

Independent Living Service Programs for Foster Youth:
How Individual Factors and Program Features
Affect Participation and Outcomes

By

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines factors that impact the provision of services and resources for youth during their transition from foster care into adulthood, specifically the support provided through federally funded Independent Living Skills Programs (ILSPs). The population targeted by these programs numbers fewer than 400,000 current and former foster youth between the ages of 16 and 21 at any given time. The review of the ILSP evaluation literature presented here shows little evidence to suggest that ILSPs, as they have operated over the past two decades, have had a positive impact on the young adult outcomes of former foster youth.

A quantitative analysis of ILSP graduation data from one California county is used to examine how need and program access affect ILSP participation, factors not previously addressed in the literature. This case study provides evidence that youth are more likely to graduate from ILSP if they had a higher level of need for transitional supports and greater physical access to an ILSP site. Youth more likely to be referred to ILSP – either because of the nature of their care setting or because they were placed within their county of origin - are also more likely to graduate from the program.

A qualitative examination of CC25, an initiative to improve the supports available to transition-age foster youth, indicates that counties implementing strategies that more effectively engage youth and caregivers in transitional planning and support program delivery, have the potential to increase the reach and relevance of ILSP services. In addition, increased community partnership and investment can create a more comprehensive array of support programming greatly needed by transitioning youth. These findings were consistent with data on transitional outcomes reported by the initiative which showed increased participation of youth in support services, greater satisfaction with the support received and some positive impact on permanency, financial literacy, housing, and education.

The findings of this research have direct implications for the provision of ILSP services at the local level and can be used by child welfare agencies to better target eligible youth, increase the participation of youth in ILSP and develop ILSP services that more effectively address the needs of foster youth. Promising strategies include greater outreach to kinship and guardian caregivers, increased inter-agency collaboration and outreach to better engage out-of-county youth in ILSP, improved incentives to participate for youth who live further from ILSP sites, and better assessment of transition-age foster care youth to better measure their need for support.

In loving memory of my father, Erich Sommer and stepfather, Alfons Burmann

In honor of my mother, Theresa Sommer

Dedicated to Chris VavRosky and Ella VavRosky

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| List of Figures | iii |
| List of Tables | iv |
| Acknowledgements | v |
| I. Introduction | 1 |
| II. Policy Context: Recognizing and Responding to Poor Adult Outcomes of Former Foster Youth | |
| Issue Background..... | 3 |
| ILSP Logic Model..... | 5 |
| Review of the ILSP Evaluation Literature..... | 9 |
| Current Context..... | 11 |
| Funding for ILSP..... | 12 |
| Remaining Research Questions Related to Improving ILSP Efficacy..... | 13 |
| III. A Theoretical Framework for the Examination of ILSP Participation | |
| Factors Influencing the Decision to Participate in ILSP..... | 16 |
| Program Design Factors Influencing ILSP Efficacy..... | 22 |
| IV. Alameda County Case Study: A Quantitative Examination of Factors Affecting Graduation from a Local Independent Living Skills Program | |
| Introduction..... | 25 |
| Program Description..... | 25 |
| Data Description..... | 27 |
| Methodology..... | 28 |
| Findings..... | 33 |
| Limitations..... | 40 |
| Discussion and Policy Implications..... | 40 |
| V. Connected by 25 Case Study: A Qualitative Examination of Strategies to Improve Support Services for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care | |
| Introduction..... | 45 |
| Design of the CC25 Program and Evaluation..... | 45 |
| Efforts to Increase the Reach of ILSP..... | 49 |
| Efforts to Increase the Relevance of ILSP | 54 |
| Efforts to Expand Existing Transitional Services into a Continuum of Support... | 60 |
| Limitations | 67 |
| Discussion and Policy Implications..... | 68 |
| VI. Conclusion | 70 |
| References | 72 |
| Appendix | 86 |

List of Figures

| | |
|---|----|
| Figure 2.1: ILSP Program Logic Model..... | 7 |
| Figure 5.1: Increased Transitional Service Use among Exiting, Child-Welfare Supervised | 53 |
| Figure 5.2: Permanent Connection and Satisfaction with Transition Services among Transitioning, Child-Welfare Supervised Youth in CC25I Counties, 2008/2009 to 2010/2011..... | 59 |
| Figure 5.3: Housing Outcomes among Transitioning, Child-Welfare Supervised Foster Youth in Early Implementing CC25I Counties, 2008/2009 to 2010/2011..... | 64 |
| Figure 5.4: Educational Outcomes among Transitioning, Child-Welfare Supervised Foster Youth in Early Implementing CC25I Counties, 2008/2009 to 2010/2011..... | 66 |

List of Tables

Chapter 2

| | |
|---|----|
| Table 2.1: Estimated Foster Youth Population Eligible for ILSP Nationwide in 2009..... | 6 |
| Table 2.2: Share of All Youth Aging Out of Foster Care (both Child Welfare and Probation jurisdictions) Reported as Having Received ILSP in 2011..... | 8 |
| Table 2.3: Young Adult Outcomes of Former Foster Youth, 1990 to 2006..... | 11 |

Chapter 3

| | |
|---|----|
| Table 3.1: Theorized relationships between placement type and ILSP participation..... | 22 |
|---|----|

Chapter 4

| | |
|---|----|
| Table 4.1: Explanatory Variables and Hypothesized Relationship to ILSP Graduation..... | 29 |
| Table 4.2: Explanatory Variables and Hypothesized Relationship to ILSP Graduation continued..... | 31 |
| Table 4.3: Alameda County ILSP Eligible Youth (ages 16 to 20) and invitation to Participate in ACILSP, 2008..... | 34 |
| Table 4.4: Percentage of Youth who graduated from Alameda County ILSP, by explanatory variables Included in the Analytical Model..... | 36 |
| Table 4.5: Percentage of Youth who graduated from Alameda County ILSP, by explanatory variables Included in the Analytical Model..... | 37 |
| Table 4.6: Mean Per Capita Income in Neighborhood of Placement, by ACILSP Graduation Status | 38 |
| Table 4.7: Logistic Regression Results for Variables Predicting Graduation from the Alameda County Independent Living Skills Program for Full Sample of Youth | 39 |
| Table 4.8: Characteristics of Foster Youth, by proximity to ACILSP Program Site..... | 42 |

Chapter 5

| | |
|---|----|
| Table 5.1: Child Welfare and ILSP Reform Efforts..... | 46 |
| Table 5.2: Transition-age Youth Served by CC25 Early Implementing Counties..... | 47 |
| Table 5.3: Number of Transitioning Foster Youth Surveyed through CC25 Efforts to Outcomes..... | 49 |
| Table 5.4: County-Reported Percent of Child-Welfare Supervised Youth Who Received ILSP prior to Exiting Care, 2009-2011..... | 53 |
| Table 5.5: Description of CC25I County Youth Advisory Boards..... | 56 |
| Table 5.6: Number of Community Partners, by County and CC25 Focus Area..... | 60 |
| Table 5.7: Summary of Other Program Investments in CC25 Counties: Programs, Focus Areas, Counties/Youth Served and Amount Invested..... | 61 |
| Table 5.8: Share of Exiting, Child Welfare Supervised Foster Care Who Had an IDA Account, 2009-2011..... | 64 |
| Table 5.9: Share of Exiting, Child Welfare-Supervised Foster Care Who Obtained Employment, 2009-2011..... | 67 |

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Chapter 1 Introduction

“Society has a major financial stake in the foster care system. If the concept of human capital investment is to have meaning, child welfare will need to document the extent to which its social investments are cost-beneficial and linked to positive outcomes (Mech, 1988).”

Since the issue first came to the public agenda in the early 1980s, growing concern over the poor adult outcomes of former foster youth has led to a multitude of program and policy interventions, continued increases in funding for these programs, and a great deal of literature evaluating youth outcomes and efforts to improve them. Since that time, the focus of these efforts has shifted considerably, from a need to prepare older foster youth for independent living prior to their exit from care, to the provision of comprehensive supports more commensurate with what average young Americans might receive from their family during the transitional period. Today, reform efforts in this area are concentrated primarily on state implementation of policies that allow foster youth in care until age 21. However, the option for some youth to remain in care longer will not eliminate the need for additional support and resources for all youth transitioning out of care, a role that traditionally has been played by federally-funded, locally operated Independent Living Skills Programs (ILSPs).

This dissertation examines several issues related to the provision of support services and resources to foster youth during their transition to adulthood:

- Chapter two reviews the history of this policy problem, the relevant evaluation findings to date and the resulting interventions that have emerged over the past three decades to address the problem.
- Chapter three develops a theoretical framework, one grounded in the existing research literature, to guide the analysis of factors affecting participation in ILSP and other transitional support programs.
- Chapter four uses a county case study to conduct a quantitative analysis – using the full population of youth eligible for ILSP – of how need and program access affect ILSP participation. Previous literature on this topic has not adequately addressed the determinants of service receipt in this voluntary program and this chapter provides evidence that subpopulations of youth are less likely to graduate from ILSP because of insufficient awareness of or access to the program.
- Chapter five includes a qualitative case study of the California Connected by 25, an initiative that undertook comprehensive reform of the system of care for transitioning foster youth. This chapter shows that efforts to improve the reach, relevance and breadth of transitional supports for foster youth *can* positively impact their outcomes, but not without a great deal of community partnership and investment.

- Chapter six provides a brief conclusion, linking the findings of both the quantitative and qualitative chapters and summarizing the key policy implications of this dissertation.

The findings of this research have direct implications for the provision of ILSP services at the local level and can be used by local child welfare agencies to better target eligible youth, increase the participation of youth in ILSP and develop ILSP services that more effectively address the needs of foster youth. This research also contributes to the academic literature by advancing the theoretical approach and methodology used previously to evaluate these types of programs.

The individuals targeted by these efforts – aging out and former foster care youth – are a disadvantaged population that receives considerable public empathy and a considerable policy response relative to other vulnerable populations of youth. There is an added imperative to serve foster care youth because the state has directly assumed the familial responsibility to ensure their safety and well-being. An examination of the strengths and weaknesses of the programs that serve them can inform future efforts to reform ILSP. In addition, successful demonstration that transitional support programs can positively affect the adult outcomes of former foster youth could bolster efforts to extend similar supports to other subgroups of adolescents who are also struggling during the transition to adulthood and independent living.

Chapter 2

Policy Context: Recognizing and Responding to Poor Adult Outcomes of Former Foster Youth

This chapter provides the background and policy context for the research on Independent Living Skills Programs (ILSPs) for transition-age foster youth presented in this dissertation. It briefly reviews the history of the issue and early policy responses in the United States, and provides a logic model for the primary program intervention. This chapter then presents the current policy context in this area, including a summary of previous program evaluation in this area and remaining research questions.

Issue Background

On any given day, there are roughly 425,000 children living in foster care in the United States, and one in five (89,400 youth) are in the transitional age range (16 and older).¹ Though some of these youth will be reunited with their families prior to reaching adulthood, others will remain in care until they are legally “emancipated” or age out of the system. In 2009, nearly 30,000 youth exited from foster care through this process of legal emancipation.

A large proportion of former foster youth exhibit poor young adult outcomes – such as failure to complete high school, homelessness, and high rates of unemployment and welfare reliance – resulting in limited capacity to lead independent, healthy, and successful lives after leaving foster care (Bart 1990; Cook 1994; Courtney and Piliavin 1998). The occurrence and persistence of such poor outcomes indicates the existence of real challenges to child welfare policy and practice. While state child welfare systems have assumed responsibility for youth removed from neglectful or unsafe homes, these youth have rarely reached a point of self-sufficiency before aging out of the system. In addition to the moral imperative for child welfare systems to better serve these youth, there is an economic incentive in addressing this policy issue. The poor outcomes exhibited among this transitional adult population create a tremendous expense for all of society – the costs associated with sheltering the homeless, lost productivity from un/under-employment, public assistance reliance, and criminal justice involvement. Programs that more effectively link foster youth to available support resources and prepare them for independent living can translate to considerable cost-savings.

Earliest definition of the problem

For nearly three decades, researchers, policy makers and community stakeholders have worked to better understand this policy problem and craft strategies and solutions to effectively overcome the challenges facing transitioning foster youth. In 1983, a Request for Proposals from the United States Department of Health and Human Services inviting study on how foster youth adapt to independent living after care seemed to be the first federal recognition of this problem and acknowledgement of the need for information on the issue (Mech 1994). Perhaps in response to the request, the first research on the adult outcomes of former foster care youth

¹U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2010). *Preliminary Estimates for FY 2009 as of July 2010*. Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. Accessed online 4/14/12 at: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/tar/report17.htm.

began emerging, and the findings suggested a clear need for policy and practice that better prepare these youth for independent living (Mallon 1998).

The first study to use a large and nationally representative sample of youth was conducted by Westat, Inc. who surveyed 1,644 youth at the time of discharge from foster care (between 1987 and 1988) and then again two and a half to four years later (Cook 1994). Only 44 percent had completed high school at discharge, increasing to only 54 percent at the time of follow up (ages 18 to 24). This was in comparison to the 80 percent graduation rate among the general U.S. population of 18 to 24 year olds. Only 39 percent of foster youth had any job experience at discharge and at follow up, 49 percent were currently working, and only 38 percent had maintained employment for a year or more. Only 17 percent were supporting themselves completely through employment. Between discharge and follow up, 24 percent of males and 60 percent of females had become parents; 30 percent received public assistance; 25 percent had been homeless at least one night; and 25 percent had experienced trouble with the law.

Other early studies using much smaller and more local samples of youth found equally poor outcomes. Examining youth within a few years of discharge, Barth (1990) and Courtney and Piliavin (1998) found that only 45 to 55 percent of youth had completed high school; 50 to 75 percent were working; 40 percent of females were pregnant and 10 and 27 percent of females and males (respectively) had been incarcerated at least once since leaving care. Most of these early studies of foster youth transitional outcomes emphasized the need for child welfare agencies to address the critical issues of high school completion, securing safe and stable housing, maintaining employment, and gaining independent living skills (Cook 1994). Sample attrition and inability to locate many former foster youth is a common methodological challenge for these types of studies, and raise questions as to if the youth who were missed are different than those who were successfully surveyed (Courtney et al. 2001). For example, the Cook (1994) study sampled 1,644 youth while still in foster care but was able to locate only 854 youth 2.5 to 4 years after leaving care (and only 810 of them were successfully surveyed).

Early policy response

While some state and local programs for youth aging out of foster care existed earlier, the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1985 provided the first federal legislation and \$45 million in funding (with actual disbursement first occurring in 1987) to support state and county delivery of independent living skills services. While foster youth were eligible for a number of mainstream, federally funded assistance programs, this legislation signaled that there was a government responsibility to provide additional services specifically designed to address the needs of this vulnerable population. Initially only youth from families eligible for federally funded welfare assistance, and exiting between the ages of 16 to and 18, were eligible for ILSP services. The policy goals established for ILSPs were to identify youth likely to remain in care until age 18 and offer the services that facilitate a successful transition to self-sufficient adulthood. The desired outcomes of the program focused on 1) educational attainment (particularly high school completion); 2) employment; and 3) the avoidance of dependency on public assistance, homelessness, premarital childbirth, incarceration and other high-risk behaviors (drug use, etc.).

There was some advocacy around this issue in 1988 when the Child Welfare League of America created a special issue of its research journal examining issues around foster care youth and the independent living skills programs that served them, and followed it up by publishing their recommended standards for independent living service programs in 1989. In 1993, federal funding for ILSP received permanent entitlement status (Mech 1994) and funding was increased to \$70 million annually, though states were required to provide a 50 percent match (CWLA 1999). Legislators continued to increase federal ILSP funding so that by 1998 it reached \$70 million a year (USGAO 1999b).

After a decade of gradual expansion, ILSP growth culminated in 1999 with the passage of Public Law 16-169, the Foster Care Independence Act, which renamed the program the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (“Chafee Program”). The Act doubled the previous level of federal funding to \$140 million a year, further expanded ILSP eligibility to all youth in foster care (not just those eligible for federally-funded welfare), and provided a state option to provide ILSP services to all youth likely to remain in care until age 21 (and removing the minimum age requirement) (Foster and Gifford 2005). In addition, states could use up to 30 percent of the federal grant to fund room and board for 18 to 20 year olds and provided states the option to extend Medicaid coverage to former foster youth (Children’s Defense Fund 1999).

In 2002, Public Law 107-133 also authorized up to \$60 million a year to create a discretionary fund under the Chafee Program, the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program, which provided additional dollars for states and localities to distribute to youth to cover educational and training expenses. Youth generally eligible for ILSP participation, as well as those adopted after the age of 16, can apply for vouchers worth up to \$5,000 annually. Since 2002, little else had emerged in terms of federal policy targeting ILSP until the federal Fostering Connections to Success Act (H.R. 6307) of 2008 created a state option and federal funding to extend foster care payments until age 21, which is discussed briefly below.

ILSP Logic Model

Historically the goals of ILSP have been to identify the youth most likely to remain in care until age 18 and help them make successful transitions to self-sufficient adulthood. In the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, the primary goals of ILSP were defined as: “(1) increased identification and outreach to youth who are likely to be in foster care until age 18; (2) the provision of education and training necessary for employment; (3) preparing ILSP participants for postsecondary education; (4) the provision of emotional and personal support to youth aging out of care; and (5) the provision of a range of services to former foster youth ages 18 to 21.” (Lemon 2005, p. 254)

States and counties receive federal funding to help youth achieve these outcomes but can exercise flexibility in choosing the types of services they offer and the range of youth who are eligible for them (USGAO 1999b). ILSPs are also administered in a variety of different ways by states and localities. In some cases child welfare agencies establish their own county ILSP program with designated staff positions but in other cases, child welfare agencies contract with community service providers to deliver some or all of the supports available to transitioning

foster youth. Regardless of how they are administered, ILSPs generally provide foster youth with five categories of important services (USGAO 1999b):

- Independent Living Skills – money management, health and safety, food and nutrition, access to community resources, and social skills development;
- Education services - tutoring/training to finish HS/GED, help preparing for post-secondary or vocational education, financial assistance with school expenses through the Chafee ETV program;
- Employment services - career planning, job readiness, job search and job placement;
- Transitional housing assistance – support with finding and maintaining housing; and
- Financial assistance – stipends or incentives, transportation expenses and assistance with establishing a residence (utility deposits, furniture, etc.).

The ILSP Target Population

Caseload data for all youth in out-of-home care nationwide (stratified by age) can provide a sense of the size of the total eligible population at a given time. While some states offer ILSP services at an earlier age, foster youth are generally eligible for ILSP services by age 16 and remain eligible through age 21. **Table 2.1** estimates the total number of youth who would be eligible for ILSP in 2009 by including all those in care between age 16 and 20 at the start of that fiscal year (98,213), those who entered care in this age range that year (33,471) as well as youth who exited care in previous years, at age 16 or older, but are still under the age of 21 in 2009. That would include youth exiting in 2008 who were ages 16 to 20 (67,121); youth in 2007 who were 16 to 19 (67,837); youth exiting in 2006 who were 16 to 18 (62,091) and so on. This totals to over 380,000 youth who could potentially receive ILSP services in 2009, a relatively small population of youth to be targeted by ILSP policy. This number duplicates a share of youth who cycled in and out of care between ages 16 and 20, but also omits foster youth younger than 16 eligible to receive services in states offering early ILSP. The fact that these foster youth are so identifiable and serviceable a population makes them an ideal target for transitional programming (Wald and Martinez 2003; Foster and Gifford 2005; Elliott and Feldman 1990).

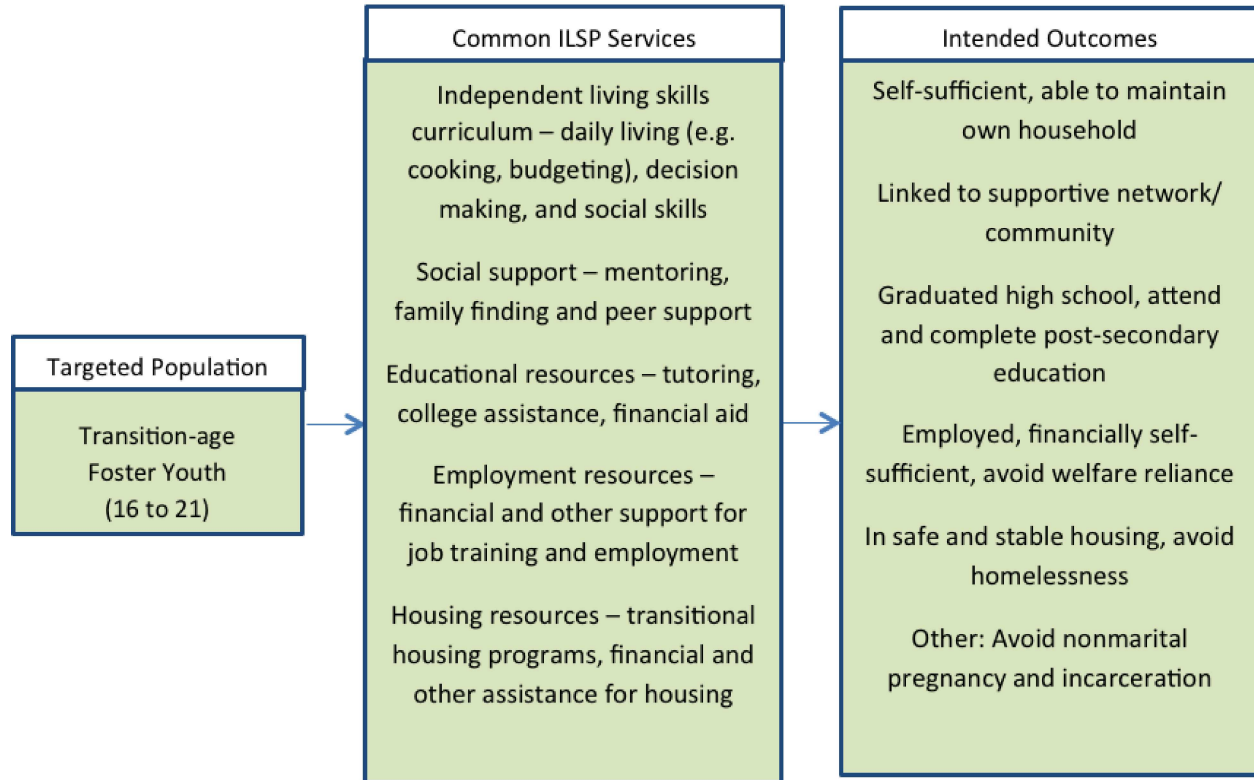
Table 2.1: Estimated Foster Youth Population Eligible* for ILSP Nationwide in 2009

| # youth exiting by age: | Youth Exiting Care Annually, by Age | | | | | Starting In-care, By Age | Total New Entries (16-20) | Total Estimate of All Youth, Ages 16-20, Eligible for ILSP in 2009 (includes some duplication): |
|--|-------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2009 | |
| 16 Years | 17,599 | 18,559 | 18,264 | 18,238 | 17,011 | 38,475 | 19,953 | |
| 17 Years | 19,762 | 17,635 | 24,597 | 30,469 | 22,325 | 39,832 | 12,816 | |
| 18 Years | 19,608 | 23,282 | 19,230 | 15,929 | 22,274 | 13,069 | 563 | |
| 19 Years | 3,514 | 3,781 | 3,599 | 3,201 | 3,728 | 4,088 | 95 | |
| 20 Years | 2,073 | 2,154 | 2,561 | 2,485 | 1,783 | 2,749 | 44 | |
| TOTAL Youth Potentially Eligible for ILSP | 17,599 | 36,194 | 62,091 | 67,837 | 67,121 | 98,213 | 33,471 | 382,526 |

* Shaded cells are those included in the estimated eligible population for 2009

Figure 2.1 illustrates how the services delivered by ILSPs are intended to impact foster youth outcomes during the transition to adulthood. However, an important element of ILSP programming is that participation is rarely required. Youth may receive a referral into the program from their social worker or someone else, and they may be strongly encouraged (or even offered an incentive) to attend the program but their participation is voluntary.

Figure 2.1: ILSP Program Logic Model



And indeed, ILSPs do not serve the full population of eligible youth. The earliest estimates suggest that between 44 and 60 percent of foster care youth eligible for ILSP nationwide were actually receiving services (USGAO 1999b; USGAO 2004). Lemon et al. (2005) in their ethnographic analysis of nine counties in California found rates of participation in ILSP ranged greatly – from 30 percent to 98 percent. A 2006 survey by the U.S. General Accounting Office found that a third of state child welfare directors reported serving less than 50 percent of the eligible population of youth, a third were serving 50 to 75 percent of eligible youth and a third reported serving 75 percent or more (USGAO 2007). Most recently the Midwest Study (Courtney et al 2005) found that among current and former foster youth at age 19 just over a third (36 percent) had ever received some kind of housing service from a local ILSP and only 23 percent reported ever having received an independent living subsidy. This pattern continued to the third wave of the Midwest Study (Courtney et al 2007b), at age 21, when only 24 percent reported having received housing services from ILSP since age 19.

