2004

Youths' perceptions of an independent living program

Valorie Albertina Alba

Gloriana Parral

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YOUTHS' PERCEPTIONS OF AN INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM

A Project
Presented to the Faculty of California State University, San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Social Work

by
Valorie Albertina Alba
Gloriana Parral
June 2004
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the County of San Bernardino's Independent Living Program's efforts to prepare ILP participants for self-sufficiency. These efforts were evaluated from the perspective of foster youth who are currently participating in an Independent Living Program. The study utilized quantitative and qualitative research methods to assess the ILP participants' preparedness for independence. This study revealed that foster youth perceive the ILP program to be effective in the areas of employment and money management. However, areas of housing and education need further development.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to acknowledge the efforts made and the dedication of San Bernardino County's Department of Children Services to foster youth and the Independent living Program. We would like to extend a special thank you to the ILP youth for their participation in this project and the clerical staff of the Independent Living Program Stacey Bryant, Irma Romero and Sandra Hernandez—without your generous support this project would not have been accomplished.

We would also like to thank Dr. Laurie Smith and Dr. Rosemary McCaslin for their valuable feedback, support, advice and guidance in completing this project. Thank you!
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

Studies report that the number of children in foster care is rising and will continue to rise throughout the next decade (Courtney & Barth, 1996; Mallon, 1998). There are more than 545,000 children in foster care nationwide (Ayasse, 1995). Within the state of California, the total number of children placed in out-of-home care by public child welfare agencies has increased from 33,285 in 1984 to more than 84,000 in 1994 (Ayasse, 1995).

Although historically, child welfare practice has emphasized the temporary removal of children from the home, a significant proportion of children in out-of-home care remain in foster care and do not leave until they "age out" of the system (Melpighanos & Collins, 2003). Since one in four of these children remain in out of home care until they reach the age of emancipation, the need to provide this population with the skills needed to achieve self-sufficiency has become increasingly evident (Ayasse, 1995). Despite this increased awareness however, until recently, limited attention has been given to adolescents in foster care by child welfare system.
There are approximately 30,000 foster children aging out of government run programs each year who are expected to transition into self sufficient adults (Melpighanos & Collins, 2003). Researchers have found that while most children who leave the child-welfare system upon reaching adulthood adjust reasonably well, many former foster children encounter significant problems making the transition towards independence (Melpighanos & Collins, 2003).

Unlike those who have the advantage of a stable home environment, out-of-home care youths have limited opportunities to learn the skills necessary to live independently (Mallon, 1998). Although it may be believed that once a child enters foster care, this ends a child's prolonged experience of trauma, studies have shown that this is typically not the case (Geroski, 2002). Children in foster care face several challenges including experiencing serious psychological, social, and physiological difficulties resulting from the abuse they endured and with problems relating to adapting to multiple foster care placements (Geroski, 2002). According to a study completed by the National Alliance to End Homelessness (1995), foster youth leave foster care not knowing how to deal with the problems resulting from the
circumstances that caused them to be removed from their homes. Foster care also often fails in helping these children address problems that arise during their time in foster care. Moreover, an extended amount of time in foster care facilitates foster youths to become accustomed to institutionalized living, instead of independent living. Such encounters can seriously hinder opportunities for foster care youths to learn the skills needed in order to transition into independent and self-sufficient adults (Mallon, 1998).

Functioning as a self-sufficient adult in society requires a tremendous amount of knowledge, skill and most importantly outside support that most out-of-home care youths simply do not have. Youths exiting out of foster care who do not possess the skills necessary for independent living are at great risk for getting involved in situations that are not only disastrous to the young adult, but to society as a whole.

Scannapeico et al. (1995) discovered that an only 34% to 48% of emancipated youths complete their high school diplomas. Approximately one third of youths who have exited foster care relied on Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) or another version of a city’s home relief program within 18 months of leaving the system.
Several studies indicated an overrepresentation of former foster children in homeless shelters (Davis & Barrett, 2000). In fact, according to San Bernardino County's 2003 Homeless Census and Survey for the Community Action Partnership of San Bernardino County, of the 1723 homeless people interviewed, 12% reported that they had been in foster care. This study also revealed that those with a foster care history tend to become homeless at an earlier age and have their own children in foster care than those who do not have a foster care history. Homeless youth are at high risk of contracting HIV when they have no choice but to engage in "survival sex" (exchanging sex for housing, food, shelter, drugs, goods or services).

Since these children are under Juvenile Court's jurisdiction, it is critical that these youths are protected in all aspects including assisting these youths prepare for life after foster care prior to aging out of out of home care. Preparing foster children for independent living has unfortunately proven to be an extremely complicated task for the child welfare system.

Recognition of the difficulties foster care children experience after leaving the foster care system has increased over the years, in particular to child welfare
and policy makers (Courtney, et al., 2001). Despite this increased awareness however, and with the implementation of programs geared to assist these youths prepare for independent living, numerous studies suggest that youths leaving foster care continue to fail in areas of education, employment, public assistance, and housing (Nollan et al., 2000; Courtney et al., 2001; Davis & Barrett, 2000). Researchers agree that providing foster youth with appropriate guidance and services can be a very cost-effective method of preventing future social problems (Ayasse, 1995). These findings suggest that other methods for improvement need to be explored to better assist foster children obtaining the skills and tools necessary to achieve self-sufficiency prior to leaving foster care.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify areas for service improvement for preparing foster youths to live independently. This exploratory research study focused on participants in the Department of Children’s Services Independent Living Program within the County of San Bernardino. More specifically, this study explored whether the services offered by the Department of Children’s Services Independent Living Program are perceived
sufficient by current ILP participants to prepare them to live independently.

Studies have shown that program satisfaction is particularly important in servicing youths mainly because this population typically lacks the ability to express discontentment (Collins, et al., 2000). Because input by ILP participants is important in order to identify specific aspects of service improvement, a qualitative component was included in the study to get a better understanding of the specific concerns ILP participants have.

This research project also included ILP participants' feedback regarding their readiness to become self-sufficient based on the services they receive. By evaluating their perceptions, this research study will provide insight regarding the barriers ILP youths face when leaving foster care. Areas needing further exploration and improvement were also addressed.

