1996

Participating foster care youths' perceptions of an Independent Living Program

Sonja Anita Flowers

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PARTICIPATING FOSTER CARE 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
Sonja Anita Flowers
Rae Marlene Evans
June 1996
PARTICIPATING FOSTER CARE YOUTHS' PERCEPTIONS
OF AN INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

Emancipation at age 18 can be a difficult time for adolescents who have little to no family support systems that would foster independence and self-sufficiency. Independent Living Programs address the problem of sufficiently preparing court wards for independent living upon emancipation. This research study used the Positivist paradigm to explore the students' perceptions of the program's effectiveness. The purpose of this study was to explore whether ILP participants perceived the ILP classes to be helpful with their soft skills training in the areas of self-esteem, interpersonal relationships and, coping. A questionnaire was given at the completion of an ILP program that addressed these related variables. The majority of ILP participants' qualitative and quantitative responses indicated the program was helpful with these areas. Some of the data provided praise, criticism and suggestions for the program. In the future, more extensive research with larger populations was recommended that would provide more insight into students' perceptions of the program.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

"I gave up some youth for knowledge, but my gain was more valuable than my loss." — Maya Angelou

A number of people enabled me to get through this program. First, thanks to my parents, Donald Evans & Minnie Taylor, who have encouraged me to follow my dreams. Second, my gratitude is extended to two dear friends, Gerald Jones & Doris Baggett for their continued support and to my extended family. A special thanks to the American Association of University Women and Kaiser Foundation.

With never ending love, to my loving and patient husband, Derrick, and to my understanding children, Derrick and Taylor, I thank you for your encouragement and support in my pursuit of educational endeavors and to my parents, Andrew Sams & Irma Sams who have always believed in me, and taught me to believe in myself.
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INTRODUCTION

Foster care dependents

There are approximately 18,000 young people a year leaving foster care to assume adult status in society (Ryan, 1988). The State of California recognizes the need for independent living skills and has a voluntary Independent Living Program. This program enables eligible youth to achieve self sufficiency prior to "aging out" or leaving the foster care support system by providing independent living skills' assessments, training services, and a written transitional independent living plan for each participating youth (State Department, 1991).

Counties are encouraged to provide as many optional services as possible to all participants in addition to the mandated services. The mandated services are education, training and resource listing and training. One county divides its Independent Living Program into two sections: hard skills and soft skills. Hard skills are those skills relating to money management and job and career development. The focus of this study is on soft skills. This study will address such soft skills as: self esteem, coping with feelings, and interpersonal relationships, which include relationships with peers, family, and significant others.

The focus of the research was to determine whether the ILP participants perceive the ILP program as adequately
preparing them for a successful transition from adolescence to adulthood upon leaving their dependency status of the foster care system. The level of preparedness to function effectively varies widely depending upon individual characteristics and individual childhood experiences (Maluccio & Fein, 1985). Many are able to handle their adult roles, eventually, while others only survive marginally in a society with which they are unprepared to cope (Feistinger, 1983; Ryan, 1988).

Research Question

The research question for this study was: "Do Independent Living Program participants perceive the ILP program as helping them improve their soft skills?" Soft skills refers to those skills that are of an interpersonal nature. This construct was operationalized through three variables: (1) self esteem; (2) coping with feelings, and (3) interpersonal relationships. These variables were explored via a client satisfaction survey questionnaire.

Literature Review

There is limited information on how effective ILP services are perceived by its participants. According to Ryan (1988), adolescents leaving the foster care system are lacking the necessary social skills required to meet their
day-to-day needs. Furthermore, Ryan (1988), state that there is little systematic effort made to use foster parents in providing the adolescents with the necessary skills for successful emancipation.

Throughout the life cycle, all of the adolescent’s behavior depends on whether or not his/her basic needs have been met and are being met. These six basic needs, according to Maslow (as cited in McConnell, 1974) are: physical needs, the need for safety, the need to belong, the need for love, the need for self-esteem, and the need for self-actualization.