Evidence from California shows considerable variation at the local level in terms of ILSP participation. Lemon et al. (2005) in their ethnographic analysis of nine counties found rates of

participation in ILSP ranged greatly – from 30 percent to 98 percent. More recent statistics from state-mandated reporting on ILSP participation, presented in **Table 2.2**, indicate continuing variation among California counties, though not quite so severe. Looking at only the 17 counties with more than 50 youth aging out of foster care (from both child welfare and probation agencies) in 2011, we see that in all but four counties the percent of all youth reported as having received ILSP services were close to the state average of 77 percent. In three outlying counties - Tulare, San Bernardino, and Fresno - rate of ILSP receipt ranged from a low of 34 percent to a high of 58 percent.

One factor that could explain both local variation within California, and the large disparity in ILSP receipt rate between California and the Midwest Study findings could be differences in how ILSP participation is defined. For example, the Midwest Study asks specifically about the receipt of housing assistance or an independent living subsidy, where as the state reporting in California asks about any kind of ILSP service receipt – which could include attendance at an initial orientation for information on the program. Even with consistency in how service receipt is defined, rates of ILSP participation would likely vary by locality due to differences in implementation (such as program outreach and recruitment) and program take-up among youth. ILSP is a voluntary program and what it offers locally will appeal to some youth and not to others. These patterns of selection into the program create challenges for efforts to evaluate ILSP. Ideally youth who could most benefit from ILSP would be the ones participating, but that is not necessarily the case. This dissertation attempts to contribute to the existing literature by engaging in a more thorough examination of these issues.

Table 2.2: Share of All Youth Aging Out of Foster Care (both Child Welfare and Probation jurisdictions) Reported as Having Received ILSP in 2011

| | # All Youth Aging Out | # All Youth Who Rec'd ILSP | % Rec'd ILSP (among all youth) |
|----------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Statewide | 3,374 | 2,586 | 77% |
| Los Angeles | 567 | 486 | 86% |
| Sacramento | 296 | 202 | 68% |
| Riverside | 285 | 215 | 75% |
| San Diego | 250 | 233 | 93% |
| San Bernardino | 167 | 75 | 45% |
| Fresno | 151 | 87 | 58% |
| Alameda | 202 | 150 | 74% |
| Orange | 154 | 115 | 75% |
| Santa Clara | 110 | 87 | 79% |
| Kern | 156 | 129 | 83% |
| Tulare | 89 | 30 | 34% |
| San Joaquin | 71 | 59 | 83% |
| Ventura | 60 | 47 | 78% |
| Contra Costa | 58 | 44 | 76% |
| Merced | 58 | 49 | 84% |
| San Francisco | 54 | 43 | 80% |
| Stanislaus | 52 | 46 | 88% |

Review of the ILSP Evaluation Literature

As greater awareness of the issue and federal funding for ILSPs emerged in the 1980s, so too did calls for better documentation and evaluation of the impact of these programs (Mallon 1998). Efforts to measure the impact of ILSP increased over time, commensurate with growth in federal funding and expansion in program scale and focus. However, none of these studies employed a randomized design and most were locally specific, utilized small sample sizes and did not include a comparison group (Kerman et al. 2002; Courtney et al. 2004; Montgomery et al. 2006). Most of these ILSP studies also did not address selection bias – that improvement in targeted adult outcomes might in fact be due to individual variables that facilitate ILSP participation (motivation, academic standing, proactive caregivers, etc.) rather than to the skills actually obtained through ILSP.

Among some of the more sophisticated studies, samples of foster youth who did not participate in ILSP were used as the comparison group or matched control group. The first two analyses cited here used ex post facto research design with post-test only, a comparison of group means between the ILSP and non-ILSP on youth outcomes and no statistical controls for differences in demographic characteristics or foster care history. Lindsey and Ahmed (1999) found that ILSP youth were significantly more likely to live independently than non-ILSP youth (55 percent vs. 12 percent). Though not statistically significant, ILSP youth were more likely to be paying their own housing expenses (used as a measure of financial independence) and be employed one to three years after exiting from care. Scannapieco et al. (1995) found that ILSP participants were significantly more likely than non-ILSP youth to graduate from high school, be employed at case closing (52 percent vs. 26 percent) and be living independently. Pasztor et al. (1986) employed a quasi-experimental design with both pre- and post-tests for both groups, but also did not control for initial characteristic differences between the two groups. This study found significantly higher scores on the Emancipation Social Functioning Scale among ILSP youth, but no significant differences in scoring on the Psychosocial Functioning Inventory. Shippensburg University (1993) compared the outcomes of ILSP youth with non-ILSP youth and did employ statistical controls in their methodology. While some differences in adult outcomes between these two groups of youth were found, all but one were statistically insignificant, possibly due to the small sample sizes employed (32 ILSP youth and 24 non-ILSP youth).

In their review of eight ILSP evaluations (two of which are cited above) that assessed the efficacy of ILSPs through use of suitable comparison groups, Montgomery et al. (2006) found that all but one found better high school graduation results for ILSP participants; half of the studies found better employment outcomes for ILSP participants, and all studies that examined housing outcomes found better results for ILSP participants, relative to their non-ILSP counterparts.

The nationally representative Westat study cited above (Cook 1994) compared the outcomes of former foster care who did and did not receive independent living services (84 percent and 16 percent respectively, of the final 810 youth in the sample), though it does not specify if these services were received from an ILSP or another community service provider. The analysis consisted of five different models which together tested the relationships between 16 different skills training measures and 8 young adult outcomes.

The study found:

- In total, the author tested 128 relationships between independent living skills training measures and young adult outcomes and a total of 23 were significant.
- No statistically significant impact on desired outcomes (employment, high school completion, reduced welfare reliance², access to health care, avoidance of early parenting, having a social network and general satisfaction) when comparing youth with none versus any type of independent living skills training.
- Some significant relationships between training on individual skills and individual outcomes. For example, there was positive association between receipt of educational skills and maintaining a job for a year or longer; employment skills and being no cost to community; and housing skills and general satisfaction.
- When youth received training in a combination of five skill areas (money management, credit, consumer, education and employment), there were positive and significant impacts on several outcomes including maintaining employment and low welfare reliance, but no significant effect on education or delayed parenting.

While this study did control for youths' demographic characteristics and foster care experiences, this would not accurately address selection bias. It seems likely that differences in initial skills, knowledge and motivation would be associated with both a youth's participation in an ILSP-type program – and particularly with the likelihood of completing training in multiple independent living skills areas – as well as the dependent outcomes being examined. Controlling for initial ability and motivation would likely decrease the estimated size and statistical significance of the impact of independent living skills training.

One of the most recent studies of ILSP, conducted by researchers with the Urban Institute (Courtney et al. 2008), did employ an experimental design in which ILSP-eligible foster youth were randomly referred to a treatment group or a control group. The treatment group was invited to participate in a classroom-based independent living skills class (similar to what is offered by most ILSPs), which was offered on college campuses throughout Los Angeles County. The control group youth were to obtain independent living skills in the “usual manner” – such as from family members, caregivers and community-based service providers. In many cases, community-based organizations were providing services very similar to those received by the treatment group, and the researchers also found that about a quarter of control group members actually participated in the treatment. The study found no significant impact of the ILSP on any of the targeted outcomes (including high school completion, employment and financial self-sufficiency, housing stability, ability to live independently, and avoidance of other negative outcomes such as homelessness, incarceration, pre-marital childbearing). The researchers did report that there were numerous violations of the random assignment process and found that youth in both groups reported receiving skills and support from various sources beyond the ILSP.

² While decreased welfare utilization is used here as a measure of increased self-sufficiency, the authors themselves note that this is an ambiguous outcome as there are cases in which receipt of available public assistance would be considered a positive outcome.

In conclusion, existing evaluations to date provide little evidence in support of ILSP efforts having a significant impact on the young adult outcomes of former foster youth. The majority of studies suffer from weak evaluation design, and where more robust methodology was employed, effects were modest or nonexistent.

Current Context

Despite two decades of increased federal funding for independent living services – more than 4-fold increase from \$45 million in 1987 to \$185 million in 2009 – we have seen persistently poor outcomes among former foster care youth in the available research (Nixon 2005). **Table 2.3** compares findings on young adult outcomes of former foster youth from the two strongest studies: the nationally-representative Westat study (Cook 1994) conducted in 1990-1991 with those from the Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth (Courtney et al 2007b) conducted in 2006. The Midwest study was the first longitudinal study of foster youth, employing a representative sample of youth from Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin.

While **Table 2.3** shows the later MidWest sample having better outcomes on most measures, we still see that at age 21 nearly a quarter of former foster youth have not completed high school or GED, nearly half are unemployed, nearly one in five experience some homelessness, over half of females have a child and nearly a third had been arrested at least once in the past two years. **Table 2.3** also shows that receipt of public assistance has increased – nearly doubled – among this population, which on its face seems to be a worsening in this outcome. However, given the likelihood that a significant share of former foster youth are living in poverty (due to their low levels of education, high levels of unemployment), increased receipt of government aid could indicate that these young adults are better connected today to the support resources for which they are eligible and to which they are entitled (a positive outcome). For example, the Westat study found that 40 percent of former foster youth who were working still received at least some public assistance.

Table 2.3 Young Adult Outcomes of Former Foster Youth, 1990 to 2006

| Outcome | At Age 18 to 24 (Westat Study 1990-1991) | At Age 21 (Midwest Study 2006) |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| Completed high school/ GED | 54% | 77% |
| Employed | 49% | 56% |
| Homeless at least once | 25% | 18% |
| Receiving public assistance | 30% | 57% (22% of males and two-thirds of females) |
| Females who had at least one child | 60% | 55% |
| Ever arrested as an adult | - | 59% of males and 33% of females |

Sources: Cook 1994 and Courtney et al 2007b

It should be noted here that the Midwest study includes a substantial number of youth from Illinois (62 percent of the total wave 3 sample), a state in which youth are able to remain in foster care until age 21, and these youth have exhibited better young adult outcomes than youth from states where emancipation occurs at age 18 or 19 (Courtney et al 2007a). This certainly contributed to the better outcomes observed in 2006 relative to those in 1990-1991 (and is discussed further below).

The young adult outcomes for former foster youth were more similar to the experiences of young adults living in poverty than to the lives of the general population of 18 to 24 year olds, both in the 1994 data (Cook, 2004) and in the more recent MidWest study. While Courtney et al (2007b) found that in most cases (where they were able to compare outcomes) foster youth in 2006 fared worse than a nationally representative sample of 21-year-olds (from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health), the more appropriate comparison would have been to young adults living in poverty. The former foster youth were twice as likely not to have a high school diploma or GED; over two times as likely to have a child; and at least seven times more likely to be arrested as an adult than the comparable group in the population.

Funding for ILSP

Between 2002 and 2009, federal funding for ILSP through the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program remained at \$140 million, a level that fell in real terms by 16 percent. Federal funding for the Education and Training Voucher Program actually decreased from \$60 million in 2002 to \$45 million in 2009.³ This amount translates to less than \$500 per eligible youth in 2009, if one includes in the denominator the many youth who had exited care and were still eligible for aftercare services in that year, as demonstrated in Table 2.1. Including only those youth age 16 to 20 in care in 2009 would increase the amount available to just over \$1,400 per transition age youth. The U.S. Government Accounting Office (2004, 2007) highlights the wide variation across states in funds per youth that states receive for ILSP.

This suggests that one reason we have not seen a larger impact of ILSP on former foster youth outcomes is because the federal funding level has not been sufficient to serve enough foster youth or provide them enough support to significantly impact their outcomes. As stated above, recent literature suggests that ILSPs nationwide are serving less than two-third of the foster youth who are eligible for services (USGAO 2004).

However, rather than pushing for further increases in federal ILSP spending to expand the program's reach and scope, the most recent attempts to expand federal support of transition-age foster youth have taken a different approach. The federal Fostering Connections to Success Act (H.R. 6307) of 2008 created a state option and federal dollars to extend foster care until age 21. The Act, which took effect in 2010, also changed the definition of foster care placement – to include “a supervised setting in which the individual is living independently”⁴ such as transitional or supportive housing options – and attached eligibility for extended foster care funding to education and work requirements. While some states already allowed youth to stay in

³ From: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/resource/chafee-foster-care-program>.

⁴ Source: “Frequently Asked Questions: HR 6307 and Expanding Federal Funding for Youth in Foster Care to Age 21,” summary by the John Burton Foundation, available at: http://www.heysf.org/pdfs/070408/HR6307_FAQ.pdf.

care past age 18, this new approach at the federal level seemed an appropriate response to two policy influences.

First, there was greater public awareness of the fact that young adults today generally require a much longer period of time, and continued parental support, before they successfully transition to self-sufficiency and independent living. Brown et al (2003) found that nearly one quarter of adults aged 23 to 27 still live with at least one parent and Goldscheider and Goldscheider (1994) found that 40 percent of adults move back into their parental home at least once during their late teens and twenties. Shoeni and Ross (2005) found that among young adults living apart from their parents, two-thirds of adults in their early twenties and 40 percent in their late twenties, receive some material assistance from parents. A 2003 nationwide survey found that the average age at which respondents felt a young adult is capable of complete independent living was about 23 (Lake, Snell, Parry and Associates 2003). In that same survey, 70 percent of respondents felt that foster youth should have support programs available during their transition from care and half thought foster care should extend beyond age 18.

Second, and perhaps more influential, were recent findings from the Midwest Study (Courtney et al 2007a) that youth who are allowed to age out of foster care later fare better than those who must legally exit by age 18. Controlling for observed baseline characteristics, the study found that foster youth from Illinois – where foster care extends until one’s 21st birthday – exhibited much better early adult outcomes than former foster youth from Wisconsin and Iowa. Illinois foster youth were three and a half times more likely to have completed one or more years of college; 38 percent less likely to become pregnant between ages 17 and 19; and for each additional year in care after the baseline interview (at age 17), they earned an additional \$924 per annum than foster youth from the other two states.

While some might consider an extension of foster care an alternative policy to prepare youth for independent living, it is interesting to note that ILSP utilization was actually greater among youth in extended foster care than those who aged out at 18. Illinois youth were more likely (one and a half to over two times as likely) to have received some ILSP assistance in each of six service domains (education, vocational training/ employment, financial literacy, health education, housing and youth development) after age 18 than youth from the other two states.

Remaining Research Questions Related to Improving ILSP Efficacy

For youth in stable and supportive living arrangements, extending the foster care experience until age 21 can more closely simulate what youth in the general U.S. population experience and provide additional years to prepare for independent living. But even for these youth, ILSP can play a role in imparting skills, offering education and employment-related resources, and linking youth to a wide range of available housing and other resources. The need for ILSP among youth in extended foster care may be greater since extended payments are attached to federal requirement that youth be working towards their high school diploma or similar credential; enrolled in a post-secondary educational, vocational or employment program; or working at least 80 hours a month.⁵ Moreover, for youth who do not opt to extend their time in foster care, ILSP

⁵ Source: Frequently Asked Questions: HR 6307 and Expanding Federal Funding for Youth in Foster Care to Age 21,” Summary by the John Burton Foundation, available at: http://www.heysf.org/pdfs/070408/HR6307_FAQ.pdf.

may still be one of the only resources available to assist them during the transition to adulthood. For these reasons, efforts to further improve ILSP should continue to be a part of the research agenda. The final section of this chapter outlines some of the issues related to ILSP efficacy – whether the program is currently serving the foster youth most in need, in the most effective ways – to be further explored through this dissertation.

Are ILSPs Serving the Neediest of Youth?

As shown above, ILSPs nationwide have tended to serve far fewer than the full population of foster youth eligible for support during the transition to adulthood. And while many ILSPs offer a broad array of training, services and resources, many youth do not get the assistance they need during this time. According to the Midwest Study (Courtney et al 2007b) nearly 40 percent of former foster youth surveyed at age 21 said that there was some type of ILSP service that could have helped them live on their own that they did *not* receive. As it is unlikely that ILSPs will be able to provide comprehensive support to all eligible youth in the near future, one alternative approach would be greater targeting of ILSP assistance to the youth of greatest need (Foster and Gifford 2005). In their 2006 review of ILSP impact evaluations, Montgomery et al. stated that an exploration of which foster youth could most benefit from the services and resources offered by these programs would fill a void in the current body of research.

In one of few studies to address this, Wulczyn and Brunner Hislop (2001) found that among foster youth still in care at age 16, there were two primary categories: 1) youth who were removed from home at a later age and returned to their birth family relatively quickly and 2) youth who entered care at a younger age and have spent a large amount of time in foster care. The first group had greater connection to their birth families and tended to receive support services in family- and community settings relative to the second group which had less connection to family and was more likely to receive services in community- or facility-based settings. A second study (Courtney et al 2010), using the Midwest Study sample of former foster youth, conducts latent class analysis of independent living factors at age 23 and 24 and found four subgroups of youth with distinctive characteristics and increasing level of need in the aftercare period (Accelerated Adults, Struggling Parents, Emerging Adults, and Troubled and Troubling). These researchers and others have suggested that further insight on how individual characteristics, connection to family and experiences in foster care impact a youth's need for support can guide the development of program strategies that more effectively improve their outcomes (Barth et al. 1994; Wulczyn and Brunner Hislop 2001; Courtney et al 2010). Perhaps if the foster youth with the greatest need for support can be identified and actively linked to an adequately-funded ILSP – through more effective outreach, recruitment and engagement – the program will have greater positive impact on their early adult outcomes.

Are ILSPs Serving Youth in the Most Effective Manner?

While the existing ILSP literature has not made great progress in identifying the program elements most effective at improving young adult outcomes among former foster youth (Montgomery et al 2006), those engaged in this research have suggested a few avenues for further exploration:

- *Alternative Service Delivery Strategies.* Researchers have long expressed an interest in better ways to deliver independent living training to foster youth including which settings are most conducive to learning, what methods are most effective, and who is and should be involved in the imparting of skills (caregivers, community service providers, etc.) (Cook 1994; Courtney et al. 2008).
- *Further Development of Aftercare (for ages 18 to 21) Supports.* In their survey of ILSPs, Lemon et al. (2005) found that while aftercare services for former foster youth often include financial assistance with day-to-day living expenses and pursuit of educational or employment goals, they were often lacking a more comprehensive array of additional supports to address the multitude of challenges they face.

These issues are further detailed in the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 3 and explored in further detail through both the quantitative and qualitative case studies presented in Chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 3

A Theoretical Framework for the Examination of ILSP Participation

The concluding section of Chapter 2 suggests that two promising strategies for future efforts to improve the impact of the Independent Living Skills Program (ILSP) on transition-age foster youth are: 1) ensuring that the foster youth most in need of support are actively engaging in ILSPs and 2) designing ILSPs that can more effectively and comprehensively address the needs of transition age foster youth. This chapter develops a theoretical framework for examining these two strategies in greater detail by incorporating both the factors that influence the decision to participate in ILSP as well as the program design features that can affect how well ILSPs can deliver the needed support. Because early ILSP interventions developed without the benefit of an empirically-based program model, an attempt is made here to integrate within this framework the relevant research findings that have emerged in this policy area in the past two decades.

Factors Influencing the Decision to Participate in ILSP

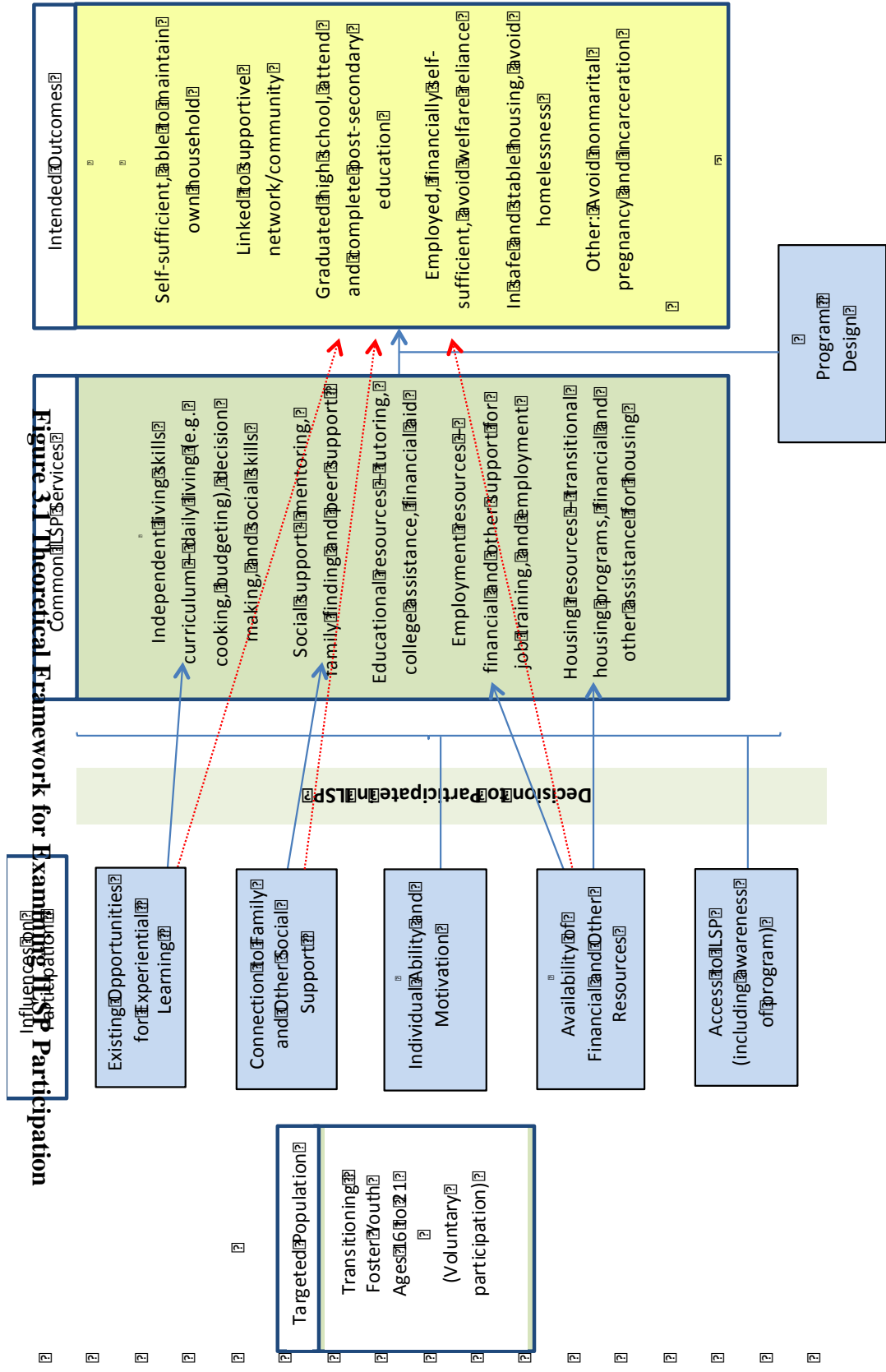
The program logic model presented in Chapter 2 shows that in order to achieve the intended outcomes among former foster youth (self-sufficiency, socially-connected, employed, stably housed, etc.), ILSPs commonly offer services that are intended to:

1. Teach independent living skills;
2. Develop a support network (of people and programs); and
3. Provide access to financial and other resources, especially for
 - a. education,
 - b. employment and training, and
 - c. housing

The theoretical framework developed here (**Figure 3.1**) repeats the same ILSP Services and Intended Outcomes presented in the program logic model in Chapter 2, but adds a set of factors that influence participation in ILSP. I focus here first on these “Participation Influences” and how they are theorized to affect a youth’s decision to participate in the ILSP.

Opportunity for Experiential Learning

ILSPs offer instruction designed to teach youth many of the independent living skills (cooking, household maintenance, financial management, etc.) that a young person would generally learn at home from one’s parents or caregivers. Therefore, those foster youth with opportunity to develop independent living skills through daily practice in their placement setting will be less in need of those types of resources from the ILSP.



Connection to Family and Other Social Support

How close a relationship a foster youth has with their biological family or other caring adults, can affect a youth's need for alternative sources of social support or the setting in which they receive support (Wulcynand Brunner Hislop 2001). These relationships can provide youth with emotional and financial support during the transitional period and help keep a youth connected to community. One study, for example, found that a majority of foster youth surveyed a year or two after leaving care were somewhat or very close to their family of origin and over a third had returned to live with biological family members (Courtney and Dworsky 2006). Youth with greater connection to family and other caring adults will likely have less need for the social supports available through ILSP.

