

Independent Living Practice Implications and Summary

Philosophy and Practice:

The available research on transitional services for youth in foster care points to the reactionary nature of most independent living programs. Services tend to be program-focused rather than centering around children's developmental needs. For children in general, training and planning for autonomy begins long before adolescence and is primarily the responsibility of their caregivers. This is not the case, however, with most programs targeting children in foster care.

Further study is needed to isolate the specific services and amounts of services most critical in successful independent living and transitional programs for foster youth. However, a review of the existing research supports the identification of the following key features:

- Addressing life skills as a child/youth development goal in on-going case planning (Christenson, n.d.; Loman & Siegel, 2000)
- Recruiting, training, and encouraging foster parents as the primary support to life skills and independent living (Loman & Siegel, 2000; Mech, 2003; Mech & Che-Man Fung, 2003)
- Initiating and strengthening life skills programs in more restrictive placements (Mech, 2003)
- Creating life skills training curricula that provide informal settings, opportunities for real-life trials with safety nets, and depend upon significant adult relationships (Charles & Nelson, 2000; Loman & Siegel, 2000; Pacifici, n.d.; Sheehy, et al., 2001)
- Preparing youth for continuing contact and reconnections with biological families and supporting the development of connections with other persons of significance to the youth (Charles & Nelson, 2000; Landsman, et al., 1999)
- Providing structured mentorship (Mech & Leonard, 2003; Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001); attention to matching mentors and youth based on gender/culture (Baker, Olson, & Mincer, 2000)
- Using assessment tools along with caregiver and caseworker observations and youth input in case planning and life skills preparation (Southward, 2003)
- Establishing collaborative relationships with other programs, services and providing training to youth on accessing services (Pecora, et al., 2003; Sheehy, et al., 2001; Zanghi, et al., 2003)
- Providing concrete assistance related to education, employment, housing, and health care (Courtney, et al., 2001; Loman & Siegel, 2000)

- Providing post-discharge services such as transitional apartments, mentoring foster homes, and other after-care supports (Loman & Siegel, 2000; Mech, 2003; Mech & Che-Man Fung, 2003).

Conclusions:

The emphasis on youths aging out of foster care and the funding provided in the past several years has resulted in a wealth of descriptive information about the significant issues confronting such youth. The literature suggests that there is general agreement related to needs and desired outcomes. Future research should focus on the development of common data elements and measures that will enable more precise description of activities, resources, and skills that promote the successful transition of youth to independence.

Perhaps the most important recommendation to be drawn from existing knowledge is the critical responsibility of foster care programs to employ intentional case planning and aggressive advocacy for educational and life skills development services needed by youth to attain independence. This planning must begin as soon as a child enters care and should emphasize teaching and support by caregivers and others with whom he or she has or can form close connections, rather than relying solely on class-based instruction occurring only during adolescence. Transitional and aftercare supports are also important in supporting youth's functioning as young adults.

INDEPENDENT LIVING ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

January, 2004

Baker, A.J.L., Olson, D., & Mincer, C. (2000). The WAY to Work: An independent living/aftercare program for high risk youth. Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America.

The Study: Work Appreciation for Youth (WAY) was initially designed for youth leaving foster care, particularly those who were in most restrictive care such as group homes. It has now been adapted for other youth populations. WAY is best described as a comprehensive youth development program which starts early with an individualized, long term approach to employment including academic, attitudinal, employability, and at least one adult who has a “strong stake and interest” in the youth’s success. The WAY study is a longitudinal study of outcomes for participants in WAY.

The Methods: The study includes ten cohorts of 15 to 20 youth recruited into WAY scholarship from 1984 to 1994 comprise the treatment group (N=155). A comparison group of 76 youth was recruited in the first six years of program operation. A detailed database was maintained on all of the youth.

The Findings: Attrition decreased from 29% in the first six cohorts to 16% in the last four. Youth who dropped out were older at enrollment, had been discharged from the campus sooner, and experienced fewer types of early abuse. They were similar in ethnicity, IQ, and behaviors.

- In cohorts 6 to 10, youth had an average of four jobs with employment time averaging three months. 71% had never been fired.
- Educationally, WAY participants achieved at 80% compared to less than 65% in the comparison group.
- At the end of the program 95% of WAY scholars who participated in WAY for at least 2 years (76%) were either in school, working, or had obtained high school or GED degrees.
- Paid professional mentors were viewed positively by 75% of cohorts 1 to 6 with 2 years in the program. Mentors for cohorts 6 to 10 were mostly the same gender and ethnicity. This group averaged two changes of mentors during the program. Youth with whom female counselors worked showed lower end of program self-sufficiency and educational attainment but no significant difference in working or savings. Youth with fewer turnovers in mentors showed greater self-sufficiency and educational attainment but no differences in savings or time working.

