SAFETY NET: COLLABORATING TO SERVE EMANCIPATED FOSTER YOUTH

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SAFETY NET: COLLABORATING TO SERVE EMANCIPATED FOSTER YOUTH

A Project

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Abstract of SAFETY NET: COLLABORATING TO SERVE EMANCIPATED FOSTER YOUTH by Linda Garrett

Statistics regarding youth who age out of the Foster Care System show that many fail to succeed on their own which leads to them facing homelessness, imprisonment, gang involvement, and other negative outcomes due to the lack of support.

Despite new legislation to provide funding for Independent living programs for youth who age out of Foster Care and a plethora of available after care program options, many former foster youth find themselves in dire situations, ill prepared to survive on their own.

The purpose of this project is the development of a community program to serve emancipated foster youth after they complete an independent living program. Providing this ongoing support to this population will aid in their successful transition to adulthood.

____________________, Committee Chair
Dr. Lisa William-White

____________________
Date
DEDICATION

To Ennis S. Johnson, II – the twinkle of your eye, your radiant smile, your infectious laugh, your loving demeanor, will always bring joy to my life. I will love you FOREVER.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The journey to this point has been challenging and enriching. I must thank Quick and Florida Garrett and Clarence and Maude Hinkle for instilling the necessity to serve in my parents, who went on to instill that same necessity to serve in me. And to my parents, Leonard and Clara Garrett, who have always supported me in my every endeavor.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Foster parents are meant to act in place of birth parents. They are supposed to impart the lessons to their charges, lessons that will carry them successfully into adulthood. By the time a foster child reaches eighteen, they should have been taught about self-respect and self-determination, budgets and bank accounts, respect for the law and respect for your fellowman, and equipped with the tools needed to succeed on their own. Unlike those youth who grow up with their birth parents, once they turn 18, many youth, do not have a place to go for help when they are faced with obstacles or struggles. They do not have an arsenal of information that was deposited by a caring and loving parent to draw from to help them get through a challenging time. All they have are the memories of a broken home and an abusive or neglectful parent, and a successive line of foster homes in which they have resided since their removal from a parent’s home.

Statistics show that there are some 542,000 children and youth in foster care in the United States. In California, approximately 4,000 of these youth are emancipated each year. Former foster youth face a plethora of negative outcomes, in California: 65% emancipate without a place to live, less than 3% attend college, 51% are jobless, and emancipated females are 4 times more likely to receive public assistance than the general population. While foster children only comprise 0.3% of the population, they comprise 40% of the nation’s homeless population; they also are disproportionately represented in the prison population (Betz, 2010; California Wellness Foundation, 2007; Geenen & Powers, 2007; Georgiades, 2005a; Lemon, Hines, & Merdinger, 2005; Mech & Fung,
While there are many current provisions to address the needs of emancipating youth, once emancipated they still face the harsh realities of living on their own without a safety net.

Foster children come from backgrounds filled with trauma. A child who grows up in foster care and eventually “ages out” of the system has often endured a great deal of heartache. Vacca (2008) points out that four years after a youth emancipates, 46% will not have finished high school, 25% will be homeless, 42% will become parents and fewer than 20% will be self-supporting. Foster children also tend to lack continuity in their educational experience due to placement disruptions that require them to move when classes are in session. Foster children often experience interruptions in their direct instruction requiring them to adjust to different teachers, courses, school rules and expectations.

Hatton and Brooks (2009) note that former foster youth have higher rates of high school drop-out, are at a greater risk for homelessness upon exiting foster care, are at greater risk of hospitalization due to injury, greater risk for juvenile justice or criminal involvement, and greater risk for morbidity or mortality. Current statistics paint a bleak picture of outcomes for former foster youth. The National Association of Governors (2010) report on the transition to adulthood included these statistics from the Chapin Hall Midwest Study:

- Approximately 25% of foster youth do not obtain a high school diploma or General Education Development (GED) by age 23 or 24.
• Only six percent of former foster youth complete a two- or four-year degree by age 23 or 24.

• Median yearly income from employment among foster youth $8000 compared to non-Foster youth the same age whose earned on average $18,300.

• Fifty-seven percent of foster youth had medical coverage compared to 78 percent in the general population.

• Twenty-four percent of former foster youth had been homeless at least once.

• Eighty-one percent of male foster youth had been arrested by age 23 or 24.

• Seventy-seven percent of female foster youth had been pregnant by age 23 or 24.

• Two-thirds of female and 27 percent of male foster youth receive food stamps.

The poor outcomes for former foster youth is very costly to states. It is estimated that the cost of each annual cohort that emancipates from the foster care system is about $5.7 billion. These costs come from lost earnings (and thus lost revenues), criminal justice system expenditures, and unplanned pregnancy costs, such as government cash assistance and health programs.

Most youth at eighteen have community and family support that they take for granted. They have at least one relative who can lend money or offer a place to live. They
have parents who cover them on insurance or co-sign loans. They have teachers or other adults who offer guidance, advice and emotional support. This is not the case for most foster youth.

Foster youth often leave care disconnected from supportive adults, services, and economic support that would increase their opportunities to become productive, self-supporting citizens. Because foster youth have histories of abuse and neglect, many youth leaving foster care have physical, mental health, and developmental issues that raise the importance of having caring adults to support them and provide guidance (Avery, 2010).

When a youth from an intact family graduates, he or she receives a party, a computer, or a car. When foster youth turn 18 and receive a diploma, they lose their housing, support, and medical assistance as a reward. (Vacca, 2008, p. 488)

Independent living programs are a likely referral for foster youth who are identified as more “at-risk” because of educational and placement instabilities and no family support. Foster youth with “at-risk” behavior are more likely to come to the attention of caseworkers than other youth, because of this, they are referred to independent living programs at a higher rate. Those youth with more foster care placements are generally less ready for independent living. Independent living services target youth with placement instability or who reside in non-relative placements because those youth have an increased risk of failure due to the lack of life skills (Lemon, Hines & Merdinger, 2005).

Independent living programs, in many counties, are provided by outside agencies who contract with the county. The agencies develop their own curriculum and are funded
based on the number of youth that attend workshops. The biggest issue with this format is that agencies become more interested in making sure that youth show up for workshops, then the content of the workshops. In one instance in Solano county, a former foster youth reported that the Independent Living Program was a “waste of time” because the program did not actually teach the concrete skills but instead chose to show movies (Votaw & Powell, 2005).

Independent life skills programs are meant to teach foster youth concrete skills that will aid them in their transition to adulthood. Independent Living Programs teach foster youth how to open a bank account, find jobs, budget money, balance a checkbook, and find a place to live. In addition to concrete skills, programs also teach how to ask for help, how to achieve goals and how to find opportunities for training and education. These programs are supposed to aid foster youth in their transition to independent living. While many youth do partake in the available programs, it appears to have had minimal impact on their outcomes, once they are out of the child welfare system. This would suggest that while the programs are trying to prepare youth for independence, the reality of independence is far more challenging then what the classes cover. Too often agencies focus on “preventing negative outcomes, rather than supporting positive outcomes, such as initiating a career or pursuing additional education or training” (Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006).