Individual Ability and Motivation

At the center of these participation influences are the youth's own ability and personal motivation to engage in available support programs. The literature indicates that foster youth face many challenges beyond those that originally brought them into out-of-home care - including the exhibiting of learning disabilities and mental health issues at rates higher than the general population of youth (Pecora 2005; Courtney et al 2005; Courtney et al 2004). Youth dealing with mental health challenges or learning disabilities are likely to be among those with the greatest need for ILSP support, but also less motivated or able to pursue those resources.

Availability of Financial and Other Resources

Even if connected to family or other supportive adults, foster youth may not have access to resources sufficient to support them during the transitional period. The family economics literature provides ample evidence that the resources parents have to invest in children are constrained by available household income, the amount of time parents have to impart knowledge and skills to youth, and the potential costs associated with not investing these resources elsewhere (Becker 1993A; Becker 1993B; Willis 1994). U.S. households in the highest income quartile provide at least 70 percent more assistance to their children between ages 18 and 34 than those in the lowest income quartile (Schoeni and Ross 2005). Factors linked to higher household income are also likely to benefit young adults in their transition – these include the positive impact of having experienced better schools, neighborhoods, peer groups and family dynamics (Cook et al. 2002; Settersten 2005). Youth who do have access to greater financial and other resources will have less need for the financial assistance ILSP offers (which is concentrated in the areas of education, training and housing).

Access to ILSP

Regardless of the real or perceived need for the various ILSP services, it seems self-evident that youth with limited knowledge of (and with caregivers who have limited knowledge of) the local ILSP, or those with limited physical access to the program, will be less likely to participate.

The blue lines in **Figure 3.1** reflect how the Participation Influences affect the decision to participate in ILSP by determining a youth's need for the common services and resources offered

by the program and access to the program overall. In addition, the red lines represent how the Participation Influences can also have a direct effect on the Intended Outcomes.

The Participation Influences are determined primarily by a foster youth's individual and family characteristics, the duration of and experiences while in foster care, their placement and caregiver characteristics, and ease of access to ILSP. The existing research literature provides considerable evidence to support associations between these variables and the Participation Influences as defined in this theoretical framework.

Individual Characteristics

Earlier studies have found that ILSP participants are more likely to be female and African American or Latino (and less likely to be white) than non-ILSP participants (Lemon et al. 2005; Courtney et al. 2008), but provide no evidence that gender or race/ethnicity have an independent effect on the likelihood of graduating from ILSP. If ILSP graduation follows trends in high school graduation in the United States, then one would expect higher ILSP graduation among females and that Asian youth would have the highest ILSP graduation rate, followed by white youth, African American youth and Hispanic youth.⁶ While we know that foster youth are more likely to exhibit learning disabilities or mental health issues, no literature was found to indicate how these challenges are associated with ILSP participation.

Family Characteristics

Characteristics of the biological family have generally not been examined in ILSP research. However, there is no question that many of the families from which foster youth are removed are operating under severe financial constraints and this could easily impact a youth's need for financial resources outside of the family. In California, for example, nearly two-thirds of the over 83,000 youth in foster care in June 2008 came from homes with incomes low enough to qualify for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (CDSS, 2006). It seems plausible that foster youth from lower income families will have a greater need for the financial assistance and other resources available through ILSP.

Case History Variables

There are a number of ways in which case history variables might influence ILSP participation:

Reason for Removal. Previous research supports an association between the severity of removal reason and a youth's *connection to biological family*. For example, Glisson et al. (2000) found that children removed because of sexual abuse were the least likely to be reunified with their parents followed by neglected children and then those removed for physical abuse or due to behavioral problems. This being the case, one might expect that foster youth removed for more serious reasons will have weaker connections to biological family and be in greater need of the social and other supports available through ILSP.

⁶ Results based on high school completion rates among individuals ages 18 to 24 not enrolled in high school or below. As cited in: Chapman, C., Laird, J., and Kewal Ramani, A. (2010). Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 1972–2008 Compendium Report December 2010. Accessed online 3/19/2012 at: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011012.pdf>.

Time in Care. Longer time in care is likely to indicate weaker *connection to family* of origin and greater *need for resources* from the ILSP as a substitute for family guidance and support during the transition to adulthood. Wulczyn and Brunner Hislop (2001) found that youth who are in care for a longer period of time and often have less connection to family, are more likely to receive support services in foster or group home settings or community-based setting (and less in family of origin settings) than youth who enter care later and leave relatively quickly. Although Lemon et al (2005) in their study of California ILSPs found some indications of a contrary pattern, with ILSP participants having been in care for less time than non-participants, this difference was not statistically significant.

Placement Stability. Placement instability could increase a youth's need for ILSP services because it: 1) may reflect challenging youth characteristics (behavioral issues, special needs, etc.) that create greater *need for support*; 2) impedes a youth's ability to establish and maintain supportive *connections with family or caring adults* (Freundlich 2003) (which can facilitate resource sharing, experiential learning, support network); and 3) reduces the ability to engage in the type of formal and informal *experiential learning* of life skills that tends to occur in a stable home environment (Mallon 1998). On the other hand, greater placement instability might make it more difficult for a youth to consistently engage in an ILSP to access these resources. Evidence supports the first hypothesis; ILSP participants have a higher average number of placements than non-ILSP participants (Lemon et al. 2005).

Placement/Caregiver Characteristics

The placement type reflects both the youth-caregiver relationship and the placement environment, both of which can affect a youth's need for life skills development, social networking and community support, and financial or other resources. There is more research evidence on how placement type is associated with the Participation Influences than any other factor.

Placement types offering more *opportunity for experiential learning* could translate to less need among youth for ILSP services targeted at developing independent living skills. Research on living arrangements emphasizes that youth in foster family settings have greater chance to learn practical living skills (budgeting, shopping, time management, etc.) from adult caregivers and role models, whereas those in highly structured institutional and group care settings will have less access to experiential learning (Kroner 1988). Comparing assessments of the life skills knowledge of 534 older foster youth in three different placement settings, Mech et al. (1994) found that youth in transitional living apartment settings scored highest, followed closely by youth in foster family homes and more distantly by those in group homes or institutions. This finding does not rule out the possibility that varying levels of life skills knowledge is more driven by individual characteristics and case history (which can determine placement setting) than by the placement settings themselves. Beckman and Jones (2007) also found that the teaching of life skills was not consistently provided in group homes in one California County (Alameda).

Placement types that allow more *connection to biological family* could translate to less need among youth for ILSP resources that develop social networks and community support. A larger

share of youth (81 percent vs. 58 percent) in kinship placements had some contact with the birth parents compared to youth in nonrelative placements (Berrick et al. 1994). The National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW, 2002) also finds that contact with biological family was weakest among youth placed in congregate care and strongest among those placed with kin, while those placed with non-relative caregivers were somewhere in between. In this case too, it is hard to distinguish between the effects of child characteristics and placement or caregiver effects.

Placement types with greater *financial resources* could translate to less need among youth for ILSP for financial resources. One study finds that kin caregivers have much lower average annual gross income than other foster parents (\$32,424 and \$51,320, respectively) (Berrick et al., 1994). Using data from the National Survey of American Families, Urban Institute researchers also find significant differences in household income depending on caregiver type. Relative to youth in non-kin foster care placements, youth residing with kin caregivers were more likely to be in households with incomes less than the federal poverty level (39 percent vs. 13 percent) (Ehrle and Geen, 2002). Furthermore, while one might suspect that available resources will be more accessible to youth in kinship settings (where we might expect higher levels of altruism), research has shown that kin and nonrelative caregivers report a near equal (and high) propensity to spend their own money on the youth in their care (87 percent and 83 percent respectively) (Berrick et al., 1994) though this does not speak to potential differences in the amount of money actually spent.

Regardless of real or perceived need for ILSP services, placement types with limited knowledge of or *access to ILSP* could hinder participation in the program. Research indicates that kinship caregivers have less frequent contact with case workers than nonrelative caregivers (Dubowitz, 1994; Berrick et al., 1994) and are less likely to receive a variety of support services than other foster parents (Berrick et al., 1994). Therefore, it is quite likely that youth in kinship placements will also be less likely to be aware of or actively connected to ILSP services. There is also evidence that assistance with accessing ILSP and other community support services is very inconsistent in some group home settings (Becker and Jones, 2007).

Table 3.1 (next page) summarizes the theorized relationships between placement type, participation influences and ILSP participation. For youth in kinship placement, three of the four participation influences are expected to have a negative association with ILSP participation so I theorize that youth in kinship placements will be the least likely to participate in the program. For youth placed in group homes, three of the four participation influences are expected to have a positive association with ILSP participation so I theorize that group home youth will be more likely to participate in the program.

For youth in nonrelative foster homes, the four participation influences are evenly split between having a negative and having a positive association with ILSP participation so I expect their likelihood of participating to be somewhere between youth in the other two placement types. Lemon et al. (2005) do find that ILSP participants in their study were more likely to have been in nonrelative foster homes and congregate care (group homes, shelters) and less likely in kinship placement than youth who did not participate in ILSP (Lemon et al., 2005).

Table 3.1 Theorized relationships between placement type and ILSP participation

| Placement Type | Participation Influence | Expected Association with ILSP Participation |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| Kinship | Higher opportunity for experiential learning | Less need for ILSP skill-building programs |
| | High connection to family | Less need for ILSP social support |
| | Lower levels of financial resources | Greater need for ILSP resources |
| | Less awareness of/connection to support services | Less access to ILSP |
| Nonrelative Foster Home | Higher opportunity for experiential learning | Less need for ILSP skill-building programs |
| | Medium connection to family | Moderate need for ILSP social support |
| | Higher levels of financial resources | Less need for ILSP resources |
| | Greater awareness of/connection to support services | Greater access to ILSP |
| Group Home | Lower opportunity for experiential learning | Greater need for ILSP skill-building programs |
| | Low connection to family | Greater need for ILSP social support |
| | No access to caregiver financial resources | Greater need for ILSP resources |
| | Inconsistent connection to support services | Less access to ILSP |

ILSP Access Factors

Where ILSP is more *accessible* to youth, they will be more inclined to utilize the services and resources it offers. The program’s accessibility is affected both by awareness of the program and actual physical or geographical access to the program. Though the specific recruitment or referral process varies by program, youth are generally notified of their eligibility for ILSP either by their social worker/probation officer or directly by the local ILSP. Where outreach and referral is weak, youth or caregivers may remain unaware of eligibility and the potential benefits of the program. Physical access to the ILSP site can also facilitate or hinder program participation; youth who live nearby can easily walk but those residing further will be dependent on available transportation options. An evaluation of the ILSP operating in Los Angeles County suggested that contributing to the program’s high enrollment rate (76 percent of eligible) were outreach efforts beyond what is customary in other localities, including the employment of specialized outreach workers that assist with transportation and link youth to information and resources (Courtney et al 2008). In conclusion, I theorize that where the program is more effectively promoted (e.g. through outreach and caseworker referral) and where it is more physically accessible (e.g. convenient location, reliable transportation), youth will be more likely to participate in ILSP.

Program Design Factors Influencing ILSP Efficacy

For those youth who do decide to participate in ILSP, the theoretical framework also allows that features of the program’s design can impact how well ILSP engages transitioning foster youth and responds to their needs, facilitating the ultimate goals of achieving better early adult outcomes. This section briefly reviews some of the program design features and strategies highlighted in the ILSP literature as offering the potential for improving transitional support services for foster youth.

Better Engage Youth and Caregivers in Transition Planning and ILSP Services. Effective strategies that outreach to and engage youth in ILSP and other transitional support programming have been identified as critical in efforts to prepare them for adulthood (California Child Welfare

Co-investment Partnership 2011). Successful methods of increasing youth engagement in ILSP include having specialized social workers with smaller caseloads and using peer mentors to conduct outreach to youth (Waldinger and Furman 1994; Courtney et al. 2008). Waldinger and Furman (1994) also found that youth with more involved caseworkers were more likely to feel that they were instrumental in preparing for the transition and were also more likely to stay in touch with or seek assistance from caseworkers after leaving care.

In addition, the multi-county Breakthrough Series Collaboration on ILSP Reform (California Child Welfare Co-investment Partnership 2011) found that an important element of effective systems change in this area was greater involvement of caregivers and other caring adults in the lives of youth. Improved outreach to caregivers can raise awareness of the resources available to youth through ILSP and increase the likelihood that they will help youth attend programs and services on a consistent basis. In their guide for developing effective transitional supports for foster youth, Casey Family Programs (2001) also suggested that positive and trusting relationships with caring adults could help foster youth fare better during the transitional period.

Design Programs That are More Relevant to Foster Youth. In the past decade, there has been increasing work done to examine what factors could improve the ability of ILSP and other support programs to meet the needs of transitioning foster youth. Many of these have focused on increasing youth leadership in determining the content and youth-friendliness of support programming, while others have looked for ways to take independent skills learning beyond the classroom setting. It has been acknowledged that hearing first hand of the personal experiences of youth in the foster care system helps policymakers to develop more effective policies and programs and that the sharing of these experiences empowers youth to advance their own well-being as well as the good of the larger community (NGA Center for Best Practices 2007). Youth engagement has been defined as the genuine involvement of youth in their own case planning and in advocating for their own well-being (Shirk and Stangler 2004).

Youth engagement, a core strategy for improving permanency outcomes (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2006; Annie E. Casey Foundation et al. 2008), has included efforts that directly engage youth in permanency planning such as through the use of team decision making (TDM) models which bring together youth, caregivers, family members, mentors, other caring adults, and child welfare staff to discuss placement changes, transition planning and permanency efforts. The Foster Youth Housing Initiative found that another key strategy that helped youth stay engaged in transitional housing programs was having positive youth role models available, such as by having other youth serve as resident advisors, peer advocates and mentors (Latham et al. 2008). Research has found that these various youth engagement approaches do offer the potential for improved programs and more positive youth outcomes (Gray and Hayes 2008). There are also important benefits to foster youth who participate in leadership or staff roles in ILSP programming. Volunteer and paid work experience – as well as group teamwork with other youth – relate directly to the development of effective life skills (Nollan et al. 1997). Opportunities for youth leadership can also contribute to the development of “soft skills,” such as self-esteem and personal abilities which will benefit them throughout life (Pine, Kreiger and Maluccio 1990).

In addition to an emphasis on the importance of youth assuming greater leadership in program reform, the Breakthrough Series Collaboration on ILSP Reform also encouraged the integration of living skills instruction into care settings (California Child Welfare Co-investment Partnership, 2011). There is growing consensus that learning which takes place in real-life settings, or utilizes reality-based examples and strategies, can be more effective at imparting the desired knowledge and skills (Cook 1994; Casey Family Programs 2001). For example, Mech et al. (1994) found that youth living in transitional apartments, in which they can practice living independently while still receiving some support and supervision, exhibited better life skills assessment scores than youth in other placement types (Mech et al. 1994). Additionally, the co-locating of ILSP classes on community college campuses – which is not uncommon today – has been cited as providing an ideal opportunity to familiarize youth with educational settings, peer networks, and community resources while providing instruction on independent living (Courtney 2008; Waldinger and Furman 1998). Other research has suggested that caregivers can contribute to improved ILSP efficacy not only by supporting youth in their acquisition of independent living skills but by providing more experiential learning opportunities in the care setting (Waldinger and Furman 1994).

Create a True Continuum of Support that Addresses a Wide Array of Youth Needs. There has been recent acknowledgment that a more comprehensive approach to the provision of transitional supports – one that provides greater youth and caregiver involvement and more experiential learning opportunity – is unlikely to be achieved by most ILSPs without a great deal of additional community collaboration (California Child Welfare Co-investment Partnership, 2011). A comprehensive system of support requires collaboration and coordination among a multitude of agencies and organizations that currently touch the lives of transition age youth in both small and large ways. This type of collaboration can improve the base of knowledge with which practitioners are operating (through data sharing), maximize available resources (by tapping into larger pools of mainstream federal funding) and more efficiently expand the array of support services for youth (through the avoidance of duplicative efforts) (Casey Family Programs 2001).

Chapter 4
Alameda County Case Study:
A Quantitative Examination of Factors Affecting
Graduation from a Local Independent Living Skills Program

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine how a youth's individual characteristics, foster care history and current placement impact participation in the local Independent Living Skills Program (ILSP) in one California county. Specifically addressed is whether graduation from ILSP is determined more by level of need or degree of access to the program.

There are numerous evaluations of local ILSPs, most analyzing the efficacy of a program at improving the outcomes of former foster youth. However, the majority of studies suffer a variety of shortcomings, often due to the poor or inconsistent data available on this population. Earlier studies have generally utilized a small sample of ILSP participants only and many failed to include comparison group data (Kerman et al. 2002; Courtney et al. 2004; Montgomery et al. 2006). The study presented in this chapter offers some important improvements over previous research. First, it employs data from the full population of ILSP-eligible youth in the county, rather than just a comparison of some ILSP participants and some non-ILSP participants, to examine the factors associated with participation in the program. In addition, this analysis controls for geographic access to ILSP resources, a unique addition to the modeling of ILSP participation.

Research Questions

This research addresses the following questions:

- What factors (individual, family and caregiver factors, geographic access) affect a youth's graduation from the local ILSP?
- Is ILSP reaching the most needy of foster youth or those that would do fairly well anyway?
- What do these findings suggest for future efforts at ILSP reform? (for example, better targeting, expanded recruitment, transportation assistance, etc.)

Program Description

One of the first such programs established in California, the Alameda County ILSP (ACILSP) is fairly representative of county-administered ILSPs across the U.S., offering an array of courses and workshops on independent living skills (money and home management, health and safety, food and nutrition, community resources, etc.), educational supports (tutoring, test preparation, college applications) and employment skills development. Services are also available to assist youth with transitional housing and an array of other needs (health, mental health, disability, etc.). Like other ILSPs, Alameda County's program is also the primary route through which

youth can access federal funding (such as the Chafee Educational and Training Voucher program) for post-secondary education and housing costs as well as to supportive housing through California's Transitional Housing Plus Program. These supports are designed to facilitate completion of high school, college attendance, gainful employment, stable housing and successful independent living during the transition to adulthood.

Youth are eligible to participate in ACILSP if they were in out-of-home care (under the jurisdiction of either the child welfare or probation agency) at any time on or after their 16th birthday, making equally eligible youth who have been in care for long periods of time through their 16th birthday and youth who first entered care after age 16, even if only in care a few months. Having met this eligibility requirement, youth can participate in ILSP throughout the transitional years (ages 16 through 21) whether they are currently in an out-of-home placement or not.

In the period observed, the ACILSP provided its services to youth from two locations – a main office in central Oakland and an auxiliary location at Chabot College in Hayward, about 13 miles southeast of the main office. A foster youth generally receives a referral to the program from their social worker⁷ around the time of their 16th birthday, or as soon as they enter the system if older than 16. In addition, ACILSP staff received a list of youth who became eligible for the program each month. All youth directly referred to the program, as well as those listed as being program-eligible, were sent a letter informing them of the services offered by ACILSP and inviting them to a future orientation. If a foster youth under Alameda County jurisdiction was placed in another county, ACILSP would refer the youth to that county's ILSP and offer reimbursement for any services provided. Likewise, youth in care in Alameda County but sent there by another county's child welfare agency could be referred to ACILSP for services, and ACILSP would be reimbursed. Between 1999 and 2005, an average of 223 Alameda County youth were placed out of county each year (roughly a third of Alameda County's annual caseload of youth 16 to 20), while an average of 117 youth from other jurisdictions were placed within Alameda County each year.⁸

Eligible youth, after attending an initial orientation, can participate in a variety of services and workshops through the course of the year. Participation is voluntary and their level of involvement is self-determined, though the ACILSP staff does work to assess youth and recommend supports that correspond to their needs. While ACILSP "graduation" – the observed outcome and dependent variable in this analysis – does not translate to completion of a specific quantitative goal (e.g. a certain number of units completed or workshops attended) it does indicate that a youth had a greater degree of involvement with the ACILSP and its staff beyond the initial orientation, as well as more prolonged exposure to its resources and programs. Youth tend to graduate from the ACILSP program in June of the year they graduate from high school, or about the time they would otherwise graduate if no longer still in school.

⁷ Youth who are in out-of-home care but under the jurisdiction of the probation department would be referred to ACILSP by their probation officer.

⁸Needell, B., Webster, D., Armijo, M., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Williams, D., Zimmerman, K., Simon, V., Hamilton, D., Putnam-Hornstein, E., Frerer, K., Lou, C., Peng, C. and Moore, M. (2010). Child Welfare Services Reports for California. Retrieved 9/12/2010, from University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research website. URL: http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare.

Foster youth residing in Alameda County also have access to additional support during this transitional period from organizations other than the ACILSP. For example, there are community-based organizations – such as the First Place Fund for Youth in Alameda County – that offer individual case management, transitional housing, academic support and other services that parallel those offered by the ACILSP. In addition, some group homes offer on-site workshops and support services in preparation for life after foster care. However, even if a youth is receiving support services from one of these other sources, a youth would be well-served to simultaneously enroll in the ACILSP and take advantage of the education and housing financial support programs that flow through county-administered ILSP programs. In addition, because actual delivery of on-site independent living skills programs at group homes is less than consistent, some residential facilities in Alameda County even mandate that youth above age 15 and a half enroll in ACILSP.⁹

There are a number of challenges to achieving full utilization of the ILSP program among eligible youth in Alameda County (see the theoretical model presented in Chapter 3 for greater detail). The social worker or probation officer may fail to mention to a youth his/her eligibility for ACILSP or not complete the required referral form and as a result, a youth remains unaware of the program and its potential benefits. A youth may be unable to attend ILSP services and events on a regular basis due to a lack of transportation, sufficient encouragement and support from the caregiver, frequent moves and placement instability, language or literacy barriers, or a number of other personal challenges. A youth may also choose to participate or not based on their actual need for support (financial and other) and the perceived value of the services being offered by ACILSP as well as those offered by community-based organizations.

Data Description

This research utilizes data on youth who graduated from the ACILSP between 1998 and 2005 merged with data on the full population of Alameda County foster youth who would have been eligible for the program during this time period. The first dataset was compiled by the researcher at the ACILSP and the second dataset was provided by the Center for Social Services Research (CSSR) archive of Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) caseload data.

In this analysis, foster youth are included as eligible for ACILSP graduation if they were in foster care under the jurisdiction of Alameda County's child welfare agency and placed in Alameda County on or after their 16th birthday, and were also within the normative age range for ILSP graduation during the study period. The normative age range here, based on the finding that nearly all (98 percent) youth graduate from ACILSP between ages 17 and 19, means that eligible youth should have been no older than 19 at the time of the first graduation observed (1998) and at least 17 years old at the time of the last graduation observed (2005). As a result, the 2,034 youth in the ILSP-eligible population were born between December 3, 1978 and June 3, 1988. ACILSP eligibility as defined above includes placement in Alameda County at age 16 or older because youth receive ILSP services in the county of placement, though the county of

⁹Beckman, Tara and Jones, Regena Jones. (2007) *Alameda County CASA: Group homes Project: Advocating for Group Home Youth and Supporting Emancipating Youth*. Accessed online 02/08/11 at: www.nww.org/documents/ytatdocuments/CASA_GH_Report07.pdf.

jurisdiction is responsible for reimbursing the costs of such services. (See Appendix A for additional details on initial case selection.)

Among the 620 ACILSP graduates during this period, I identified a total of 319 graduates that match to youth in the ILSP-eligible population. The remaining ACILSP graduates were most likely under the jurisdiction of the Alameda County's probation agency or another county entirely and were therefore not contained in the dataset of ACILSP eligible youth. These 319 graduates translate to an overall graduation rate of 16 percent among the total 2,034 youth in the final dataset. (See Appendix A for additional support on data matching results.)

Methodology

Following the theoretical framework of factors affecting ILSP utilization presented in Chapter 3, this section reviews the variables included in the analytical model of ACILSP graduation presented below.

Dependent Variable

There are several different ways to measure a youth's program participation in ILSP, including: attendance at an ACILSP orientation, participation in the array of ACILSP services offered, and ultimately graduation from the ACILSP. At the time of data collection the ACILSP lacked an integrated tracking system capable of generating an individual-level dataset with these multiple measures, but the county was able to provide a list of ACILSP graduates. Thus, the dependent variable used in this analysis is ACILSP graduation. *This binary variable is coded 0 if a youth was not an ACILSP graduate and 1 if the youth was a graduate, a variable hand-entered from ACILSP records.*

In addition, ACILSP provided aggregate numbers of youth invited to its orientations, and these data are also reported and analyzed, although not with any individual characteristics.