R2Practice: This study indicates the efficacy of intense focused employment training. The research on mentors is valuable with the implication that paid professional mentors are effective.

Charles, K. & Nelson, J. (2000). Creating Life Long Connections: What Does It Mean for Adolescents? Norman, OK: The University of Oklahoma, National Resource Center for Youth Development.

The Study: This initiative focused on permanency planning for adolescents.

The Method: The NRCYD collected data on and reviewed adolescent adoption demonstration projects funded by USDHHS; developed and disseminated an annotated bibliography related to adolescents and permanency; provided training and technical assistance to state agencies; and convened a think tank.

The Findings: The think tank identified eleven support categories:

- Adoption is an option
- Relationships with caring peers and adults
- Youth driven change
- Youth defined family connections
- Organization and work force enhancement
- Funding
- Community educational support and involvement
- “Real” life skills in action
- Systems collaboration
- Access to health and mental health services
- Youth centered permanency policy

The think tank chose five of the categories: 1) Relationships with caring peers and adults; 2) Youth-driven change; 3) Youth-defined family connections 4) Organization and workforce enhancement and 5) adoption is an option for which to develop strategies.

“First, adolescents need connections with adults and peers throughout their lifetime. Second, adolescents need to be taught skills that will prepare them to live interdependently. Finally, all youth, but particularly adolescents, must be seen as central actors in their own futures and must be incorporated in the planning process. “

R2Practice: This project supports the redefining of permanency planning to include independent living goals along with individualized planning. The significance of an adult relationship is mentioned along with participation by youth in planning, implementation, and experiential learning.

Christenson, B.L. (n/d). Youth Exiting Foster Care: Efficacy of Independent Living Services in the State of Idaho. Cheney, WA: Eastern Washington University. Retrieved on line December, 2003 at www.jimcaseyyouth.org

The Study: A six-year, quantitative, longitudinal research study was conducted in the State of Idaho evaluating the efficacy of independent living services delivered to foster youth who exited care at age 18 between 1996 and 2002.

The Method: Data was collected from individual case records. Preexisting data was collected from reports of Independent Living coordinators. A comparative analysis was made on the following factors:

- Educational attainment
- Employment
- Dependency (use of social services, etc.)
- Homelessness
- Teenage pregnancy/ Child bearing rates

Findings:

- Inconsistent service delivery, no state-wide core standards of practice
- Utilization of independent living funds and services for emergency assistance vs. prevention and support.
- Process based evaluation and program reporting.
- Under-reporting of outcomes for IL youth on a state-wide basis.
- High rates of social service utilization and homelessness among youth.
- More IL youth served post-Chafee implementation.
- Positive outcomes for IL youth receiving IL services utilizing individual, goal oriented, realistic, achievable, and strengths-based IL plans focusing on all levels of service implementation.

Recommendations:

- Develop state-wide core service standards and train all staff
- Implement and enhance services with foster care youth at the earliest age possible. Individual, goal oriented, realistic, and strengths based that engage youth while focusing on all levels of service implementation.
- Preserve and enhance collaboration through training and joint service delivery efforts with Casey Family Programs at a state-wide and national level.
- Develop data reporting tools that measure goal outcomes
- Develop and implement a pregnancy prevention program

R2Practice: The findings and recommendations are specific to Idaho but present the need for state-wide service standards, individualized planning, and evaluation of programs. There is a strong recommendation for programs addressing pregnancy prevention.

Courtney, M. E., Piliavin, I.J., Grogan-Kaylor, A, & Nast, A. (2001). Foster Youth Transitions to Adulthood: A Longitudinal View of Youth Leaving Foster Care. Child Welfare, 70(6), 685-718.

The Study: This research tracks the experience of 141 youth who left foster care in Wisconsin in 1995 and 1996. It provides a description of (1) the issues that youth confront as they approach the time at which they will exit foster care; and (2) the circumstances of young adults 12 to 18 months after they have been discharged from the foster care system.