The research questions specifically addressed in this research study were: How effective do ILP youth perceive the ILP program to be? If the ILP program is perceived be not effective, what needs to improve or change?
Significance of the Project for Social Work

The need to examine different avenues for improving services for foster youths is great and significant in the field of social work. An effort to continue to address this issue is not only essential to ensuring the well-being of a population in need but is warranted by the ethics and standards to which social work adheres. Incorporating ILP youth's perceptions about Independent Living Programs is also significant in that it will "provide a viewpoint necessary for evaluation, provide a primary area necessary for examining program effectiveness and will also present administration and policy makers with the feedback needed to improve service delivery" (Collins, Lemon, & Street, 2000, p. 290).

Although several programs have been implemented to teach foster children the skills necessary to become self-sufficient, because so many foster youths continue to fail, something is obviously going wrong. Thus, in order to better serve and protect this population from continual failure, identifying areas of improving services is imperative. Since state agencies have a legal responsibility for youths in their care, it is critical for child welfare agencies to not only become aware of some of the problems associated with youths leaving foster
care unprepared but must also become more involved with helping these youths transition successfully into self-sufficient members of society. Research findings will also identify areas of improvement for social work practice and within current agency policy protocols when preparing foster care youths to become independent.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The literature review will discuss the development of policies and programs relevant to independent living programs. The educational, employment, housing, income, legal, and early parenting challenges emancipated foster youth often encounter will also be discussed in this section. Lastly, several outcome studies regarding ILP programs will be explored along with the theories that have guided this research.

Policy and Program Development Relevant to Independent Living Programs

The initiation of the Independent Living Programs resulted from concerns among human service professionals and the general public. The concerns derived from a substantial number of former foster children returning to the care of the state as adults (Stone, 1987). In 1986, Congress addressed these concerns through the construction of the Federal Independent Living (FIL) program via the addition of Section 477 to Title IV-E of the Social Security Act. Since initiation, there have been several
implemented policies, which have contributed to the continual development of independent living programs.

In 1987, federal funds were allocated and ILP programs were implemented in all 50 states (CWLA Testimony, 1999). Forty-five million dollars in incentive funding was allotted to the states under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act. The funding was to be utilized to provide independent living services to foster youth and post-foster youth ages 16 to 18. The federal program delegated the construction and defining of independent living services, delivery of services and standards to the states and local levels of child welfare (Irvine, 1988).

Since the initial FIL program, there have been several federal amendments. In 1990, the age of eligibility to receive services was extended from 18 to 21. This extension of services was left to each state's discretion. In 1993, the independent living program was permanently reauthorized under the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (P.L. 103-66). The Act authorized 70 million dollars a year for states to develop and implement services that would assist foster and post-foster youth ages 16 to 18 in transition from foster care to living independently (Federal Document Clearing House, Inc. Congressional Testimony, 1999). A set formula was used to
dispense the funds in each state and the funds were matched dollar for dollar over the original amount provided to the states in 1986 (CWLA Testimony, 1999).

In November of 1999, the Foster Care Independence Act (P.L. 106-169) was enacted and named the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program. The Act was authorized under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act and the federal allotment doubled from $70 million to $140 million dollars per year (Allred, 1999). The Act’s primary focus was to reform and extend ILP and aftercare services by providing further assistance and expanding support services for transitioning foster youth in their pursuit of independence.

**Challenges Foster Youth Encounter**

It is estimated 20,000 youth leave the foster care system each year (Allred, 1999). Many are not prepared to live independently but are expected to survive. McMillen et al. (1997) stated that many foster youth feel unprepared, insecure, and unsure of how to make the transition to independence. Foster youth’s lack of preparedness can contribute to their failure to transition into self-sufficient adults. Many former foster youth
often lack essential education, employment, housing and other skills necessary for independent living.

Education

According to the Casey Family Program (2001) "success in school is a critical contributor to a high quality of life and is central to the transition process" (p. 18). With school success playing an essential role in successful transition to independent living, it is worthwhile to explore educational issues among transitioning foster youth.

One issue that emerged throughout research is educational deficits among transitioning foster youth. Scannapieco et al. (1995) discovered that only 34% to 48% of youth emancipating from the foster care system completed their high school diploma. According to Propp, Ortega, and NewHeart (2003) recent research has revealed a higher percentage: 50% of the studied foster youth had not finished high school upon exiting the foster care system.

Additional research explored educational issues among foster youth after exiting the foster care system. Westat (1991) discovered that 46% of foster youth had not completed their high school diplomas two to four years after leaving the foster care. Research by Courtney and
Pilivian (1998) found that 37% of former foster youth had not completed their high school education twelve to eighteen months after emancipation. Furthermore, research on former foster youth found that 38% of had not completed their high school education ten years after leaving the foster care system (Barth, 1990). In a society where high school diplomas are critical for desirability in the job market, these percentages should be considered disturbing.

Employment

Employment issues present another barrier foster youth encounter in obtaining self-sufficiency. Studies indicated that half of all foster youth studied were not employed upon exiting the foster care system (Propp, Ortega and NewHeart, 2003). Research by Westat (1991) found that fifty-one percent of former foster youth were unemployed and sixty-two percent were unable to maintain employment for at least one year, two to four years after leaving foster care.

Twelve to eighteen months after leaving the foster care system, thirty-nine percent of former foster youth were unemployed and nineteen percent had not held a job since leaving foster care (Courtney & Pilivian, 1998). After ten years, twenty-five percent of former foster
youth were unemployed, and fifty-three percent reported being affected by financial hardship (Barth, 1990). Finally, research indicated that former foster youth have a history of job instability and earn less than their non-foster peers (Barth, 1990).

Homelessness

Runaways and homeless youth have emerged as another serious social challenge to policy makers, human service providers and communities. In 1994, 1.3 to 1.6 million young people became homeless (Kurtz et al, 2000). Many of these youth experience significant housing instability and are forced to live in several places, such as shelters, psychiatric hospitals or on the street.

Studies have identified an overrepresentation of former foster children in homeless shelters. The Alliance to End Homelessness surveyed 21 homeless shelter organizations and Alliance found that of the 1,134 homeless clients, 36.2% were previously in the foster care system (Roman & Wolfe, 1997). The Chicago Coalition for the homeless (1991) found that among the 200 homeless adolescents interviewed, in their study, 45% had been in Juvenile Court's jurisdiction and in the custody of the state.
Reliance on Public Assistance

Several studies had similar findings regarding former foster youth and public assistance use. The studies found that one third of youths who had exited foster care relied on Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) or a city’s home relief program within 18 months of leaving the system (Allen, Bonner, & Greenan, 1988; Mallon, 1998).