Tables 4.1 and 4.2 summarize the individual characteristics, removal site, placement site, and ILSP access variables included in the analysis and the hypothesized impact of those explanatory variables on a youth's likelihood of completing the ACILSP program.

Table 4.1: Explanatory Variables and Hypothesized Relationship to ILSP Graduation

| Explanatory Variable | Proxy Measure (if applicable) | Values | Hypothesized Relationship |
|---|--|--|--|
| Youth and Family-of-Origin Characteristic Variables | | | |
| Gender | N/A | Dummy Variables: Female , Male | Females will be more likely to graduate than males. |
| Race/ ethnicity | N/A | Dummy Variables: African American , White, Hispanic, Asian, Other ¹⁰ | Asian and white youth will be more likely to graduate than other youth. |
| Income level – Eligibility for federally funded foster care | Proxy for resources potentially available to family of origin | Equals 1 if Eligible for federal foster care | Expect positive correlation between eligibility for federal foster care and probability of graduating ACILSP. |
| Case History Variables | | | |
| Reason for most recent removal from home | Proxy measure of closeness to biological family. | Dummy Variables: General Neglect, ¹¹ Severe Neglect, Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse, Other , Missing | Expect sexually abused/neglected youth will have the weakest ties to their biological family and be more likely to graduate from ACILSP. |
| Total time in care, by placement at age 16+ | Proxy measure of closeness to biological family | Dummy Variables: 0 to <2 years , ¹² 2 to <5 years, 5 to < 10 years, 10 to 16 years | Expect positive correlation between number of days in care and probability of ACILSP graduation. |
| Number of placements, by placement at age 16+ | Possibly proxy for factors that impede permanent placement ¹³ | Dummy Variables: One , 2 to 3, 4 to 5, and 6 or more | Uncertain – More placement changes could suggest need for increased support but also interfere with ACILSP attendance and completion. |

Variables in **bold** text are the omitted category for each variable series.

Youth Characteristics. If ILSP graduation mirrors trends in high school graduation, I would anticipate youth who are female will be more likely to graduate from ACILSP, and might also expect higher rates of ACILSP graduation among youth who are Asian or white than among African American, Hispanic, or other youth. There is no clear hypothesis with regard to the number of placements experienced by the time of a youth’s placement at age 16 or older.

Family-of-Origin Characteristics. Because information on the actual income level of a youth’s family of origin was not available in the caseload data utilized here, I utilize eligibility for federally funded foster care as a proxy for the financial resources potentially available to a youth from their biological family. A youth is eligible for federally funded foster care if the family of origin qualified for federal welfare benefits under the former Aid to Families of Dependent

¹⁰ “Other” includes 16 youth who are Native American (8), Pacific Islander (6) or Missing (2) race/ethnicity info.

¹¹ “General Neglect” also includes Caretaker Absence/Incapacity. Other includes Child’s Handicap/Disability, Emotional Abuse, Exploitation, Law Violation, Relinquishment and Voluntary Placement. Missing are cases with no data because of an agency data conversion error.

¹² The 454 cases for which time in out-of-home care by placement at age 16 or older was 0 days indicates that the youth’s first placement in out-of-home care occurred after the 16th birthday.

¹³ Factors include youth characteristics, caregiver characteristics or a mismatch between youth and caregiver, all of which can affect a placement’s success.

Children program. It is expected that receipt of federal foster care payment will be associated with a higher likelihood of ACILSP graduation because youth have access to less family support.

Case History Variables. The variables reflecting a youth's foster care experience - since entering care through their placement at age 16 or older - include reason for the most recent removal from home, total amount of time in out-of-home care and total number of placements. The first two of these variables serve as proxy measures for closeness to family since many foster youth receive assistance and support from their biological family during the transitional period, support which can reduce their need for ILSP assistance. Being removed because of sexual abuse or neglect, and longer time spent in care are hypothesized to decrease closeness to family and increase the likelihood of graduating from the ACILSP program. Greater placement instability could both indicate a greater need for ILSP resources but also result in less consistent access to ACILSP, creating potentially contradictory influences on the likelihood of graduating from the program.

Table 4.2: Explanatory Variables and Hypothesized Relationship to ILSP Graduation – Continued

| Explanatory Variable | Proxy Measure (if applicable) | Values | Hypothesized Relationship |
|---|---|---|---|
| Placement/Caregiver Characteristic Variables | | | |
| Placement type (at age 16+) | N/A | Dummy Variables: Group Home, Foster Family, Foster Family Agency (FFA), Kinship, Guardian , Other ¹⁴ | Expect youth in kin and guardian placements to be less likely to graduate from ACILSP, youth in group homes or FFAs to be the most likely to graduate, and youth in nonrelative foster homes to be somewhere between. |
| Income level (block level), neighborhood placement (at age 16+) ¹⁵ | Proxy for resources potentially available to placement family | Per capita income in \$1,000s | Expect negative correlation between per capita income and probability of graduating ACILSP. |
| ILSP Access and Exposure Variables | | | |
| Distance from placement site (at 16+) to nearest ACILSP site ¹⁶ | N/A | Dummy Variables: Under 1.5 miles , 1.5 to 3 miles, 3 to 5 miles, 5 to 10 miles, 10 to 25 miles, 25+ miles, Missing | Expect negative correlation between distance to nearest ILSP site and probability of ACILSP graduation. |
| Nearest ACILSP site ¹⁶ | N/A | Dummy Variables: Site1 , Site2, Missing | Expect that youth residing closer to Site 1 (the larger site) will be more likely to graduate from ACILSP. |
| Exposure to the Opportunity to ACILSP Graduation | N/A | Age at start of ACILSP observation period. | Youth with greatest exposure to ACILSP during the study period – 2001 and 2002 – will be more likely to graduate from ACILSP. |
| County of Removal and Placement Variables | | | |
| Removed from County other than Alameda | N/A | Equals 1 if youth was removed from a county other than Alameda. | Expect that youth who were removed from another county will be less likely to graduate from ACILSP. |
| Removal County Missing | N/A | Equals 1 if youth is missing data on removal county. | Included as a control variable. |
| Placement County Missing | N/A | Equals 1 if youth is missing data on placement county. | Included as a control variable. |

*Variables in **bold** text are the omitted category for each variable series.*

¹⁴ “Other” includes Court Specified, Shelter, Medical, and Adoptive placements.

¹⁵ Income level for neighborhood of out-of-home placement is missing for those for whom the geographic identifier for placement is missing or failed to match to Census data.

¹⁶ Distance to nearest ACILSP site variables are missing for those for whom the geographic identifier for placement at age 16+ is missing.

Placement and Caregiver Characteristics. The analytical model also includes characteristics of the placement environment (at age 16 or older) that could affect a youth's need or inclination to participate in the ACILSP, as discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3. In nearly all cases, kinship caregivers are relatives and all other placement type categories are with non-relative caregivers.¹⁷ It is hypothesized in **Table 4.2** that residing in a kin or guardianship placement will reduce the likelihood of graduating from ACILSP as more experiential learning from caregivers, more frequent contact with biological family and weaker connection to support services among kin/guardian placements will reduce the need for or awareness of the ACILSP. Youth in group home placements will be more likely to graduate from ILSP because less opportunity for experiential learning and weaker connection to family and other supports will increase their need for ILSP resources. The likelihood of graduating from ILSP among youth in nonrelative foster family homes will be somewhere between those two groups because of contradictory influences (for example, greater opportunity for experiential learning in placement but greater awareness and access to community supports such as ILSP). In addition, I hypothesize that youth in FFA placements will be more in need of ILSP assistance, and will be more likely to graduate from the ACILSP, because such placement often indicates a youth requires a higher level of care. In this sense, FFA placement also serves as a proxy for a youth's ability or special needs, information which is otherwise missing from this analytical model (as mentioned above). FFA homes are also reimbursed at a higher rate for youth requiring a higher level of care, and in exchange are held accountable for providing a greater degree of support for youths' needs, including transportation to available community services such as ILSP.

Since information on income level of caregivers is not available, US Census per capita income data at the block level is merged to placement location (at 16 or older) to serve as a proxy measure for resources available at placement. I expect that as per capita income increases, the probability of ACILSP graduation will decrease because youth will be less likely to need the resources offered by the program.

ACILSP Access and Exposure Factors. ACILSP provides services from two locations, one in central Alameda County and one in the eastern part of the County. Thus, the primary measure of access to ACILSP is a series of dummy variables representing the calculated distance from placement site to the nearest ACILSP location. I expect that youth who reside closer to an ACILSP site will have a greater probability of graduating from the program. To control for between-site variation the model also includes a dummy variable indicating which of the two ILSP sites (based on proximity) a youth would have likely accessed. I expect that youth residing closer to the central ACILSP site, which offers more orientation events and services, will be more likely to graduate from the program.

To control for the amount of exposure a youth has to ILSP graduation during the period of graduation data used here (1998 to 2005), I examine ACILSP graduation rates by a youth's most likely year of high school graduation. The data set contains both older youth, who may have graduated just before the ACILSP data begins, and also younger youth, who may have graduated after the ACILSP data ends. Therefore I anticipate that the youth with maximum opportunity for ACILSP graduation will have likely high school graduation years around 2001 and 2002.

¹⁷ The only exceptions are 30 youth in kinship placements for whom the caregiver was categorized as being a nonrelative.

County of Removal and Placement Variables. Three dummy variables were created to flag youth who were removed from a county other than Alameda, or were missing data on county of removal or placement at age 16 or older. While youth removed from another county but placed in Alameda would be eligible for ACILSP services, it is also possible that they might return to the removal county or maintain contact with the ILSP in their original county, and graduate from that program instead of ACILSP. Therefore I expect these youth will be less likely to graduate from ACILSP than youth removed from homes in Alameda County (or youth who are missing information on county of removal). The dummy variables indicating missing data for county of removal or placement are included to control for the fact that these youth are systematically missing data for distance and income variables, because they were missing geographic identifiers to map distance and block level information used to merge Census data.

Missing Values. Nearly all (200) of the 202 youth missing a value for per capita income in placement neighborhood were missing a geographic identifier for home of placement at age 16 or older, and were therefore also missing a value for the nearest ACILSP site variables. For the purpose of the regression analysis presented below, missing values were replaced with the mean calculated among all non-missing values for each respective variable.

Analysis Conducted. To get a sense of initial program take-up among these youth, I first compare publicly available Alameda County child welfare caseload data with orientation data provided by the ACILSP for the 2008-2009 school year. Bivariate statistical analysis was utilized to identify significant differences in rates of ACILSP graduation among subgroups of youth defined by the various explanatory variables described above. Finally, logistic regression was conducted using SPSS to examine which explanatory variables had a significant impact on the likelihood of graduating from ACILSP.

Findings

This section first presents the findings related to ACILSP program take-up and then the results of both bivariate analysis and logistic regression using the merged ILSP-eligible and ACILSP graduation data.

ACILSP Program Participation

Table 4.3 presents the findings on ACILSP take-up among eligible foster youth. On January 1, 2008, there were 443 child welfare-supervised youth between ages 16 and 20 placed in Alameda County (344 were under Alameda's jurisdiction and 99 were under another county's jurisdiction) and 215 probation-supervised youth (also ages 16 to 20) in Alameda County, all of which would have been eligible for ACILSP.¹⁸ Another 131 youth (ages 16 and 17) entered care over the course of 2008 under Alameda County's child welfare and probation agencies.¹⁹ While some of

¹⁸Needell, B., Webster, D., Armijo, M., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Williams, D., Zimmerman, K., Simon, V., Hamilton, D., Putnam-Hornstein, E., Frerer, K., Lou, C., Peng, C. and Moore, M. (2010). Child Welfare Services Reports for California. Retrieved 9/12/2010, from University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research website. URL: http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare.

¹⁹Needell, B., Webster, D., Armijo, M., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Putnam-Hornstein, E., Williams, D., Simon, V., Hamilton, D., Lou, C., Peng, C., Moore, M., King, B., Henry, C., and Nuttbrock, A. (2012). *Child Welfare Services Reports for*

these youth may have entered care too late in the year to be invited to the ACILSP Fall 2008 orientation (in September), the full 131 is used to compensate for the lack of information for 2008 on the number of youth who entered placements in Alameda in 2008 though they were removed from and under the jurisdiction of other counties. ACILSP recorded having sent out 605 letters to eligible youth, inviting them to attend the orientation.

Table 4.3: Alameda County ILSP-Eligible Youth (ages 16 to 20) and Invitation to Participate in ACILSP, 2008

| | # Youth |
|---|---------|
| Child Welfare On 1/1/2008 | 7 |
| Alameda Jurisdiction | 344 |
| Other County Jurisdiction | 99 |
| Alameda Probation On 1/1/2008 | 215 |
| Alameda Jurisdiction Entered Care 1/1/2008-12/31/2008 | 131 |
| Total ACILSP Eligible | 789 |
| # of ACILSP Orientation Invitations Sent | 605 |
| % Eligible Youth Invited to ACILSP | 77% |

As shown in **Table 4.3**, approximately three-fourths of youth eligible for ACILSP were invited to attend the program’s orientation. Of the 605 youth that were invited to the orientation, 18 percent (or 110 youth) attended in Fall 2008 and another 10 percent (or 59 youth) had already attended an orientation at an earlier date. While participation in the orientation is strongly encouraged, the ACILSP will still provide services to eligible youth even if they did not attend, so the actual rate of ACILSP service receipt was likely higher than the combined 28 percent of those invited (equivalent to 21 percent of those potentially eligible.)

Bivariate Analysis

Using the final merged data set of 2,034 youth eligible for ACILSP during the 1998 to 2005 time period observed, I find 319 youth (15.7 percent) actually graduated from the program – indicating that nearly one in seven of these youth were active enough with the program (attending classes, being case managed, etc.) to “graduate.” The bivariate analysis results are presented below in **Tables 4.4 and 4.5**. Cross tabulations reveal statistically significant different rates of ACILSP graduation among subgroups of youth defined by the categorical explanatory variables.

- Females were more likely than males (17 vs. 13 percent, $p < .05$) to graduate from ACILSP, consistent with expectations.

California. Retrieved 4/2/2012, from University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research website. URL: http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare.

- As hypothesized, Asian youth were the most likely to graduate from the program (24 percent) but they were followed by African American youth (19 percent) who had much higher graduation rates than white youth (8 percent), which was not expected ($p < .001$).
- Youth who were eligible for federally funded foster care had higher rates of ACILSP graduation (17 vs. 13 percent, $p < .01$) as anticipated.
- Sexually abused youth were, as expected, among the most likely to graduate from ACILSP (20 percent), though those removed for severe neglect had an even higher graduation rate (24 percent) respectively ($p < .05$).
- ACILSP graduation rates were lowest among youth with both the smallest number and the highest number of placements (14 and 13 percent respectively) by the time of placement at age 16 or older ($p < .05$). This is consistent with the hypothesis that greater placement instability may increase the need for support services, but at the highest level also interferes with a youth's ability to graduate from ACILSP.
- Consistent with expectations, youth placed with guardians or kin were less likely than other youth to graduate from ACILSP (8 and 14 percent respectively), youth in FFA homes had the highest graduation rates (20 percent) but youth in nonrelative foster family settings had higher graduation rates (18 percent) than group home youth (15 percent), which was unexpected ($p < .01$).
- Youth who live closer to the more central ACILSP site are more likely to graduate ($p < .05$), as expected, than those closer to the second site (18 vs. 13 percent).
- Distance from placement location to the nearest ACILSP site is associated with program graduation as hypothesized ($p < .05$); those who live closest to the program are most likely to graduate (20 percent), and those who live furthest away are least likely (10 percent). However graduation rates do not decline continuously as youth reside further away – those who live three to five miles out are less likely to graduate ACILSP (14 percent) than those who live five to 10 miles out (19 percent), which is not as expected.
- As expected, ACILSP graduation rates peak among youth most likely to graduate from high school in 2001 and 2002 (the middle-aged youth in the data) and then decrease among both older and younger youth ($p < .001$).
- Also as expected, youth removed from a county other than Alameda, had a much lower graduation rate than youth for whom removal county was Alameda or missing ($p < .001$).

Table 4.4: Percentage of youth who graduated from the Alameda County ILSP; by explanatory variables included in the analytical model

| Explanatory Variables | Values and Frequency | Percent Graduated from ACILSP | Chi-Sq. Value | Total Youth |
|--|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------|--|
| TOTAL | - | 15.7 | - | |
| <i>Youth Characteristic Variables</i> | | | | |
| Gender* | Female (1,286) | 17.0 | 4.79 | 2,034 - No cases with missing value. |
| | Male (748) | 13.4 | | |
| Race/ethnicity** * | African-American (1,263) | 18.5% | 35.045 | 2,032 - Two cases with missing value, categorized as Other |
| | White (413) | 8.0% | | |
| | Hispanic (244) | 11.5% | | |
| | Asian (98) | 23.5% | | |
| | Other/Missing (16) | 6.2% | | |
| Income level** | Not Eligible for Federal FC (569) | 12.0% | 8.32 | 2,034 - No cases with missing value. |
| | Eligible for Federal FC (1,465) | 17.1% | | |
| <i>Removal/Family-of-Origin Variables</i> | | | | |
| Reason for most recent removal from home* | General Neglect (1,332) | 15.2% | 12.889 | 1,962 – Cases (72) with missing value due to an agency conversion error. ²⁰ |
| | Severe Neglect (102) | 23.5% | | |
| | Physical Abuse (309) | 15.9% | | |
| | Sexual Abuse (162) | 20.4% | | |
| | Other (57) | 7.0% | | |
| | Missing (72) | 9.7% | | |
| Total time in care, by placement at age 16+ | 0 to <2 years (925) | 14.2% | 3.623 | 2,034 - No cases with missing value. |
| | 2 years to < 5 years (320) | 18.1% | | |
| | 5 years to <10 years (420) | 16.0% | | |
| | 10 years to 16 years (369) | 17.1% | | |
| Number of placements, by placement at age 16+* | One (1,153) | 14.0% | 10.904 | 2,034 - No cases with missing value. |
| | 2 to 3 (543) | 18.8% | | |
| | 4 to 5 (164) | 20.7% | | |
| | 6 or More (174) | 12.6% | | |
| <i>Placement/Caregiver Variables</i> | | | | |
| Placement type (at age 16+)** | Group Home (658) | 15.3% | 15.465 | 2,034 - No cases missing a value. |
| | Foster Family (560) | 18.4% | | |
| | Foster Family Agency (182) | 19.8% | | |
| | Kinship (469) | 14.3% | | |
| | Guardian (154) | 7.8% | | |
| | Other (11) | 0.0% | | |

* p < .05; ** p < .01, *** p < .001

²⁰ For whatever reason, this conversion error only resulted in missing data on reason for removal, and was not related to missing data on other variables. Youth having geographic identifiers that were missing or located outside of Alameda County explains the share of missing data on all other variables in this table.

Table 4.5: Percentage of youth who graduated from the Alameda County ILSP; by explanatory variables included in the analytical model – Continued

| Explanatory Variables | Values and Frequency | Graduated ACILSP | Chi-Sq. Value | Total Youth |
|---|-----------------------|------------------|---------------|--|
| TOTAL | - | 15.7% | - | |
| <i>ILSP Access and Exposure Variables</i> | | | | |
| Nearest ACILSP site* | Site 1 (1,099) | 17.9% | 9.299 | 1,834 – Cases (200) with missing value because placement geographic identifier is missing. |
| | Site 2 (735) | 13.3% | | |
| | Missing (200) | 12.0% | | |
| Distance from placement site (at 16+) to nearest ACILSP site* | Under 1.5 miles (156) | 19.9% | 14.793 | |
| | 1.5 to 3 miles (393) | 17.6% | | |
| | 3 to 5 miles (708) | 14.4% | | |
| | 5 to 10 miles (419) | 18.9% | | |
| | 10 to 25 miles (137) | 8.8% | | |
| | 25+ miles (21) | 9.5% | | |
| | Missing (200) | 12.0% | | |
| Most likely year of high school graduation*** | 1997 (89) | 10.1% | 38.289 | |
| | 1998 (158) | 15.2% | | |
| | 1999 (207) | 12.6% | | |
| | 2000 (225) | 15.1% | | |
| | 2001 (230) | 22.2% | | |
| | 2002 (249) | 19.7% | | |
| | 2003 (247) | 17.8% | | |
| | 2004 (246) | 17.1% | | |
| | 2005(246) | 15.9% | | |
| | 2006 (137) | 0.7% | | |
| <i>County of Removal and Placement Variables</i> | | | | |
| Removed from County other than Alameda*** | No (1,830) | 17% | 16.471 | 2,034 - All cases assigned a value. |
| | Yes (204) | 6% | | |
| Removal County Missing | No (1,721) | 16% | .437 | |
| | Yes (313) | 17% | | |
| Placement County Missing | No (1,834) | 16% | 2.276 | |
| | Yes (200) | 12% | | |

* p < .05; ** p < .01, *** p < .001

While the differences are not statistically significant, ACILSP graduation was more likely among youth in care the shortest period of time (0 to 2 years) than among those in care for longer periods of time, which is consistent with expectations. **Table 4.6** also reveals no large or significant difference between ACILSP graduates and non-graduates in terms of the level of per capita income in their neighborhood of placement. This could mean that this variable provides a poor proxy of the financial resources actually available to placement households, or that household-level income does not accurately reflect the resources directly available to youth.

Table 4.6: Mean Per Capita Income in Neighborhood of Placement, by ACILSP Graduation Status

| Explanatory Variable | ACILSP Graduation Status | N | Mean | T-test | Stat. Sign. | Total Youth |
|---|---------------------------------|----------|-------------|---------------|--------------------|--|
| Per capita income (in \$1,000s) in placement neighborhood | Non-Graduate | 1,538 | 22.28 | - 1.538 | 0.124 | 1,832 – Value is missing for 202 cases with geographic identifier for placement missing or not matched to Census data. |
| | Graduate | 294 | 23.31 | | | |

Multivariate Analysis

The results of the binary logistic regression model are reported in **Table 4.7**. Though only approaching statistical significance ($p= 0.05$), males were less likely to graduate from ACILSP than females. Relative to African American youth, both white and Hispanic youth were less likely to graduate (statistically significant at the $p<.05$ level or better) and Asian youth were more likely to graduate from ACILSP (though not statistically significant). A youth’s family being eligible for federally funded foster care - suggesting limited financial resources - was significantly and positively associated with the likelihood of ACILSP graduation ($p<.01$).

Consistent with the bivariate analysis results, youth removed because of severe neglect were much more likely to graduate from ACILSP than youth removed for other reasons ($p<.05$). The relationship between sexual abuse and the probability of graduating was in the expected direction and approached statistical significance ($p=.078$). Results for both total time in foster care and number of placements (by age 16 or older) were as hypothesized, though only being on one’s second or third placement (relative to being on one’s first placement) approached statistical significance ($p=.077$).

Youth in all placement types (with the exception of “other placement”) were more likely than youth in guardian placements to graduate from the ACILSP, and all but Kin and Other placements were statistically significant ($p<.01$). Youth placed by a Foster Family Agency or in a foster family home had the highest probability of graduating (relative to youth placed with guardians), but they were followed closely by those in group homes (who were anticipated to have the highest rates of ACILSP graduation). The per capita income of the census block of placement location also had no significant impact on the probability of graduating, again suggesting this variable likely provides a poor proxy of resources available in the placement setting.

In terms of ACILSP access factors, while which of the two ACILSP program sites a youth lived closest to did not have a statistically significant impact on the probability of graduating, distance to the nearest site did. Youth who lived more than 1.5 miles from an ACILSP site were less likely to graduate from the program than those who lived within 1.5 miles (with probability declining as distance increased). However, results were only statistically significant (at the

p<.05 level) for those who lived three to five miles and 10 to 25 miles from ACILSP, relative to those who lived within 1.5 miles.