Child welfare workers have a growing list of mandates and priorities to manage, in addition to a growing list of children in need of their services. They want to do what is
best for each child but this task becomes harder to do with growing caseloads and shrinking budgets.

The transition time from adolescence to adulthood is challenging regardless of the circumstances—i.e., two parent home, single parent home, poverty, affluence, or foster care. It is a time where the average youth believes they know everything and they long to be independent. Usually it is not until out on their own for the first time, that youth realize what they do not know what skills they are lacking and what help they will require. For youth outside of foster care, they have a safety net. They have parents or relatives they can contact for help or often have the option of returning home to regroup before they strike out on their own again. For foster youth, ready or not, when they hit their states magic age, whether it be eighteen or twenty-one, they are released from the system. This release is not based on proper preparation or obtaining the necessary tools and skills to make it on your own, but only on age. An agency does not have to identify a permanent residence for foster youth, there are reported cases of youth being release to hospitals, homeless shelters, colleges and jail. If parents across the United States started to “release” their children at the age of eighteen and require them to pack up and move out, to find their way never to return; we would have a big problem. Yet, every state who has taken over the parenting responsibilities for foster children, does that same thing, every day. This is a very expensive practice because not only does it cost former foster youth, it is very expensive for states to support these youth who have not be properly equipped to live independently. If states would consider spending a bit more money at the
outset, and holding agencies that serve the foster population accountable for the services they provide, it could actually prove to be the most economical option.

FOSTER YOUTH

The current research on former foster youth paints a bleak picture of a growing group of adolescents who group in the child welfare system, only to wander aimlessly from one placement to another. This group has experienced abuse, loss and trauma. They find few people that they can consistently count on. Once emancipated from foster care, they endure high rates of homelessness, poverty, early parenting, criminal justice involvement and low rates of education attainment. The current research would lead you to believe that these youth are doomed. Not true.

I believe as Krebs and Pitcoff (2006) that all teens in foster care have the potential to successfully live as participating citizens and reach their personal and career potential. We must do a better job of preparing former foster youth for success. We must provide them with access to services and support beyond their eighteenth birthday. When the State ends their birth parents parental rights and ostensibly becomes their parent, then the State is obligated to parent them until they reach self-sufficiency. The road to self-sufficiency will look different for each person. Some will need more support than others will.

The creation of a safety net to catch those foster youth who are struggling with their independence or those who are slipping through the cracks is needed. The first step in this process should be listening to the foster youth, they are incredibly adept at
articulating what they need, but too often because of their age or how they express themselves, we discount their requests. Secondly, once a foster youth has emancipated from the child welfare system, they are adults, so we must stop treating them like children, seeking to dictate to them what they really need. Lastly, we must equip them; we have to arm them with the tools needed to communicate, to seek assistance, to respect and be respected, to overcome obstacles and thrive even in the face of adversity. We must ensure that these youth are provided with the support needed to become productive citizens. The benefits of meeting this challenge far outweigh the costs.
STUDY LIMITATION

The study is based solely on previous research, now new data was collected. I am confident that previous research conducted gleaned a suitable amount of narrative data that can be used to support the project. However, if new narratives were obtained it could have added a fresh perspective on a growing issue. Each generation of emancipated youth is faced with a changing and evolving set of issues.

Independent living programs do not have standardized curriculums, but the programs are all charged with the same task—prepare foster youth to succeed after leaving foster care. All young adults leaving emancipating from the foster care system are supposed to be offered access and information about Independent Living programs.

The purpose of my project is to develop a program that will provide support to emancipated foster youth once they have completed an Independent Living program. The program would serve these young adults in the communities in which they live and utilize volunteers from local churches. In addition, the program would seek to give these young adults, advocates who would work with them to achieve a successful transition to adulthood and increase positive outcomes.

KEY TERMS

Abandonment

The failure of a parent to adequately provide for the financial support for a child and an unjustified failure to maintain, or attempt to maintain, contact or a parental relationship
with the child. Abandonment is judged over a period of time, which varies in different states; but the time period to prove legal abandonment is usually between 6 months and one year.

Abuse

The use or treatment of someone or something that is seen as harmful. Abuse of a person can be physical, sexual, emotional, verbal, or a combination of any or all of those. Abuse of a substance may involve alcohol or drugs.

Advocate

A person who speaks up on behalf of themselves or someone else in an effort to gain services or things.

Agency

The organization responsible for providing services while a child or youth is in foster care. Agencies may have names such as Child Protective Services (CPS), Department of Human Services (DHS), or Child and Family Services (CFS) and may be run by the county, state or by a private organization.

Aging Out

When a youth emancipates or leaves foster care because he/she turns a certain age, such as eighteen or twenty-one (depending on the laws of the state they live in). Aging out usually results in loss of support from the State for things such as foster care payments, housing, living costs and health services.

Caregiver

A person who has the responsibility to care for a young person in foster
Case Plan
A plan that the foster care agency, along with the youth and family, makes and updates regularly. It includes the services provided to the youth and family, and makes clear the expectations and progress made toward reaching the goals for the child or youth.

Caseworker
Works with youth and their families to provide services and support, with the goal of permanent placement for the youth.

Chafee
An abbreviation for the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, named after John H. Chafee, the U.S. Senator responsible for introducing legislation that offers assistance to help current and former youth in foster care achieve self-sufficiency. The legislation provides funds for Independent Living Programs and Education and Training Vouchers for higher education.

Child Protective Services
Works with children, youth and families (sometimes the children and youth are still in their homes) to assess, investigate and provide ongoing social services to families where abuse and neglect of youth has been reported.

Education and Training Voucher
Provides Federal Chafee funds for young people from foster care to support their higher education. In most cases, funds can help pay for a Trade or Vocational school, housing, transportation, books, fees and other costs related to education. See also Chafee.
Emancipation

A youth who is legally declared an adult (by a court) prior to age 18. A youth in foster care who emancipates is no longer a ward of the court (or in foster care).

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse can be difficult to pin down because there may not be physical signs. Emotional abuse happens when yelling and anger go too far or when an individual is criticized, threatened, or dismissed until their self-esteem and feelings of self-worth are damaged. Emotional abuse can hurt and cause damage just as physical abuse does.

Foster Care

Placing a child in the temporary care of a family other than its own as the result of problems or challenges that are taking place within the birth family.

Group Home

A home or facility where a number of unrelated young people live with house parents or rotating staff (caregivers). More specialized therapeutic or treatment group homes have specially-trained staff to assist children with emotional and behavioral difficulties. The make-up and staffing of the group home can be adapted to meet the unique needs of its residents.