The Method: Researchers conducted interviews and assessments using the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS). In phase 1, 141 youth were interviewed before leaving care. In Phase 2, 80% of original participants were interviewed 12-18 months after leaving care.

Findings:

- Almost 50 % of the respondents reported they would contact the agency for assistance with life skills
- In the preceding 12 months since discharge, 74% had visited with birthmothers, 38% with birthfathers, 65% with grandparents, and 83% with siblings
- Over 40% reported that birth families tried to help them, provided emotional support, and they could talk to them about problems
- 40% reported speaking with former foster families once a week since discharge and 20% reported continuing assistance and support from foster families
- 85% had received training in health issues, job seeking and decision making compared to 70% who received training in money management, use of legal services, accessing community resources, or parenting
- 39% identified foster parents as primary source of training compared to 32% who stated specialized independent living training programs were primary source
- One-third reported not prepared to seek a job, manage money, or secure housing
- 55% had finished high school at 2nd interview compared with 92% who were optimistic about high school completion at first interview
- According to the Mental Health Inventory, the youths experienced more psychological distress than typical for their age and had less access to services
- 44% reported difficulty in obtaining health care
- 12% reported being homeless at least once
- A large percentage were unemployed or underemployed

R2Practice: This study identifies several realities with implications for practice. Youth need skills for accessing services after aging out of foster care. They, also, need concrete assistance related to education, employment, housing, and medical services. One clear finding is continued contact with birth families for which many youth have little preparation. The research does not identify which services are more effective in teaching these skills. It is interesting to note that 39% identified foster parents as the primary source of skills.

Landsman, M. J., Malone, K., Tyler, M., Black, J., & Groza, V. (1999). Achieving Permanency for Teens: Lessons Learned From a Demonstration Project. Prevention Report. The University of Iowa, National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice.

The Study: Iowa's Permanency for Teens Project (PTP) was a three year demonstration project funded by the Administration for Children, Youth, and Families. It was a collaborative between Iowa DHS and a private non-profit, Four Oaks Inc. The project was designed to facilitate placement and/or other permanent connections for thirty Iowa teenagers. Permanency Teams using the family based practice model were formed for each teen.

The Methods: 30 youth were selected for the pilot project and 44 youth who met the eligibility criteria served as a comparison group for evaluation. Three phases of the project included assessment of options, recruitment, and support services.

A "quasi-experimental" non-equivalent control group design was used to compare the 30 PTP youth with the 44 youth in the control group. The study also examined process and outcome measures available within the project group including: model implementation and services, changes over time on key domains such as child behavior, development of family connections, and in-depth case studies of five youth.

The Findings: PTP staff worked with teens to reconnect with significant others. Connections believed likely to endure were established with siblings, biological mother and/or father, grandparents, aunts/uncles, prior foster parents, and other adults/mentors.

At the end of the project, five youth were living independently, one was in supported independent community living, and one had turned 18 and returned to his biological mother.

There were difficulties with data management but the study showed a slight statistical advantage for the PTP group – slightly fewer subsequent placements, slightly more stability.

The researchers did expand the definition of “permanency” to include not only legal and placement status, but “a multifaceted construct which includes several key dimensions including a youth’s legal status, stability in and appropriateness of the placement setting, connection to family and significant others, and the youth’s emotional well-being and preparedness for adulthood”.

R2Practice: This research supports altering the definition of permanency planning to include maintaining connections or reconnecting youth to significant others.

Loman, L.A. & Siegel, G.L. (2000). Evaluation of Independent Living Services in Ohio. St. Louis, MO: The Institute of Applied Research.

The Study: This is an evaluation of existing independent living services in Ohio.

Programs and services include:

- Daniel Memorial Institute Independent Living Assessment For Life Skills
- Curriculum for life skills varies but most utilize classroom training
- Educational services – very little college prep, GED available in most counties
- Foster parent training uneven, some specialized foster parents, competency based curriculum was being developed
- Four types of transitional living arrangements:
 - Separate areas of residential facilities
 - Transitional group homes
 - Supervised apartments or boarding
 - Semi-supervised apartment or boarding
- Specialized programs for pregnant teens and teen parents

The Method: This evaluation included a literature review, an inventory of programs and services, a survey of youths and caseworkers, and a needs assessment with private and public representatives.