Table 4.7: Logistic Regression Results for Variables Predicting Graduation from the Alameda County Independent Living Skills Program for Full Sample of Youth (n = 2,034)

| Explanatory Variables | | β | SE β | Wald | Sig. | e ^{β} (OR) |
|--|--------------------------------|---------|------------|--------|------|--------------------------------------|
| Gender (Female is reference) | Male | -.282 | .144 | 3.853 | .050 | .754 |
| Race/ethnicity (African American is reference) | White*** | -.867 | .216 | 16.139 | .000 | .420 |
| | Hispanic* | -.577 | .233 | 6.132 | .013 | .561 |
| | Asian | .171 | .273 | .394 | .530 | 1.187 |
| | Other Ethnicity | -1.614 | 1.054 | 2.347 | .126 | .199 |
| Income level of family of origin | Eligible Federal Foster Care** | .536 | .163 | 10.774 | .001 | 1.709 |
| Removal reason (Other reason is reference) | General Neglect | .872 | .541 | 2.602 | .107 | 2.393 |
| | Severe Neglect* | 1.387 | .593 | 5.476 | .019 | 4.002 |
| | Physical Abuse | .786 | .562 | 1.954 | .162 | 2.195 |
| | Sexual Abuse | 1.016 | .575 | 3.115 | .078 | 2.761 |
| | Missing | .578 | .685 | .711 | .399 | 1.782 |
| Total time in care (0 to 2 years is reference) | 2 to 5 years | .274 | .199 | 1.897 | .168 | 1.315 |
| | 5 to 10 years | .158 | .199 | .628 | .428 | 1.171 |
| | 10 or more years | .164 | .208 | .622 | .430 | 1.178 |
| Number placements (1 placement is reference) | 2 to 3 | .275 | .156 | 3.128 | .077 | 1.317 |
| | 4 to 5 | .301 | .240 | 1.571 | .210 | 1.351 |
| | 6 or more | -.127 | .284 | .198 | .656 | .881 |
| Placement type (Guardian placement is reference) | Group Home** | 1.043 | .348 | 9.002 | .003 | 2.839 |
| | Foster Home** | 1.078 | .338 | 10.175 | .001 | 2.940 |
| | FF Agency** | 1.149 | .378 | 9.228 | .002 | 3.154 |
| | Kin | .610 | .343 | 3.158 | .076 | 1.841 |
| | Other | -18.532 | 11859.208 | .000 | .999 | .000 |
| Per capita income (in \$1,000s) - Placement Neighborhood | Income | .032 | .023 | 1.946 | .163 | 1.033 |
| Nearest ACILSP site (Site 1 is reference) | Sq. Income | .000 | .000 | .378 | .538 | 1.000 |
| | Site 2 | -.122 | .167 | .536 | .464 | .885 |
| Distance to nearest ACILSP site (Less than 1.5 mi. is reference) | 1.5 to 3 mi. | -.453 | .263 | 2.971 | .085 | .636 |
| | 3 to 5 mi.* | -.520 | .243 | 4.584 | .032 | .594 |
| | 5 to 10 mi. | -.433 | .276 | 2.461 | .117 | .649 |
| | 10 to 25 mi.* | -.949 | .428 | 4.921 | .027 | .387 |
| | 25+ mi. | -1.047 | .802 | 1.705 | .192 | .351 |
| Age at start of observation period | Age*** | 1.557 | .328 | 22.507 | .000 | 4.745 |
| | Sq. Age*** | -.056 | .012 | 22.444 | .000 | .945 |
| Removal & placement controls | Removed from other county*** | -1.110 | .315 | 12.421 | .000 | .330 |
| | Rem. address missing | .060 | .177 | .114 | .736 | 1.061 |
| | Place. address missing** | -.963 | .332 | 8.421 | .004 | .382 |
| | Constant*** | -14.215 | 2.362 | 36.206 | .000 | .000 |
| Model Chi-Square | 152.126 | | | | | |
| df | 35 | | | | | |
| N | 2,034 | | | | | |
| Nagelkerke R Square | 0.124 | | | | | |

* p< .05; ** p < .01, *** p < .001

A youth's exposure to the opportunity to graduate from ACILSP was also statistically significant. In the regression model, opportunity to graduate from ACILSP during the observed period was controlled for by inclusion of age at the start of graduation data observation - June 2, 1998. The squared version of this variable was also included because the bivariate analysis

suggested it had a nonlinear association with the likelihood of graduating. The probability of graduating increases between the oldest cohort of youth (who were no more than 19 in June 1998) to the middle cohort (who were age 17 to 19 in 2001) and then decreases as the cohorts decrease in age to those who were 18 in 2006).

As expected, having been removed from a county other than Alameda has a statistically significant and negative impact on the probability of graduating from ACILSP. But youth who are missing the address and county of placement at age 16 or older, are also significantly less likely to graduate from the program than youth who are placed in Alameda County, suggesting these youth may have actually been placed outside of Alameda County.

Limitations

The analysis presented here improves upon previous ILSP studies by examining data on all foster youth eligible for the program, and including possible explanatory factors such as a youth's need for transitional support and geographic access to the program. However, there are some shortcomings that should be noted as well. First, the data are missing a measure of a youth's own ability or personal motivation, which could certainly increase the likelihood of assistance-seeking behavior (Wald and Martinez 2003). Ideally one should include academic performance or need for special education as a measure of ability – variables that were not available in this analysis.

While an attempt was made to include measures of financial resources available to the youth, additional improvement could be made in this area as well. Eligibility for federally funded foster care is a reasonable indicator of the family of origin having limited financial resources but income at the block level seems to serve as a poor proxy for resources available at a youth's placement. Future analysis would benefit from the availability of actual household income for family of origin and placement, and if possible, some measure of the degree to which these resources are shared with foster youth. Not only can the absence of these measures introduce missing variable bias into the logistic regression results, they limit one's ability to determine with greater confidence the impact of a youth's need for support on ILSP participation.

In addition, this analysis could be strengthened by inclusion of other dependent variables that precede actual ILSP graduation – such as program attendance and the level of actual service receipt. This would allow a more thorough analysis of how a youth's need for support is associated with various degrees of engagement in the program and how to better recruit and engage youth throughout the transitional period.

Discussion and Policy Implications

The findings obtained through this analysis have clear implications for the design and delivery of ILSP services to transition-age foster youth. This concluding discussion is framed around the original research questions of what factors affect ILSP graduation and what implications do these findings have for future program reform.

What Factors Affect ILSP Graduation?

The logistic regression results presented indicated that several explanatory variables had an impact on the probability of graduating from ACILSP, and most were in the direction hypothesized in Chapter 3. These findings speak to whether ILSP serves the foster youth most in need of financial and other support during the transition, but also sheds light on how geographic access and program awareness impact ILSP participation.

- 1) This analysis provides evidence that youth with greater need for transitional supports are more likely to graduate from ILSP.
- Youth from families of origin with more limited financial resources are more likely to participate in the ILSP - Youth from families eligible for federally funded foster care (and welfare) were 70 percent more likely to graduate from ACILSP than youth from families not eligible for federal foster care.
- Youth with weaker connection to family of origin, as proxied by reason for removal, were more likely to graduate from the program - Youth removed due to severe neglect were in fact four times more likely to graduate than youth removed for “other” reasons. Youth removed because of sexual abuse were also more than two and a half times as likely to graduate from ACILSP, though this finding was not significant at the $p < .05$ level. One possible explanation for why severe neglect had a greater impact (and at a higher level of statistical significance) than removal due to sexual abuse is because “severe neglect” may in fact be the classification used for cases in which more serious types of abuse were involved (including sexual abuse) but were not substantiated. Severe neglect might also be picking up some of the effects of a family of origin having extremely limited financial resources, since that may not be adequately captured by the explanatory variable indicating eligibility for federally funded welfare and foster care.
- Group home youth, theorized to have more limited access to experiential learning and weaker connection to biological family, were nearly three times more likely than youth in guardian placements to graduate from ACILSP. Though not significant at the $p < .05$ level, youth in kin placements were 80 percent more likely to graduate from ACILSP than youth in guardian placements which could indicate that placement setting is also picking up differences in financial resources in placement household not adequately controlled for in the model.

This analysis of how ILSP respond to the needs of transitioning foster youth would benefit from better measures of actual financial and other support resources available, and the degree of resource sharing between biological family, caregivers and youth.

- 2) This analysis provides evidence that youth with greater physical access to ILSP are more likely to graduate from the program.
- Statistically significant (at $p < .05$ or better), youth who lived 3 to 5 miles or 10 to 25 miles from an ILSP site, relative to youth who lived within one and a half miles, were roughly 40 to 60 percent less likely to graduate from ACILSP.
 - Tied to geographic access, there is also likely to be some cultural cohesion effect at play in ILSP participation. Among the individual characteristics examined, the higher than expected likelihood of African American and Hispanic youth to graduate from ACILSP, relative to white youth, could support a cultural cohesion effect. As mentioned above, ACILSP operates from two locations within Alameda County and if the youth living in the immediate areas surrounding program sites are more heavily concentrated in one or more racial/ethnic categories, this may provide added incentive for youth of similar backgrounds to seek services (and likewise, provide a disincentive for other youth to participate). A quick look at the make up of youth living within one and a half miles of both ACILSP sites does suggest that some cultural cohesion effect may be at play.

Table 4.8: Characteristics of Foster Youth, by proximity to ACILSP Program Site

| | <1.5 miles of ACILSP Site 1 | <1.5 miles of ACILSP Site 2 | > 1.5 miles from an ACILSP Site |
|--|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| % African American | 72% | 51% | 62% |
| % Caucasian | 18% | 25% | 20% |
| % Latino | 4% | 17% | 12% |
| % Asian | 7% | 8% | 5% |
| % Other | 0% | 0% | 1% |
| Mean Income in Placement Neighborhood | \$13,645 | \$18,615 | \$23,106 |
| N | 103 | 53 | 1,878 |

Table 4.8 shows that youth living closest to Site 1 are more likely to be African American (and less likely Latino) than youth living closest to Site 2 or further than one and a half miles from an ACILSP program. Youth living closest to Site 2 are more likely to be Caucasian or Latino (and less likely African American) than youth living closest to Site 1 or further than one and a half miles from an ACILSP program. Youth living closer to ACILSP locations also have a lower mean income in placement neighborhood (using the US Census Block proxies) than youth who living further away. While this variable did not have an independent effect on the likelihood of graduating from ACILSP, it could contribute in some way to this cultural cohesion effect.

- 3) This analysis provides evidence that youth with greater awareness of or linkage to ILSP are more likely to graduate from the program.
- Youth removed from homes in another county but placed in Alameda County (and therefore eligible to receive services from ACILSP) were only a third as likely to

graduate from the program than youth who were removed from homes in Alameda County (or youth for whom county of removal was unknown).

- Like their peers in group homes, youth in foster home and FFA placements were also about three times as likely to graduate from ACILSP as youth placed with guardians. This despite the prediction that these youth would be less likely to participate in ILSP because they have greater access to experiential learning and caregiver support. One possible explanation is that foster parents and FFA caregivers are made more aware of ILSP resources and therefore more active in encouraging their youth to access these support services than guardian caregivers.
- 4) This analysis suggests the need for further examination of the roles of both time in care and placement stability over time in influencing ILSP participation and graduation.
- Lengthier time in care increased the likelihood of graduation (relative to being in care less than 2 years) but the level of impact decreased as time in care increased. This was consistent with the theoretical framework that more time in care could indicate weaker ties to family of origin and increase the need for ILSP support – though this finding was not statistically significant (at the $p < .05$ level). This variable was also tested as a continuous rather than categorical variable (using years in care and years in care squared) with similar results that also fell short of statistical significance. Being on a higher order placement (relative to on one's first placement) also increased the probability of ACILSP graduation until one reached their sixth or higher placement.
- These results are consistent with what previous literature has found – that youth that are in care longer or experience greater placement instability are more likely to be in greater need of transitional supports (Mallon 1998; Wulczyn and Brunner Hislop 2001; Freundlich 2003). However, they also suggest the need for further exploration of how time-in-care and placement stability reflect actual connection to family of origin, ability to bond with foster caregivers, youth characteristics or behavior, and opportunity to access community resources.

Implications for ILSP Reform

One of the unique contributions of this analysis is that it utilizes the full population of youth eligible for ILSP in the study area, and in doing so, finds that only 16 percent of these youth actually graduated from the program. While a larger share of these youth may have been involved with ILSP to a lesser degree and still benefited from the program in some way, this still suggests that strategies to improve outreach and recruitment could expand the program's overall reach and impact. The strategies presented here, which are supported by the findings above, focus on efforts to increase utilization among youth who are currently underserved by the program.

- Outreach to raise awareness among kin and guardian caregivers – These findings suggest that youth who reside with kin or guardians could benefit from efforts that raise awareness of ILSP, and the resources it offers, among their caregivers. Special outreach

to kin and guardians could encourage greater support of their youth in accessing the program, helping to bring rates of ILSP participation up to those experienced by youth in foster family and FFA placements. This is especially important in cases where kin/guardian households have limited financial resources to offer their foster youth.

- Inter-agency collaboration and outreach to better engage out-of-county youth in ILSP – Generally a youth’s social worker is responsible for informing a youth of ILSP-eligibility and referring youth into the program, but when youth who are placed out-of-county, this system can break down. System improvements, such as improved communication and collaboration among county child welfare agencies could increase ILSP participation among youth who are placed outside of their county of origin. This effort could occur at the state level since most child welfare agencies place at least some of their youth out of county. An automated notification system, generated by the CWS/CMS system when youth aged 15 or older are placed out of county, could provide an easy solution to this challenge.
- Support and incentives to increase access and participation – The findings related to proximity of ILSP location indicate a clear need for assistance in bringing youth who live further away to the program. This could include help with transportation costs but also more communication with caregivers to clarify their role in helping youth to participate in transitional support services. The findings also suggest the need for strategies that more effectively engage certain subgroups of youth. For example, though not statistically significant (at $p < .05$ level), males were less likely to graduate from the ACILSP and this is important because some studies show that they fare worse than females on several young adult outcomes, including education and involvement in criminal behavior (Courtney et al 2007). In addition, some efforts could also be directed to ensuring that youth of all backgrounds (racial, ethnic, cultural) feel comfortable accessing support from ILSP and see these services as beneficial to them.
- Improved assessment of transition-age foster care youth to better measure their need for support – Child welfare agencies use a variety of assessment tools and in California, youth also complete an Transition to Independent Living Plan, but these tools rarely collect information on the actual need for financial and other supports, and whether they are likely to receive these from family, caregivers or others in the community. Improved data collection along these lines could help agencies to identify the youth with the greatest need for ILSP services and develop outreach strategies that recruit them.

Chapter 5

Connected by 25 Case Study: A Qualitative Examination of Strategies to Improve Support Services for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care

Introduction

In the past decade, efforts to evaluate or reform support services for transition age youth have concluded that foster youth are likely to require a great deal of support beyond the classroom-based skills training, social support and referrals generally offered by Independent Living Skills Programs (ILSPs) to make a successful transition to adulthood (Courtney et al 2008; California Co-Investment Child Welfare Partnership 2011). Today we see an increasing number of public-private child welfare initiatives exploring an array of strategies to improve the efficacy of ILSPs in addressing the full range of youths' needs during this critical time, and have more marked impact on their targeted adult outcomes. This chapter presents a qualitative examination of one such initiative – California Connected by 25 (CC25) – identifying some of the best practices emerging from these efforts and discussing their potential to improve the transition experience of foster youth in the future. In particular, it describes some of the successful strategies by which county child welfare agencies more effectively engaged youth and caregivers in their own transitional planning and improved the reach and relevance of support services available to exiting foster youth.

Research Questions

While counties participating in CC25 have targeted a larger number of priority areas, this study focuses specifically on those elements of ILSP program design discussed in Chapter 3, namely the strategies utilized to improve the reach, relevance and comprehensiveness of support services for transitioning foster youth. This chapter then addresses the following questions:

- How have these strategies improved transitional support services and youth outcomes?
- What do these findings suggest for future efforts at ILSP reform?

Design of The CC25 Program and the Evaluation

Since at least 2000, a variety of public and private initiatives have aimed to improve child welfare systems more broadly - and outcomes of transitional youth in particular - many with overlapping objectives and strategies. **Table 5.1** provides an overview of a few of the initiatives that have had a strong presence in California. The Family to Family Initiative, a public-private partnership between philanthropic foundations and both state and county child welfare agencies, has been working with child welfare agencies in 25 California counties (and 17 other states) since 1992 to achieve better outcomes for children and families through four core strategies.²¹ Nearly a decade later, growing concern over foster care outcomes prompted the California legislature to pass the Child Welfare System Improvement and Accountability Act (Assembly Bill 636) of 2001. The Act established a system for ongoing review of child welfare performance in California to prepare for the Federal Child and Family Services Review to take place in 2002 and 2007 (Needelland Patterson 2004). In addition, the County Welfare Directors

²¹ Information on this initiative retrieved from: <http://www.f2f.ca.gov/>.

Association of California developed several subcommittees and workgroups, including one focused on issues related to ILSPs.²²

Table 5.1: Child Welfare and ILSP Reform Efforts

| Initiative | Scale | Focus | Evaluation/Data Tracking |
|---|--|--|--|
| Annie E. Casey Family to Family (started in 1992) | National | Broad child welfare system reform | Utilize existing county and state data tracking systems |
| California Child Welfare Systems Improvement (AB 636 enacted in 2001) | California | Improvement of outcomes for youth in care, including transitioning youth | Utilize existing county and state data tracking systems |
| Connected by 25 (started in 2004) | 3 Sites: California, Florida and Indiana | Improvement of support services for and outcomes of transitioning foster youth | In California, implemented new data tracking system for services and outcomes. |
| Breakthrough Series Collaboration on ILP Transformation (started in 2006) | California | Improvement of support services for and outcomes of transitioning foster youth | Encourage counties to utilize existing county data tracking systems |

The CC25 Initiative evolved from several separate efforts to expand transitional foster youth supports beyond age 18. In 2003, a publication by Wald and Martinez presented the imperative and tremendous opportunity to improve support programming for transition age youth in housing, education and employment. This work inspired the Youth Transitions Funders Group²³ to launch the Connected by 25 Initiative at three demonstration sites across the country to address the issues impeding the successful transition of foster care youth. In 2004, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Walter S. Johnson Foundation and Stuart Foundation began a new initiative to build a continuum of care for transition-age foster care youth as an additional strategy of Family to Family in California. In 2005 these forces combined and Connected by 25 in California expanded to multiple counties including Fresno, San Francisco, Santa Clara and Stanislaus. All four of these counties had taken part in both Family to Family and the California Child Welfare System Improvement efforts. In addition, three of the four (all but Stanislaus) would later take part in the Breakthrough Series Collaboration on ILSP Transformation, an initiative begun in 2006 to develop and test a new vision for how support services are provided to transition age foster youth.

Program Description

Counties participating in CC25 engaged in comprehensive assessment, planning, and strategy implementation to expand the continuum of supports available for transitioning and former foster care youth, particularly those available through local ILSPs. Working collaboratively with youth, caregivers, and community partners, CC25 counties were to develop programs and services addressing seven focus areas: K-12 Education; Post-Secondary Education/Employment;

²²Information on these efforts retrieved from: <http://www.cwda.org/>.

²³The Youth Transitions Funders Group is a collaboration of philanthropic interests that invest significantly in programs and services for transition aged youth in three vulnerable populations – youth involved with the juvenile justice system, foster care youth, and youth who were educationally disconnected - across the United States.

Financial Competency and Asset Development; Housing; Independent Living Skills Programs; Personal/Social Asset Development; and Permanency. To assist them in reaching that goal, each county was provided grant funding (approximately \$150,000 a year for three to five years) and an array of technical assistance, including a new system for tracking service and outcomes data. Many of the counties were also part of related foster youth initiatives – such as the California Permanency for Youth Project (advancing lifelong connections with caring adults), College Pathways (linking youth to post-secondary education and employment opportunities) and Guardian Scholars (supporting youth in completing a college education) – and as part of those initiatives they received additional funding and technical assistance that certainly contributed to their CC25I activities.

Each county’s self-assessment and planning process resulted in the creation of a work plan to guide their overall CC25 activity. The work-plans were required to address all seven focus areas but counties had flexibility in prioritizing certain goals and were able to direct their grant dollars to where they were most needed. Each county created at least one CC25 workgroup to oversee the activity set forth in the work-plan and these workgroups generally met on a monthly or quarterly basis. Collaboration between child welfare, other public agencies, community partners, families, caregivers and youth was emphasized throughout this work and workgroups members represented each of these populations.

As shown in **Table 5.2**, the four early implementing CC25I counties – Stanislaus, San Francisco, Fresno, and Santa Clara – were together responsible for 1,572 transition-age foster youth under the jurisdiction of either the child welfare or probation agencies on January 1, 2007.²⁴ This represented roughly 9 percent of all youth in out-of-home care in California between age 16 and 20. In addition, these counties were likely providing at least some assistance to the 1,449 youth who had already aged out of care between 2004 and 2006 but were still eligible for ILSP until age 21. Finally, many of the 1,397 youth who were aged out between 2001 and 2003 and still under the age of 25, while no longer still eligible for ILSP services, would still have been eligible for some support services such as the Transitional Housing Placement Plus which operates in California. CC25 also sought to expand additional supports to these older youth during the aftercare period.

Table 5.2: Transition-age Youth Served by CC25 Early Implementing Counties

| | California | Fresno | San Francisco | Santa Clara | Stanislaus | 4-County TOTAL |
|--|---------------|------------|---------------|-------------|------------|-------------------|
| Child Welfare Caseload (1/1/2007 point-in-time) | | | | | | |
| Ages 16-20 | 13,487 | 404 | 480 | 361 | 92 | 1,337 |
| Probation Caseload (1/1/2007 point-in-time) | | | | | | |
| Ages 16-20 | 4,199 | 75 | 49 | 73 | 38 | 235 |
| In-Care Total | 17,686 | 479 | 529 | 434 | 130 | 1,572 |
| Youth Who Exited to Emancipation (Child Welfare & Probation Supervised Placements (of 5+ days)) ² | | | | | | |
| Between 1/1/2004 and 2/31/2006 | 14,890 | 475 | 459 | 357 | 158 | 1,449 |
| Between 1/1/2001 and 2/31/2003 | 13,777 | 505 | 417 | 358 | 117 | 1,397 |

²⁴ Table 5.2 data source: Needell, B., Webster, D., Armijo, M., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Putnam-Hornstein, E., Williams, D., Simon, V., Hamilton, D., Lou, C., Peng, C., Moore, M., King, B., Henry, C., and Nuttbrock, A. (2012). *Child Welfare Services Reports for California*. Retrieved 5/15/2012, from University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research website. URL: http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare.

CC25 counties promoted child welfare systems improvement through use of technical assistance, convenings, cross-county sharing and utilization of a new data system to track youth outcomes and inform county self-evaluation efforts. CC25 counties also implemented new program strategies to expand and strengthen the array of support services available during the transitional period. Of particular interest in this case study was their use of strategies targeted at improving the reach, relevance and comprehensiveness of support services for transitioning foster youth. These efforts focused heavily on the increased involvement of transitional youth and their caregivers in the development, delivery and utilization of transitional support services, as well as the building of community partnerships to develop an integrated and comprehensive continuum of services for transitioning youth. CC25 counties borrowed from existing best practice in each of the Initiative's focus areas and the flexible grant dollars allowed them to also develop new strategies of their own.

Data and Methodology

The researcher observed CC25 county activity over a three and a half year period, from early 2006 through mid 2009. Qualitative data was collected through observation notes at county workgroup meetings, CC25I all-county convenings and technical assistance sessions, as well as gleaned from annual reports prepared by counties for the funders. The researcher also developed short surveys through which county leads provided additional information on their existing and new programs, and their growing community partnerships. Information on activities undertaken, challenges encountered, and strategies developed to address those challenges were summarized and organized by each CC25 focus area. Research was also conducted on successful initiatives to improve support services for transition-age foster youth elsewhere in the United States in order to identify where CC25 strategies built on or contributed to existing best-practice knowledge.

To examine potential impact of the initiative on youth outcomes, the researcher compares data from both Initiative evaluation results and publicly available sources. The first data are the results of information collected through the Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) data tracking system which CC25 counties were required to use. ETO was developed specifically for the Initiative to track youth characteristics, services received and relevant transitional outcomes for both in-care and after care foster youth. The database was created as a tool for county self-evaluation but results were also used by those funding and managing the Initiative to measure the early impact of CC25. Integrated within the database were several youth assessments to be completed by case workers with youth while they were still in care, close to their transition out of care and during the aftercare period.

Though not available for direct analysis by this researcher, The Initiative's concluding report (Stuart Foundation and Walter S. Johnson Foundation 2011) provided some results from the ETO data system at the conclusion of the observation period. These findings were based on a total of 858 surveys of youth (**Table 5.3**) around the time of their aging out of care (also known as Assessment C) over the three-year period (2008-2009 through 2010-2011). These results provide aggregate findings for the four early implementing counties (Fresno, San Francisco, Santa Clara and Stanislaus) and Humboldt County, which joined the Initiative in 2007. The 858

surveys represented 56 percent of the 1,525 youth that emancipated in these five CC25 counties over the same time period.