Physical needs are the need for warmth, food, shelter, clothing and rest. Many foster children have been removed from their natural parent/guardian due to severe lack of food, shelter and/or clothing. Some have been deprived of the bare necessities such as being clothed properly in inclimate weather.

Secondly, the need for safety frequently is another reason for removal of a child from his/her natural parent/guardian. Some parents, due to their lack of education, drug habit, etc. do not provide security for the child. These parents are not protecting their child from harm. The child may grow up fearful instead of being free from fear.
The third basic need is the need to belong. Often, when children are placed in the foster care system, they feel lost, alone, and isolated from family, friends, and society-at-large. When there are several siblings to be placed in foster care, many times the family group will be separated causing the children to feel more isolated.

Everyone has the need for love. The foster child, feeling lost and abandoned from the family and environment he/she is used to may feel no one loves them. He/she may express this lack of love by self-hatred, feeling as if the placement and break-up of the family was their fault.

The fifth need is the need for self-esteem, to believe that we are a person of worth, to feel a sense of competence. Many children and youth within the foster care system have low self-esteem, which may stem from the fact that some of them feel that their removal from their natural parent is somehow their fault. Understandably their self-esteem suffers.

Finally, the need for self-actualization: the need to be and to reach our full potential is necessary for a well-rounded adult. Because of being placed in foster care, many youths, especially, have lost their desire to be creative, while others feel lost and hopeless.

Maslow looked at the healthy side of human nature. He acknowledged the strength of human physiological instincts
but he saw them as being basic needs satisfied in most civilized societies. (McConell, 1974).

In terms of self-esteem, Salahu-Din & Bollman (1994), state that the most pervasive chronic problem of the foster care child is his poor self esteem. Blomquist (1992) and Mauzerall (1983), both indicate that programs that offer separate living quarters from the foster family setting are more effective in meeting the individual needs of their ILP participants by increasing their level of self esteem and enabling them to cope more effectively with daily living. According to Timberlake & Verdieck (1987), self esteem is adversely effected by earlier experiences with family dysfunction, uprootment, and loss. For many adolescents in ILP Programs, neither family reunification nor adoption is feasible and therefore require the acquisition of such soft skills.

According to Erikson and his theory on Psychosocial development adolescence is a time when the individual struggles with the task of identity formation and role confusion. Salahu-Din & Bollman (1994) concur with Erikson (1962) by stating that the transitional period from adolescence to adulthood is a time of overwhelming stress.

Much evidence exists that abused and neglected children are exposed to frequent and severe stress as a result of their biological families' poverty, restricted educational
opportunities, unemployment and unstable family situations (Howing, et al, 1990). The effects of such environmental stressors may be exacerbated by the inability of the maltreated child to cope adequately with frustrating situations. These situations may arouse feelings of anger, fear, aggression, and trust, as well as those associated with separation.

Often the abused child is both angry and fearful. If the youth was abused or neglected as a child and has not had the opportunity to resolve anger and fear, feelings may perpetuate a cycle of acting-out behavior (Maluccio, 1990). Due to the complexity and dynamics of the youth’s family system many have not learned effective ways of dealing with their overwhelming feelings.

The issues surrounding separation and trust are common themes in the foster care child’s life. The separation of child from parent is perhaps the most tragic occurrence in a child’s life. Overall, less than 20 percent of the adolescents in foster care return to their birth home (Barth, 1986). For the remaining whose needs have not been met, the painful reality of their fate becomes clear. They realize they are different from other children and this realization leaves long lasting wounds. Trust is betrayed and the teen often isolates themselves to guard against other painful feelings of separation and abandonment.
During the early adolescent stage, unresolved issues may remain and, if mastery of coping skills is not achieved, the individual may experience a deficit in their coping skills that may follow him or her into adulthood (Salahu-Din & Bollman, 1994).