Problems with the Law

Additional research (Allen, Bonner, & Greenan, 1988; Iglehart, 1995) points out a relationship that exists between foster youth and arrest, serious crimes, and incarceration following emancipation from foster care. A survey conducted in California revealed that an astounding two-thirds of inmates in the State of California prison system were at one time placed in the foster care system. This same survey discovered that one-third of children in the juvenile system had also been in the foster care system at least once (Moynihan, 1988).

Parenting

Another issue presented itself when addressing foster youth’s transition towards independence. The issue is foster youth becoming young parents. A study by the Children’s Defense Fund suggested that children in foster
care experience higher incidences of early pregnancy and parenting (Sims, 1988). Cook (1994) found that 60% of former female foster youth were either pregnant or already parenting within 12 to 18 months after leaving care. In these cases foster youth are faced with the challenge of obtaining self-sufficiency for themselves and supporting their dependent child.

In sum, previous studies suggest that foster youth face many obstacles in their pursuit of independence. Areas in which these obstacles are present are education, employment, homelessness, reliance on relief programs, problems with the law and early pregnancy.

Research on Independent Living Programs

Studies indicated that independent living programs could be effective if utilized. Several agencies across the United States have examined the effectiveness of various independent living programs. Scannapieco and Schagrin (1995) suggested that independent living skills programs may have a positive impact on the ability of youth to be self-sufficient at the time of discharge from the foster care program. Scannapieco and Schagrin (1995) also found that foster children who participated in independent living programs were more likely to complete
high school, be employed, maintain employment, be self-sufficient and be self-supporting at the closing of their case (Scannapieco & Schagrin, 1995).

National studies of independent living programs have shown a significant relationship between exposure to life skills training programs, accomplishments and self-sufficiency in several domains (Gavazzi, Alford, & Mckenry, 1996).

Studies supported the idea that independent living programs can be effective, if utilized. However, as noted above, research indicates that many former foster children continue to encounter issues with homelessness, employment, education, the law, and early pregnancy. Although there was ample literature and outcome research available on foster youth's transition to living independently, there appeared to be insufficient research that specifically asked foster youth their perceptions on how effective they perceive the ILP program to be or their input about areas needing improvement. Kroner (1988) recommends that programs must work with youths at their level. The foster youth's perceived needs, ideas and thoughts concerning achieving independent living must be taken into consideration as independent living programs continually improve.
To continually develop independent living programs, it is essential that foster youth have a voice in creating and designing programs that meet their needs. Not only will foster youth’s input provide vital information but will also empower foster youth to take ownership and an active role in achieving independence. According to Casey Family Programs (2001) youth empowerment and participation are essential components of successful transitional work. The above concepts resulted in the research question: How effective do ILP youth perceive the ILP program to be? If not effective, what needs to improve or change?

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Providing foster children with opportunities for empowerment, increasing self-esteem, and reducing feeling of alienation, isolation, anxiety and depression (Schran & Givengo, 1991) may be fundamental elements that need to be further incorporated into independent living programs. According to Pecora et al. (1999), child welfare, more specifically the foster care system, has often not taken the voice of their client into consideration. If this is correct, the client’s voice and input may be one essential component that needs to be improved upon as child welfare
continues to take on the complex and difficult tasks of developing independent living programs.

Using a client-centered approach and listening to the voices of the foster youth may provide an abundant amount of information as to the specific and prevalent needs of the foster youth. The foster youth is best able to assess what areas they need assistance at their current developmental level.

Giving foster youth the opportunity to voice their opinions serves as an empowering experience. According to Sohng (1992), the empowerment approach emphasizes the essentialness of client participation in many areas, such as service delivery and client population. The goal of the empowerment approach is to assist the client to enhance their own sense of strength and competence through participation and involvement in critical decision-making. Empowerment is essential in developing the most effect independent living program. Empowering foster youth by giving them a voice to express their perception of the independent living program can be vital in the improvement of the program.
Summary

The need for effective independent living programs is essential. The question becomes what components are necessary to create more effective programs? Discovering which elements are missing from the ILP program may be key. One essential element may be foster youth’s perception of effectiveness with the ILP program’s components and services to foster youth. Incorporating and studying this area is important in the development and evolution of independent living programs and ultimately contributing to an increase in foster youth successfully achieving self-sufficiency.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This chapter will review the study design, sampling methods, data collection and instrument, procedures, protection of human subjects, and the data analysis used to evaluate the data from foster care youths served by County of San Bernardino’s Independent Living Skills Program.

Study Design

The purpose of this study was to examine the County of San Bernardino’s Independent Living Skills program’s efforts to prepare ILP participants for self-sufficiency. These efforts were evaluated from the perspective of foster youths who are currently participating in an Independent Living Skills Program. This study used a written questionnaire consisting of several scales and open-ended questions. A written questionnaire was the most feasible way to obtain data from the desired data source.

This study primarily utilized a quantitative approach in order to make it more feasible to obtain a larger sample size and to allow respondents to complete the survey in a short amount of time. In order to give the
respondents an opportunity to express their personal opinions and comments, the survey also utilized several open-ended questions. While responses from these open-ended questions were not statistically analyzed, they were qualitatively analyzed.

While studies investigating the effect of independent living skills programs are numerous, few have included direct feedback from its most important client—ILP youth. Analyzing current ILP participants' perceptions will provide valuable information to further assist in identifying areas of program strengths and in identifying deficiencies in service delivery.

Sampling

Participants in this study included sixty 16-18 year old current ILP participants who are in out-of-home placement under the jurisdiction of San Bernardino County DPSS. This age range was selected because it coincided with the age requirement for foster youths to participate in the ILP program.

The researchers were granted access to current ILP participant records to obtain the names and mailing addresses of current ILP participants.
Data Collection and Instruments

Data were collected using a seven page self-administered survey consisting of 44 questions. While the survey was primarily quantitative, a small qualitative section consisting of three open-ended questions was also included. This qualitative section was added in order to provide the participants an opportunity to express their opinions and recommendations for improving the ILP program.

Desiring the largest possible sample size, a survey was the most convenient way to meet this goal. Variables in the questionnaire included demographics (age, gender, region and length of time in foster care), educational status and goals, housing status and goals, employment status and goals and services utilized. The survey also included participant reactions to the ILP program.