Table 5.3: Number of Transitioning Foster Youth Surveyed through CC25 Efforts to Outcomes

| Year | Number of Youth Surveyed |
|-----------|--------------------------|
| 2008-2009 | 248 |
| 2009-2010 | 311 |
| 2010-2011 | 299 |

The chapter also draws on some publicly available data sources including report data submitted by counties to the California Department of Social Services (CDSS). One of the county report sources is the SOC 405E, a new form implemented in October 2008 that requires counties to report on a quarterly basis the outcomes of child welfare and probation youth aging out of care in that time period. SOC 405E data is easily accessed from the CDSS website.²⁵ In addition, this chapter refers to data that are tracked by counties through the statewide Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS). These data are compiled by the Center for Social Services Research at UC Berkeley and made available in aggregate form through their website.²⁶

The next two sections of the chapter presents the findings on how CC25 early implementing counties incorporated cross-agency collaboration into their ILSP programs (Section 2) to create a continuum of support (Section 3). These practices correspond directly to the promising program design characteristics presented in Chapter 3. Integrated within these findings are some of the results on youth outcomes available from both the Initiative’s data tracking system and other publicly available data.

Efforts to Increase the Reach of ILSP

CC25I counties employed a number of strategies to expand youth and caregiver engagement, both in terms of more actively involving them in the transition planning process as well as increasing their utilization of the resources and services available to support them during and after their transition from foster care.

Youth Engagement in Transition Planning Efforts

Consistent with the “team decision-making” (TDM) model used by the Family to Family Initiative, CC25 counties utilized a number of strategies to ensure that the needs and opinions of youth were central to the transitional planning process:

²⁵ SOC 405E data are available at: <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/research>.

²⁶ Select variables from the CWS/CMS system are available through the Center for Social Services Research at: <http://cssr.berkeley.edu>.

- In Fresno County, youth and caregivers are actively encouraged to attend “emancipation” (transition or exit from care) conferences (held at age 17) and TDM meetings to discuss future placement changes.
- In San Francisco County, “Goals” meetings are used to bring together youth and supportive adults and get them on the same page with regard to a youth’s goals. At the meetings, youth and adults jointly identify three objectives for the future and then establish a plan for achieving these goals, including the enlisting of additional adults to support their efforts. Since 2006, Goals meetings have been mandatory for all foster youth age 16 and up and have been very successful in involving youth in the planning of their own transitional services.
- In Santa Clara County, emancipation conferences are held every six months for youth age 16 and older. These conferences are used to set goals and identify the support resources necessary to help a youth successfully transition to independent living.
- Stanislaus County developed the Connected for Life meeting process, with input from their Youth Advisory Council, as a mechanism for creating a youth’s initial Transitional Independent Living Plan (TILP) and for updating the TILP annually. Connected for Life meetings are held in cases where the youth and the foster parent have already established that the youth will continue to reside in the caregiver’s home upon after exit from care. The Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment is completed prior to each meeting and the results guide the development of an individualized TILP. In addition, TDMs are used prior to transitioning from care and placement changes (especially before a youth is moved to long term foster care) bringing together youth, caregivers, permanent connections and other important adults to participate in youth-focused discussions. Emancipation TDMs are held prior to the youth’s leaving the system and focus on transition planning, goal-setting and identification of needed support resources.
- Also in Stanislaus County, weekly pizza nights are used as an informal strategy for engaging aftercare youth in permanency and transition planning. The Aftercare Social Worker facilitates these group sessions at which former foster youth discuss their short and long term goals for permanency and independent living.

Youth Engagement in Transitional Services

Counties participating in CC25 also worked to increase the utilization of a growing array of programs, support services and resources available to assist them during this transitional period. Strategies to accomplish this objective include:

- Engaging youth at an earlier age to increase the likelihood they will be more actively involved in their own transition planning and ILSP services throughout the transitional period. The San Francisco Early ILSP has youth ages 14 to 15 complete a version of the Transitional Independent Living Plan to begin exploring their educational, employment, housing, and financial goals as soon as possible. Stanislaus County also engages youth as young as 14 with their Jump Start to Independence or pre-ILSP program.

- In Santa Clara County, the ILSP unit initiated a tickler system to automatically inform social workers about youths' ILSP eligibility so that youth can be more actively contacted and encouraged to receive support services. Additionally, the child welfare agency uses data extracts of demographic and educational information in order to identify youth eligible for support programs and services particularly suited to their needs. More current and accurate educational data – the result of the County's K-12 educational initiatives – was critical in this process.
- A similar strategy to increase the participation of foster youth in the AVID educational initiative, the educational liaison within the Stanislaus County child welfare agency reviews student records on an ongoing basis and speaks with social workers about eligible youth on their caseload. Identified youth are paid a visit by the educational liaison and invited to attend an introductory AVID event.
- As part of their work with the Breakthrough Series Collaboration on ILSP Redesign, San Francisco County is now conducting monthly tracking of youth involvement and satisfaction with transition age services.
- In Fresno County, child welfare staff reviewed the cases of aftercare youth between ages 21 and 24 to identify which are eligible to participate in new CC25-related programs such as the IDA asset matching program, THP-Plus transitional housing program, and the post-secondary education College Pathways program.

CC25 counties also engaged in a variety of outreach efforts and other strategies to expand awareness among foster youth and caregivers of the transition services available, and to increase their utilization of these services. Two of the most innovative strategies were implemented in Fresno and Stanislaus Counties:

- Fresno County had five ILSP social workers reaching out to foster youth directly on high school campuses in the three school districts attended by the heaviest concentration of transition-age foster youth. This not only boosted their ability to recruit youth for ILSP programs but increased communication between the child welfare and educational professionals involved with foster youth. The child welfare agency also hosts events to increase program utilization, such as the annual "Access to Higher Education Event" which connects high school age foster youth with information, tools, resources, and inspiration necessary to steer them toward post-secondary education or career opportunities.
- Stanislaus County created two new ILSP Interviewer positions (filled by former foster youth) to conduct a variety of activities that engage local youth and caregivers in transition planning and program activities that prepare a youth for independent living. The ILSP Interviewers administer the Ansell-Casey assessment tool to youth 15 and a half and older (and their caregivers) – and use the assessment to refer more youth to ILSP services. In addition, the ILSP Interviewers call ILSP-eligible youth and caregivers to invite them to events, and provide transportation if needed.

Caregiver Engagement in Transitional Planning and Support Services

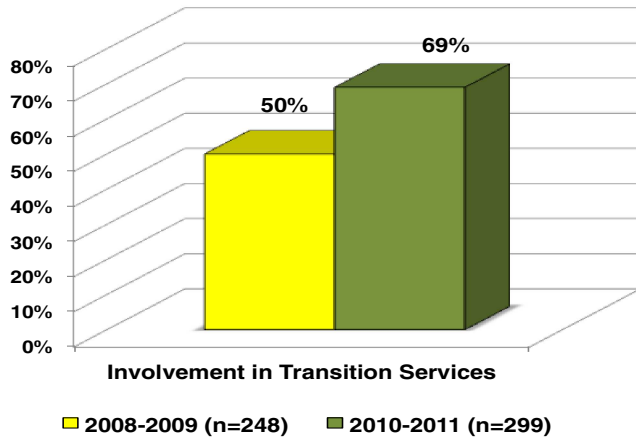
The primary activities undertaken by CC25 counties to increase the involvement of caregivers and other caring adults during the transitional period were 1) joint involvement of youth and caregivers in team-decision making meetings and 2) ongoing training and special events to keep caregivers actively involved in transition planning and available support programs. The same strategies used to actively involve youth in the decisions that affect their placements, permanency outcomes, and transition planning were also used to engage caregivers and other caring adults as planning partners and supporters of youth during the process. And while not all to the same degree, counties made some effort to engage caregivers and family member participation in actual transitional support services. In most cases, this consisted of formal and informal events to educate and more actively involve caregivers, particularly around issues of K-12 education, permanency and transition planning.

- The Fresno County child welfare agency developed a seminar for caregivers and professional service providers in a position to assist youth in preparing for their future.
- The San Francisco County child welfare agency offered a series of evening events at multiple locations to share information with caregivers about ILSP and transition services; resources relevant to education, employment, housing, health and mental health; and to encourage their involvement in transition planning team meetings.
- Through a variety of outreach strategies, caregivers in Santa Clara County were informed about ILSP events and asked to support youth participation.
- The Stanislaus County child welfare agency and the Foster Parent Association co-host a quarterly “Coffee Connection” to strengthen relationships between caregivers and social workers as well as provide training on topics affecting youth and caregivers, such as permanency and transition planning.

Impact of Youth and Caregiver Engagement on ILSP Reach

By the conclusion of the observation period, there was little consistent data across counties to suggest how many youth and caregivers, or what share of those eligible, were more actively engaged in the transition planning process. In one instance, Fresno County provided an early report that caregivers, including relatives and foster parents, participated in three-quarters of the nearly 400 TDMs on placement change that took place between August 2005 and July 2006. Findings from CC25 data tracking efforts, however, did suggest that overall these strategies had a positive impact on actual youth participation in transitional support services in early implementing counties.

Figure 5.1: Increased Transitional Service Use among Exiting, Child-Welfare Supervised



Based on the youth assessment just prior to exit from care, the share of youth involved with transitional support services increased from 50 percent in 2008-2009 to nearly 70 percent in 2010-2011, statistically significant at the $p < .001$ level (**Figure 5.1**).²⁷ Individually, Stanislaus County reported that improved outreach and recruitment strategies (implemented by their two newly created ILSP Interviewer positions) resulted in an early and dramatic increase in the number of youth attending ILSP events – for example more than doubling from 83 youth in the Fall of 2007 to 185 in the Fall of 2008.

All counties are mandated to report on local ILSP program utilization to the California Department of Health and Human Services, and those figures are provided here as a point of comparison with the measure provided by the CC25 ETO tracking system. Though not on exactly the same time scale (fiscal years above versus calendar years below), **Table 5.4**²⁸ shows that across all four early implementing counties, an average of 71 percent of the youth who were about to leave child welfare or probation care in 2011 had received ILSP services – nearly the same as what was reported in **Figure 5.1** above. However, the **Table 5.4** also shows that this is down somewhat from two years prior, when reported ILSP receipt was higher (78 percent in 2009 and 81 percent in 2010, across the four counties) than in 2011. Statewide, ILSP receipt was reported at its highest in 2009 but also fell slightly by 2011.

Table 5.4: County-Reported Percent of Child-Welfare Supervised Youth Who Received ILSP prior to Exiting Care, 2009-2011

| | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | Sample Sizes, 2009; 2010; 2011 |
|----------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------------------------|
| California | 87% | 87% | 85% | N=2,906; 2,667; 2,248 |
| Fresno | 52% | 69% | 53% | N=56; 32; 123 |
| San Francisco | 84% | 80% | 84% | N=62; 49; 43 |
| Santa Clara | 89% | 84% | 79% | N=80; 30; 32 |
| Stanislaus | 87% | 86% | 97% | N=31; 37; 134 |
| 4-County Weighted Average | 78% | 81% | 71% | N=229; 198; 282 |

²⁷ Figure 5.1 data source: ETO Assessment C (at emancipation) results for Fresno, Humboldt, San Francisco, Santa Clara and Stanislaus Counties between 2008/2009 and 2010/2011 as reported in Stuart Foundation and Walter S. Johnson Foundation. (2011). *The premise and promise of the California Connected by 25 Initiative: Improving outcomes for transition age foster youth*. Available at: http://74.81.204.52/Files/CC25I_Premise_Promise.pdf.

²⁸ Table 5.4 data source: SOC 405 E - Exit Outcomes for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care Quarterly Statistical Reports, available at: <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/research/PG1940.htm>.

Looking at individual CC25 counties, reported ILSP receipt exhibited varying patterns in **Table 5.4**. For Fresno County there was a significant bump in 2010 but otherwise ILSP receipt remained consistent between 2009 and 2011. San Francisco County, on the other hand, remained consistent between 2009 and 2011 but had a slight decrease in 2010. Santa Clara County reported consistently declining ILSP receipt across the three years, while Stanislaus is the only county that showed a significant increase in ILSP receipt over the three years, perhaps resulting from the greater degree of youth and caregiver engagement exhibited there. Other than Stanislaus, CC25 counties generally had lower ILSP receipt than the State overall throughout the three-year period, particularly Fresno County, which was unexpected given the presence of ILSP social workers directly on high school campuses. It is possible that CC25 counties are reporting more accurate but lower rates of ILSP receipt due to their use of the new ETO data tracking system, whereas other counties are still using older methods (including hand-tallying in some cases) which may be prone to overestimation.

It is important to note that **Table 5.4** provides only a three-year window on reported ILSP receipt; as the SOC 405E was first implemented in October 2008. A longer horizon would allow us to see if these disparate trends eventually converge (after the SOC405E form is not so new) and also enable an examination of the sustainability of youth and caregiver engagement in transitional support services in CC25 counties.

Efforts to Increase the Relevance of ILSP

Acknowledging that the current emphasis of ILSPs on classroom-based life skills instruction is not always the most effective way to engage and retain youth in transitional supports, CC25 counties engaged in a variety of activities to make available services and programs more youth-focused and youth-friendly. These ranged from efforts to incorporate more youth feedback in program design to engaging youth and caregivers in the delivery of services so that programs provide more experiential learning and offer resources that directly respond to the needs of youth and caregivers. This section first examines strategies that resulted in more youth-informed and youth-led programs and then shifts to practices that engaged caregivers, family members and other caring adults as lifelong connections and teachers of independent living skills.

Engagement of Youth in Program Development and Implementation

Youth engagement has come to be understood as offering young people meaningful opportunities to take responsibility and leadership, while working in partnership with caring adults who value, respect and share power with them. The four early implementing CC25 counties received group technical assistance on how to engage youth and community members in program development and implementation from the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative²⁹ as well as at county convenings, and individually from contracted TA providers specializing in youth engagement. CC25 technical assistance emphasized the importance of having youth at the table, whenever possible, on discussions that impact the policies, programs and services. Child welfare agencies and community partners within CC25 counties used a variety of approaches to increase the actual level of youth engagement from transitional services developed with very

²⁹ For additional information on the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, please see: www.jimcaseyyouth.org.

little youth input or feedback to the provision of programs that are designed and co-facilitated by current or former foster youth.

In many cases, CC25I counties' youth engagement activity built on the work of other pre-existing youth advocacy and youth leadership programs, including organizations such as the California Youth Connection (CYC) and Honoring Emancipated Youth (HEY) in San Francisco. Most child welfare agencies participating in CC25I counties already had relationships with these organizations, directly or through the collaborative work of their ILSPs. CC25 counties added to this foundation additional efforts to engage youth in program development and evaluation in CC25I counties including:

- *Youth Participation in CC25I Workgroups and Agency Meetings* – In nearly every county, current and former foster youth were involved (and received a stipend for participating) in CC25 workgroups and related taskforces, guiding program development and implementation in the area of transition age youth. In Santa Clara, two former foster youth participated on the County's ILSP Redesign team, empowered as equal members of the process. In Stanislaus County, ILSP and Aftercare youth were consulted on a number of program development issues and were also asked to evaluate every ILSP class. Monthly workgroup meetings in that county were held on Modesto Junior College so that participating youth could be exposed to a college environment.
- *Youth Engagement in Public Speaking* – Current and former foster youth were given the opportunity to speak to the wider community on issues related to their transition into adulthood and on the importance of their leadership in transitioning planning. In Fresno County, foster youth were actively involved in presentations at agency trainings and community events including ILSP workshops and forums to recruit caregivers into the THP+ transitional housing program. San Francisco County youth were involved in interagency meetings, press conferences and community events and could receive financial assistance to attend trainings and conferences. In Santa Clara County, current and former foster youth have contributed to media stories, interviews and legislative hearings. Members of the Stanislaus County Youth Advisory Council were able to develop their leadership skills by attending national leadership conferences and presenting at PRIDE trainings for new foster parents and County Board of Supervisors meetings.
- *Agency Development of Youth Advisory Boards* – In an effort to formalize the engagement of youth in child welfare practice and program development, CC25 counties were encouraged to establish youth advisory boards (YABs) and were able to utilize their CC25I grant dollars to support these efforts. All four of the early implementing counties did exactly that. **Table 5.5** summarizes the parameters of the YABs established by the four early implementing CC25I counties.

Table 5.5: Description of CC25I County Youth Advisory Boards

| Group Name | Start Date: | Frequency of Meeting | Incentive: | # Members | Expected of All Members: |
|---|---------------|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|--|
| Fresno County Youth Organizing New Ideas (YONI) | July 2007 | Twice monthly | \$25/meeting, \$25 to prepare for meeting | 8-10 (both in- and out-of-care youth) | Play a leadership role, present ideas, work together respectfully |
| San Francisco ILSP Youth Advisory Board | February 2009 | Twice monthly | \$25/meeting, \$25 to prepare, facilitate or attend other agency meetings | 8 (both in- and out-of-care youth) | 1+ YAB meeting or other activity/monthly, share opinions and ideas verbally or in writing |
| Santa Clara County Youth Advisory Board | November 2005 | Monthly, Officers three times monthly | \$20/meeting plus \$5 to prepare/clean-up, Officers receive \$100-150/month for all YAB activity | 15 (both in- and out-of-care youth) | Consistent meeting attendance, 6-month commitment, be respectful, represent YAB positively, share concerns and solutions |
| Stanislaus County Youth Advisory Board - The Advisors | November 2008 | Twice monthly | Not available | 8 (in-care youth) | Consistent meeting attendance, 6-month commitment, share concerns and solutions, participate in election/voting |

Boards met monthly or twice monthly, and most boards were open to both current and former foster youth. YAB participants were engaged in a wide variety of activities in each of the CC25 counties but were most commonly asked to share their foster youth experiences at public forums; attend agency meetings to contribute to program and policy design and improvement; assist with ILSP services and other transitional youth programming; and serve as advocates and leaders of change by raising community awareness of issues relevant to foster youth.

As part of observation and data collection on these efforts, the researcher conducted a survey of CC25 YAB participants. Among the positive impacts reported, YAB participants experienced:

- Improved speaking, advocacy and leadership skills. Some youth felt that child welfare staff and other community members viewed them in a more positive light because of their YAB efforts and this empowered them to tackle policy and program issues in other arenas such as their school/college campuses or other community programs.
- Opportunity to voice the foster youth perspective and be a positive role model for other foster youth. Several youth felt that the voices of foster youth were most effective when expressed as a collective and those youth that perceived limited effects of their efforts thus far were confident that their impact would grow over time.
- A sense of accomplishment at having contributed to improvement in agency practice and programs. In some cases, YAB participation even led to new jobs and public accolades.
- One of the most significant contributions of YAB participants was in Stanislaus County where youth members had direct input in the development and naming of the new transitional housing program - MY HOME THP-Plus. Youth insisted that there be a formalized agreement, which clearly spells out the various roles and responsibilities required of all participants and housing providers. Acting on

their advice, the child welfare agency developed a five-page shared housing agreement that was incorporated in the THP+ proposal.

To ensure the future success of the YABs, members across counties reported the need for youth leadership and team-building training; practical skills development (budgeting, computer literacy, note-taking, public speaking, etc.); technical assistance with recruiting youth and keeping them actively involved; positive youth role models; and cross-county sharing among YABs.

- *Hiring of Foster Youth into Agency Youth-Serving Positions* – Involving positive youth role models - peers who have faced and overcome similar challenges - was a promising practice in terms of increasing the relevance of programs developed for transition-age youth in CC25 counties. Three of the counties took youth engagement to the highest level by employing former foster youth in critical youth-serving positions.
 - In Fresno County, the child welfare agency hired a full-time Youth Advocate (former foster youth) to work with their CC25 workgroup in planning and carrying out the work of the Initiative.
 - In Santa Clara County, former foster youth were hired in the following roles: two positions in the Family Finding Unit to assist with permanency efforts; a Financial Literacy Liaison position, and a THP-Plus Housing Liaison. The County’s ILSP also makes every attempt to hire former foster youth as Case Aides to recruit eligible youth and support the efforts of case managers. In addition, Evergreen College hires current and former foster youth to co-facilitate the financial literacy trainings offered on its campus. Particularly in the case of their financial literacy/IDA program, county staff felt that participants needed to hear the real-life stories of their peers to make the lessons come to life and youth-led evaluation also elicited a greater response than adult-facilitated evaluation discussions.
 - Stanislaus County hired two former foster youth to serve as ILSP Interviewers, responsible for engaging foster youth and caregivers in transition planning and activities that prepare a youth for independent living. According to one ILSP Interviewer, her personal experience in foster care has given her unique insight into the youth she works with – “It can speed up the process of trust and allows me to connect with the youth. Once I give the youth the results of the assessments, they become personally empowered.” Additionally, the Foster Parents’ Association invites members of the Youth Advisory Council into their office to do job shadowing and volunteer work – gaining skills, leadership opportunity and community service.

Engagement of Caring Adults in the Delivery of ILSP Services

Going beyond the inclusion of caregivers, family members and other caring persons in team decision making meetings around permanency, placement change and transition planning, CC25 counties worked to involve these adults in the creation and delivery of ILSP and other

transitional support services as a way to increase experiential learning and contribute to the development of lifelong connections for foster youth. Some examples of these practices include:

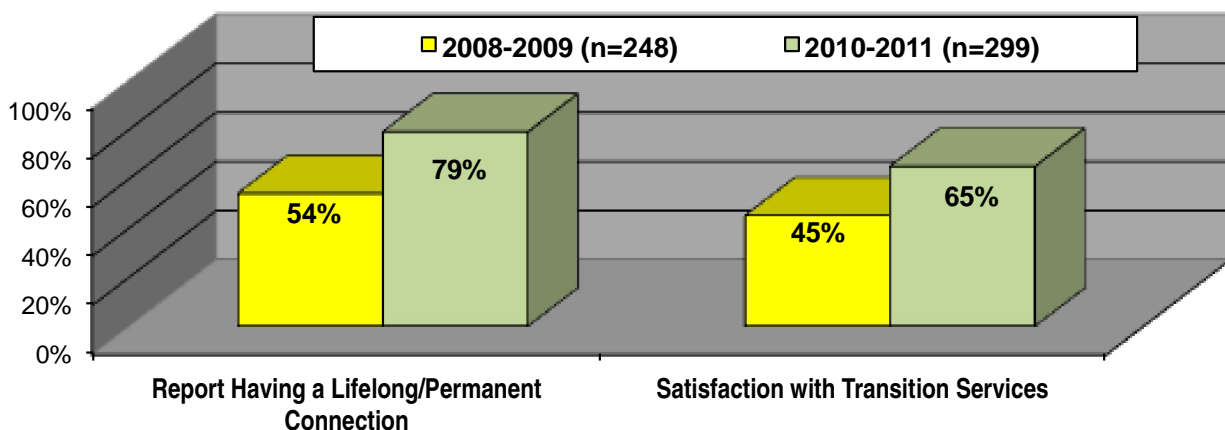
- Fresno County’s Recruitment, Development and Support Taskforce, which includes child welfare agency staff, specialized foster parent academy staff, and foster family agency representatives, met monthly to discuss issues relevant to caregivers and other resource families, as well as to develop curricula that assist caregivers in helping youth plan and prepare for the transition out of care.
- In San Francisco County, the Community College Foundation hosted separate youth and caregiver focus groups to identify areas in which they felt they needed additional support. The caregivers focused their discussion on the priorities previously identified in the youth focus group – so they could respond to their requests for job and training opportunities, medical coverage, money management skills, educational opportunities, transportation and other support resources.
- In Santa Clara County, the President of the Foster Parent Resource Center, the Director of the Foster Parent Association and other caregivers are active participants in CC25 and other workgroups. The welfare agency also utilized feedback from youth, caregivers, social workers, probation officers, and other community partners in the development of their THP+ housing program and the redesign of the County’s Independent Living Skills program. Finally, in their search for a new ILSP contract service provider, the County was requiring caregiver education and training as well as strategies that utilize caregivers in outreach to youth and the delivery of ILSP services.
- Stanislaus County exhibited a high level of caregiver engagement that actively involved caregivers in ILSP service delivery and kept central the important role that caregivers (and other caring adults) play in supporting foster youth during the transition.
 - Members of the Stanislaus County Foster Parents’ Association conduct outreach to other caregivers to increase their attendance at ILSP events and the Association has a formal commitment to assisting with facilitation of ILSP classes.
 - Permanency concepts and establishing of lifelong connections are integrated within the ILSP curriculum. People identified as lifelong connections are always invited to ILSP activities.
 - Stanislaus County’s PRIDE training for future foster parents introduces the philosophy of being connected for life and also includes a component on how caregivers can assist their youth in developing and achieving the goals listed in their Transitional Independent Living Plan.
 - Connected for Life Meetings identify individuals who are important to the youth and establish formalized lifelong connections through the creation of “Agreements to Maintain Contact.”

- The My Home transitional housing model developed in Stanislaus County provided financial support that allowed foster youth to stay in a stable environment with a nurturing and committed adult of their choice for up to two years post exit from care.
- Finally, the County was considering a pilot of home-based ILSP in which caregivers utilize prepared modules to teach youth independent living skills in the home.