Independent Living Program

ILP is a program designed to provide support and services to young people preparing to transition from foster care to life on their own. Services often include training for employment, education, housing, relationships, health and other daily living skills.
Life Skills
Abilities that are helpful to a young person to possess or gain to ensure a successful transition to adulthood. These include skills and knowledge pertaining to employment, housing and home life, money management, health and self care, relationships, education, and daily living.

Mentor
Somebody, usually older and with more experience, who provides advice and support to a young person.

Placement
This term is used to describe the point in time when a young person goes to live in a foster home, group home, or other temporary living arrangement.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
A very strong stress reaction that can develop after a traumatic event. Abuse, witnessing or experiencing any type of personal or environmental disaster, or being threatened with an assault can lead to PTSD. Symptoms may include: strong emotions, jitters, and trouble sleeping, eating, or concentrating. A person with PTSD might experience frequent thoughts and images of what happened, nightmares, or fears. The right care and support can reduce or eliminate these symptoms and allow a person to move on.

Residential Facility
A structured care facility with highly trained staff that provide services to young people to overcome behavioral, emotional, mental, or psychological problems that have had harmful impacts on family life, school achievement, and peer relationship.
Social Worker

A licensed professional who gives children and families support. Social workers play a key role in the recruitment of qualified foster parents, placing children in supportive homes, and coordinating available resources for families.

Transition From Care

When a young person leaves foster care, whether through reunification, adoption, or emancipation. See also Emancipation and Aging Out.

Transition Plan

A structured plan for services and supports for a young person who will emancipate (or “age out”) of the foster care system to life on their own. The goal is to assure a young person’s safety and health as they adjust to supporting themselves as a young adult.

Transitional Living Program

A service, usually including housing, provided to young people who are in the process of aging out of foster care or have recently emancipated from the system.

Tuition Waiver

A program provide by some states that allows current and former foster youth to attend publicly funded colleges and higher education institutions without paying (or with a substantial reduction of) tuition and fees.
INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAMS

[It can’t be] assume[d] that an 18-year-old, either in foster care or not, is going to be ready to go out and get their own apartment, get a job, live on their own and support themselves.

Even if you are very adaptable, which most people aren’t, and you start to do really well in the congregate care facility, there is still this day when you are not going to live there anymore. The decision to leave home is hard even in a family but here you have a situation where there isn’t a lot of personalized care or individual planning – you are asking these kids to decide to be discharged at 18 or 21 with no one to go back to. (Freundlich & Avery, 2006)

Youth who are transitioning from foster care into adulthood are often filled with trepidation and despair. Most have spent the majority of their formative years under the supervision of the Child Welfare System; all ended up in the care of the system because of traumatic events in their own birth families. Permanence planning for youth in foster care is a challenge for social workers, even though they know that it is needed for youth to succeed once emancipated.

Independent living program legislation was developed in 1986 following a class action lawsuit that was filed in New York by former foster wards of the city. The former foster wards lived homeless as adults on the streets and charged that the city’s child
welfare system failed to prepare them to successfully live independently. The courts held that the New York Department was liable for the many deficiencies experienced by the plaintiffs in adulthood, like illiteracy, unemployment, substance abuse and homelessness. Independent Living Programs are geared toward youth in foster care who are nearing the age of majority and who have no permanency plans for family reunification or adoption. Independent living programs provide instruction on the basics of everyday living, for example, housekeeping, nutrition, money management, high school completion, and employment preparation (Georgiades, 2005b).

Independent living programs generally utilize social skills training techniques like, instruction, modeling, role play and feedback. Training is usually conducted in group settings, while individual support (mentoring) may be provided on a one-to-one basis. Independent living programs are generally offered in community centers, group homes, independent tenancies, transitional placements, and supervised practice placements (Montgomery, Donkoh & Underhill, 2006).

Every state offers some kind of Independent Living Skills program for youth in foster care. The goal of the programs is to equip youth with the skills needed to live successfully after leaving the child welfare system. Living successfully is generally defined as: obtaining at least a high school diploma/GED; obtaining employment; obtaining a place to live; avoiding early pregnancy; and avoiding interactions with law enforcement. Most programs do not push college attendance, preferring to concentrate on obtaining basic skills and maintaining entry level employment. Even with the available Independent Living Skills programs, not all emancipating foster youth are being served
and those who are served do not always avoid the pitfalls that come with the adult transition. Studies have shown that youth who age out of the system face unemployment and underemployment, in addition, they are at greater risk of poverty and rely on public assistance (Freundlich & Avery, 2006).

EMERGING ADULTHOOD

The transitional period from adolescence to adulthood has been called the time of “emerging adulthood” (Avery, 2010, p. 400). Emerging adulthood describes the period from about 18 to 25 years of age that describes certain common features that differ from adolescence and that precedes young adulthood. During this time period, progress toward independence is “made rather than achieved” (p. 400). There are three developmental domains identified in the transition to adulthood:

- Cognitive Domain: it is characterized by the development of adult reasoning, which includes logical reasoning, subjective feelings, personal experiences, a sense of responsibility to others, and interdependence within the larger society.
- Emotional Domain: characterized by the development of autonomy from one’s parents (not complete separation), and ability to establish intimacy in adult relationships.
- Behavioral Domain: characterized by the establishment of firm impulse control and complying with social conventions.

Research shows that even though some adolescents may be able to exhibit identical levels of cognitive ability as adults in decision making, often they make different decisions.
Adolescents are more likely to be influenced by the emotions of the moment and then desire for peer acceptance, than adults (Avery & Freundlich, 2009). As we enter the 21st century, the transition to adulthood for teens in the U.S. has become longer, more complex and uncertain. The median age for marriage, completing school, and becoming a parent has risen. Young adults well into their 20s juggle work and school and continue to live at home with parents; postponing marriage and beginning their own nuclear family. Research indicates that few young people are ready to assume adult roles and live independently before they reach their mid-twenties (Avery, 2010).

Young people who are forced from the child welfare system when they reach 18, are of special interest from a developmental perspective because they are required to negotiate the transition to adulthood without the guarantee of continuing support. Emancipation from foster care represents a discontinuity in care. For the average adolescent, maintaining connections to parental figures and being able to rely upon them in times of need contribute to positive adjustment through the transition to adulthood. While many young people may leave their parents during the transition to adulthood, often they may return to reside in the family home, using it like a safety net or a base for launching into new roles. In addition, caregiving adults may provide guidance in navigating important decisions during the transition to adulthood, and the average adolescent relies on family for material assistance in early adulthood (Keller, Cusick, & Courtney, 2007).

Youth exiting foster care are more likely to have a history of family instability in combination with other factors, such as: poverty, poor parenting, and poor bonding to
parents, schools, and communities. In addition, many youth in foster care have suffered abuse, neglect, abandonment or loss of a parent. The initial placement in foster care involves being separated from family and familiar settings. Foster youth experience inconsistent parenting, school transitions, and difficulties with placement, particularly when placement disruptions cause subsequent moves. Youth in their final years of state care have generally low levels of education and occupational attainment and relatively high rates of negative outcomes (Keller, Cusick & Courtney, 2007).