The instrument used included self-administered questions on preparation for independent living. These questions were taken from two previous studies conducted by Steenwyk (1995) and Asher (1996) and modified for this study. The questions assessed basic life skills such as education, employment/career, housing, home arrangements and money management (Questionnaire is in Appendix A). A qualitative section in the survey was added to include
participants concerns with the ILP program and/or possible areas of improvement.

Procedures

The researchers began with obtaining a list of current ILP participants and their mailing addresses from three regions: the High Desert, Rancho Cucamonga and San Bernardino. A list of one hundred ILP youths was obtained from each of the three regions. Packets containing an informed consent form, a survey, and a debriefing statement were mailed to each participant. Each packet also included a letter from the researchers stating the purpose of the study and encouraging participation as a way to help the researchers understand, through their own voices, how the ILP program could better serve them. Participants were provided with a self-addressed stamped envelope to use for returning completed questionnaires to their regions ILP office.

All packets were mailed out on or about February 3, 2004, and participants were asked to return the questionnaires within 30 days. Out of the 300 questionnaires mailed, 60 were returned (20%). The researchers began entering the data in the SPSS program during the time period of March 19 to April 9, 2004.
Protection of Human Subjects

The participants in this study were not asked to include any identifying information on the survey. All participants were asked to complete a notice of informed consent, which described the purpose of the study and explained the voluntary nature of participation in this study. Participants were advised that they were free to withdraw from the study without penalty at any time. Informed consent was confirmed by requesting the participants to mark an "X" on the informed consent page prior to completing the survey. Having the participants provide consent using this method further ensured maintaining confidentiality.

The rights and welfare of all participants were protected and kept confidential with regard to this study. Participation was voluntary, and all participants who participated were required to provide informed consent. Because the participants were minors and dependents of the Court, an additional informed consent was obtained and signed by DPSS, acting as their legal guardians. Approval was also acquired by the Department of Social Work Sub-Committee of the Institutional Review Board at California State University, San Bernardino and from the
director of the Department of Children’s Services from San Bernardino County, Cathy Cimbalo.

No significant risks were apparent in this study. This study was a non-manipulative, non-stressful study of individual responses. For added protection, the participants were given a debriefing statement listing contact information for counseling available should participation in the study result in discomfort or distress for the participant.

Although, DPSS was provided with a copy of this study’s results, the identity of the subjects was not revealed to DPSS nor any other person or agency. Any information that would link data with an identity will be destroyed at the conclusion of this project no later than July 1, 2004.

Data Analysis

Quantitative and qualitative procedures were utilized to answer the research questions: How effective do ILP youth perceive the ILP program to be? If the ILP program is perceived to not effective, what needs to improve or change? The responses of ILP participants were examined to determine if a correlation existed between perceptions of readiness for independent living and actual services of
the independent living program. Correlational associations were considered to examine any possible relationship among the variables. In addition, descriptive statistics were calculated to describe the study participant's demographic characteristics.

Variables that were analyzed included total number of ILP classes attended by respondents, length of time in foster care, current living arrangement, money management and housing, educational and employment goals. In addition, questions pertaining to the participant's reactions to whom they perceived helped them the most in preparing for independent living were used to explore if the ILP program influenced their responses.

This study also incorporated a qualitative aspect by asking ILP participants to describe their opinions about the Independent Living Program and what they believe to need improvement. Responses to the open-ended questions at the end of the survey were not statistically analyzed, but were examined for themes or patterns for the discussion section of this study in the comments.

Summary

This study hopes to lead to an improved understanding of the dynamics of ILP youth's perceptions about San
Bernardino County's Independent Living Program. A better understanding of the perceptions of ILP participants can eventually result in improving the Independent Living Program.
CHAPTER FOUR
RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine how effective ILP youth perceive the ILP program to be and if not effective, what needed to improve or change. To analyze the participants’ perceptions, quantitative and qualitative data was collected from the survey. The survey contained general demographic information, 44 close-ended questions, and three open-ended questions, which offered the opportunity for foster youth to articulate their thoughts and ideas regarding the independent living programs.

Presentation of the Findings

Univariate analysis was used to determine the demographic characteristics of the participants, which included gender, age, ethnicity, planned education goals, number of years in foster care, current type of placement, and the region they presently resided in (see table 1 and 2).

A total of 60 respondents completed the survey. Of the 60 respondents, 75% (n = 45) were female and 25% (n = 15%) were male.
Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Gender, Age, Ethnicity, Region, and Type of Placement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Characteristics</th>
<th>Frequency (n)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
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<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current type of Placement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster Care</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative Care</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>37.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Home</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster Family Agency (FFA)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The age of respondents ranged from 16 to 19 years of age. The majority of the respondents were either 17 (45.0%) or 18 (38.3%) years of age.

The respondents represented a diverse population with a majority of the respondents being African American (35%). Thirty percent (30%) of the respondents categorized themselves as Latino/Hispanic and a little over twenty-three percent (23.3%) of the respondents considered
themselves to be Caucasian. The smallest group of respondents was those who categorized themselves as Asian American (1.7%). Ten percent (10%) of the respondents selected "other" as their ethnic group.

The majority of respondents (61.0%) resided in the San Bernardino region. Twenty two percent (22.0%) lived in the High Desert region, 10.2% resided in the West End region and 6.8% of respondents selected other for the region they reside.

Most of the respondents (44.1%) lived in a foster home care setting. Relative care was the second highest with (37.3%) residing in relative care. A little over ten percent (10.2%), lived in-group homes. The smallest percentage of the respondents lived in a Foster Family Agency (FFA) home, (8.5%).

The majority of respondents (n = 19) replied that they had been in the foster home care system four to six years. Twelve respondents (n = 12), stated that they had been in foster care zero to three years. Eight respondents (n = 8) declared that they had been in the foster care system seven to nine years and eight respondents (n = 8) stated ten to eleven years. Finally, six respondents (n = 6) stated they had been in the foster care for thirteen to fifteen years and six respondents (n = 6)
determined that they had been in the foster care system sixteen to eighteen years. The average length of time in the foster care system was zero to three years (see Table 1).

Thirty five percent 35% of the respondents' educational goal was to pursue a Bachelor degree, 26.7% of the respondents' educational goal was to obtain a post graduate degree, 11.7% planned on attending a trade school, 8.3% planned on obtaining their high school diploma, 8.3% intended on completing some college, 8.3% anticipated obtaining an Associates degree, and 1.7% of the respondents' educational goal was to complete their General Equivalency Diploma [GED] (see Table 2).