Impact of Efforts to Increase the Relevance of ILSP on Youth Outcomes

By the conclusion of the observation period, there was some evidence that youth outcomes which support a more successful transition to adulthood had increased in CC25 counties. While this information is not sufficient to prove that these changes were solely due to county efforts to engage youth and caregivers in transitional support program development and delivery, it is likely that they contributed in a positive way. First, as shown in **Figure 5.2**, youth in CC25 early implementing counties were more likely to report that they had established a permanent connection with a caring and supportive adult – up from 54 percent in 2008-2009 to 79 percent in 2010-2011, statistically significant at the $p < .001$ level.³⁰ **Figure 5.2** also shows that the share of transitioning youth who said they were satisfied with the services they received during the transitional period increased from 45 to 65 percent between 2008-2009 and 2010-2011 (also statistically significant at the $p < .001$ level), suggesting that efforts to improve the relevancy of ILSP services did have a positive impact.

Figure 5.2: Permanent Connection and Satisfaction with Transition Services among Transitioning, Child-Welfare Supervised Youth in CC25I Counties, 2008/2009 to 2010/2011



It seems plausible that CC25 efforts to engage more caring adults in the transitional support services would have contributed to the development of more permanent connections among foster youth. Since Stanislaus County exhibited a higher degree of adult engagement than other

³⁰ Figure 5.2 data source: ETO Assessment C (at emancipation) results for Fresno, San Francisco, Santa Clara and Stanislaus Counties between 2008/2009 and 2009/2010 provided by the CC25I Self-Evaluation team at the UC Berkeley Center for Social Services Research. ETO Assessment C results for Fresno, Humboldt, San Francisco, Santa Clara and Stanislaus Counties between 2008/2009 and 2010/2011 as reported in Stuart Foundation and Walter S. Johnson Foundation. (2011). *The premise and promise of the California Connected by 25 initiative: Improving outcomes for transition age foster youth*. Available at: http://74.81.204.52/Files/CC25I_Premise_Promise.pdf.

counties, along with a strong integration of permanency throughout their practice, we might expect to see even greater improvement in these outcomes there.

Efforts to Expand Existing Transitional Services into a Continuum of Support

Acknowledging that transitioning foster youth have a variety of needs not likely to be fully addressed by existing ILSP services, CC25 counties developed collaboration among public agencies and institutions (child welfare but also probation, education, employment agencies), community partners (including local businesses and service providers), and other philanthropic initiatives. The objectives were to leverage available resources, avoid duplication in efforts, and transform the existing array of services into a comprehensive and integrated continuum of support that successfully helps foster youth transition to adulthood. This section summarizes the findings on efforts to increase community collaboration and expand support programming for transition-age foster youth in CC25 counties.

Increasing Collaboration in CC25 Counties

Towards the conclusion of the observation period, an inventory of community partners engaged in CC25 was completed using information obtained through grant reports and additional surveys. Across all four counties, child welfare agencies worked with an average of 31 community partners among the five key CC25 program areas. **Table 5.6** shows that, based entirely on the number of partnerships in each focus area: Fresno County’s collaboration was concentrated among K-12 Education and Permanency; San Francisco County’s among Post-secondary Education and Employment and Housing, Santa Clara County’s among Post-secondary Education and Employment, K-12 Education and Housing, and Stanislaus County’s among K-12 Education, Housing and Post-secondary Education and Employment.

Table 5.6: Number of Community Partners, by County and CC25 Focus Area

| | Financial Literacy | Housing | K-12 | Permanency | Post-Second. Education/ Employment | Total |
|---------------|--------------------|---------|------|------------|------------------------------------|-------|
| Fresno | 2 | 4 | 6 | 6 | 3 | 21 |
| San Francisco | 3 | 9 | 2 | 5 | 18 | 37 |
| Santa Clara | 4 | 8 | 9 | 0 | 11 | 32 |
| Stanislaus | 4 | 8 | 11 | 3 | 7 | 33 |

These partnerships led to data sharing on educational outcomes (necessary to link youth to additional academic support); coordination and collaboration on the development and implementation of new services, and increased cross-referral of foster youth into available programs. County engagement in CC25 also resulted in increased investment from sources outside their local communities. The following sections provide additional detail on some of the key programs implemented during the Initiative as a result of these new resources, which are summarized in **Table 5.7**.

Table 5.7: Summary of Other Program Investments in CC25 Counties: Programs, Focus Areas, Counties/Youth Served and Amount Invested

| Initiative | Focus Area | Participating Counties - # Youth Served | | | | Amount Invested |
|--|---|---|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| | | Fresno | San Francisco | Santa Clara | Stanislaus | |
| Transitional Housing Placement-Plus | Housing | 20 youth/ 20 beds | 240 youth/ 127 beds | 135 youth / 96 beds | 29 youth/ 20 beds | \$7.3 million over 2 years |
| Individual Development Accounts | Financial Literacy | Goal: 20, 23 served over 1.5 years | Goal: 40, 38 served over 2 years | Goal: 70, 82 served over 2 years | Goal: 20, 17 served over 1 year | \$120,000 plus ~\$60,000, over 3 years |
| Advancement Via Individual Determination | Post-Secondary Education | 25 foster youth over 1 year | | 15 foster youth over 1 year | N/A | Received CC25 technical assistance with recruitment |
| Guardian Scholar-Type Programs | Post-Secondary Education | 30 foster youth over 1 year | 193 foster youth over 3 years* | 53 foster youth over 2 years | | \$1.35 million over 3 years |
| Career Pathways (Bridge) Programs | Post-Secondary Education/ Employment | 57 foster youth over 2 years | | 93 foster youth over 2 years | 27 foster youth over 2 years | \$525,000 over 2 years (not just for foster youth) |

N/A indicates that no numbers were yet available on youth served by this program by conclusion of the observation period.

* This includes 151 youth served over the first year of the new Guardian Scholars program at City College of San Francisco, and 42 youth served over three years by the Guardian Scholars program at San Francisco State University established prior to CC25.

Financial Literacy and Asset Development

CC25 provided the resources counties needed to implement new Individual Develop Account (IDA) programs for foster youth. These programs helped youth set up savings accounts by providing a match amount to incentivize saving behavior. Each county received technical assistance from the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative and \$10,000 a year for three years (a total of \$120,000 across the four counties) in additional CC25 grant funding to provide matching funds. Counties provided additional matching dollars, usually from ILSP funds, and in the case of Stanislaus County, from the United Way, and this additional funding ranged from \$10,000 to \$30,000 per county. IDA matched funds ranged from \$2,000 to \$3,000 so youth could potentially save as much as \$6,000 each (including the match).

The biggest success in this program occurred in Santa Clara County where in the first two years of the program, 82 participating youth saved over \$38,000 of their own funds and received \$27,000 in matched funds. This accomplishment was supported by close collaboration with a local financial planning organization that developed and provided ongoing financial literacy training for foster youth in the County. Key lessons learned in this area were that youth must

have access to earning opportunities, financial literacy training, and that sustainability (in terms of securing the IDA matching dollars) can be a considerable challenge.

Transitional Housing Support

The Transitional Housing Placement-Plus (THP-Plus) is a state funded program that originally provided a 40 to 60 percent state-county match to fund transitional housing units for foster youth. In 2006, the program became fully state-funded and the funding level tripled. Prior to CC25, San Francisco was the only one of the four intervention counties to access THP-Plus funds. During the course of the Initiative, THP-Plus allocations increased from only \$837,000 a year to fund 31 beds in San Francisco in 2006/2007 to over \$6 million a year to fund 263 beds in all four counties in 2007/2008 – an average cost of about \$23,000 a year per bed. The 157 beds funded in 2006/2007 served 186 youth and the 263 beds funded in 2007/2008 served 324 youth. As an early implementer, San Francisco accounted for about half of all funded beds across the four counties.

Fresno and Stanislaus County concentrated all of their beds in host-family units – which places added emphasis on the role of permanent connections during this transitional period - whereas the other two counties utilized scattered-site, single-site and host-family housing units. Lessons learned from these efforts in the housing focus area were that youth are more likely to succeed in housing programs when they receive case management and a variety of support services throughout the transitional period. Counties also found it important to link youth in transitional housing with other programs and services – such as financial literacy services as well as post-secondary education and employment programs.

K-12 Educational Technical Assistance

In an effort to increase the participation of foster youth in higher education, CC25 funders supported technical assistance for child welfare agencies in recruiting youth into the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program. AVID targets students who would be the first in their families to attend college, and provides the motivation, support and resources needed to prepare for and successfully enroll in college. However, because AVID does not specifically target foster youth, very few foster youth were participating in the program. Fresno, Santa Clara and Stanislaus Counties participated in this technical assistance initiative and as a result, over 40 youth were accepted into the program in the 2008-2009 school year.³¹ CC25 also provided technical assistance and convenings in two areas related to K-12 Education – strategies on sharing educational data between child welfare and educational institutions and how to draw down federal funding to provide academic support for foster youth. In addition, three of the four CC25 counties – San Francisco, Santa Clara, and Stanislaus – also received resources and support from the Educational Technical Assistance Project which several Family to Family counties across California.

³¹ This figure only includes youth accepted into AVID in Fresno and Santa Clara Counties; figures for Stanislaus were not available.

College Support

Three of four CC25 counties (all but Stanislaus) received significant investment from the Walter S. Johnson Foundation (a key CC25 funder) to establish new Guardian Scholar-type programs on local college campuses, in some cases after small initial planning grants. In addition, the Stuart Foundation (another key CC25 funder) was already investing in a pre-existing Guardian Scholar program at San Francisco State University. These programs provide the campus-based support services former foster youth need to successfully engage in and complete higher education including financial aid, housing, academic and life coaching, tutoring, and mentoring. These programs have proven effective at helping foster youth complete courses and graduate from college. For example, the program operating at San Francisco State University reported a student retention rate of 83 percent, higher than that for the university as a whole, and participating students have averaged GPAs of 2.42 for the first cohort in 2005 to 3.05 for the 2008 cohort.

Together the additional investment made by CC25 funders to these programs totaled \$1.35 million over three years: \$300,000 over three years at Cal State University Fresno, \$300,000 over three years at City College of San Francisco, \$450,000 over three years at San Francisco State University and \$300,000 over three years at San Jose State University in Santa Clara).

College-to-Career Support

In the past decade, a number of programs have been developed to provide a bridge to higher education and careers among low-literate and low-skilled individuals. These college to career pathway or “bridge” programs offer basic skills education and training to help those who would otherwise be unemployed or trapped in low-wage jobs move on to better employment prospects in high growth industries. These programs are usually implemented through close collaboration between Local Workforce Investment Boards, which provide participants with case management and other federally-funded employment and training services, and community colleges, which provide the faculty, coursework and campus support services.

In CC25 Counties, the Walter S. Johnson provided additional grant funding for three career pathway-type programs in Fresno (\$200,000 over two years, at Fresno City College), Santa Clara (\$200,000 over two years, at Mission College and San Jose City College) and Stanislaus Counties (\$125,000 over two years at Modesto Junior College). These programs served a total of 318 disadvantaged and disconnected young adults, of whom 177 (or 56 percent) were former foster youth. The early results of these programs somewhat mixed, with all three counties reporting challenges with retaining youth through completion of all enrolled courses. One of the key lessons learned was that flexibility in program design is necessary to accommodate the many challenges and responsibilities of participants. Some sites found it necessary to reduce the academic course load and shifted classes to focus on those that could contribute directly toward a degree or certificate requiring only two or three more semesters. Across the three sites, the rate at which foster youth completed the semester long program ranged considerably from 44 to 88 percent.

Employment Supports

Though not listed in **Table 5.7**, it should be noted that some CC25 counties also developed other pathways to employment and training in creative ways.

- San Francisco County, through more formalized and coordinated efforts between child welfare, the workforce development agency, and youth employment community partners, managed to place 123 foster youth in jobs or work training programs over a two-year period.
- In Santa Clara, the County’s own career development unit created the Emancipated Foster Youth (EFY) Employment Program, which designates 21 different entry-level positions (such as Account Clerk, Lab Assistant, and Office Specialist) as available to former foster youth applicants. These jobs begin as probationary with the possibility of becoming permanent positions. Youth can attend a workshop to learn about the program, get help with the online application and are then eligible for referrals to job interviews. In the first year, 173 youth entered the applicant pool and fifteen youth were successfully hired into available positions. The EFY program was recognized by the California State Association of Counties with a Challenge Award for “Most Replicable County Program.”

Impact of Expanded Support Programs on Youth Outcomes

While a thorough evaluation of these efforts is not possible, in this section I combine publicly available data with findings from the CC25 data tracking system made available during and after the observation period – to examine changes in youth outcomes in the relevant CC25 focus areas: savings through IDA programs, housing stability, and educational progress.

Though missing data for Stanislaus County, **Table 5.8** shows that CC25 counties did have higher rates of IDA-holders among youth exiting care than the State average in the 2009 and 2010.³² This is consistent with implementation of CC25 IDA programs, which commenced in early 2007 to early 2008 and would have been winding down by the end of 2010. The declining trend over the three years could support the finding that the program was difficult for counties to sustain once CC25 funding ceased. It should be noted that in some counties, San Francisco for example, youth likely had access to other IDA programs outside of the one established by CC25.

Table 5.8 Share of Exiting, Child Welfare-Supervised Foster Care Who Had an IDA Account, 2009-2011

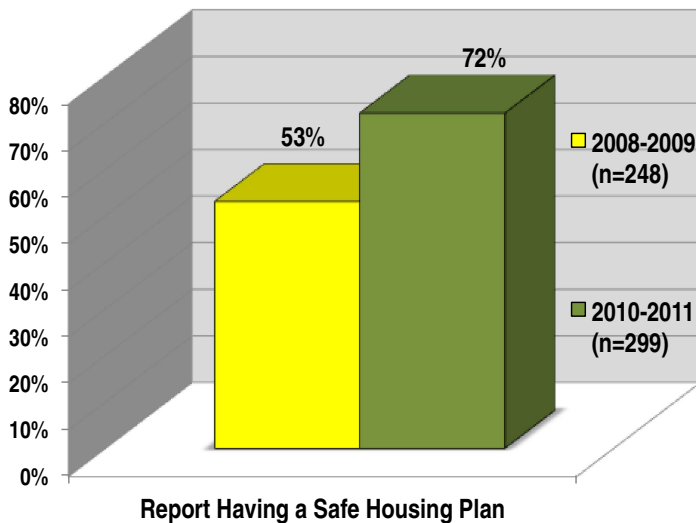
| | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | Sample Sizes, 2009-2011 |
|-------------------|-------|------|------|-------------------------|
| California | 1.7% | 1.8% | 1.3% | N=2,906; 2,667; 2,248 |
| Fresno | 3.6% | 3.1% | 0.0% | N=56; 2; 123 |
| San Francisco | 12.9% | 6.1% | 2.3% | N=62; 49; 43 |
| Santa Clara | 3.8% | 2.5% | 1.2% | N=80; 80; 82 |
| Stanislaus | ? | ? | ? | N=31; 37; 134 |

³²Table 5.8 data source: SOC 405 E - Exit Outcomes for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care Quarterly Statistical Reports, available at: <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/research/PG1940.htm>.

However, the small share of youth holding IDA accounts in **Table 5.8** suggests that even with investment by CC25 and other initiatives, this type of support is still very uncommon.

Figure 5.3 presents a transitional housing outcome in which CC25 counties made progress.³³ An increasing share of foster youth reported that they had a safe place to live after exiting from care (72 percent in 2008-2009 versus 53 percent in 2010-2011, statistically significant at the $p < .001$ level). This is consistent with efforts across all four CC25 counties to both expand housing options and work more closely with youth, caregivers and other caring adults to plan and prepare for the transition from care. Likely also contributing to safe housing plans was the finding (reported in **Figure 5.2** above) that youth were also more likely to report that they had established a permanent connection with a caring and supportive adult over the course of the Initiative.

Figure 5.3: Housing Outcomes among Transitioning, Child-Welfare Supervised Foster Youth in Early Implementing CC25I Counties, 2008/2009 to 2010/2011



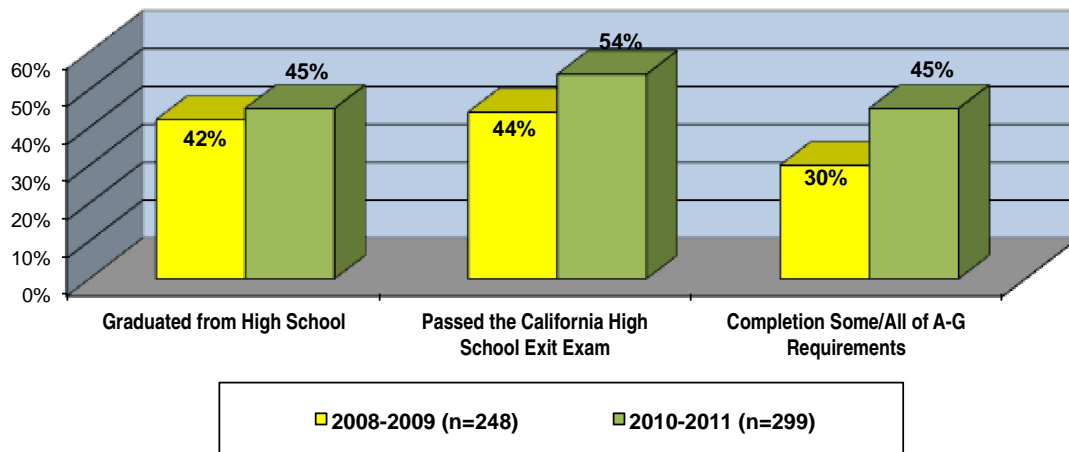
In addition, **Figure 5.4** displays some of the educational outcomes in which early implementing counties made progress over the course of the Initiative.³⁴ Foster youth in CC25 counties (under child-welfare supervision) made a small increase in the percent that graduated from high school by the time they aged out of care (42 to 45 percent, not statistically significant at the $p < .10$ level)

³³ Figure 5.4 data source: ETO Assessment C (at emancipation) results for Fresno, San Francisco, Santa Clara and Stanislaus Counties between 2008/2009 and 2009/2010 provided by the CC25I Self-Evaluation team at the UC Berkeley Center for Social Services Research. ETO Assessment C results for Fresno, Humboldt, San Francisco, Santa Clara and Stanislaus Counties between 2008/2009 and 2010/2011 as reported in Stuart Foundation and Walter S. Johnson Foundation. (2011). *The premise and promise of the California Connected by 25 initiative: Improving outcomes for transition age foster youth*, available at: http://74.81.204.52/Files/CC25I_Premise_Promise.pdf.

³⁴ Figure 5.5 data source: ETO Assessment C (at emancipation) results for Fresno, San Francisco, Santa Clara and Stanislaus Counties between 2008/2009 and 2009/2010 provided by the CC25I Self-Evaluation team at the UC Berkeley Center for Social Services Research. ETO Assessment C results for Fresno, Humboldt, San Francisco, Santa Clara and Stanislaus Counties between 2008/2009 and 2010/2011 as reported in Stuart Foundation and Walter S. Johnson Foundation. (2011). *The premise and promise of the California Connected by 25 initiative: Improving outcomes for transition age foster youth*, available at: http://74.81.204.52/Files/CC25I_Premise_Promise.pdf.

but a larger improvement in the share that passed the California High School Exit Exam (44 to 54 percent, statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level). Transitioning foster youth in CC25 counties also increased their rate of completion for some or all of the A-G courses (required for college attendance) between 2008-2009 and 2010-2011 (30 to 45 percent, statistically significant at the $p < .001$ level).

Figure 5.5: Educational Outcomes among Transitioning, Child-Welfare Supervised Foster Youth in Early Implementing CC25I Counties, 2008/2009 to 2010/2011



Though not displayed here, there was also some information suggesting that individual CC25 counties outperformed the aggregate 4-county results between years 2 to 3 on youth outcomes where their partnerships and efforts were concentrated:³⁵

- **Remaining at Current Placement** – Across all CC25 counties, the share of youth planning to stay at their current placement after exiting from care was 38 percent in both years two and three. Stanislaus County, which placed a heavy emphasis on expanding transitional housing options using the host-family model was the only CC25 county in which a growing share of youth said they would remain at their current placement after exiting care (45 to 49 percent between years two and three).
- **Moving in with a Family Member or Permanent Connection** – While the share of youth planning to live with family or permanent connections after exiting care increased across all CC25 counties, it was highest and improved the most in Stanislaus County, increasing from 36 to 50 percent. Fresno County, which had partnership concentration in permanency, also did well on this outcome increasing from 31 to 44 percent over the two years).
- **Completion of A-G Requirements** – Across all CC25 counties, 30 percent of youth completed some or all of the A-G requirements in years two and three. Fresno County, which engaged in a great deal of K-12 activity exhibited the biggest increase on this measure (from 29 percent in year two to 44 percent in year three) suggesting positive

³⁵ Data source: ETO Assessment C (at emancipation) results for Fresno, San Francisco, Santa Clara and Stanislaus Counties between 2008/2009 and 2009/2010 provided by the CC25I Self-Evaluation team at the UC Berkeley Center for Social Services Research.

impact of heavy concentration on K-12 initiative work and campus-based ILSP social workers.

CC25 data tracking efforts did not identify any positive findings on employment outcomes, but it seems logical that the worsening economy at the time of the Initiative might have neutralized any positive impacts of early implementing counties' youth employment efforts.

Table 5.9 shows that average in terms of transitioning foster youth employment rates, two CC25 counties fared as well or better than the State average (San Francisco and Santa Clara Counties) and two did worse.³⁶ It is also not unexpected that the two rural counties – Fresno and Stanislaus – have even lower rates of employment among transitioning youth. For the most part, however, all counties and California as a whole, showed decreasing rates of employment (34 percent to 27 percent between 2009 and 2011) as the economy worsened. San Francisco County, where the improvement of employment opportunity for foster youth was the number one priority, fared best among the four counties and also did as well or better than the State average in all three years (starting at 39 percent in 2009 and ending at 30 percent in 2011). Santa Clara County began quite strong with a 45 percent employment rate in 2009 – perhaps reflecting greater opportunity provided by the County's EFY program as well as proximity to the more job-rich Silicon Valley. However, the employment rate among transitioning youth then decreased significantly to 26 percent (just below the State average) in 2011.

Table 5.9 Share of Exiting, Child Welfare-Supervised Foster Care Who Obtained Employment, 2009-2011

| | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 |
|----------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Statewide | 34.4% | 28.7% | 27.1% |
| Fresno County | 17.9% | 9.4% | 13.0% |
| San Francisco County | 38.7% | 28.6% | 30.2% |
| Santa Clara County | 45.0% | 27.5% | 25.6% |
| Stanislaus County | 25.8% | 8.1% | 8.8% |

Limitations

Despite standardized reporting forms and surveys, CC25 counties did not always provide consistent data on the activities undertaken or services delivered as part of the initiative. While they were more consistent in providing information on new programs funded by CC25 or other initiatives (including the number of youth served by CC25-funded IDAs, Guardian Scholars type programs and College Pathways type programs), data on participation in existing programs or in team decision making (TDM)-type strategies were often lacking. Also not addressed by CC25 county self-evaluation efforts was a measure of how many foster youth are accessing multiple

³⁶ Table 5.9 Source: SOC 405 E - Exit Outcomes for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care Quarterly Statistical Reports, available at: <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/research/PG1940.htm>.

programs across the continuum of support, information which could help in the examination of how more comprehensive support affects program efficacy at improving outcomes.

It is also important to note a few limitations of the early findings on outcomes derived from the ETO youth assessment data. First, because it took some time for the ETO system to be developed and for counties to be trained and begin implementing the system, data are missing for year one of the Initiative, which would have provided a truer baseline measure of youth outcomes. In addition, while counties were instructed to complete the assessments with all youth in the transitional age range, it is likely that not all social workers or units were able to comply with this request and therefore, these results may have limited generalizability to the full population of transitioning youth in these CC25 counties. For example, the results presented in the Initiative's final report were based on Assessment C results for 858 youth surveyed over the three-year period in the five counties, which represented 56 percent of the 1,525 foster youth that aged out in the select counties (Stuart Foundation and Walter S. Johnson Foundation 2011). We do not know in what ways the assessed youth are similar to or different from the full population of foster youth eligible for support services and CC25 programming, or which youth are not at all engaged in the continuum of care. It is highly likely – because so much ETO assessment was completed by ILSP social workers – that youth more actively engaged in ILSP services are better represented by ETO assessment data.