According to Avery (2010), the transition to adulthood is especially challenging for members of racial/ethnic minority groups, due in part to the fact that these youth must also deal with identity issues in relation to their racial heritage, in addition to personal identity exploration facing all emerging youth. For youth of color, belonging to an ethnic, racial, or cultural group is an issue that pervades and influences the transition to adulthood. These youth are faced with discriminatory attitudes and evidence of their “lower status and power in society which forces them to have to continually negotiate their sense of self in relation to other groups” (p. 403).
FEDERAL LEGISLATION

According to the National Association of Governors, the federal government has approved approximately 65 programs to provide funding to states to support foster youth in transition. The two most comprehensive laws that address the needs of foster youth are the Foster Care Independence Act and the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act.

The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 is the most critical for the provision of services to foster youth. The Act provides states with funding to provide transitional services. The main component- the John H. Chaffee Foster Care Independent Living program- receives $140 million per year in federal funding to support services to youth in transition. The Chafee program provides payment to states and tribes to aid youth to move successfully into adulthood, including providing services to former foster youth up to age 21. The Chafee program also provides Educational and Training Vouchers to eligible foster youth. The vouchers provide up to $5,000 per year for post-secondary education and training.

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 was enacted to assist states with providing services to youth in transition. The Act provides federal matching funds for maintenance payment to foster care youth up to age 21. The Act also provides federal matching funds for legal kinship guardians for the first time. In addition, the act requires child welfare agencies to work with local education agencies to keep children in their school of origin, provided it was in their best interest; it provides
additional funding for transporting children in foster care to their school of origin. A major improvement is the requirement for youth in foster care to develop a transition plan at least 90 days prior to exiting from care. The transition plan must be a collaboration between the agency and the foster care youth; the plan must address housing, health insurance, education, mentoring, continuing support services, workforce support, and employment support. (National Association of Governors Center for Best Practices, 2010)

INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAMS

Independent life skills programs across the United States, typically offer some variation of the following services:

- Money management
- Job readiness and retention skills (resume writing, interviewing skills, etc)
- How to obtain housing
- Health and nutrition
- Cooking
- Home maintenance
- Sexual responsibility
- Stress management
- Interpersonal skills
- Application workshops (job, college, financial aid, etc)
- Incentive structure for participants
- Direct financial assistance to foster youth
- Exit meetings that provide information about available resources.

There are unique programs that also include: computer training courses, experiential activities, collaborations with foster parents, formal pre-independent living programs for foster youth ages 13 to 16, workforce partnerships, transitional housing, use of education specialists, tours of local 4-year universities, SAT preparation and celebration events for participants (Lemon, Hines & Merdinger, 2005). Youth are eligible for Independent Living Programs up until the day before their 21st birthday; and if they were in care anytime between their 16th and 19th birthday or participated in the Kinship guardian program. Independent Living Programs in California often include housing assistance, employment assistance, educational resources, financial assistance for college or vocational schools, practical skills training (i.e., daily living, money management), decision making and self-esteem programs (Hatton & Brooks, 2009).

MENTORSHIP

Finding an adult to assist with the transition to independent living has been shown to increase a youth’s successful transition to adulthood. It is recommended that caseworkers assist transitioning youth to identify a supportive relationship and aid in maintaining these relationships throughout the transition to independent living. Former foster youth can find support in their families of origin, especially siblings and grandparents; other foster youth, and mentors.

Youth with mentors were found to have fewer symptoms of depression, less perceived stress, and greater satisfaction with life. Long-term support of a mentor was
associated with a lower likelihood of being arrested and less perceived stress after controlling for custody status, maltreatment history, psychiatric history, and previous perceived stress level. Mentoring relationships that lasted longer than a year were associated with fewer symptoms of depression (Hatton & Brooks, 2009).

Foster youth noted that independent living training with mentors was more meaningful than the regular classroom training because of practical, hands-on experience in the context of the supportive relationship. Resilience research has shown that the presence of a supportive and caring non-parental adult in the lives of children and youth who succeed even in the face of adversity and hardship. Both natural and volunteer mentors can act as shield youth from negative outcomes by providing a trusting and supportive relationship, by serving as a role model, and aiding youth in the acquisition of independent living skills. The level of trust between mentor and youth, and the overall intensity and duration of the mentoring relationship play important parts in the success of mentoring (Osterling & Hines, 2006).

It is recommended that mentoring programs serving older adolescent foster youth build on three key areas: building a strong, supportive and caring relationship between mentor and youth (should begin before youth turns 18); building a strong link between mentoring programs and independent living programs to improve program participation; and creating mentoring programs would benefit greater program coordination and more support for mentors.
FOSTER YOUTH PROFILES

There were four distinct subpopulations\(^1\) identified in foster care transition group. The largest is the “distressed and disconnected” group (Hatton & Brooks, 2009, p. 13). This group is more likely to live in nonfamily care, group care or independent living arrangement, they have had more than five placements, had run away from a placement, had a high rate of negative behavior, had lower employment and higher grade retention rates. This group is more likely to have a difficult transition. These youth also have the highest rate of traumatic experiences and few resources to depend on. Despite being identified as the most in need of services, this group is the most likely to resist help.

The second group is identified as “competent and connected” (Hatton & Brooks, 2009, p. 13). This group is characterized by the highest level of employment experience, and the lowest levels of problem behaviors and grade retention. They are more likely to living in kinship foster care or foster care without relatives and possess a stable placement history. They have average rates of parenthood and moderate rates of running away. They have stable, supportive relationships, positive educational experiences, and employment experiences. They benefit from focused services to build on their individual strengths.

The third group is identified as “struggling but staying” (Hatton & Brooks, 2009, p. 14). They have the lowest rates of parenthood, and no reports of running away from placement. This population had the highest rates of grade retention, were more likely to

\(^1\) The subpopulation data was quoted in Hatton & Brooks, 2009; the original study was completed by Keller, Cusick and Courtney, 2007.
be enrolled in special education, and have problem behaviors that result in expulsion or incarceration. This youth tend to live in foster care without relatives and have an average of two to four placements. This group is most likely to request continuing support. This group would most benefit from a gradual transition to independence with focused services to overcome identified issues.

The last and smallest group is the “hindered and homebound” (Hatton & Brooks, 2009, p. 14). This group has the highest rates of parenthood and grade retention and the lowest rates of employment experience. This group has the highest rate of residing in a kinship foster care placement; and this tends to be their first placement. Their early parenthood status is a primary factor in their transition. They benefit from mentors to supplement their social support network and build their self-sufficiency. They also benefit from programs for teenage parents.