Most, (55%), of respondents plan on living in their own apartment, dorm, or military housing after they leave the foster care system. Twenty percent of the respondents plan on living with relatives. Just over eleven percent (11.7%) of respondents did not know where they were going to live after leaving the system. Fewer, 6.7% of respondents plan to live with foster parents and 6.7% plan on living with their birth parents (6.7%) after exiting the foster care system (see Table 2).
Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Years in Foster Care, Planned Educational, and Planned Living Arrangements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Characteristics</th>
<th>Frequency (n)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years in foster care</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>32.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not answer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planned educational</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GED</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.A. Degree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade School</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.A. or B.A. Degree</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Graduate Degree</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planned living arrangements after emancipation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With foster parents</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With parents</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With relatives</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On their own (apartment, dorm or military)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>55.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A majority of respondents (29.3%) indicated that no one had helped them prepare for their planned living arrangements after exiting the system. Among the respondents, (25.9%) specified that their foster parent or guardian had been the most helpful in helping them prepare for their planned living arrangement after emancipating from foster care. A little over twenty two percent (22.4%) named their relatives as being the most helpful with
planned living arrangements. Over twelve percent (12.1%) reported that their social workers/ILP staff had been most helpful in this task. Nearly seven (6.9%) percent indicate that their parents had been the most helpful. And lastly, 3.4% indicate others as having helped them the most to prepare for planned living arrangements. Two respondents did not answer this question (see Table 3).

Table 3. Most Helpful in Planning and Preparing for Independent Living

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individuals who helped the most</th>
<th>Frequency (n)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who has helped the most with planned living arrangements?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No one</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>29.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Worker/ILP staff</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth Parents</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatives</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster Parents/Guardian</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who has assisted in preparing for independent living?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No one</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social worker/ILP staff</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>32.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth parents</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatives</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster Parents/Guardians</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>32.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of who helped the most in preparing overall for independent living, 32.1% indicated that their social workers or ILP staff was the most helpful. Another 32.1% also indicated that their foster parents or guardian had
statistically significant relationship did not exist between the two variables.

A Pearson r (2-tail) test was conducted to see if a correlation existed between the numbers of attended employment related ILP classes and the perceived level of employment readiness. The results indicate a statistically significant correlation, \( r = .001, p < .05 \), between the two variables.

Finally, a Person r (2-tail) test was also performed to see if a correlation existed between the number of attended money management ILP classes and the perceived level of money management readiness. The results also resulted in a statically significant correlation, \( r = .000, p < .05 \), between the two variables.

Qualitative Data

Three open-ended questions were incorporated into the questionnaire (see question 6 under housing arrangements and A and B under the additional comments section in Appendix A) to allow the foster youth an opportunity to voice responses to the following questions: 1) What barriers or problems do you think you might have in getting or keeping the housing that you would like? 2) In what way can the Independent Living Program be more helpful to you? and 3) What would you like foster care
workers and people who plan programs for foster youth to know about how to prepare foster care youth for a successful future? The open-ended questions were intended to empower foster youth by providing them an avenue to offer input regarding strengths, deficits, and service gaps and areas of improvement within the ILP program. Narrative type questions also afforded the researchers insight into the respondents' level of maturity and needs in obtaining independence.

The first qualitative question stated: "What barriers or problems do you think you might have in getting and keeping the housing that you would like?" Four themes emerged as issues in obtaining housing (see Table 4).

The first theme identified financial problems \((n = 24)\) as a barrier. Sixteen \((n = 16)\) indicated that they did not anticipated barriers in obtaining or sustaining housing. Employment barriers followed with seven \((n = 7)\) responses. Finally, nine \((n = 9)\) respondents identified other problems as barriers and four \((n = 4)\) respondents did not answer this question. A common reply to this qualitative question resembled the following respondents statement, "I don't know that I'll have a place to live."
Table 4. Anticipated Barriers in Obtaining Housing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>Frequency (n)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial Barriers</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Anticipated Barriers</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Barriers</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did Not Answer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What barriers or problems do you think you might have in getting and keeping the housing that you would like?

The second qualitative question asked: "In what way can the Independent Living Program be more helpful?" A total of eight themes emerged.

The majority of respondents (n = 15) indicated that they find the ILP program to already be very helpful and offered no suggestions for further improvement. Ten (n = 10) respondents were grouped as a result of a second theme that emerged. The second theme centered on offering more employment/career training as being more helpful. For example, one ILP respondent stated "The ILP program could be more helpful to me by helping me find a good paying job or some type of internship in becoming a social worker or after-care provider." Ten respondents (n = 10) left this answer blank, which created the third theme. Eight (n = 8) of the responses shared no common theme. As a result, they were grouped as "other." An example of a response from the other category was one suggestion from an ILP teen mother.
participant. She suggested ILP offer "classes that my son can attend and help girls with kids or who are pregnant know what to do."

The fifth theme appeared and identified further assistance with financial aspects of independent living, as a means ILP could be more helpful. A total of six (n = 6) respondents identified with the fifth theme. The sixth theme indicated that further assistance with housing would be most helpful (n = 5). One respondent suggested "offer us housing camps, for example, a place where kids can go and run the home for a couple of weeks as if it were their own." The seventh theme specified that assistance with college would be helpful (n = 3). Lastly, the eight theme (n = 3) points out that offering more classes and workshops would be more helpful (see Table 5).

The final qualitative question asked: "What would you like foster care workers and people who plan programs for foster care youth to know about how to prepare foster care youth for a successful future?" The responses from this question were grouped by seven themes that emerged.

The first theme emphasized a need to improve communication between ILP staff and youth and increase staff ability to relate to foster youth (n = 14). One respondent explained, "listen to teens carefully! See what
Table 5. Suggestions for Making Independent Living Program Can Be More Helpful

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggestions</th>
<th>Frequency (n)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In what way can the Independent Living Program (ILP) be more helpful?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILP is already very helpful</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer more employment/career training</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not answer</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial assistance</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further assistance with housing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistance with college</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering more classes and workshops</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

areas they need help in and challenge them." Another suggested that ILP staff "communicate with the youth and ask for their opinions individually." In regard to foster care worker relating better to foster youth, one respondent stated, "I think it's important for them to try and understand where the kids are coming from." A final example was "I think if they can relate to us more it would help us more."

