

# **Foster Youth Transition to Independence Study**

First Annual Report  
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## Foster Youth Transition to Independence Study First Annual Report

### **Executive Summary**

Nationally, nearly 20,000 youth emancipated from foster care in 1999. Homelessness, poverty, unemployment, crime, and non-marital childbearing are common outcomes for youth who are unprepared to live independently (Foster Care Independence Act 1999). In 1999 Congress provided recommendations for improving the Independent Living Program (See Title 1, Subtitle A, Section 101). In this legislation, Congress outlined the goals of Independent Living as preparing emancipating youth for employment, post secondary education and successful management of adult responsibilities. Congress also included requirements regarding outcome measures for Independent Living Programs. Under Section 101 (f) (1) (B) Congress specified that States must report the number and characteristics of children receiving services, the type and quantity of services provided, and performance on outcome measures identified for children receiving services that facilitate the successful transition from foster care to self-sufficiency.

The Washington State Foster Youth Transition study was designed to examine the readiness for independence of youth leaving foster care and to learn about outcomes for youth once they are living on their own. The purpose of the study is to gain information to improve programs for transitioning youth. This study attempts to interview all eligible youth in Washington State prior to emancipation and follow up 6 to 9 months later with a post emancipation interview once they have had time to live on their own.

The pre-emancipation interview collects data on the youth's readiness for independence, services provided to assist the youth toward independence and youth characteristics that might influence readiness for independence. A brief 20 item survey (Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment (ACLSA)- short form) examining the preparedness of youth for independence is included in the first interview. Results of ACLSA will be used to compare state foster youth outcomes to Casey foster youth outcomes. Youth's Social Workers are also interviewed at the time of the pre-emancipation interview to obtain maltreatment and placement histories for the youth.

The second youth interview takes place six to nine months following emancipation from out-of-home care and collects data on the youth's post placement adjustment, including: housing, education, risk behaviors, substance/alcohol use, criminal behavior, finances and employment, social support, mental health, medical and dental needs, general satisfaction with life, and out of wedlock births.

This report examines the results of the pre-emancipation and social worker interviews. A brief summary of the results of these interviews follows.

The pre-emancipation interview rate is 72% and the social worker interview rate is 90%. The youth interviewed are 17 years of age, have lived in out-of-home care at least one year, are equally divided between genders, and 60% are white, and 28% mixed race. Most youth have plans for their housing, employment and education upon emancipation; however some social workers wonder how realistic some of these plans are. Close to half of the youth report tobacco use and one-fourth report alcohol use. Reported criminal activities are low, although 64% of the youth report being arrested in the past. Close to 70% of the youth report having had sex and over one-fourth of the females report at least one pregnancy. Most youth visit with their biological families while in care and most youth have some sort of social support structure – youth indicated they would turn to a friend, foster parent, or relative when they need help in the future. Mental health problems are reported for more than half of the youth. A majority of the youth receive counseling and independent living training, 19% of the youth scored in the “mastery” range of the ACLSA, measuring preparedness for independence.

## **Introduction**

This study will provide Washington State policy makers and program directors information on the preparedness and outcomes for foster youth as they transition from out-of-home care to independence. Nationally, former foster youth are thought to have high rates of homelessness, unemployment, crime and non-marital child-bearing. Similar to the Washington state study, a study in Wisconsin (Courtney and Piliavin, 1998), found that, overall, 37% of the foster youth interviewed experienced negative outcomes (i.e., physical victimization, sexual assault, homelessness, or incarceration) up to 18 months after leaving care. The Washington study will provide information on the obstacles and needs of youth in care, the services they receive, outcomes for youth once they transition to independence and will direct us toward improving transitions for youth in the state's care.

Eligible study subjects include all youth emancipating from out-of-home care in Washington State over a two year period who are 17 years of age and who have lived in out of home care a minimum of 12 months. Severely developmentally disabled youth are excluded from the sample because they are not likely to have the opportunity to live independently. Other exclusion criteria include youth who are imprisoned through their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and youth who returned to their birth/adoptive home before turning 18. The data in this report covers a selection of information from the pre-emancipation and social worker surveys. See Appendix A for a copy of the complete pre-emancipation and social worker surveys.