Youth exiting care have histories that reflect unstable families, poverty, poor parenting, poor schools and disorganized communities. These youth in care have suffered abuse, neglect, abandonment, or loss of a parent. Being placed in foster care separates children from their families and familiar settings. Those youth who are nearing emancipation and those who have already emancipated, have low levels of educational and occupational attainment and high rates of negative outcomes; which correspond to the many challenges emancipating youth face (Keller, Cusick & Courtney, 2007).

NEED FOR FURTHER STUDY

There is a great deal of literature that exists that examines the issues and outcomes of youth who emancipate from foster care (Avery & Freundlich, 2009; Keller, Cusick &
Courtney, 2007; Kerman, Barth & Wildfire, 2004; Lemon, Hines & Merdinger, 2005;). Much of it focuses on the need for resources, funding, and assistance to aid youth in overcoming the challenges that they face as they journey from adolescence to independence and adulthood.

Most studies addressing the needs of emancipated foster youth are from the social work arena. Social workers have a unique perspective that differs from other areas. Social workers are first responders and are the first line of defense in protecting the safety of youth. Their jobs entail ensuring the safety of children and youth. They are often called upon to make decisions in emergency situations. This perspective influences the research they conduct and the programs they develop.

Educators are trained to consider the whole person in creating curriculum or programs to serve a specific population. Educators generally are not emergency responders. The goal of an educator is to put in the necessary time to adequately address the issues and bring about a resolution.

It is the opinion of this researcher, that further study is needed on the long term effectiveness of Independent Living Skills programs. Studies need to be completed on how well the participants in the program fare, especially in comparison to those emancipated youth who did not participate in a program and those youth who were not in foster care. There are many short term studies that examine the efficacy of independent living programs, but there is a need to gauge the long term benefit of such programs.

There are many types of independent living programs offered throughout the United States: residential, early start, late start, etc. It would be a good thing to study the
benefits of each type of program and identify what youth fare the best in each type of program.

It would also be beneficial to research the long term costs to not providing adequate support to foster youth once they leave the child welfare system. If youth are not provided the support they need, they are destined to lives of homelessness, prison, underemployment, and public assistance. Will more support reverse this cycle?

It would also be beneficial to have research that focused more on the strengths of this population, instead of its weaknesses. Available research tends to focus on the negative outcomes for former foster youth and neglects to provide options to build on this population’s positive characteristics.

Adolescence and the transition to adulthood is a complicated time for all youth, not just those who age out of the foster care system. It is important that all youth receive the support they need for a successful transition to adulthood.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

The Safety Net Project will be a ministry of local churches working together to provide services to emancipated foster youth. The project is a centralized service organization where members of local religious organizations will collaborate to provide service to emancipated foster youth in the community. The Safety Net Project would recruit volunteers from local churches throughout the San Francisco Bay Area; these volunteers will collaborate to provide the services offered through the project.

By providing services in the communities in which the youth reside, it should make services more readily and easily accessed. The Safety Net project would provide a place where emancipated foster youth could go to get mentoring services, life skills assistance, and tangible support.

To develop the program for this project, I explored a great deal of literature and statistics regarding the plight of foster youth; thereby examining the current conditions and expected outcomes. I also examined federal and local legislation to see what the current laws are that govern services to the foster youth population.

What is often overlooked or discounted in the research are the voices of the emancipated youth themselves. Often quotes from the youth were included in the literature; it was clear from the statements made by the youth that they were clear on what they needed to be successful on their own; but often their voices were ignored (Fuller, 2009; Geenen, & Powers, 2007; Georgiades, 2005b; Votaw & Powell, 2005).
Because of the age of the youth, it appears that researchers want to believe that they know what will best serve the population better than the population knows itself. Thus, it is important to value the opinions of this young adult population in order to best serve them. To avoid a prescriptive approach, it is important to include emancipated youths to direct the development of programs to serve them. Former foster youth were very clear on what they felt they needed to be successful. They were also clear on how they wanted the information to be delivered.

In reviewing existing Independent Living Skills curriculum, many of these do a good job covering the standard topics that should be covered, i.e., budgeting, job searches, housing, daily living and relationships. The disconnect seems to occur in how the curriculum is delivered, and the lack of support emancipated foster youth receive once they leave care.

My Project

My project is the Safety Net Project, which is a program to provide assistance to emancipated foster youth once they leave care and are on their own in the community. The goal of the program is to connect interested individuals from local churches to work together to improve outcomes for program participants.

Participants in Independent Living Skills programs are generally age eighteen to twenty-one. This population fits well within what is termed the “hip-hop” generation. The term “hip-hop generation” generally refers to urban youth, aged 12 – 35. So, the Safety Net program will utilize a Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy framework to reach the target population. This framework will aid in the youth participants to be comfortable and
open and easily accessing activities meant for their edification. Workshops designed for youth often seek to prescribe solutions for the issues addressed; by employing the tenets of Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy, youth participants will be at the center of solutions to the issues addressed.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy has at its foundation the tenets of Friere (1970) and Critical Race Theory. Critical Race Theory begins with the notion that racism is normal, not isolated incidents, in American society. Racism is so woven into the fabric of our social order that it appears normal and natural to people in this culture. Critical Race Theory uses parables, chronicles, stories, counter-stories, poetry, fiction and revisionist histories to “name one’s own reality” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 21, 23). The goal of Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy is to respond to issues of racism and other axis of social difference that people of color face in urban and suburban schools and communities. The emancipated foster youth population fits well into the hip-hop generation definition. Building a program designed around the tenets of Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy should make the information more relevant and accessible for youth participants. According to Akom (2009), the fundamental elements of Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy are:

- It is participatory and youth driven.
- It is cooperative, engaging students in a joint research process in which each contributes equitably.
- It foregrounds race, racism, gender, and other axis of social difference in the design, data collection, and analysis.
- It helps prospective teachers focus on the racialized, gendered, and other intersections of social difference, experiences within and by communities of color.
- It challenges the traditional paradigms, methods, and texts as a way to engage in a discourse on race that is informed by the actual conditions and experiences of people of color.
- It is committed to co-learning, co-facilitating, and multi-directionality.
- It is trans-disciplinary, drawing on Black/Africana Studies, Raza Studies, Ethnic Studies, and Women's Studies, to name a few.
- It involves local capacity building.
- It is an empowering process through which all participants can increase control of their lives.
- It seeks a balance among critical thinking, reflection, analysis, and action.
- It emphasizes a union of mind, body, and spirit rather than a separation of these elements.