A second grouping was created due to twelve (n = 12) respondents who left the question blank. A third theme presented as a result of respondents who stated that there is no need for improvement (n = 7). A respondent stated, "I feel that the independent living program is already very helpful to foster youth in helping them have a better
and more successful future." A fourth theme was labeled as "other." This category derived from other suggestions that presented with no common theme (n = 7). One suggestion from the other category was "make the ILP classes fun."

A fifth theme developed from responses, which suggested improved staffing and more availability of ILP staff, classes and social workers (n = 6). A sixth theme emerged from respondents' suggestions for improved employment and housing training and assistance (n = 10). The seventh theme suggested ILP provide more information on aftercare and exiting services when preparing foster youth for a successful future (n = 3) (see Table 6).

Table 6. Foster Youths' Needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Needs</th>
<th>Frequency (n)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What would you like foster care workers and people who plan programs for foster youth to know about how to prepare foster youth for a successful future.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve communication between ILP staff and youth and increase staff ability relate to the foster youth.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not answer</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No need for improvement</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve staffing and availability of ILP staff, classes and social workers.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve employment and housing training and assistance</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More information on aftercare and exiting services</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Additional Comments from Foster Youth

The foster youth’s additional comments have been incorporated into this section of the research. Many of the participants had positive statements about the independent living program. One participant shared “I use to say I can’t wait until I’m eighteen. Now it’s around the corner and I am somewhat afraid of being alone and by myself but on the other hand I’m ready for the world. I thank ILP because I know more than I did when I started.” Another stated “I just wanted to say thank you for all the help that you have given me and that I greatly appreciate how you have been a great help in my life and my future.” Another participant expressed “I appreciate all the help and efforts that you guys have given and shown us foster kids. It means a lot to me. Thank you for everything.” One participant wanted to thank “all the ILP staff and people who assisted me throughout these years.” Lastly, a participant wanted to acknowledge and thank the ILP staff for “spending the time to think up this program and help kids like me out.”

Summary

The use of univariate and bivariate data analysis was used to perform the statistical operations. The
researchers utilized frequencies and correlations to study the relationship between demographic variables. Additionally, correlations were performed to see if a relationship existed between the number of ILP courses attended and level of perceived preparedness in the areas of education, housing, employment/career and money management.

A significant relationship surfaced between the numbers of employment-related ILP classes attended and the respondents perceived level of employment readiness. Additionally, a significant relationship was present between the amount of attended money management ILP classes and the perceived level of readiness regarding the financial issues.

A statically significant relationship did not surface between the number of education-related ILP classes attended and foster youths' perceived level of educational readiness. Furthermore, a statically significant relationship did not appear between the number of housing-related ILP classes attended and the perceived level of readiness in acquiring housing.

Finally, qualitative data was utilized to examine the barriers in obtaining housing, what ways ILP can be more helpful, and what foster care workers and policy writers
need to know to prepare foster youth for a successful future. A common theme emerged as an obstacle in obtaining housing. A majority of respondents identified financial problems as a major barrier in obtaining housing. Regarding how the ILP program can be more helpful, the majority view was that the ILP program is doing a good job and a majority of respondents indicated that they find the ILP program very helpful. Lastly, communication and the ability for the ILP staff and social workers to relate to foster youth surfaced as a major theme that the respondents would like to make foster care workers and policy makers to change.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION

This study focused on measuring the effectiveness of an Independent Living Program (ILP) as perceived by current ILP participants in regard to preparedness for independent living. The results of the study as well as limitations that affected data collection and analysis will be reviewed in this chapter. The chapter will conclude with recommendations for social work practice and future research considerations in helping foster care youth better prepare for independent living.

Research Findings

The findings from this research study indicated that there was a statistical significant relationship between the number of ILP classes attended in the area of employment and money management and foster youths' overall perceived level of readiness in these areas. The results indicate the ILP program's employment and money management services are beneficial to foster youth perceived level of readiness. Interestingly, these quantitative results differ from the qualitative responses. Common themes among the qualitative data reflected the need for offering more services in the areas of employment and financial
assistance. These differences could have been attributed to ILP youths' understanding of the challenges faced in locating employment and lack of available financial assistance. Future research is needed to gain a better understanding of why such discrepancies exist.

A statistically significant relationship did not exist between the number of ILP classes attended in the area of housing, education and foster youths' overall perceived level of readiness. These findings are congruent to common themes that emerged within the qualitative portion of the study. One respondent stated, "ILP should offer more classes on transitional housing and give us information in how to obtain certain things for housing." Such responses demonstrate the need for tailoring services to meet ILP youths' individual needs and provide the additional guidance. Hiring additional ILP staff may be one way of meeting this need. Additional research is needed to determine what housing issues ILP youth are most concerned with.

Foster Youth Suggestions for Improving Independent Living Program

One of the researchers' desired objectives was to empower foster youth by giving them the opportunity to express their voices. Foster youth can often feel that
their thoughts, ideas and opinions go unheard. Incorporating foster youth's input can be a vital component in the continual improvement and development of the independent living program. Unlike much past research, this study hoped to provide input from the foster youth in regards to the independent living program. These researchers believe that a collaborative approach between the independent living program and foster youth can be essential in the ILP programs' growth.

The ILP program and foster youth working together can be a powerful force that can result in a collaborative approach in the development of ILP programs. Providing foster youth with a forum to express their voices encourages collaborative approaches between the ILP program and foster youth. While taking the time to listen to foster youth's input, many helpful ideas materialized as ways to assist foster youth in preparing for a successful future. Foster youth seemed to be very appreciative of the ILP program and the chance to be given a voice to be heard.

Limitations

Several limitations existed which potentially influence the reported results and/or any outcomes of this
study. Such limitations need to be taken into consideration when interpreting these results.

The sample size of this research study was the most evident of its potential limitations. Only 20% of the participants responded to the mail out survey, which brought the sample size to 60. This sample size constitutes only a tiny fraction of the total number of the ILP participants within the County of San Bernardino and could affect internal and external validity. Consequently, there is a higher probability of error due to sample size. Caution should be used when generalizing the results of this study with other Independent Living Programs.

Another limitation may have resulted from the measuring instrument due to utilizing a self-reporting method of gathering information. When participants are allowed to self-report, it poses a risk to the validity of the responses due to the potential for the respondent to be biased and give more socially desirable responses.