## **Methodology**

Three interview sets are included in this study: a pre-emancipation interview, a social worker interview and a post-emancipation interview. The pre-emancipation interview is administered when youth are between 17 and 18 years of age, the social worker interview coincides with the pre-emancipation interview,

and the post emancipation interview occurs 6 to 9 months following the youth's emancipation from placement. All three interviews were developed with the guidance of an advisory committee consisting of representatives from Casey Family Programs, the Independent Living Program Manager, Independent Living Regional Coordinators, and current or former foster youth when available. Sections of the instruments were taken from measures that have been field tested in other studies as well as some site developed questions where necessary (see Appendix B for a list of survey questions and the instruments they were taken from). All interview material and procedures were approved by the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) and Department of Health (DOH) Human Research Review Board prior to administration. An additional data point is arrest data for youth participating in the study in years 3 and 4. A data sharing agreement will be created with the Washington State Patrol to obtain any arrest information available for the study sample.

A list of eligible youth names, dates of birth, and identification numbers are downloaded on a quarterly basis from an administrative database, the Case and Management Information System (CAMIS). Interview staff search for the most recent address information for each youth in CAMIS and enter this information into a tracking database. Initial youth contact is made with a letter explaining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of the study, information that an interviewer will contact them by telephone a week later to provide more details about the study and to request participation (see Appendix C for a copy of the youth introduction letter). Youth are informed they will receive a \$25.00 gift certificate to a department store as an incentive for participation. Based on the youth's preference, the pre-emancipation interview is conducted either in person or by telephone. Previous research involving focus groups with youth (Office of Children's Administration Research (OCAR, 1998) indicates that youth would be more likely to participate in a survey of this type if they were able to meet the person conducting the interview. Regardless, some youth prefer to complete the interview by telephone. After a youth completes the pre-emancipation interview

they are asked for the contact information of four people who will know how to reach them for the follow up interview. To obtain information about their maltreatment and placement history, youth are also asked for permission to interview their social worker

Interviews with Social Workers are conducted by telephone only with the written permission of each youth. Social Workers are informed prior to the interview that their participation is voluntary.

Post-emancipation interviews are conducted by telephone six to nine months following youth's emancipation from placement. At the time of the follow up interview, youth are tracked using the contact names they provided during the pre-emancipation interview and through their last foster home and social worker. Post emancipation interviews with youth have just begun, data for these interviews will be discussed in the next report.

## **Results**

### **Interview Rate**

To date, 72% (251) of the eligible foster youth have been interviewed. Thirteen percent (44) of the youth refused participation, 8% aged out of the interview period prior to the interview, and another 8% were "on the run" through the age of 18. A group of 91 potential youth subjects were excluded from the sample due to: returning to their birth/adoptive home (31), living out of state without DSHS services (12), developmental delay (24), in jail or detention through the age of 18 (14), and 10 were excluded for other reasons (i.e., adopted and incorrect date of birth in data base).

A majority of the youth interviewed (90%, n=227) provided assent allowing us to interview their social worker. The social worker interview rate is high, 91% (206/227) of the eligible social workers participated in an interview.

## Demographics

All youth participating in the pre-emancipation interview are at least 17 years of age with a focus on youth closer to their emancipation at age 18. A few more females than males participated in the interview with 51% of the respondents female. The race/ethnicity breakdown is shown in Table 1 with a majority of the youth white (60%), and a little over one fourth (28%) mixed race. Washington State 2000 census data comparison of these rates show that whites and Asian/Pacific Islanders are under-represented in our study group. Whites account for 72% of the population in the 17 years old and younger census data compared to 60% in the Foster Youth Transition study (FYT) sample, and Asian/Pacific Islanders account for 5% in the general population compared to 1% in our sample. This difference may be accounted for by the larger mixed race population in our study group. The other race/ethnicity categories are fairly similar to the general population in Washington State.

Table 1. Ethnicity of Youth Interviewed

<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>FYT Interview Sample</b>
White	60%
Mixed Race	28%
Hispanic/Latino	4%
African American	4%
Native American	3%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1%
Other	<1%
Missing	<1%

In order to compare the FYT interviewed sample to Washington State 2000 census data for youth, we moved the study sample of Hispanic/Latino mixed race youth into the Hispanic/Latino category (see Table 1a). This reclassification of Hispanic/Latino mixed race youth as Hispanic/Latino results in a representative sample of Hispanic/Latino youth compared to the census data for youth in Washington State.

Table 1a. Comparison of Ethnicity between Interviewed Sample and Census Data\*

<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>FYT Interview Sample</b>	<b>2000 Census Data</b>
White – not Hispanic	60%	72%
Mixed Race – not Hispanic	19%	5%
Hispanic/Latino – all races	12%	12%
African American - not Hispanic	4%	2%
Native American – not Hispanic	3%	2%
Asian/Pacific Islander – not Hispanic	1%	5%
Other – not Hispanic	<1%	<1%
Missing	<1%	--

\*Youth who identified as mixed race with Hispanic as one category were included in the Hispanic/Latino category in order to compare rates with 2000 census data for youth in Washington State.