When discussing interpersonal relationships, Rice and McFadden (1988), found that when the adolescents' issues went unexpressed, maladaptive behavior resulted; however, when the foster care adolescents were given the opportunity to talk openly about their feelings regarding others, their interpersonal relationships improved. In addition, Howing (1990), states that children who exhibit interpersonal problem-solving skills are less likely to experience peer-relationship disturbances. A growing body of research has established the usefulness of problem-solving training with adolescents to help generate alternative solutions to interpersonal problems (Howing, 1990).

Problem Focus

This will be a positivist exploratory study. The positivist orientation was selected for various reasons. First when using the positivist view, the research can address causality by examining the relationship between dependent and independent variables. Positivist oriented researcher begins the study with a research question and
sometimes, a hypothesis. The positivist view allows the researcher to make observations using a deductive approach while simultaneously employing use of qualitative and quantitative methods.

The problem of whether or not ILP participants perceive the ILP program as improving their social skills is relevant to social work. If the adolescent does not have adequate social skills as they are "aged out" of the foster care system, they may experience difficulties with self esteem and with coping with their feelings and with interpersonal relationships. This could require the individual to seek professional help through individual, group, or family therapy.

These ILP adolescents could also seek assistance for their social problems within the school system. San Bernardino County’ Department of Child Protective Services (CPS) has implemented the Healthy Start Program which places social workers on school campuses part-time to address problems, social or otherwise, that the teen and/or their family may be experiencing. For some teens, the convenience of an of-campus social worker may bring them in to seek assistance. Both of these environments employ direct practice social workers.

Social workers in ILP Programs areas responsible for conducting ILP classes. The goal of ILP is to improve its
participants’ “soft skills”. The provision of these classes can help not only the teen but also allow the social worker to advocate for needed changes for program improvement.

As court wards, each ILP participant is assigned a case management social worker who works in conjunction with the ILP Coordinator to ensure successful completion of the ILP program. These case management social workers work closely with the adolescents and can often get a good feel for what services would best benefit that minor.

Finally, this study is important because it will guide the practitioner in the various foster care functions to include therapy, program operation and evaluation. Social workers are now found in various arenas with an array of skills. The ILP participant in the foster home setting is a prime example of the Person-In-Environment (PIE) configuration. It allows the social worker to include the contextual details that can be very relevant to the participant and may have otherwise been left out. If ILP participants are to perceive the ILP Program as being helpful, social worker assistance must be maintained to encourage those adolescents who are experiencing difficulties making the transition from childhood to adulthood.
METHODS

Purpose and Design of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore whether ILP participants perceive the ILP classes as being helpful with their "soft skills". Exploration is a common and useful purpose for examining a subject of study that is relatively new and unstudied such as the ILP Program's participants' perceptions. By exploring and researching these types of areas, the findings can yield new insights into the program. The information gathered can also be used to "point out" aspects of the program that may need to be modified, excluded and/or included. This will be an exploratory piece of a program evaluation looking at the variables relating to the "soft skills" training.

The positivist orientation was selected to examine this particular area for various reasons. The design to be used for this study is a formative evaluation using a client satisfaction survey questionnaire. This design is generally and commonly found in the positivist orientation with the needs assessment being one of four types generally used. The purpose of this design was to assess and improve the conceptualization, design, planning, administration, implementation, effectiveness, efficiency, and utility of social interventions and human service programs (Rossi & Freeman, 1982).
There are multiple implications when using a positivist orientation with a program evaluation design. Positivism allows for the examination of causality and the evaluation of data. When one thinks about program evaluation, one might immediately think about asking if a program is achieving a successful outcome or not. Program evaluation has three components: (1) the success of the program, (2) problems in how the program is implemented, and (3) information on program planning and development. This formative evaluation is concerned with examining the success, implementation and performance of ILP skills training.