The core elements of Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy utilize Youth-led Participatory Action Research, Freirian pedagogy and Critical Race Theory to challenge racism and other intersections of social difference to prepare prospective teachers to serve in urban and suburban schools. The work of Paulo Freire (Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 1970) provides the theoretical foundation for a theory of democratic schooling that is tied to serving the marginalized groups in our society. Foster youth are often marginalized and so often
viewed in a negative light; by employing this framework it will serve to empower them and recognize the strengths in this community. It will also provide opportunities for them to speak for themselves.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970) noted that one of the ways that schools serve to maintain the "status quo" is by utilizing the "banking method" of education. The "banking method" leads to: the view of students as passive receptacles waiting for knowledge to be deposited by the teacher, mono-directional pedagogical formats where students feel their thoughts or opinions are not important enough to be discussed, cradle classrooms where students depend on teachers for the acquisition of knowledge, and students view schools as the key factor in the reproduction of inequality. *In Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970) also introduces the problem-posing method of education that has five general phases: Identifying the problem, analyzing the problem, developing a plan, implementing the plan, and evaluating the plan. The problem posing method creates opportunities for young people to engage in critical praxis - reflection and action.

To enable youth to deconstruct the material and ideological conditions that oppress them, can inspire a process of community and knowledge production. Educators must find ways to identify the resources and strengths of youth of color and place them at the center of their research, curriculum, and teaching practicum. Central to the process is the concept that students are not culturally deficient but instead, enters classrooms with rich and diverse experiences. Students should be challenged to think of themselves, their families, and communities as resources and sources of strength. Students are also
challenged to re-examine their stereotypical knowledge of hip hop as it intersects with race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other axis of differences while analyzing and theorizing and what it means to teach a diverse student population (Akom, 2009). Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy stresses a more nuanced notion of community cultural production; one that positions communities of color as central subjects to knowledge production, and underscores their ability to actualize their agency for personal and social transformation. With the changing racial demographics of students in public schools, educators are continuously challenged to develop new ways of teaching, learning, knowing, and constructing new knowledge.

The goal of Critical Hip Hop pedagogy is to create educational spaces where marginalized youth are equipped to gain a consciousness of how their own life experiences have been shaped by the larger social institutions. The implementation of Critical Hip Hop pedagogy can increase the space in the curriculum to allow students to discard their stereotypical knowledge of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other axes of social difference while analyzing, problem solving, and theorizing about what it means to be part of a diverse population.

METHODS

To build a program that is useful for equipping youth as they begin their transition to adulthood, we must first grasp how to present the information in a way that will be meaningful to the target population. Great care must be taken to build on those knowledge bases already held by the target population.
The initial training for project volunteers will be a workshop utilizing heterogeneous groupings based on the human relations approach (Sleeter & Grant, 2003). The human relations approach aids in the creation of positive feelings among participants and reduces stereotyping. This promotes unity and tolerance in groups composed of different people. By promoting a spirit of unity and inclusion from the outset, all participants will feel their input is valued and a genuine commitment to work together can be garnered. Foster youth have experienced so much loss, it is important to ensure that every interaction leaves them feeling valued and that their input is important.

According to Sleeter and Grant (2003), the general principles of the human relations approach are programs that should be comprehensive; diverse strategies should be employed to different facets of the program; the program should start with the real life experience of participants and one participants’ success, should not be contingent upon another participant’s failure.

The workshop will consist of project volunteers, emancipated foster youth, social service agency representatives and project facilitators. Workshop participants will be separated into heterogeneous groups and asked to work together to address selected issues – i.e., how to reach the target population, effective mentoring techniques, and needs of the population. The information gathered in these workshops will be utilized to build our approach to serve the emancipated foster youth population. Workshop groups will utilize a Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy framework to facilitate communication. This framework will be essential to creating an atmosphere where the emancipated youth participants feel comfortable and that their opinions are important and valued. The
framework will also provide enough structure so that the goals of the workshop can be accomplished.

At the outset, I had planned to develop a training manual that could be utilized by programs to provide training to foster youth as they prepare to emancipate from foster care. But, after reviewing the literature about existing Independent Living Programs, the curriculum used covers the needed topics. However, the greatest challenges faced by emancipated foster youth comes after leaving the system. Emancipated foster youth need a dependable support network that they can access on an as needed basis because often once they leave care, they are not adequately prepared to face adult responsibilities on their own.

The project I developed is an informational recruitment brochure for the Safety Net Project. The brochure provides information to potential volunteers, through a consortium of churches, who wish to serve emancipated foster youth. The Safety Net Project will act as the centralized resource for emancipated foster youth, so they can locate the assistance they require as needs arise.
Chapter 4

SAFETY NET PROJECT: WORKING TOGETHER TO SERVE
EMANCIPATED FOSTER YOUTH
Safety Net Project:
Working Together to Serve Emancipated Foster Youth

A ministry project to serve emancipated foster youth
One of the great liabilities of history is that all too many people fail to remain awake through great periods of social change... Today, our very survival depends on our ability to stay awake, to adjust to new ideas, to remain vigilant and to face the challenge of change.

- Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
Our Mission

To establish a network of individuals from local communities of faith to provide needed services to former foster youth who have recently emancipated from the Child Welfare System.

The plan includes mentoring, in-kind support, and resource referrals. Our goal is to provide needed support the emancipated Foster youth to aid in their transitions to adulthood.

Safety Net is a centralized organization the coordinates the efforts of local communities of faith to provide social service assistance to those in need.
It should be our purpose in life to see that each of us makes such a contribution as will enable us to say that we, individually and collectively, are a part of the answers to the world problem and not part of the problem itself.

~ Andrew Cordier
Executive Summary

Thank you for the taking the time to explore the Safety Net project. It is our hope that after reviewing this material you will decide to volunteer in some way to help enrich the lives of emancipated foster youth.

The plight of former foster youth in the United States is well documented. In spite of existing Independent Living Programs, these youth still have issues connecting with the services and support they need to be successful.

Our goal at Safety Net is to provide assistance to emancipated foster youth in connecting with those services that already exist in the community. In addition, we provide mentoring and educational support. We seek to equip these young adults with the skills needed to find the services available to them and navigate challenges inherent in transition to adulthood.

At Safety Net we welcome all levels of commitment. You can volunteer your time or provide in-kind donations. You can commit as much or as little time as will work within our schedule. We will provide all the training you need to ensure success.

Safety Net provides:

- Mentoring
- Service referrals
- Educational Assistance
- Independence Planning
- Workshops
- Support Groups
- New Home Necessity packages
Introduction

The transition to adulthood for all youth is a challenging time. Once one reaches the age of 18, you are faced with a new set of rules and responsibilities. You are expected to begin to utilize the tools that your parents equipped you with, so that you can begin to live on your own and become a successful adult. In that transition period, you often reflect on the lessons that were imparted to you by your parents, the wisdom shared with you by an older relative or grandparent. In times of stress or struggle, you find yourself returning to your parents for a refresher course in those lessons, so that you can overcome whatever the struggle is. As we get older, we learn to appreciate the wisdom of our parents, our grandparents or other elders in our lives. And when we ourselves begin to parent, we share with our children the same wisdom that was shared with us. We value these experiences, we count ourselves lucky to have had them (even though when you are a kid, parental lesson impartation is a pain!)