#### Separation from Birth Families:

Close to half of the interviewed youth (46%) had been separated from their birth families for more than five years at the time of the interview (see Table 2).

Table 2. Length of Time Separated From Birth Families

<b>Years</b>	<b>Percent of Youth</b>
1 to 2 years	14%
2 to 3 years	13%
3 to 4 years	15%
4 to 5 years	10%
more than 5 years	46%

#### Education and Employment

A majority of the youth (87%) were still in high school at the time of the interview. A little over half of the youth (53%) expect to graduate high school by the time they leave care. Close to half (45%) report they feel very prepared to get a job and make money once they emancipate, 46% feel somewhat prepared, and 9% don't feel prepared.

## Independent Living Services

Three out of four youth (77%) had the opportunity to participate in Independent Living (IL) services and two-thirds of all the youth (61%) participated in an IL program or class. Of the youth who took an IL class, 71% felt it made a difference for them.

## Risk Behaviors

Current use of drugs/alcohol and tobacco products is assessed as an indicator of risk behavior for youth. Youth are asked if they used tobacco products, drugs, or alcohol in the last three months. Close to half (48%) indicate they used tobacco and one-fourth (24%) report using alcohol in the 3 months preceding their interview. A little over one-third (35%) of the youth report daily use of tobacco products, four percent of all the youth report daily use of Marijuana and less than 1% report daily use of alcohol (see Table 3 for further breakdown of substance use).

Table 3. Tobacco/Drug/Alcohol Use

Drug/Alcohol:	% youth who have used in past 3 months:	Out of youth reporting usage:	
		% youth using <u>weekly</u> :	% youth using <u>daily</u> :
Tobacco products	48%	15%	73%
Alcohol products	25%	6%	2%
Marijuana	21%	19%	17%
Cocaine	1%	--	--
Speed or uppers	3%	--	--
Other illegal drugs	3%	--	--
Other people's prescription medication	3%	--	--
Inhalants	<1%	--	--

## **Mental Health**

Over one-third (35%) of the foster youth respondents have a high score of depressive symptoms<sup>1</sup>. The depression scores range from 1 to 49, with 60 being the highest score possible on the instrument indicating the most depressive symptoms.

## **Delinquency**

Youth are asked about their participation in delinquent behaviors. In the three months preceding the interview, 5% of the youth report taking part in gang activities, 3% stole or shoplifted, and 20% were in a physical fight.

## **Lifetime Self Report of Delinquency**

Considering the youth's entire life, 64% report they have been arrested at some time in their lives, 60% have stayed overnight in a jail or detention center, 63% have run away from home overnight, 35% have carried a weapon and 20% reported they have threatened someone with a weapon.

## **Pregnancy/Sex**

Sixty-nine percent of the 17 year olds report they have had sex and 70% of these youth report use of birth control. Just over one fourth (28%) of all the females in this study have had at least one pregnancy, and 10% of the males report they have impregnated someone. One in ten of the youth in this study report they have contracted a sexually transmitted disease. In a national study by the Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI, 1999) researchers found that approximately 4% of all women 17 years of age and younger become pregnant in the United States, this is considerably lower than the reported pregnancy rate in this study (28%).

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale, L.S. Radloff (1977). Cut score of 16)

## Social Support

A majority of the youth (85%, or 214) indicate they visit with their biological families while living in out-of-home care. 29% (n=63) of these youth visit with their biological families weekly, and over half (59%, n=123) visit at least monthly. In times of trouble, most youth (74%) would call a friend for help, 61% would call their foster family, and 54% would call a relative (see Table 4 for more detail).

Table 4. If Youth Needed Help in the Future They Said They Would Call:  
(Youth may indicate more than one person)

Percent	Person(s) Youth Would Call
74%	a friend
61%	foster family
54%	relatives
39%	biological parents
35%	another adult
35%	social worker
22%	a teacher
21%	someone at a church
15%	youth group leader
17%	IL program leader
13%	a neighbor
8%	YMCA staff
13%	Other (includes agency staff 3%, emergency services 2%, counselor 2%, another person 3%)

## Placement Experiences

The number of moves youth experienced while living in out of home care is equally divided. One third of the youth experienced between one and three different placements, one third between 4 and 9 different placements, and one-third 10 or more different placements. As may be expected, a significant positive correlation ( $r=.575$ ) is found between the length of time in placement and the number of placements a youth experienced. That is, youth who were in care longer experienced more changes in placement than did youth in placement a shorter period of time. Three fourths of the youth indicate their most successful living situation was with a foster family and the remaining youth indicate various

places in which they felt success (i.e., in a group home 7%, on their own 4%, with their birth family 5%, in a residential treatment facility 2%, and 7% other).