Findings: Problems and barriers identified in the literature review were:

- Poor relationships with nuclear and extended families but most return
- Minority maintain relationship with foster providers
- Emotional and behavior problems
- High birth rate among females
- Low high school graduation rate
- Youth lack a continuum of life skills training
- Low employment rates

Recommendations include:

- Specialized educational support
- Life skills emphasize informal structures v. formal classroom – mentoring homes, begin earlier than 16 Individualized planning and provision of services by specialized personnel
- Coordination with MR/DD re: special needs
- Mental health/ substance abuse prevention/treatment services
- Health insurance and primary care services
- Transitional living arrangements
- Aftercare
- Develop portable regional programs, ex: life skills training

R2Practice: This study identified gaps in services and gives the impression that existing services are not adequate. There are several implications for practice including early and individualized case planning and utilizing less formal training venues.

Mech, E. & Leonard, E.L. (2003). Effectiveness of Mentors for Adolescents in Placement. In E.V. Mech and J.J.Gill (eds.) Uncertain Futures: Foster Youth in Transition to Adulthood, pp. 163-178. Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America Press.

The Study: Data was gathered from 29 programs in 15 states.

The Method: In-person interviews were conducted with 280 mentors and 272 mentees. Pairs of mentors and mentees rated the match on a series of eight factors: goals, skill development, responsiveness, trust, improvement in school performance, readiness for independent living, satisfaction with match, and effect on mentee development.

Findings: Overall cumulative scores indicated 60% of matches were very successful. Cross-racial matches were associated with higher level of failure.

Over 100 points separated mentors and mentees on effect of mentees with mentors rating effects lower than mentees. The readiness for Independent Living was difficult to rate with this gap in mentor perspective and mentee's view. "The message that foster youth mentees appear to be sending is that mentors are helpful and are having a positive effect on youth. Mentors apparently are unaware of the value that many mentees place on the relationship." (p. 169)

Study indicates that effective matching is possible. Older mentors were more successful than those younger than age 35. Cross-racial matches were less effective.

R2Practice: The study supports the value of mentoring for youth in foster care and gives valuable guidelines for matching mentor-mentee pairs.

Mech, E. & Che-Man Fung, C (2003). Preparing Adolescent Wards for Independence in Foster Family Settings. In E.V. Mech and J.J.Gill (eds.) Uncertain Futures: Foster Youth in Transition to Adulthood, pp. 109-124. Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America Press.

The Study: This research was conducted to determine which placement setting was most helpful in preparation for independent living .In a follow-up study with 390 foster youth in Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio at age 21, placements were rated according to the helpfulness related to IL.

Findings:

- 80% rated foster homes as most helpful placement in preparing for independence.
- “Foster homes are a vital threshold resource and an indispensable ally in preparing state wards for independence.” (p. 109)
- Foster home models discussed are transitional homes, the mentoring model, and the boarder model.

R2Practice: One implication is the need for preparing and training foster parents to teach developmental tasks and life skills. Also, the research indicates the need for exploring foster home models with specialized care and training focused on life skills.

Mech, E. (2003). Effectiveness of Transitional Apartments. In E.V. Mech and J.J.Gill (eds.) Uncertain Futures: Foster Youth in Transition to Adulthood, pp. 153-162. Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America Press.

The Study: This research explored the effectiveness of placement types. Data was collected from 500 older adolescents in out-of-home placements. Youth were interviewed at 18 and 21. Living arrangements were classified at the time of first interview.

The Method: Data collected included ratings of effectiveness of placement options according to youth, a life skills inventory using a multiple choice instrument, a case record review with emphasis on school grades, readiness for independent living using scores at age 18 and outcome indicators at age 21 including education, employment, and finances.

Findings: The most effective placements for preparation for Independent Living were foster family homes and scattered site apartments. Institutional facilities were rated lowest

R2Practice: Focus is needed to enhance services in the most effective placements such as foster homes and transitional apartments. There is, also, an inference for services targeting youth in institutional facilities such as residential group homes, etc.

Pacifici, C. (n.d.) Media-Based Instruction for Foster Teens: Building Life Skills for the Real World. Phase I Final Report. Eugene, OR: Northwest Media, Inc. Retrieved on line January, 2004 at <http://www.northwestmedia.com/research/vstreet-i.pdf>

The Study: This research explored the effectiveness of a video model of life skills instruction. A video, *The Apartment Hunt*, in two fifteen minute segments and a curriculum delivered in two 90 minute sessions, along with a set of instructional materials was evaluated to assess the impact on teenagers' knowledge, confidence and comfort in finding housing and foster parents' confidence and comfort in assisting. Both parents and teens participate in the curriculum.