Also, as mentioned elsewhere in this dissertation, data on transition-age youth (services provided and outcomes achieved) provided by counties to the State in the SOC405E reports should also be treated with caution. The counties do not use a single data tracking mechanism for this information, relying instead on a variety of databases, spreadsheets and hand tabulations. One would therefore expect some inaccuracy on these reports, which could contribute to inconsistency in the trends over time. And also as mentioned above, the recent change in which SOC405E reports focus on which populations of youth in out-of-home care mean that we have a very short observation period (from 2009 onward).

Discussion and Policy Implications

This chapter details the many ways in which CC25 early implementing counties successfully implemented strategies that more effectively engaged youth, and to a lesser extent caregivers, in their own transitional planning and support program implementation, resulting in ILSP and other transitional supports with greater reach and relevance. It is also clear that counties participating in CC25 increased community partnership around, and investment in, services and resources in ways that produced a more comprehensive array of support programming for transitioning youth. Available data suggests that these strategies had positive impact on the actual participation of youth in support services, increased satisfaction with the support received and with a host of important youth outcomes such as permanency, financial literacy, housing, and education. Still, a few questions remain.

First, how sustainable will these improvements be over time? Counties suggested that some strategies will be easy to continue, such as youth and caregiver engagement in transition planning and improved outreach to youth and caregivers to increase program utilization. Others will depend on available government funding and community partner investment – such as the

provision of IDAs (with matching funds), transitional housing and support programs such as Guardian Scholars or Career Pathways. In the foster care policy arena, the current focus is on expanding paid foster care through age 21, which should have a positive impact on housing stability and permanent connections during the transitional period for those foster youth who choose it. However, unless a continuum of supports are still available during this period – and ideally to more youth than are currently served – it is possible that at age 22, far too many former foster youth will still exhibit poor outcomes in terms of post-secondary education, employment and ability to live independently and self-sufficiently.

Second, the availability of reliable child welfare data will likely continue to be a challenge in evaluating transitional services and outcomes among foster youth, not only with CC25 counties, but all counties in the State. It is uncertain how fully CC25 counties will use the new ETO data tracking system or how consistently they will use it across all youth eligible for transitional support programs and resources. Other counties must also strive to improve their tracking of this information so that the resulting information can guide local system improvements to the benefit of transition-age youth. Across CC25 focus areas, there was a perception that youth fared better when they accessed multiple resources from the continuum of support, though could not be supported quantitatively. Until we have a clear sense of which youth are receiving which resources, it will remain a challenge to measure the full impact of expanded support services or determine if the receipt of several types of support has a multiplicative effect on those impacts. In addition, a longer horizon of data on ILSP use, satisfaction, and youth outcomes will also help us to examine how counties are doing in sustaining these efforts.

Finally, this chapter makes clear that while it is possible to significantly expand transitional support programs for youth, and achieve improved youth outcomes, this can only be done with additional investment well beyond what we have historically spent on ILSP services for youth. Based on the program investments and numbers of youth served in **Table 5.7**, the provision of transitional housing cost nearly \$23,000, IDA cost approximately \$750, Guardian Scholars college support was \$2,500, and Career Pathways program was just over \$1,800, per youth per annum. This level of funding for new transitional support programs – in addition to the grant funding provided by CC25 for counties' overall operation of the Initiative – is much higher than the roughly \$1,700 per eligible foster youth (both current and former) allocated each year in federal funding for ILSP, as estimated in Chapter 2. There remains a great opportunity – if we can more accurately track services received, investment required and outcomes achieved on an individual level – to conduct a thorough cost-benefit analysis of the longer-term impact of transitional supports for foster youth.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This dissertation has explored several issues related to programs that support foster youth during the transition to adulthood, and its findings can contribute to future efforts to improve their efficacy. Though much of the current policy landscape affecting these youth is focused on the extension of foster care to age 21, the role of ILSP and other transitional support programs is not likely to diminish given the tremendous need these youth will continue to have for skills training, education and employment services and other resources. Yet achieving a significant, positive impact on the adult outcomes of former foster youth will require more effective ILSP and related support programs as well as greater efforts to ensure that all youth in need of support are accessing them.

The first part of chapter three provides a theoretical framework for examining the decision by foster youth to participate in ILSP – how their connection to family and their experiences in care might affect their need for and access to the program. The second part of the chapter incorporates elements of program design that the existing literature suggests could improve ILSP services and increase the likelihood of youth to participate. The analysis conducted in chapters four and five were guided and strengthened by that theoretical framework which highlights the importance of understanding how factors such as life experiences, personal relationships, and care settings interact with program characteristics to influence a foster youth's decision to participate in available services. Future efforts to improve transitional support programs for foster youth will do well to develop logic models that consider these and other factors that could affect a youth's need, motivation and ability to participate, remain involved and complete programs to assist them.

The Alameda County case study in chapter four presented a quantitative analysis of how need and program access affect the likelihood of graduating from ILSP. Using the full population eligible for transitional supports, this research indicates that having biological family with more limited income, or having less connection to one's biological family, increases the odds of graduating from the program. While this result was anticipated, the analysis relied on proxy measures of those factors -highlighting the need for improved data collection on this population. More accurate measures of resources and support already available to foster youth would enable ILSP and other programs to better connect youth with the supports they need, and perhaps more efficiently target the more limited resources. This research also finds that certain subgroups of youth – those who are removed from other counties but placed in Alameda County, those living in guardian placements and those who live further away from a program site – are less likely to graduate from ILSP, suggesting that awareness of and physical access to available services play important roles in facilitating foster youth's access to transitional services, and their absence presents a significant barrier.

Chapter five presents a case study of the California Connected by 25 (CC25) Initiative to examine some strategies used by local child welfare agencies to address exactly these types of barriers. CC25 counties utilized more aggressive outreach and recruitment strategies for ILSP and other support programs, actively raising awareness of and facilitating access to services among both youth and caregivers, and found that participation did increase as result. These

engagement activities also contributed to greater satisfaction among youth with transitional services and greater establishment of permanent connections. This chapter also shows how increased community partnership and investment in CC25 counties expanded the supports available to foster youth, and resulted achieved positive impact on permanency, housing and educational outcomes. Increased communication and partnership could improve how we currently serve those youth who are removed from one county but placed in another – one of the subgroups identified in chapter four as having particularly low ILSP graduation rates – if we could achieve collaboration among all child welfare agencies across the state. In sum, these findings emphasize the importance of public-private partnership in efforts to improve services for and outcomes of transitioning foster youth, as government funding alone seems unlikely to provide programs that can serve enough foster youth in a comprehensive way. Sustainability, however, will be an ongoing challenge.

As a society, we have a tremendous opportunity to better serve these youth in our care, at a critical time of life and while our access to them is facilitated by their being in our child welfare systems. Though the costs of expanded transitional services and program participation are high, they would likely be less than the enormous economic and human costs we incur from the currently poor adult outcomes of former foster youth. Rather than expenditures for high rates of incarceration, unemployment, and welfare reliance, public funding could be used to provide the supports and resources need to impart the skills, knowledge and abilities necessary to successfully navigate the transition and become a productive member of society (Wald and Martinez, 2003). Transition services can prove just as cost-effective as early childhood interventions (Karoly 2003) and could prevent significant psychological, social and economic costs over the long run (Cohen, 1998; Coles, 2002). Improved data collection on this population of youth - their need for support, the services received, and their transitional outcomes – could make possible a thorough cost-benefit analysis documenting the potential cost savings to society that could be achieved through an expansion of this program area.

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Appendix A

Appendix A provides 1) detail on the case selection process and 2) additional information that provides a measure of how reliable a match resulted from the merging of the ACILSP graduate and total ILSP-eligible data sets.

I. Initial Case Selection

This section explains how the researcher obtained the study population of ILSP-eligible foster youth utilized in the analysis presented in Chapter 4. The original ILSP-eligible dataset provided by the Center for Social Services Research (CSSR) contained 3,630 youth defined as having been in out-of-home care under Alameda County's child welfare agency at least one day at or after age 16. Though youth under the County's probation department are also eligible for ILSP if in out-of-home care on or after their 16th birthday, these youth were excluded from the ILSP-eligible data by CSSR programming staff because the caseload data on probation youth was known to be unreliable at the time the data were drawn.

Additionally, as the eligible youth population should only include those likely to have graduated in the study period (June 1998 through June 2005) CSSR staff restricted the data draw to youth who were under age 21 on Jan 1, 2000. This excluded youth born in 1978 or earlier who would already have been age 20 or older in the first year of graduation data (1998). This exclusion is consistent with the normative age range for ILSP graduation presented in **Table A.1** which shows that nearly all youth who graduated ACILSP between 1998 and 2005 did so between the ages of 17 and 19.

| Age of Youth at ILSP Graduation | All ACILSP Graduates, 1998-2005 |
|--|--|
| 14 or 15 | 3 (<0.5%) |
| 16 | 3 (<0.5%) |
| 17 | 150 (24%) |
| 18 | 401 (65%) |
| 19 | 58 (9%) |
| 20 or 21 | 5 (<1%) |
| Total Youth | 620 (100%) |

To ensure the research sample of ILSP-eligible population is consistent with this normative age of graduation across the study period, youth should have been no more than age 19 at the time of first ACILSP graduation observed here (June 1998) and at least 17 years of age at the time of the last ACILSP graduation observed (June 2005). **Table A.2** examines the oldest cohorts of youth in the CSSR dataset, defined by their date of birth relative to the California public school cut-off date of December 2nd, and displays the number of each that matched to the ACILSP graduation data. All five of the six-month cohorts were no older than 19 in June 1998 and are therefore

³⁷ Table 1 uses a youth's age on June 30th of the recorded year of ACILSP graduation.

retained in the eligible population. Their rate of ACILSP graduation increases from six percent among the oldest cohort (born between Dec 3rd, 1978 and June 2nd, 1979) to 14 percent among the fifth cohort (born between Dec 3rd, 1980 and June 2nd, 1981), as one would expect, since any graduations prior to 1988 are not observable in our data on ACILSP graduation.

Table A.2: Cohorts of Older Youth in ILSP-Eligible Data and Numbers Graduating from ACILSP, by Year

| Cohort of Youth Born: | Number of Youth in ACILSP-eligible Dataset (N=446) | Likely High School Grad. Year | Age on June 2 nd 1998 | Number and % of Youth that Match ACILSP Graduate Data in 1998 | Age on June 2 nd 1999 | Number and % of Youth that Match ACILSP Graduate Data in 1999 | Age on June 2 nd 1999 | Number and % of Youth that Match ACILSP Graduate Data in 2000 |
|------------------------------|--|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|---|
| 1) 12/03/1978 – 6/02/1979 | 34 | 1997 | 19 | 2 (6%) | 20 | 0 | 21 | 0 |
| 2) 6/03/1979 – 12/02/1979 | 75 | 1997 | 18 | 7 (9%) | 19 | 1 (1%) | 20 | 0 |
| 3) 12/03/1979 – 6/02/1980 | 97 | 1998 | 18 | 10 (10%) | 19 | 4 (4%) | 20 | 0 |
| 4) 6/03/1980 – 12/02/1980 | 105 | 1998 | 17 | 5 (5%) | 18 | 6 (6%) | 19 | 0 |
| 5) 12/03/1980 – 6/02/1981 | 135 | 1999 | 17 | 2 (2%) | 18 | 12 (10%) | 19 | 2 (2%) |

Graduations among the youngest cohorts of ACILSP-eligible youth are shown in **Table A.3**. Cohorts 17 and 18 graduated at rates similar to cohort five but graduations drop precipitously for cohort 19. Cohorts 20 and higher were born too recently to be age-eligible for ACILSP graduation during the study period; not yet having reached age 17 by the time of the last graduation observed, they are excluded from the research sample. Only one of the 481 youth (less than .5 percent) in these youngest three cohorts had actually graduated from ACILSP. All other cohorts of youth are retained.

Table A.3: Cohorts of Younger Youth in ILSP-eligible Data and Numbers Graduating from ACILSP, by Year

| Cohort of Youth Born: | Number of Youth in ACILSP-eligible Dataset (N=1,138) | Likely High School Grad. Year | Age on June 2nd 2004 | Number and % of Youth that Match ACILSP Graduate Data in 2004 | Age on June 2nd 2005 | Number and % of Youth that Match ACILSP Graduate Data in 2005 |
|------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| 17) 12/03/1986–6/02/1987 | 205 | 2005 | 17 | 1 (<1%) | 18 | 22 (11%) |
| 18) 6/03/1987–12/02/1987 | 222 | 2005 | 16 | 1 (<1%) | 17 | 18 (8%) |
| 19) 12/03/1987 – 6/02/1988 | 230 | 2006 | 16 | 0 | 17 | 1 (<.5%) |
| 20) 6/03/1988 – 12/02/1988 | 217 | 2006 | 15 | 0 | 16 | 0 |
| 21) 12/03/1988-6/02/1989 | 230 | 2007 | 15 | 0 | 16 | 1 (<.5%) |
| 22) 6/03/1989-12/02/1989 | 34 | 2007 | 15 | 0 | 15 | 0 |

While not presented in either table, the ACILSP graduation rate of youth born between cohort five in **Table A.2** and cohort 17 in **Table A.3** (so born between June 3, 1981 and December 2, 1986) was 13 percent. Including only youth who were within the normative age range for ACILSP graduation in the study period results in an ILSP-eligible population of 3,149 youth, born between December 3, 1978 and June 3, 1988, with an ACILSP graduation rate of 11 percent overall.

Among the 3,149 youth remaining in the ILSP-eligible dataset were 302 cases in which the foster youth were no longer in an out-of-home placement at age 16 or older, though their case had not yet been officially closed. It is not clear if these youth would be considered eligible for ILSP; being “in foster care” has been defined by the State as receiving a foster care payment after the age of 16 (State of California, 1999). With their last placement ended, it likely that these youth were 1) no longer receiving foster care payments or services; 2) unaware of their ILSP eligibility; and/or 3) not actively enough engaged with a social worker to have received an ILSP referral. Only six of these youth (or 2 percent) were matched as ILSP graduates, a graduation rate much lower than the 11 percent seen among the full 3,149 youth in the ILSP-eligible population (statistically significant at the .001 level). Missing data on several key case history and geographic variables, these 302 youth are omitted from the ILSP-eligible population.

Finally, there are some youth among the remaining 2,847 cases who were not likely eligible for ACILSP because either 1) they were not actually under the jurisdiction of Alameda County or 2) they were living in counties other than Alameda at age 16. There were 241 youth whose case records indicate that they were both removed from a home outside of Alameda County AND placed within a county other than Alameda County at age 16 or older. These youth are excluded from the analysis for this reason, a decision confirmed by the fact that only four of these 241 youth (2 percent) were ACILSP graduates. In addition, youth generally receive ILSP services in

the county of placement though the county of jurisdiction is responsible for reimbursing the costs of such services. Accordingly, ACILSP is most likely to have served the 1,834 youth who were placed directly in Alameda County at age 16 or older and not likely to have offered services to the 813 youth who were placed elsewhere. **Table A.4** confirms this with a 16 percent ACILSP graduation rate among youth placed in Alameda County and only four percent among those placed in another county.

For those few youth placed in other counties who were ACILSP graduates, it is possible that they found a way to stay active in the program despite being placed further away, or they may have become involved with the program during a later placement that was in fact in Alameda County. However, while we know that 29 of the youth placed in other counties did manage to graduate from the ACILSP, we have no way of knowing if the remaining 543 youth graduated from another ILSP in their placement county. Missing full information on the dependent variable (ILSP graduation) for these youth, they are excluded from the analysis, leaving a final sample of 2,034 youth.

| Table A.4: Distribution of youth and ACILSP graduation rates (in parens) among subgroups defined by county of removal and placement | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|----------|-----------|-------------|
| County of Removal | County of Placement at Age 16+ | | | |
| | Alameda | Other | Missing | Total |
| Alameda | 1,383 (17%) | 469 (5%) | 134 (13%) | 1,986 (14%) |
| Other | 182 (7%) | 241 (2%) | 22 (0%) | 445 (4%) |
| Missing | 269 (17%) | 103 (7%) | 44 (16%) | 416 (14%) |
| Total | 1,834 (16%) | 813 (4%) | 200 (12%) | 2,606(13%) |

II. Examining the Degree of Match between ILSP-Eligible Youth and ACILSP Graduates

This section examines the accuracy of the match achieved by merging the ACILSP graduation and ILSP-eligible datasets in terms of A) the percent of ACILSP graduates matched to ILSP-eligible youth and B) the rate of ACILSP graduation achieved through the merge.

A. Percent of ACILSP Graduates Matching to ILSP-Eligible Youth

Data on the 620 ACILSP graduates were merged with the initial CSSR ILSP-eligible youth dataset of 3,630 foster youth and 58% (359 graduates) were successfully matched. The most likely explanation for the 261 ACILSP graduates that did not match up is that these youth were either 1) under the jurisdiction of the Alameda County *probation* agency or 2) under the jurisdiction of *another county entirely*, and therefore not contained in the initial ILSP-eligible population which drew only from youth who were under the jurisdiction of the Alameda County child welfare agency at some point. If youth were under Alameda County jurisdiction but supervised by the County’s probation department, or if they were under another county’s jurisdiction but placed in Alameda County, they would have been eligible for (and perhaps

utilized) services from ACILSP, but would not have been included in the initial ILSP-eligible dataset compiled by CSSR and used for the data merge. Probation youth would have been excluded because of issues with data reliability, and youth under another county’s jurisdiction would have been excluded because this dissertation’s research is only permitted to utilize case data for youth under Alameda County jurisdiction.

To examine this issue, the researcher compared the 620 ACILSP graduates with overall Alameda County foster care caseload dynamics with regard to county of jurisdiction and agency of supervision. Summarizing annual point-in-time counts of child-welfare supervised youth between 1999 and 2005, **Table A.5** shows that an average of 78 percent of the child welfare (CW) supervised youth living in Alameda County were under that County’s jurisdiction, and 22 percent were under the jurisdiction of other counties.³⁸ If ACILSP-served youth are representative of all foster youth (ages 16 to 20) living in Alameda County, we would expect that approximately three-quarters of the program’s graduates would be under Alameda County’s jurisdiction. Identifiers for county of jurisdiction (the first two digits of the youth’s Foster Care Information System identification number) indicate that 88 percent of the 620 ACILSP graduates from 1998 through 2005 were under Alameda County’s jurisdiction, while 12 percent (76 cases) were under another county’s jurisdiction.

There are two likely explanations for this overrepresentation of Alameda County youth among ACILSP graduates (that is, why only 12 percent, rather than 22 percent, of ACILSP graduates are under the jurisdiction of another county). First, it is possible that youth placed in Alameda County but under another county’s jurisdiction are less likely to be linked to the ACILSP due to weaknesses in the communications and service referral systems between counties. . In addition, probation youth made up an average of 26 percent of all out-of-home youth under Alameda County’s jurisdiction between 1999 and 2005. The ACILSP graduate data do not distinguish between child welfare- and probation-supervised youth, but the presence of probation youth would increase the number Alameda County youth among ACILSP graduates.

Table A.5: Alameda County Caseload Characteristics, Average Point-in-Time Estimates, January 1st 1999-2005, Part 1

| Youth Populations: | Point-in-Time Average # of Youth in Care, Ages 16-20, 1999-2005 | # of Youth Living in Alameda, under CW-supervision | Average % of Youth Living in Alameda, 1999-2005 | Average # of Youth Under Alameda Jurisdiction | Average % of Alameda-jurisdiction Youth, 1999-2005 |
|---|---|--|---|---|--|
| Alameda CW-Supervised Youth Living in Alameda | 416 | 416 | 78% | 416 | 48% |
| Alameda CW-Supervised Youth Living out-of-county | 223 | 0 | 0% | 223 | 26% |
| Out-of-county CW-Supervised Youth Living in Alameda | 117 | 117 | 22% | 0 | 0% |
| Alameda Probation-Supervised Youth | 224 | 0 | 0% | 224 | 26% |
| Total All Youth Subgroups | 980 | 533 | 100% | 863 | 100% |

³⁸ Table A.5 Source: Needell, B., Webster, D., Armijo, M., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Williams, D., Zimmerman, K., Simon, V., Hamilton, D., Putnam-Hornstein, E., Frerer, K., Lou, C., Peng, C. and Moore, M. (2010). Child Welfare Services Reports for California. Retrieved 9/12/2010, from University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research website. URL: http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare.

Table A.6 presents these data differently, but with similar results. Looking at average caseload numbers for the study period (1999-2005) we see that Alameda County youth who were probation-supervised and youth under other counties' jurisdictions made up a fairly substantial share of the ILSP-eligible population in Alameda County - 30 percent and 15 percent respectively.³⁹ If ACILSP graduates truly reflect the breakdown of eligible youth, in terms of supervising department and county of jurisdiction, then the 58 percent match rate (of ACILSP graduates to the ILSP-eligible dataset) is very close to the 55 percent one would expect.

Table A.6: Alameda County Caseload Characteristics, Average Point-in-Time Estimates, January 1st 1999-2005, Part 2

| Youth Populations: | Point-in-Time Average # of Youth in Care, Ages 16-20, 1999-2005 | # ILSP-Eligible Youth, 1999-2005 | % of Total ILSP-Eligible, 1999-2005 | Included in Study Data? |
|---|---|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Alameda CW-Supervised Youth Living in Alameda | 416 | 416 | 55% | Yes |
| Alameda CW-Supervised Youth Living out-of-county | 223 | 0 | 0% | Yes |
| Out-of-county CW-Supervised Youth Living in Alameda | 117 | 117 | 15% | No |
| Probation-Supervised Youth in Alameda | 224 | 224 | 30% | No |
| Total All Youth Subgroups | 980 | 757 | 100% | |

B. Graduation Rates Achieved by Matching ACILSP Graduation and ILSP-Eligible Data

When the ILSP-eligible data set is restricted as detailed in **Section I** above, the identification of 319 ACILSP graduates among the 2,606 total ILSP-eligible youth suggests a 16 percent graduation rate overall. Even when the ILSP-eligible population is restricted to only the 1,489 youth both removed from and placed in Alameda County, the ACILSP graduation rate only increases to 17 percent. In order to get a sense of if this is a reasonable merge result, the researcher analyzed rates of ILSP service receipt reported for Alameda County and California as a whole. According to **Table A.7**, which is based on county-reported data for Fiscal Year 2008-2009, 53 percent of child welfare-supervised and 44 percent of probation-supervised youth exiting from care in Alameda County were reported as having received ILSP services.⁴⁰ Rates of ILSP receipt among youth statewide were considerably higher - 86 percent and 81 percent respectively.

³⁹ Table A.6 Source: Needell, B., Webster, D., Armijo, M., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Williams, D., Zimmerman, K., Simon, V., Hamilton, D., Putnam-Hornstein, E., Frerer, K., Lou, C., Peng, C. and Moore, M. (2010). Child Welfare Services Reports for California. Retrieved 9/12/2010, from University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research website. URL: http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare.

⁴⁰ Table A.7 Source: SOC 405 E - Exit Outcomes for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care Quarterly Statistical Reports, available at: <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/research/PG1940.htm>.

Though California has recently changed to a new reporting system,⁴¹ the accuracy of these county tabulated figures has long been in question due to both variations in how “service” is defined as well different data tracking methodologies being used across counties. Far more youth receive some kind of ILSP service – which can be as minimal as attending an initial orientation – than become more fully engaged in the program and stay involved long enough to “graduate” prior to their aging out of care. As stated in Chapter 4, only 28 percent of eligible youth invited to an ACILSP orientation in the Fall 2008 period actually attended, though youth could still receive services without attending an orientation. As reported in Chapter 3, an evaluation of a Los Angeles ILSP program found that among the control group (those not specifically recruited into the treatment program), 27 percent enrolled in the ILSP and 23 percent graduated from the program.⁴² Given these figures, an actual graduation rate of 16 or 17 percent would not be unreasonable.

Table A.7: Receipt of ILSP Services among Child Welfare- and Probation-Supervised Youth, for California and Alameda

| | Child-Welfare Supervised | | Probation Supervised | |
|-------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| | Youth of known whereabouts | % who rec'd ILSP prior to aging out | Youth of known whereabouts | % who rec'd ILSP prior to aging out |
| California | 2,733 | 86% | 581 | 81% |
| Alameda | 160 | 53% | 18 | 44% |

⁴¹ Counties have long reported data on youth in out-of-home placements through quarterly SOC 405 reports submitted to the State. As of October 2008, counties now use separate SOC 405 forms or CWS/CMS data fields to report on the outcomes of and ILSP services provided to **exiting** youth (both child welfare- and probation-supervised); to **child-welfare** supervised youth who are still **in care**; and to **probation** youth still *in care* and all youth receiving services in the **aftercare** period. This new method for tracking eligibility for and receipt of ILSP services could be yielding more accurate statistics.

⁴²U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. (July 2008). *Evaluation of the Life Skills Training Program: Los Angeles County*. Washington, D.C.