This research used open-ended and close-ended questions. Positivism allows for the use of explorative techniques as those found in this research proposal. This orientation and design allowed the researcher to explore and determine the extent to which participants hold a particular perspective. This partnership of orientation and design is not concerned with having a hypothesis at the onset of the research study. Positivism is representative of the ideology that the researcher need only have a research question that may or may not later result in a hypothesis.

An additional implication is that of objectiveness on the part of the researcher. Newly constructed surveys by the researcher requires the researcher to be objective. According to Guba (1990), it is both possible and essential
for the inquirer to adopt a distant posture. Furthermore, biases are controlled by the positivist researcher’s ability to be scientific and precise.

The last implication is that Positivism approves of program evaluation studies. Its ideology looks at the formative process study and is capable of examining how the program operates and not necessarily causality.

The following construct and variables were explored to determine whether the ILP participants perceived the ILP program as helping them to improve their soft skills, therefore adequately preparing them for successful transition from adolescence to adulthood upon leaving their dependency status of the foster care system.

The overall concept of this proposal was client satisfaction as perceived by the ILP participants. The construct was soft skills which refers to those skills that are of an interpersonal nature. This construct was operationalized through three variables: (1) self esteem; (2) coping with feelings, and; (3) interpersonal relationships.

Self esteem is defined by Rubin and Babbie (1993) as an “unconditional self acceptance”. The ILP classes are designed to improve services that improve the participant’s self esteem such as exercises that promote self confidence. The second variable was coping with feelings which is
defined as the management of one's emotions. The ILP Program discusses such topics as: thinking before acting, anger management and, dealing with loss.

The third and final variable was interpersonal relationships. One of the most fundamental human need is that of affiliation. These interpersonal relationships require interaction between the ILP participant and others. These relationships can be acquaintances, friends, family and significant others. These variables and constructs are further examined through the population surveyed.

Sampling

This study used convenience sampling which is a non-random type of sampling. According to Erlandson (1993), convenience sampling saves time, money, and effort. There are no set rules for the sample size, as the researcher will be looking for quality more than quantity. The sample population will consist of participants in one Southern California county.

These participants were selected based on meeting the State of California's eligibility criteria for the ILP Program. The sample size consisted of twenty-five participants. In addition, when the survey was administered they had completed the ILP Program's Soft Skills Training
and would be more capable of giving accurate and insightful perceptions of the program.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

The data was collected using a questionnaire type of survey. The survey included three or four types of questions and asked respondents to report yes/no; Likert and open ended questions. Unlike other types of surveys, questionnaires that are administered face-to-face save money. In addition, the researcher can expect a higher response rate while he or she waits for the completed questionnaires. Surveys also give personal opinions which are insightful and can give a better view of the program being evaluated.

There are several weaknesses involved with survey questionnaires. There can be researcher bias in the construction of the questions; questions can have double meanings and lack clarity. Moreover, there can be questions left unanswered or overlooked. To account for these weaknesses, Rubin & Babbie (1993), propose that the researcher conduct a pre-test. This pre-test was examined by a DPSS social services practitioner and a DPSS supervisor who are knowledgeable in this area and are capable of providing feedback that should improve the questionnaire. The questions that are unanswered or overlooked will be
remedied by the researcher referring to the master list and obtaining the information prior to analyzing the data.

A major weakness with convenience sampling of a survey is that the researcher cannot generalize his or her findings to the general population. However, using this paradigm enabled the researchers to use the findings within the agency to modify the program, exclude and/or include factors that could improve existing services.

Procedure

The questionnaire was administered by the researchers in the classroom setting on the last day of training. Data collection took approximately thirty minutes and the results were be collected by the researchers. In addition to demographic information such as age and sex, the questionnaire elicited information on self esteem, coping skills, and relationships.