Utilizing mail surveys can potentially limit the results of a study. For those respondents that may not have understood a particular question for example, since they did not have someone available to explain a question
could have resulted in guessing and potentially increased the possibility of error in the data.

The researchers also specifically included current and active ILP participants. Active ILP participants may be more inclined to give positive feedback. However, with the original goal of trying to identify areas of improvement within the program, the researchers felt in necessary to include viewpoints from those utilizing the program would be most able to provide the most constructive feedback.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice and Future Research Considerations

The researchers were able to gather several recommendations for improving services to ILP youth. Throughout the County of San Bernardino, each region has only one ILP social worker. A repeated theme in this study reflected on ILP youths’ concern about their ILP worker never being available for them and needing more hands on experience (i.e. walking them through how to open a checking account, write a check, look for a job or apartment). How could one social worker be responsible for ensuring that all ILP youth in the region get the services they need? Hiring more ILP staff, utilizing more clerical support and volunteers in each region could provide the
additional support needed to provide more consistent services to ILP participants and assistance with providing the "hands-on" experience ILP youth so badly need.

When asked what foster youth would like foster care workers and people who plan programs for foster care youth to know about how to prepare foster youth for a successful future, one participant replied: "Give us funds or an extra 6 months of benefits so we can get a start and have time to find employment." While there are funding sources available that provide monthly financial assistance to emancipated youth such as the Supportive Transitional Emancipation Program (STEP), this program is voluntary. The STEP program provides monthly assistance payments to emancipated foster youth equivalent to the basic foster care rate. The County of San Bernardino, however, is one of the few counties within Southern California that is not currently participating in this program.

Adoption of the STEP program would be extremely beneficial for ILP youth getting ready to emancipate from foster care. Social Workers should advocate for its adoption by letting local officials know the potential beneficial impact of this program. Future research should be conducted to see how beneficial the STEP program has been in participating counties.
Conclusions

In general, the findings from this research study suggest that ILP foster youth perceive themselves to be fairly prepared for independent living. On respondent shared San Bernardino County’s ILP program may benefit from changes in several areas. Future planning and research may want to focus on hiring more ILP staff, clerical support and volunteers in order to have more available staff to provide directed services to ILP youth. San Bernardino County’s ILP program may also want to research the potential benefits of the Supportive Transitional Emancipation Program (STEP) and advocate for its adoption in order to provide foster youths getting ready to emancipate with the means necessary to maintain housing along with supportive services.
APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE
INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM
SURVEY

A. Sex:  (1) Male _____  (2) Female _____

B. Age: _____

C. Date of Birth: ________

D. Ethnicity:
   _____ African American  _____ Caucasian
   _____ Latino/Hispanic  _____ Asian American
   _____ Native American  _____ Other (Please specify _________)

E. What is your primary language? __________________________

F. What region are you in?:
   _____ San Bernardino Region
   _____ Desert Region
   _____ West End Region (Rancho Cucamonga Office)
   _____ Other (please specify ________________)

G. How long have you been involved in foster care? ______

H. What is your current living situation? (Circle one)
   1. In a family home where no adults are related to you (Foster Home)
   2. With relatives. (Relative or Kin Foster Care)
   3. In a group home. (Group Foster Care)
   4. In a foster care facility. (Foster Family Agency Home, FFA)

I. How long have you lived there? _____ years _____ months
I. EDUCATION

1. How much education do you plan on getting?
   _____ G.E.D
   _____ High School Diploma
   _____ Some College
   _____ A.A. Degree (2-year college degree)
   _____ Completion of a Trade School Program
   _____ B.A. or B.S. Degree (4-year college university degree)
   _____ Post-graduate Degree (Master’s, Doctorate, etc.)

2. To what extent are you informed of the requirements needed to get a high school diploma or G.E.D.?
   0---------------- 1 ------------- 2 -------------- 3
   I don’t Very little Well Very well
   know informed informed informed

3. To what extent are you informed of the requirements that you need to enter college or trade school, whichever is more applicable for you?
   0---------------- 1 ------------- 2 -------------- 3
   I don’t Very little Well Very well
   know informed informed informed

4. How prepared are you to complete a college application?
   0---------------- 1 ------------- 2 -------------- 3
   I don’t Very little Well Very well
   know prepared prepared prepared

5. How helpful has the Independent Living Program been in influencing your current level of preparedness regarding education?
   0---------------- 1 ------------- 2 -------------- 3
   Not at all Somewhat Helpful Very helpful
   helpful helpful

6. About how many ILP courses, classes, or workshops have you taken that focused on educational goals or requirements? __________
II. HOUSING ARRANGEMENTS

1. In how many months will you leave foster care? ______ months

2. Overall, how prepared do you feel to be on your own?
   
   0 -------------- 1 -------------- 2 -------------- 3
   Not at all     Very little     Prepared     Very prepared
   very prepared very prepared very prepared

3. Where do you plan to live after you leave foster care? ______________________

4. How confident are you that the above housing arrangement will happen?
   
   0 -------------- 1 -------------- 2 -------------- 3
   I don’t know    Very confident    Fairly confident    Not very confident

5. Who has helped you prepare for living in that kind of housing? ________________

6. What barriers or problems do you think you might have in getting or keeping
   the housing that you would like? ____________________________________________

7. Overall, how prepared are you to find a home after you leave foster care?
   
   0 -------------- 1 -------------- 2 -------------- 3
   I don’t know    Very little     Well          Very well
   prepared       prepared       prepared

8. How prepared are you to keep up a home after you leave foster care?
   
   0 -------------- 1 -------------- 2 -------------- 3
   I don’t know    Very little     Well          Very well
   prepared       prepared       prepared

9. How helpful has the Independent Living Program (ILP) been in preparing you
   maintain housing?
   
   0 -------------- 1 -------------- 2 -------------- 3
   Not at all     Somewhat        Helpful      Very helpful
   helpful        helpful

10. How many ILP courses, classes, workshops have you taken that focused on
    locating housing arrangements? ________

11. How many ILP courses, classes, workshops have you taken that focused on
    maintaining housing arrangements? ________
III. EMPLOYMENT/ CAREER

1. Currently, you are:
   ____ unemployed    ____ employed part-time
   ____ employed full-time

2. After you leave foster care, you plan to be:
   ____ unemployed    ____ employed part-time
   ____ employed full-time

3. After I leave foster care, you will most likely be employed at:
   Specify type or place of employment: ________________________________
   ____ This question does not apply to me.