In the lives of foster youth, their rearing is filled with many challenges. Their birthparents, for whatever reason, were proven to be unfit. So at a time in their lives when they need the most stability, they are taken from their homes to be placed in foster care. The State becomes their parent. The State as parent does not provide lessons about how to grow up and be responsible, law abiding citizens; the State does not provide stories about how even though your family may have gone through struggles, they endured and survived. Instead, the State places you in the home of a stranger who has been certified as a foster parent. This stranger could have chosen to become certified so that they can be of service to children when they are at their most vulnerable, or as is the case far too often they are in it for the money. This stranger’s house, is not your home. It does not smell like your old house. The food is different. The people are different. Does it matter? Probably not. The likelihood that you will stay in that same placement until you emancipate is slim.
From this situation, foster youth are expected to transition into adulthood and live independently. The support systems that were available to these young adults prior to emancipation are removed. They are expected to find their way on their own. While there are programs available to emancipated foster youth, if they are not pro-active and know how to seek out this information, they are doomed to negative outcomes.

The average young person, even with the most stable of upbringings, is not ready to make it on their own at the age of eighteen. Young adults need trusted adults to turn to for advice and support. Navigating adulthood can be challenging, and having someone in your life to go to in times of need is imperative to a successful transition.

The majority of foster youth receive some kind of Independent Living Skills training prior to their emancipation from foster care. But this training happens prior to them leaving care, and is generally in a classroom setting. Often participants do not have the opportunity to experiment with the practical application of the information before emancipation. Then, once they are out on their own and issues arise, they need support to get through challenging situations.

Safety Net seeks to provide that support to emancipated foster youth. Providing assistance to help these young adults as they complete their transition to independence and adulthood. By providing this support, our goal is to mitigate the negative outcomes that plague those young adults who were reared in foster care.

Safety Net seeks to “weave” together the efforts of individuals from local churches to create a system of support for emancipated foster youth. Safety Net seeks to equip these young adults with the skills to live successfully on their own.
Background

Of the 500,000+ children in the foster care system in the United States, 26,000 young people (between age 18-21) emancipate or “age out” each year. The documented outcomes for these youth are as follows:

Housing:

- Within 18 months of emancipation 40-50% of foster youth become homeless.
- Nationally, 27% of the homeless population spent time in foster care.
- A history of foster care correlates with becoming homeless at an earlier age and remaining homeless for a longer period of time.
- 65% of youth leaving foster care need immediate housing upon release

Education Status:

- 83% of foster children are held back by the third grade.
- 75% of children and youth in foster care are behind grade level.
- 46% of former foster youth complete high school (compared to 84% of the general population).
- Based on high birth trauma and many life challenges, 50% of foster youth experience developmental delays, which is 4-5 times more than the rate found among children in the general population.
- 70% of teens who emancipate from foster care report that they want to attend college, but less than 50% complete their high school graduation and fewer than 10% of who graduate from high school enroll and college, and of those less than 1% graduate from college.
Employment:

- Emancipated foster youth earn significantly less than youth in the general population, additionally due to their specific circumstances current and former foster youth progress more slowly into the labor market.
- 50% of emancipated foster youth experience high rates of unemployment within 5 years of emancipation.
- One third of former foster youth have incomes at, or below, $6,000 per year, which is substantially below the federal poverty level of $7,890 for a single individual.

Parenting Status:

- Forty-two percent (42%) of foster youth, including 60% of women, become parents within 2.5-4 years after exiting care.
- Parents with a history of foster care are almost twice as likely to see their own children placed in foster care or become homeless than parents without this history.
- Females in foster care are six times more likely than the general population to give birth before age 21.

Health:

- Former foster youth are found to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at 2 times the level of U.S. war veterans.
- 33% of all foster care alumni have no form of health insurance.
- Youth transitioning from foster care have disproportionately high rates of physical, developmental, and mental health problems.
- Children in foster care are more likely than other children on Medicaid to have a mental health or substance abuse condition.
- Nearly 50% of foster children suffer from chronic health conditions such as asthma, visual and auditory problems, dental decay and malnutrition.
- 50-60% of children in foster care have moderate to severe mental health problems.

**Incarceration:**

- There is a lot of crossover between youth in foster care and youth in juvenile dependency court in fact foster youth with multiple placements are 5-10 times more likely to become involved with the juvenile justice system than youth in the general population.
- 25% of former foster youth will be incarcerated within the first 2 years of emancipation.
- Youth in foster care are more likely to be detained than non-foster children, as judges perceive their lack of caregiver representation as an indication that the youth are less stable and less supervised than their non-foster peers.

*Information from www.riseabove4youth.org*
TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

During their difficult transition from care, foster youth should receive support and guidance to help them attain healthy adulthood; instead, they find themselves alone without housing, life skills, a source of income, or community support. Not surprisingly, former foster youth are at much greater risk of experiencing serious, negative social outcomes than the general population of youth, such as the following:

- **Low Educational Achievement:** Foster youth often experience numerous transfers within the foster care system and delays in school enrollment, factors that lead to low rates of educational achievement and retention. As a whole, only 53 percent of foster youth complete high school, compared to 87 percent of the general population of California youth.

- **Homelessness and Housing Instability:** A 2002 study conducted by the California Department of Social Services concluded that two out of three foster youths in California face imminent homelessness upon emancipation.

- **Poor Mental and Physical Health:** A 2002 study completed by the University of California found that 62 percent of youth in foster care have been treated for mental health disorders and that foster youth suffer from physical illnesses at rates higher than the general population of 18- to 24-year-olds. Once emancipated, youth continue to experience poor health, lack of access to medical care, and threats to their personal safety.
• **Unplanned Pregnancy and Poverty:** A 2002 study completed by the University of California at Berkeley found that youth who live in five or more foster care placements are more than twice as likely to become pregnant than youth who lived in single placement. This is of particular concern given that close to half of emancipated foster youth live in five or more placements. Early childbearing commonly results in the need for income assistance. According to a recent analysis conducted by the San Francisco Department of Human Services, emancipated foster youth are five times more likely to receive Temporary Aid to Needy Families than young adults of the same age, sex, and race.

These negative outcomes can be averted if services are available to these young adults. If emancipated foster youth have a place to go with information and support readily available. These youth need places to go for information outside of their peer group. They also need a non-judgmental place to go for those times when they have made mistakes and need assistance getting back on track.

At Safety Net, emancipated foster youth can come in and get the assistance they need to connect to resources, get advice, get educational support and meet with mentors who can help them through tough times.
Implementing the Plan

Recruitment

The central focus of our recruitment will be local Churches. We will ask individuals to volunteer their time and support to provide services to former foster youth.

By coordinating individuals from different congregations to provide the services, the belief is that by working in collectively we can “weave” together our efforts to have a greater positive impact than if each individual church had a separate outreach program.

Volunteers would be asked to contribute at their individual comfort level. If they prefer to work on fundraising projects, then that is where they will be placed. If their skill is organization, then that is where they will work. If they excel in providing one to one support to the youths directly, then there will be a place for them too.