Almost all youth (97%) indicate they have a close positive relationship with at least one adult.

A majority of the youth (87%) had most of their medical/dental needs met while in their most recent placement lasting more than 3 months.

The DCFS policy for social worker visitation while a youth is in out-of-home placement is every 90 days. Over half (59%) of the youth report their social workers visit them at least once every 90 days. However, a higher percentage of social workers report visiting youth every 90 days (86%).

A majority of the youth interviewed (60%) had fewer than three different social workers during their time in out-of-home care, with close to half (47%) of the youth having two to three different social workers (see Table 5). A significant positive correlation ( $r=.315$ ) was found between the length of time a youth spent in out-of-home care and the number of different social workers they had assigned to their case.

Table 5. Overall Number of Different Social Workers

Percent	Number of Social Workers
13%	one
47%	2 to 3
20%	4 to 5
6%	6 to 7
1%	8 to 9
9%	Ten or more
4%	Don't know

## Services

Almost all youth (94%) report they received individual counseling while living in out-of-home care. Other services youth received include: independent living

training (64%), group counseling (56%), drug/alcohol counseling (46%), participation in youth organizations (40%), employment services/training (41%), and tutoring (43%). For youth who report using drugs or alcohol (n=63), a majority (59%) received substance abuse counseling.

### Future Plans

A majority of the youth report they have plans for where they will live following emancipation (79%), and for their education (87%). Most youth interviewed have employment plans following emancipation (82%) and 19% were employed at the time of their interview. More than one-third (37%) report they will receive some sort of financial assistance after leaving care.

### Concrete Needs

A photo identification card, social security card, and a birth certificate are the most common concrete items youth already possess. About one-fourth don't expect to have a drivers license and one-fifth don't expect to have a library card upon exit from care (see Table 6).

Table 6 – Concrete Youth Needs

Item:	Youth who currently have:	Youth who expect to have item by the time they leave care:	Youth who <u>do not</u> expect to have item by the time they leave care:
Drivers license	11%	58%	26%
Photo Id	82%	16%	2%
Social Security card	75%	21%	2%
Copy of their birth certificate	72%	23%	2%
Plans for medical insurance after they leave care	46%	35%	10%

Table 6 cont.			
Plans for dental insurance after they leave care	45%	35%	11%
Bank account	50%	37%	8%
Library card	61%	19%	20%

\* Note, not all rows total to 100% due to youth who didn't know if they would have the item by the time they leave care.

### **ACLSA Short Form**

The Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment - Short Form (ACLSA), an instrument developed by Casey Family Programs designed to assess preparedness for living independently, was included as part of the survey packet. Table 7 shows the percent of youth responses for each question in the ACLSA. Calculations of youth "mastery"<sup>2</sup> of preparedness for independent living indicate that 19% of the youth scored in the "mastery" range.

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<sup>2</sup> "Mastery" on the ACLSA- short form is calculated using the percentage of questions answered at the highest possible level that is over 74%.

Table 7 – ACLSA Short Form

	ACLSA Short Form Items	Not really like me	Like me	Very much like me
1.	I ask questions to make sure I understand something someone has said.	9%	46%	45%
2.	I can explain the education or training needed for my career options	17%	50%	33%
3.	I can name three ways to find out about job openings	6%	40%	54%
4.	I can explain why good job references are important	10%	37%	53%
*5.	I think about how my choices now affect my future a year or more from now.	10%	41%	50%
*6.	I get help if my feelings bother me	24%	43%	32%
7.	I deal with anger without using violence.	12%	39%	49%
8.	I know how to wash my clothes according to the label (for example, hand wash, dry clean, cold water)	5%	24%	71%
*9.	I fix breakfast, lunch, or dinner	15%	28%	58%
10.	I follow the basic fire prevention and safety rules for where I live	9%	39%	52%
11.	I can contact places around where I live to get information on sex or pregnancy	10%	32%	58%
12.	I can explain how to establish and maintain a good credit rating	43%	32%	25%
*13.	I can name two ways to save money on things I buy	5%	36%	60%
14.	I talk over problems with a friend	12%	39%	49%
15.	I talk with an adult I feel close to	11%	43%	46%
16.	I am polite to others	1%	37%	62%
17.	I respect other people's ways of looking at things, their lifestyles, and their attitudes	2%	34%	64%
18.	I look over my work for mistakes	17%	53%	30%
19.	I prepare for exams and presentations	30%	47%	23%
20.	I use the library, newspaper, phone book, or other resources to get information	16%	37%	47%