A cover letter was attached which provided the participants with an explanation of the survey. An individual letter of consent explained the confidentiality of their response and a debriefing letter was included to be kept by the respondents. It included the researchers' names and telephone numbers for participants who had questions regarding the study and the Independent Living Program. Data was collected on March 7, 1996.
Protection of Human Subjects

The rights and welfare of all the participants were protected in this voluntary study. Confidentiality was protected by excluding names from the questionnaire and replacing them with identification numbers. No master list was compiled to protect the participants. Questions left unanswered will be used in the statistical analysis, for statistical purposes only.

The participants' anonymity was protected by having the researchers leave the classroom after administering the questionnaire. The researchers requested the participants to place the questionnaire on a designated desk once they had completed it.

By using these protective techniques, the researchers hoped to ensure better performance by the participants and to increase the accuracy of the responses.

RESULTS

Quantitative Data Analysis

Univariate analysis was used to determine the distribution of results. Demographic factors, interpersonal relationship factors, placement and social skills factors, coping and self-esteem factors were all measured using several descriptive statistics. Obtained were frequencies, measures of central tendency and measures of dispersion.
The sample population included twenty-five individuals. All twenty-five of the ILP adolescent participants completed the questionnaire. The total response rate was one hundred percent. Demographic information included age, gender, ethnicity, primary language, placement location, length of time in current placement, planned departure date and region (Table 1).
Table 1: Frequency Distribution for Demographic Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Factors</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/Hispanic</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-ethnic</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary Language</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Placement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster home</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster family agency</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group home</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Region</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Bernardino</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West End (Rancho Cucamonga)</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desert Region</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educational Goals</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay in school</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receive tutoring</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get GED</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate high school</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get career counseling</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational training</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take college prep classes</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Demographic Factors (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Long term goal</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part-time job</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time job</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community college</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-year college</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Interest</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Military service</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Corps</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current/Previous Employment</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food service</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment Status</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Want full-time job</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want part-time job</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Now working</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had job in past</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not working</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Residence after emancipation</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Own housing</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With friends</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College dorm/residence</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boyfriend/girlfriend</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Earn a living by:</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College/Training/Financial</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savings Account</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main reason for participating</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social worker/Probation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>officer/Caretaker made me</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare self better</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing better to do</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the respondents involved, twelve were age sixteen, ten were age seventeen and three were age eighteen. The
respondents birthdays fell between December 10, 1977 and March 24, 1980. Overall, sixteen (64%) were female, and nine (36%) were male (Table 1).

The respondents were of a diverse ethnic population, with a slight majority of respondents being African-American. The next largest category was Multi-Ethnic (32%); followed by Caucasian (16%); Latino/Hispanic (8%) and Native-American (4%). One respondent (4%) gave no response.

The primary language for the majority of respondents (96%) was English. Spanish was listed by one (4%) respondent.

The majority of respondents (48%) were in foster homes, in which they do not live with their biological parents and may or may not have plans for reunification (Table 1). None of the respondents reported living with one or both of their biological parents.

San Bernardino County’s ILP classes serve three regions: San Bernardino, Desert and West End which is headed out of the Rancho Cucamonga office. The majority of respondents live in the San Bernardino Region (72%) with 12% found in the Desert Region (Table 1).

When respondents were asked information concerning educational goals, most (80%) indicated they planned to graduate high school. An equal eight percent was found in
both categories of those respondents who plan to obtain their GED or to receive tutoring.

In terms of long term goals, slightly less than one-half of respondents (48%) plan to attend a four year college upon graduation from high school (Table 1 continued). Four percent stated their long term goal is to work part-time. Regarding their occupational area of interest, the majority of respondents (32%) selected the "other" category as their occupational area of interest while Job Corps had an eight percent response rate.

The largest current/previous employment area for the respondents was food service. This represented thirty-six percent of the group. The "other" category represented seven percent.

For employment status, an equal number of respondents (28%) reported they were not working and wanted a part-time job while four percent reported they have had a job in the past.