As a project volunteer, you will be providing critical support that could make the difference in whether the transition period is successful or not.

Collaboration

The Safety Net project will collaborate with other Public and Private Social Service Agencies for client referrals. In addition, the project will maintain a listing of existing services offered by other agencies and assist former foster youth with connecting to those services.

Training

The project will provide training for all volunteers who wish to act as mentors to clients. The training will equip volunteers with the skills needed to effectively serve this young adult population.
What is Mentorship?

Mentorship
A caring and well-trained adult can inspire and guide an emancipated foster youth to pursue a productive future and reach their full potential. Mentoring programs can aid these young adults overcome the challenges of the transition to adulthood by providing consistent, caring support and modeling positive life skills.

A Mentor is:

- A caring, responsible adult – For these young adults, there is not always a consistent, positive adult presence in their lives. They will greatly benefit from an adult who models appropriate behaviors, interactions, and attitudes.
- A trusted guide or friend – Young adults in foster care have limited opportunities to make friends with adults; especially adults who will take them seriously or listen to them.
- A resource who will provide exposure to people, place or things that are outside of their usual environment.
- A positive role model – Youth today have lots of role models but they do not always provide a positive influence. Mentors have a responsibility to provide a positive influence on youth.

A Mentor is not:

- All things to their mentee.
- A parent/legal guardian- It is not the mentor’s role to fulfill the responsibilities of a parent or legal guardian. If a mentor believes that a mentee is not receiving adequate support, every effort should be made to connect them with the appropriate services.
- A Social Worker – A Social Worker is a licensed professional with the necessary skills and training to assist in family issues.
- A psychologist – A mentor in not a formal counselor or therapist.
Guidelines for Mentors:

- Be honest and respectful.
- Be on time.
- Give your mentee your full attention when you are together.
- Be consistent, clear and patient.
- Allow and encourage your mentee to open up about their thoughts, feelings and values. Don’t discount your mentee’s opinion, be respectful.
- Be aware that your actions, thoughts and words may be picked up by your mentee.
- Value Diversity. Remember that you can learn as much from your mentee, as your mentee can learn from you.
- Set a positive example by obeying laws.
- Help your mentee make decisions and formulate their own conclusions without telling him/her what to do. Explore solutions together.
- Do not make promises you cannot keep.

Roadblocks to Positive Communication:

- Moralizing, preaching, obliging – “You should...” “You ought to....” “It’s your duty to...” ~ These messages induce guilt, lower self-esteem and build resistance to authority.
- Persuading with Logic, Arguing, Instructing, Lecturing – “Do you realize...” “Here is why you are wrong...” “The fact is...” ~ These invite counter arguments, increase defensiveness, reduce openness and belittles other’s opinion.
- Advising, recommending, providing answers or solutions - “Why don’t you...” “It would be best for you...” ~ Statements like these imply superiority, deprive the receiver of the esteem-building
experience of solving their own problem and may encourage dependency.

- Criticizing, blaming, judging negatively, disapproving – “You are lazy...” “You aren’t thinking straight” “You are really mixed up...” ~These statements instantly lower self-esteem, cause guilt, reduce openness, and cause resentment.

- Kidding, teasing, joking, using sarcasm – “You think that you know it all.” “Were you born yesterday?” “Get up on the wrong side of the bed?” ~ These messages may arouse feelings of resentment and rejection.

When in doubt about what to do, use your common sense. Try and place yourself in the shoes of your mentee and think of how you would feel in the same situation. Keep in mind, your mentee may have trouble developing a close, trusting relations with an adult as a result of neglect or abuse.

As mentors, you will aid with transitional life skills, cultural empowerment and career development. Keep in mind that mentees may lack self-confidence, be anxious, be distrustful, be moody, be impulsive, be emotionally detached and believe chaos is normal. Building a positive relationship with your mentee will take time and work, don’t expect overnight results. However, in the long-term, the mentees relationship with you will serve to bolster his confidence in his own abilities and nurture a positive attitude toward a successful transition to adulthood.
Did you know?

- There are more than 500,000 children currently in foster care, waiting for safe, permanent families in the United States.
- More than 75,000 children are currently in foster care in California.
- Approximately 5,000 children are currently in foster care in Sacramento.
- About 5,000 foster youth “age out” or emancipate from the foster care system in California each year. “Aged out” means the student has turned 18 and/or has graduated high school.
- More than 10.5 million children will spend some time in foster care by 2020.
- Studies show that of youth who emancipate:
  - 46% drop out of high school
  - up to 25% are homeless more than one day after leaving care
  - 51% are unemployed or on public assistance
  - 1-in-4 will become incarcerated within 2 years of leaving foster care
  - 58% have their high school diploma by 25 compared to 87% of non foster youth
  - 3% of 25 year old foster youth have earned a college degree compared to 28% of non foster youth

Many Foster Youth experience suffer multiple losses over the course of their stay in foster care including:

- sibling separation because they are placed in different homes in different cities
• never spend the night at a friend’s house
• must leave their pets behind
• have only minutes to pack when removed leaving behind clothing, toys, memories, photos, school books, and homework
• friends and teachers being left without a “good bye”
• loss of their support system such as schools, churches or communities
• no where to go on their 18th birthday

Statistics from federal AFCARS (Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System) data, 2006

Who are the children in the U.S. foster care system?
• 510,000 National children in foster care
• 32% of foster children are between the ages of 0 and 5
• 28% of foster children are between the ages of 6 and 12
• 40% of foster children are between the ages of 13 and 21
• What are United States’ foster children waiting for?
• 49% are waiting to be reunified with their birth families
• 25% are waiting to be adopted

Where did the United States’ children go after leaving foster care in 2006?
• 287,691 children exited foster care
• 53% were returned to their parents
• 17% were adopted
• 16% left to live with relatives (some through guardianships)
• 9% “aged out” or left the system at age of 18 or older
• 4% left for other reasons (ran away, transferred, died)
• 1% left for unknown reasons

Information collected from the following websites:
http://www.cafosteringconnections.org
www.sierraaff.org
http://www.fosterclub.com
www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb

How can you help?

• Volunteer your time
  o Consider becoming a mentor
  o Participate in Outreach Events
  o
• Provide In-Kind Donations
  o Household products
  o Furniture
  o Office supplies
  o Other items

• Provide cash donations

• Spread the word to others who may be interested in serving

• Pray for the success of the program
Interest Form

Name (First & Surname):_________________________ M F

Address: (residential)
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________

Contact Details:
(home)___________________(mobile)____________________

Email:______________________________________________

Age Group:  21-30   31-40   41-50   51-65   65+

When are you available for volunteer serve?:_______________

Are you interested in acting as a mentor? _________________

If so, are you willing to complete the required training?_______

Are you interested making a donation? _________________

If so, What?
  o Cash
  o Services
  o Furniture
  o Household Goods
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