- \*Does not add to 100% due to rounding.
- "mastery" is calculated using the percentage of questions answered at the highest possible level over 74%

## **Social Worker Interview**

The following data are based on telephone interviews with 125 social workers for 214 youth. Some social workers were interviewed about more than one youth on their caseload. Social workers were only interviewed with permission from the youth.

### **Education**

Social workers report that a majority of the youth (84%, n=176) were in school at the time of the interview. As for the rest of the youth, 5% have their GED, 5% dropped out of school, 2% graduated from high school, 1 was expelled from school, and 3% were not in school for other reasons (i.e., transitioning into a new school, Job Corps, “on the run”).

### **Legal Status**

According to their social worker, most of the youth interviewed are dependents of the state (79%). “Dependent child” is defined by RCW13.34.030 (5) and means any child who:

- (a) Has been abandoned;
- (b) Is abused or neglected as defined in chapter [26.44](#) RCW by a person legally responsible for the care of the child; or
- (c) Has no parent, guardian, or custodian capable of adequately caring for the child, such that the child is in circumstances which constitute a danger of substantial damage to the child's psychological or physical development.

The remainder of the youth are independent 11%, legally free from both parents 8%, and CHINS (a child in need of services) 2%.

### **Mental Health**

Social workers report that 61% of the youth have a mental health problem, and 43% have a diagnosed mental health problem. More than three-fourths (76%) of

the youth received mental health counseling within the year prior to their interview.

### **Abuse History**

Social Workers were asked to report the types of maltreatment that youth experienced during their lifetime. Most youth interviewed (95%) were reportedly victims of child abuse and/or neglect. Social workers indicated that most youth experienced multiple types of abuse. Frequently cited abuse types include: emotional maltreatment (87%), lack of supervision (79%), physical neglect (79%), physical abuse (67%), and failure to provide [shelter, food, clothing, medical care, etc.] (67%) (see Table 8 for a complete list).

Table 8 Maltreatment Experienced by Youth During Lifetime:

Type of Maltreatment	Percent*
Emotional Maltreatment	87%
Lack of Supervision	79%
Physical Neglect	79%
Physical Abuse	67%
Failure to Provide	67%
Sexual Abuse	54%
Abandonment	57%
Medical Neglect	43%

\*Maltreatment categories are not mutually exclusive, youth may have experienced more than one type of maltreatment. Percentages reflect youth who were identified as abused/neglected n=198.

### **Independent Living Services:**

Three-fourths of the social workers indicate that Independent Living (IL) services are readily available for the youth on their caseload. The quality of IL services was rated by social workers as “good” (27%), “fair” (47%), “poor” (19%) and “don’t know” (6%).

Independent living training was the most frequently cited service provided to youth in the past year (83%), followed closely by mental health services at 76% (see Table 9).

Table 9 – Services to Youth

Service	Percent
Independent Living Services, i.e., training	83%
Mental Health Services	76%
Independent Living funds i.e., for school and housing	36%
Drug/Alcohol	34%
Group Care	34%
SSI/SSA	27%
After Care	15%
Counseling – Family Reconciliation Services, Intensive Family Preservation Services, Family Preservation Services	14%
School Scholarship	5%

The quality of the youth’s relationship with their foster parent was gauged by social workers with 41% reporting an excellent youth-foster parent relationship, 39% good, 14% fair, and 6% poor relationship with their foster parents.

Social workers identified positive attributes of youth which may help them transition successfully to independence. The most frequently cited attribute is the youth’s communication skills, followed by their work or volunteer experience and their intelligence (see Table 10 for a complete list of attributes).