The Methods: The sample included 45 pairs of foster teenagers and parents. The pairs were randomly assigned to intervention or control condition. Those in control group received no instruction. The two intervention groups met for instruction two times one week apart. Both groups completed an assessment battery just prior to the first session and just after the second session for the intervention group and one week apart for the control group.

The assessment battery included five measures:

- Apartment-hunting skills
- Confidence in apartment hunting
- Comfort with Foster Parents and Counselors
- Confidence in Helping with Apartment Hunting
- Comfort with Foster Teenagers Moving

The intervention group also completed an evaluation questionnaire.

The Findings: Researchers point out limitations in the study including short term data and non-standardized instruments used to gather data.

Preliminary analyses showed no significant group differences in the baseline measures on the assessment battery. There were statistically significant positive effects on every measure for the intervention group. The teens showed particular gains in knowledge. There were equivalent gains in confidence among parents for assisting teens with living arrangements.

One trend in gender differences indicated females with higher knowledge measures had less confidence and comfort. Another interesting difference was

that urban teens in CA were more confident with less knowledge than teens in Eugene, OR. IL coordinators found it difficult to gain participation by foster parents. Researchers recommend continued use of the curriculum with teens even when foster parents are not involved.

R2P Evaluation: This study points to a good resource for teaching this life skill. The recommendation for formal curriculum and instruction is counter to other studies and trends. It is possible that life skills may be categorized into those interrelated with activities of daily living and particular skills such as renting an apartment. The venue, curriculum, and teacher may be dictated by this categorization.

Pacifici, C. (n.d.). Media-Based Instruction for Foster Teens: Building Life Skills for the Real World. Phase II Final Report. Eugene, OR: Northwest Media, Inc.

Retrieved January, 2004 at <http://www.northwestmedia.com/research/il-ii.pdf>

The Study: This study is an evaluation of an instructional curriculum including six core areas: Money Management, Job skills/Career planning, Educational Planning, Legal Skills, Food and Nutrition, and Health. Other topics integrated with the core topics are Interpersonal skills, Conflict Resolution, Decision-making Skills, consumerism, Working with Mentors, Discrimination, and Housekeeping Skills.

This curriculum uses the Phase I model of video, classroom sessions using curriculum, and instructional materials.

The Methods: One difference is the use of peer groups of teens rather than inclusion of foster parents as in Phase I. Three focus groups were used to gather information. One group included foster parents, providers, and child welfare professionals Two groups included foster teens.

The study encountered difficulty in recruiting subjects and determined to use a sample of Oregon teens that they pretested twice prior to the intervention. Intervention group results on the pretest were compared with posttest results with one unit of instruction between comparison points. The control group results were compared between first and second pretest with no instruction.

The instructional model includes 30 minute video dramatization, a tool for discovering teen's wants and needs, learning and rehearsing skills, documents and applications, and peer group discussion.

Analyses for each unit focused on three dependent variables and each was measured 3 times:

- Knowledge about IL skills

- Confidence in using IL skills
- Comfort in communicating with foster parents, mentors and counselors

Questionnaires were pilot tested with test of face validity, feedback, changes, analysis of internal reliability and test-retest reliability.

Participants, also, completed a Background Information Questionnaire and both students and teachers completed Feedback Questionnaires.

The Findings: No significant difference was demonstrated in using the parametric t-test procedures of pretest scores for any of the three measures, knowledge, confidence, or comfort. The findings on pre-post analyses were mixed with the best results for the money management unit. There were mixed results on the health segment and no apparent improvement by the use of the legal unit.

The researchers reported the satisfaction reported by students and teachers as balancing the poor results.

The study was limited by the difficulty in recruitment and retention of youth sample and by the need to limit the study to three of the seven curriculum units.

R2Practice: The research on this broader curriculum of seven units produced by Northwest Media produced mixed results. Based on other research and anecdotal evidence, several questions may be asked related to the curricula. Is the classroom setting best for teaching all life skills? Or only some life skills? Is it possible that apartment hunting and money management are more appropriate for classroom setting than for example health? Is this curriculum appropriate for training foster parents related to the skills and issues? Did Northwest lose some effectiveness by altering Phase 2 to exclude parent-teen groups?

The high rate of satisfaction reported by teens with the materials may indicate their usefulness in the online, self-teaching format. A local program might want to enhance this with parental guidelines for interaction with teens about the units.