4. How confident are you that you will be able find employment after you leave foster care?
   0-------------------1-------------------2-------------------3
   Not at all   Somewhat    Confident    Very confident
certain

5. What kind of job/career would you like to have in the future? ______________

6. How well do you know what steps are needed to achieve the above career goal? (such as experience, education, etc.)
   0-------------------1-------------------2-------------------3
   Not at all   Somewhat    Knowledgeable    Very knowledgeable
   Knowledgeable    Knowledgeable

7. How prepared are you to participate in job interview?
   0-------------------1-------------------2-------------------3
   Not at all   Very little    Well    Very well
   prepared    prepared    prepared    prepared

8. How prepared are you to complete a job application?
   0-------------------1-------------------2-------------------3
   Not at all   Very little    Well    Very well
   prepared    prepared    prepared    prepared

9. How prepared are you to obtain employment which will meet your basic financial needs?
   0-------------------1-------------------2-------------------3
   Not at all   Very little    Well    Very well
   prepared    prepared    prepared    prepared
10. How helpful has the Independent Living Program (ILP) been in influencing my current level of preparedness regarding employment and career goals?

0 --------------- 1 --------------- 2 --------------- 3
Not at all       Somewhat          Helpful        Very helpful
helpful          helpful

11. About how many ILP courses, classes, or workshops have you taken that focused on employment or career goals? ___________
IV. MONEY MANAGEMENT

1. How prepared are you to effectively use a checkbook?
   0----------------- 1 ----------------- 2 ----------------- 3
   I don’t know Very prepared Very well
   prepared

2. How prepared are you to organize a household budget?
   0----------------- 1 ----------------- 2 ----------------- 3
   I don’t know Very little Well Very well
   prepared prepared prepared

3. How prepared are you effectively open, close, and use a checking or savings account?
   0----------------- 1 ----------------- 2 ----------------- 3
   I don’t know Very little Well Very well
   prepared prepared prepared

4. How prepared are you to effectively establish and use a credit card?
   0----------------- 1 ----------------- 2 ----------------- 3
   I don’t know Very little Well Very well
   prepared prepared prepared

5. How helpful has the Independent Living Program (ILP) been in influencing your current level of preparedness regarding money management?
   0----------------- 1 ----------------- 2 ----------------- 3
   Not at all Somewhat Helpful Very helpful
   helpful

6. About how many ILP courses, classes, or workshops have you taken that focus on money management? __________

7. Over all, who or what has helped you the most to prepare for independent living?

________________________________________
V. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

A. In what way can the Independent Living Program be more helpful to you?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

B. What would you like foster care workers and people who plan programs for foster care youth to know about how to prepare foster care youth for a successful future?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

C. ANY ADDITIONAL COMMENTS?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Please use the back of this paper if more space is needed.

Thank You!
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT
INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to investigate your opinions about the Independent Living Program. This study is being conducted by Valorie Alba and Gloriana Parral under the supervision of Dr. Laurie A. Smith, Assistant Professor of Social Work. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board, California State University, San Bernardino.

You will be asked to answer questions on a survey you that will take approximately 20 minutes. Be as honest as possible and feel free to give your opinions in the spaces provided. All of your responses will be held in the strictest of confidence by the researchers. Please do not put your name on the survey. All data will be reported in-group form only.

Please understand that your participation in this study is completely voluntary, whether you participate or not will not affect your involvement with the Independent Living Program. The Independent Living Program will not know your responses to this survey. You are free not to answer any questions and withdraw at any time during this study without penalty. When you have completed the survey, you will receive a debriefing statement describing the study in more detail. We ask that you do not talk about this study with other participants so they will feel free to give their own opinions.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Laurie A. Smith at (909) 880-5000 ext. 3837.

By placing an “X” mark in the box below, I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and that I understand, the nature and purpose of this study, and I freely consent to participate.

Place a check mark here □       Today’s date:   

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APPENDIX C

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT
Debriefing Statement

This study you have just completed was designed to explore how helpful you perceive the Independent Living Program to be and what, if anything, needs to be done to improve the program. Because participants are most knowledgeable about the effect of this program on foster youths, your input is critical in evaluating and improving the program.

Please understand that your participation in this study is completely voluntary, whether you participate or not will not affect your involvement with the Independent Living Program. Please remember that the Independent Living Program will not know your responses to this survey.

If you feel uncomfortable or distressed as a result of participating in this study, you are advised to contact your social worker or probation officer to receive counseling services.

Thank you for your participation and for not discussing the study with other participants. If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please feel free to contact Assistant Professor Dr. Laurie A. Smith at (909) 880-5000 ext. 3837. If you would like to obtain a copy of the group results of this study, the group results will be available in the summer quarter 2004 at the Pfau library at CSUSB or by asking your social worker for a copy of the results.
APPENDIX D

AGENCY LETTER OF CONSENT
October 16, 2003

Dr. Teresa Morris  
California State University, San Bernardino  
Department of Social Work  
5500 University Parkway  
San Bernardino, CA 92407-2397  

This letter serves as notification to the Department of Social Work at CSUSB that Valorie Alba and Gloriana Parral have obtained consent from the San Bernardino County Department of Children's Services (DCS) to conduct the research project "Participating Youths' Perceptions of an Independent Living Skills Program."

This letter also serves as notification that DCS is giving consent to allow DCS staff to participate in this research project as outlined in the research proposal submitted by Ms. Alba and Ms. Parral.

Sincerely,

Cathy Cimbalo/LCSW  
Director  

Cathy Cimbalo/LCSW
Director
REFERENCES


ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE

This was a two-person project where authors collaborated throughout. However, for each phase of the project, certain authors took primary responsibility. These responsibilities were assigned in the manner listed below.

1. Data Collection:
   Team Effort: Valorie Alba & Gloriana Parral

2. Data Entry and Analysis:
   Team Effort: Valorie Alba & Gloriana Parral

3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:
   a. Introduction and Literature:
      Team Effort: Valorie Alba & Gloriana Parral
   b. Methods:
      Team Effort: Valorie Alba & Gloriana Parral
   c. Results
      Team Effort: Valorie Alba & Gloriana Parral
   d. Discussion
      Team Effort: Valorie Alba & Gloriana Parral