Table 10 Positive Youth Attributes

Youth’s Attribute	Percent
Communication Skills	41%
Intelligence	25%
Personality	24%
Support Network	20%
Work or Volunteer experience	19%
Maturity	17%
Attitude	17%
Motivation	15%
Goal Oriented	13%
Resilient	13%
Lack of Obstacles	13%
Use of Resources	12%
Realistic expectations of self	12%
Accepts Responsibilities	11%
Academic Achievement	11%

Table 10. cont.	
Makes Good Decisions	11%
Independence	11%
Attractive appearance	11%
Positive Self-esteem	10%
Family Support	5%

## Housing Plans

Social Workers report that most youth plan to live on their own (29%) or with their biological family (28%) after leaving care (see Table 11 for additional housing plans).

Table 11. Housing Plans

Youth will Live	Percent
On their own	31%
Biological family	28%
Foster family	12%
School Dorm	9%
Other* location	5%
Job Corps	6%
Military	4%
Supervised IL Home	<1%

\*Other includes: travel abroad, living with boyfriend, in a mother-baby home, etc.

Social Workers consider that over half (58%) of the youth's housing plans are realistic, 24% somewhat realistic and 17% not very realistic.

At the time of the pre-emancipation interview social workers did not consider the majority of youth (71%) ready to live on their own. However, when asked how likely the youth on their caseload would transition to independence successfully, social workers indicate that over half (53%) of the youth are very likely to transition successfully, 36% somewhat likely and 11% not likely at all.

## **Summary**

This study engendered a 72% interview rate with youth prior to emancipation and a 91% interview rate with their social workers. Youth interviewed are divided between genders with 51% of the respondents being female. Compared to the general population of youth in Washington State, whites and Asian/Pacific Islanders are under-represented in the sample at 60% and 1% respectively, while youth identifying as more than one race are over-represented (19%).

Respondents from other race/ethnicity's are more representative of each race/ethnicity in the general population. Most of the youth were still in high school at the time of the pre-emancipation interview, and three-fourths have taken part in an independent living training or program.

Abuse experienced by the foster youth ranges from medical neglect to sexual abuse. The most frequently cited abuse types include emotional maltreatment, lack of supervision and physical neglect. Half of the youth interviewed have been living in out-of-home care for more than five years with a minimum stay of one year based on study eligibility criteria. Equal numbers of the youth were moved between one and three times, 4 and 9 times, and more than 10 times while living in out-of-home care. Most youth had fewer than three different social workers during their placements. Policy directs social workers to visit youth in placement a minimum of once every 90 days. A discrepancy emerged between the youth's report of frequency of social worker visits (59% every 90 days) and the social workers report (86% every 90 days).

Risk behaviors for foster youth interviewed include drug/alcohol use – close to one half use tobacco, one fourth alcohol and one fifth marijuana; delinquency - a majority of the youth report they have been arrested; and pregnancy/sex – most youth report having had sex and just over one fourth of the females report at least one pregnancy, compared to 4% in the general population for the same age group. Additionally, just over one third of the youth scored high on a depressive symptom scale.

A support structure can be crucial to a youth's successful transition to independence. Emancipating youth indicate they will turn to friends, their former foster family, relatives, a social worker, a teacher, a church member or some other person for help when they need it. Almost all youth report they have a close positive relationship with at least one adult.

Individual counseling, independent living training, drug/alcohol counseling and employment services/training are all services youth report receiving while living in out of home care.

Most youth have plans for where they will live upon exit from care, as well as plans for their education and employment. Over one-third of the youth expect to receive some sort of financial assistance after leaving care. Social workers thought that over half of the youth's housing plans were realistic, and social workers thought that one third of the youth were "very likely" to transition to independence successfully. The most common concrete item youth report they won't have upon exit is a driver's license.

Results of the ACLSA-short form, measuring preparedness for living independently, indicate that 19% of the youth have gained "mastery" on this scale. Mastery is measured by the percent of answers in the highest range over 74%.

### **Conclusion**

This study attempts to interview all youth exiting out-of-home care into independence to learn about their preparedness for independence. This initial interview will be followed up with a post emancipation interview that will inform us how youth fared once they are out on their own. At the time of the pre-emancipation interview, youth appear to have many obstacles to conquer in order to successfully transition to independence. For example, one third of the youth experience depressive symptoms, close to half have a mental health

problem, most have been arrested, and one fourth of the females have been pregnant by the time they are 18.

Most youth in out-of-home care receive counseling and independent living training, however, it may be difficult for them to fully appreciate the difficulties related to emancipation before they are faced with them. The next phase of the study, the post emancipation interview, will provide information on outcomes for emancipated foster youth 6 to 9 months following placement. This information will help the state and Independent Living programs better anticipate and provide for the needs and possible outcomes for foster youth as they leave care.

## References

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