Pacifici, C. (n.d.). An Independent Living Skills Program for Foster Parents and Teens. Phase I Final Report. Eugene, OR: Northwest Media, Inc. Retrieved January, 2004 at <http://www.northwestmedia.com/research/fpil-i.pdf>

The Study: This research evaluated the impact of a video program designed as a home-based training program to equip foster parents as teachers of IL skills. The video products included a 16 minute video, *Teaching Moments: How Can Parents Teach Life Skills to Teens*, focusing on foster parents as teachers of IL skills. The method is MAP, Modeling, Assisting, and Practicing. A 12-minute

video, *Teach Teens Cooking: Planning A Meal* using the instructional model in one area of life skills

The Methods: A sample of 41 parents and 41 teenagers were included in the data analysis. The sample was small due to attrition of foster teens moving and to disincentives such as investment of time, etc. The sample was strengthened by including foster teens paired with parents. The other sample limitation is that all foster parents were female.

Parent-teen pairs were randomly assigned to a treatment or control group. The format of the standard Parent Daily Report(PDR) developed by Chamberlain and Reid was extensively modified for use in measuring general parenting practices as well as measuring short-term parenting behavior. A Teen Daily Report (TDR) was created to complement the PDR.

Dependent variables measured on the PDR:

General Parenting Practices

- Beliefs
- Current Teaching
- Life Skills List
- Best Practices
- Obstacles

Recent Parent Behavior:

- Teaching Now
- Life Skills List
- Parent Initiated Activity
- Teen Initiated Activity
- Teaching Opportunity
- Teaching Steps
- Teen Receptivity

Dependent Variables measured on the TDR:

General Parenting Practices:

- Beliefs
- Current Teaching
- Life Skills list
- Best Practices
- Obstacles

Recent Parent Behavior:

- Teaching Now
- Life Skills List
- Teaching Quality
- Parent Initiated Activity

- Teen Initiated Activity

Participants, also, completed a background information questionnaire that was administered during the first phone interview. Foster parents completed a participant satisfaction questionnaire after the final phone interview.

The Findings: Researchers reported both significant effects and non-significant trends since this was a pilot study with a small sample size. Significant information included the fact that 68% of foster parents, who had been foster parents for an average 8 years, had received no previous training in teaching living skills to foster children.

The findings in favor of the intervention are based on effect size calculations rather than statistical significance. The intervention group showed greater improvements in parenting practices and recent behaviors than the control group. The intervention group showed greater improvement after viewing the tapes in best parenting practices and greater motivation to teach life skills more often. However, all parents in both groups reported using fewer best practices over time. This may be related to an unexpected result of teen resistance to new practices. However, teens whose parents had viewed the tapes reported less resistance.

Parents in the intervention group made more efforts reporting increased teen and parent initiated activity. They also used the MAP model more frequently. They still encountered more resistance from teens. Researchers hypothesized this may be related to the intervention not moving parents away from a special time or emphasis on teaching skills and toward integrating teaching with activities of daily living.

Teens in the intervention group had improved outcomes except for their perceptions of parents' general skills.

The research is not definitive due to limitations of the current study but points to positive trends. The level of participant satisfaction was very high and over 90% of intervention group said they would like to receive more of this type of training.

R2Practice: This research points to the effective trends of video learning by foster parents and highlights the gap in training foster parents as teachers of life skills. It, also, points out teen resistance to "formal" training and supports the integration of training to daily life and mentoring approaches verses instructional approaches. This finding may point to a needed change or tweaking of the instructional model with more emphasis on integration of parental skills.

Pecora, P.J., Williams, J., Kessler, R.C., Downs, A.C., O'Brien, K., Hiripi, E., & Morello, S. (2003). Assessing the Effects of Foster Care: Early Results from the Casey National Alumni Study. Retrieved January, 2004 at http://www.casey.org/Documents/casey_alumni_studies_report.pdf

The Study: The study sample included 1,609 alumni served by the 23 Casey Field offices in operation in 1998. All of the youth served by Casey Family Programs offices between 1966 and 1998 were included in the study sample if they met the following criteria:

- Had been placed with a Casey foster family for 12 months or more; and
- Had been discharged from foster care at least 12 months previously.

The interview response rate was 73%.

The Methods: The study includes data about child maltreatment, birth-family functioning, foster care services, current mental health functioning, and a wide range of adult outcomes; descriptive data regarding alumni characteristics and outcomes; and differences between the Casey alumni and the general population.

