sources of money and material assistance

Indicator(s): Train youth on money management and later test them and hold a meeting as to what their knowledge is and see what they have learned

Short Term Outcome 3: Access to services to youth and awareness of these services, where to find services

Indicator(s): Have a new test samples of youth fill out surveys as already done in the beginning and see if they are aware of where to find services

Short Term Outcome 4: Increase knowledge among government, special needs of former foster youth

Indicator(s): Use resources such as the California Youth Connection and other services to introduce to government and show what good is being done to keep the topic on the table.

Short Term Outcome 5: Increase families knowledge of services/ programs or activities for youth

Indicator(s): Hold monthly seminars for foster families before youth emancipate and various training sessions

Short Term Outcome 6: Assign youth with a mentor or CASA that will help get them back on track

Indicator(s) : The results will show by statistics later on whether youth had another form of support such as a CASA

Short Term Outcome 7: Increase in programs available to foster care youth in Orange County and surrounding

Indicator(s): In one year find out what programs have begun and see what monies are available from government or the local city for foster youth, before emancipation

Data gathering methods, tools, forms

Data will be gathered based on the Logic Model sheet and analyzed based on the outcomes.

IX. Sustainability Elements Plan

This project will be sustained by documenting all research and any information that is discovered in the upcoming year. The project is in place to ensure youth ages 15-19 age out of the court system properly and are prepared for life as emancipated youth, whom are considered adults on their own at age 18. The project is being conducted to find out the availability of resources in Orange County, as well as any surrounding cities.

One organizational that has put together a project and advocated for the rights of foster youth is known as, “ Kids are Waiting, Fix Foster Care Now.” This project has been completed, but has helped influence key government advisors to take a closer look at the foster care system and how the resources are being used. The campaign has been completed, but “the campaign worked in partnership with other organizations to urge federal reform of the financing structure governing the nation’s foster care system.”

As a result, the “ Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 passed unanimously by the House and Senate and signed into Law in October 2008.”⁷⁹ This legislation is the key to helping fix critical problems within the foster system. It also will provide hope for youth, families, social workers and anyone ever affected by the foster system. The goal of this project are for youth to receive enough, guidance, information, resources in addition to training to use before emancipating out of the court system. The financial costs of this program are a small estimation of the years and various programs it would take to support youth beyond emancipation from the foster care system.

⁷⁹ Retrieved April 1, 2009. <http://kidsarewaiting.org/about/>

Conclusions & Recommendations

The structural deficits and conclusions weigh heavily on all people involved in the steps youth take toward emancipation. The social aspect of the system allows for overworked, overloaded social case workers that may not see the light of day due to the work load they endure. A blog spot radio show and magazine called, 'We R Family,' has allowed for professionals, mentors, foster parents, adoptive parents and caregivers to speak first hand of their experiences. Many people who have not done research and see the results of youth being left to the foster system don't always know the facts, but are quick to judge. The irony of it all is that the overall decisions that are made are by the court system and the judges who handle each case. As soon as a judge sits down at their bench, they look over the case file and then analyze the data. Having the honor to be part of the talk radio show for a period of time, has allowed the listeners as well as those involved to come up with conclusions and also allows for future recommendations to be made.

Therefore, the weight of the structural system gets heavier and heavier the more youth that end up in the foster care system along with the youth who leave the foster system. The negative impacts as discussed throughout this research process show it is vital that youth need the essentials to learn self-sufficiency. There is a large impact if youth don't receive the resources they need to strive as young adults entering society to include incarceration, homelessness, welfare and pregnancy. In order to stop this cycle and change the structure of the system each state is theoretically assigned as parents when the child enters foster care. It is important states act as proper parents by providing these youth with everything they need to love, nurture and care for them to stop this cycle from continuing.

Additionally, according to studies conducted in the state of Illinois it is important to

acknowledge and focus on the resources that are available for youth, to lessen the negative impacts on the economy and on the youth. For example, “California’s Fostering Connections to Success Act and the Costs and Benefits of Extending Foster Care to 21, chronicled the positive outcomes experienced by youth who were allowed to remain in care past the age of 18 in Illinois, versus those who exited the system at 18 in Wisconsin and Iowa. The report finds that among those youth who remain in care until age 21, they are three times more likely to enroll in college, 65% less likely to have been arrested, and there is a 38% reduction in the risk of teen pregnancy.”⁸⁰

Lastly, there were some important recommendations made by the Law Center of Los Angeles that include: adopting a child to provide them with a permanent and loving placement, become a foster parent which gives kids a safe home environment, become a CASA to regularly provide guidance to a foster child or emancipated youth in need, become a mentor with a local organization to provide the support a youth needs that is exiting the foster care system, donate your time to help children learn to read or donate items for children and most importantly celebrate a foster child’s birthday which is just a small gift that they will remember for a life time.

It is important to note the research done in this project shows all the evidence that youth need to learn emancipation skills prior to emancipation from the foster care system. It is essential that Community Based Organizations and policy makers look at the signs of the large numbers of youth in the foster system in the state of California and realize change needs to happen now. Therefore, for youth to feel empowered, they need to be able to use their own experiences to train each other while in the system, starting at the age of 14 until they reach the

⁸⁰ Retrieved April 3, 2009. California Fostering Connections to Success Act.

age of 18. Allowing youth to feel empowered pre-emancipation and post -emancipation will help youth gain the self-esteem and confidence they weren't so fortunate to have as young children. The research has shown that youth need housing, food, finances, literacy, job skills and the will and desire to want to survive the difficult task of not becoming a statistic after emancipation from the foster care system. With the research conducted in this project, communities, policy makers, non-profit organizations, for profit organizations and caring individuals can all contribute to their communities and help lower the statistics of youth leaving the foster system to end up back in the system.

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⁸ Children's Advocacy Institute, p.18

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