Findings: Recommendations, related to independent living services, based on early results:

- Life skills development should be one of the major casework goals.
- Youth and alumni involvement in developing program
- Apply an overall practice framework
- Use practical assessment tools
- Use low-cost life skills curricula
- Know how to help youth access practical skill-building experiences such as volunteer and employment internships

R2Practice: This survey points out the importance of integrating life skills development to case planning and offering practical assistance.

Sheehy, Jr., A. M., Oldham, E., Zanghi, M., & Ansell, D. (2001). Promising Practices: Supporting Transition of Youth Served by the Foster Care System. Portland, ME: Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service, University of Southern Maine.

The Study: Ninety-eight independent living programs for youth in foster care were surveyed for this study to determine the utilization of practices identified as important for successful outcomes. The promising practices identified were:

- A youth development philosophy;
- A clearly defined life skills instruction component;

- Educational supports aimed at helping youth achieve
- Educational goals;
- An employment component;
- A component that helps youth establish community linkages;
- A supervised independent living component;
- Health services that prepare youth to manage their own
- Medical/dental/mental health needs;
- Preparation for adulthood counseling activities;
- Youth development activities;
- Comprehensive aftercare services;
- An on-going training component for program staff, and,
- An on-going program evaluation component.

The Findings: The researchers changed “promising practices” to “suggested practices” because of the lack of current research on IL programs. The suggested practices are:

- Providing youth with information about a core set of life skills and opportunities to practice skills in a “real world” environment.
- Helping the youth establish a relationship with a mentor or staff member who can provide support after emancipation
- Helping youth resolve issues with their family of origin
- Integrating youth development philosophies into services
- Increasing services in the areas of vocational training, computer training, long-term educational goals, and driver's education.
- Collecting data about activities, developing uniform reporting systems with a common language describing services, and designing evaluation measures

R2Practice: This study highlights the lack of research specific to IL practice. There is reinforcement of the recommendations for a developmental approach, practical approaches to life skills, and a strong recommendation for evaluative steps.

Southward, L. & (2003). Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment Reliability Report. Starkville, MS: Mississippi State University. Report available from Casey Family Program, Dr. A. Chris Downs.

The Study: This was a study of the reliability of individual items on the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Short Form and the ACLSA I, II, and III conducted by Mississippi State University’s Social Science Research Center under contract with Casey Family Program. (NOTE – the ACLSA is the tool used by all Casey Family Programs and widely used in other IL programs.)

The Method: A convenience sample of 80 youth in a rural Mississippi county was administered three levels of the ACLSA and the Short Form during September, 2000. The sample was comparable according to race/ethnicity to the larger population of the county. The school district from which the youth were recruited has a higher proportion of African Americans than the nation and has a lower median income than state or nation.

Missing data was a problem in the study and was attributed to lack of reading skills among 8 to 10 year olds, group administration, and lack of assistance in completing assessments. The research used mean substitution on the Short Form, substituting the individual's average score across answered items for missing data. For missing data in ACLSA I, II, and III all cases that lacked 15 percent of responses at Time 1 and 2 were deleted. The sample for ACLSA I was reduced but not for ACLSA II or III.

The Findings:

ACLSA Short Form:

Some items were more reliable for the younger sub-sample and some more reliable for older sub-sample. Some items were unreliable for both age groups. The reliability for a summated score on all responses was .76 with the subsample reliability for younger teens slightly lower.

ACLSA I Form (8-10 years old):

Findings should be viewed cautiously due to youngsters' difficulty in completing the ACLSA. Reliability for individual tests items was variable. Several items in the self care section were unreliable. Items with higher reliability had in common essential life skills for which students likely had received feedback. Internal consistency for the ACLSA I at the second administration (Time 2) ranges from .64 for the Self Care scale to .82 for Social Development.

ACLSA II Form (11-14 years old):

Highest # of non-responses was to the #1 in Self Care scale – "I can contact places around where I live to get information on sex or pregnancy." Generally items on this form were reliable but no scales exceeded .70, the minimum standard for acceptable reliability.

ACLSA III Form (15-18 years old):

All scale correlations approach or exceed .70. However four out of six subscales change significantly in test/retest. Researchers suggest older students may have thought about questions in two weeks between administration of the form.

Performance questions on ACLSA Forms II and III:

Performance scores ranged from 25 – 100 percent. Only two items in ACLSA III approached .7 reliability.

Conclusions of researchers:

The ACLSA Short Form appears to be more reliable than the ACLSA I,II, and III which are much more variable.

Confidence in reliability of ACLSA II and II Forms is higher than ACLSA I due to difficulties with missing data on ACLSA I. Any interpretation of ACLSA I results should be cautious.

R2Practice: The ACLSA which seems to be the most widely used assessment should be used as one part of individual assessment and corroborated by observations of caregivers, caseworker's evaluation, other assessment tools, and youth input obtained by other means than written assessment. This research may, also, indicate the importance of rotating various tools in order to minimize internal bias.

Thompson, L. A. & Kelly-Vance, L. (2001). The Impact of Mentoring on Academic Achievement of At-Risk Youth. Children and Youth Services Review, 23(3), 227-242.

The Study: This research distinguishes between natural and planned mentoring. Participants in Big Brothers/Sisters program were surveyed. The sample included only Caucasian participants. All were from single parent homes.

The Method: The K-Tea Brief form was used for data collection.

The Findings: Boys in mentoring relationships showed significantly improved academic performance. The results include the effect of well-established infrastructure of the agency.

R2Practice: Mentoring programs should consider the research available related to matching, effectiveness, and population. This study points out the need for more research on effectiveness.

United States General Accounting Office. Foster Care: Effectiveness of Independent Living Services, GAO/HEHS-00-13. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved on line January, 2004 at <http://www.gao.gov/archive/2000/he00013.pdf>

The Study: This is a report of the features and problems of Independent Living programs in the states which was prepared to provide information to the U.S. Congress.

The Method: Researchers reviewed the independent living literature, analyzed the annual Independent Living Program reports from 46 states, surveyed all 50 states, and made site visits to four: California, Maryland, New York, and Texas..

The Findings: While all states provide services designed to prepare foster youth for independence and most (86%) also offer some form of transitional (i.e., post-discharge) services, there is scant research assessing program effectiveness. The researchers did find some studies targeting youth satisfaction and outcomes of services. These include the following:

Wayne County Michigan: survey of 61 youth currently receiving services judged housing and health care services more effective than employment services.

Nevada: survey of 26 youths indicated over 50 percent was dissatisfied with independent living services.

North Carolina: Comparison of participants in IL Services with non-participants showed more pronounced progressive movement toward independent living by participants.

Other programs showing positive outcomes for participants in IL services: Baltimore County, Harris County (Houston, TX) and Green Chimneys Children's Services in NY City.

The report recommends that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services take greater responsibility for establishing common data elements and concrete measures of IL program effectiveness and for sharing outcome information among the states.

R2Practice: The GAO reports indicate that youth are making progress in many programs but, also, exposed gaps in services and dissatisfaction among youth.

Zanghi, M., Detgen, A., Jordan, P.A. Ansell, D. & Kessler, M.L. (2003). Promising Practices: How Foster Parents Can Support the Successful Transition of Youth from Foster Care to Self-Sufficiency. Portland, ME: University of Southern Maine: Edmund S.Muskie School of Public Service, National Resource Center for Organizational Improvement. Retrieved on line January, 2004 at <http://muskie.usm.maine.edu/helpkids/rcpdfs/prompract2.pdf>

The Study: The goal of the study was to discover the most promising practices foster parents can use in assisting youth in transitioning to adulthood.

The Method: A sample of foster parents labeled by independent living coordinators as successful in assisting youth in transition was surveyed. Sixty-two foster parents responded to the survey. The majority of respondents were Maine residents. Interviews and site visits were conducted based on clusters of foster homes.

The Findings: The results are specific to the experience of this small sample but provide valuable information.

Successful foster parents define boundaries, are advocates, and seek needed services. They are comfortable with long term goals and guided by a belief system that does not demand immediate rewards. They value family experience and are committed to children. They are teachable and seek information and training as needed.

The research describes successful foster parents in the following roles each day: coach, networker, advocate, and facilitator of relationships.

The majority of successful foster parents reported deliberately and actively engaging youth in their care in activities focused on building competence in essential life skills. These included budgeting, paying bills, educational planning, advocacy and support, and identifying and networking with service providers.

The report mentions core principles and promising practices for agencies, foster parents, and youth as well as recommendations for evaluation of programs.

R2Practice: This extensive study highlights the need for considering the role of foster parents in teaching life skills during recruitment, training, and on-going support of foster parent role.