In regards to residence after emancipation, percentages in this category were evenly distributed with a slight majority indicating plans to live in their own housing (20%). Twelve percent indicated they plan to live with their boyfriend/girlfriend. Interestingly, of the twenty-five respondents, 0% expressed plans to live with either their biological mother or biological father.
When asked questions regarding earning a living, nineteen respondents (76%) indicated that after emancipation, they would earn a living by working. One respondent (4%) indicated a savings account but did not disclose the amount currently in savings.

A majority of respondents (84%) listed their main reason for participating in the ILP Program was "to better prepare myself for when I'm out on my own". One respondent (4%) stated they participated because of "nothing better to to".

Respondents were asked to rate their interpersonal relationships with others according to a Likert type scale. The responses varied from: "I don't know" to "somewhat positive", to "very positive". According to the results (Table 2), the mean response for when respondents rated their relationship with their male caretaker appeared to be somewhat positive" (Mean 3.739; S.D. = 1.839). Interestingly, respondents rated their relationship with a female caretaker higher than with a male caretaker (Mean 4.208; S.D. = 1.318).
Table 2: Means and Standard Deviation for Interpersonal Relationship Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationships with others</th>
<th>mean</th>
<th>st.dev.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male caretaker</td>
<td>3.739</td>
<td>1.839</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female caretaker</td>
<td>4.208</td>
<td>1.318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biological father</td>
<td>2.826</td>
<td>2.367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biological mother</td>
<td>3.217</td>
<td>2.295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male foster sibs</td>
<td>2.522</td>
<td>1.974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female foster sibs</td>
<td>3.174</td>
<td>1.875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandparents</td>
<td>3.458</td>
<td>1.911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male biological sibs</td>
<td>2.522</td>
<td>1.974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female biological sibs</td>
<td>2.913</td>
<td>1.881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other male relatives</td>
<td>3.458</td>
<td>1.615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other female relatives</td>
<td>3.542</td>
<td>1.719</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social worker</td>
<td>3.708</td>
<td>1.546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>3.960</td>
<td>1.241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peers/friends</td>
<td>4.304</td>
<td>.926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>3.250</td>
<td>1.909</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For placement and social skills factors, respondents were asked how well the ILP Program had provided them with social skills. According to the results (Table 3), the mean or average amount of time in current placement was 2.895 years (S.D. = 3.537). The age respondents were placed in foster care for the first time showed a mean of 9.835 (S.D. = 5.038).

For ILP providing social skills, the mean response reported for "very well" was 4.640 and the S.D. was .700 (Table 3).
Table 3: Means and Standard Deviation on Responses Related to Placement and Social Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Placement</th>
<th>mean</th>
<th>st.dev.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Length of time in placement</td>
<td>2.895</td>
<td>3.537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age first placed in foster care</td>
<td>9.835</td>
<td>5.038</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Skills</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How well has ILP provided social skills?</td>
<td>4.640</td>
<td>.700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much info on safe sex practices?</td>
<td>4.333</td>
<td>1.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How ready to assume responsibility for actions?</td>
<td>3.920</td>
<td>1.187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How prepared to carry out emancipation plans?</td>
<td>3.840</td>
<td>1.106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For safe sex practices, slightly more than one-half of the respondents (Mean 4.333; S.D. = 1.007) indicated they had been provided with "more than enough" information.

Regarding their readiness to assume responsibility for their actions, an equal reporting was found in the "ready" and "very ready" categories (Mean 3.920; S.D. = 1.187).

In terms of preparedness to carry out emancipation plans, there was a reported mean of 3.840 and a S.D. of 1.106 for respondents who indicated they are "somewhat prepared" (Table 3).

Regarding coping and self-esteem, the survey asked participants to report on four factors in the areas of: personal difficulties, useful ways of coping, need more
information and self-esteem. According to the results (Table 4), the twenty-five respondents, slightly over one-half (56%) indicated the area of family relations as one they've had difficulty with. One respondent (4%) stated difficulties with substance abuse. The areas of substance abuse recovery, delinquencies and serious illness were not selected by any of the participants.
Table 4: Frequency Distribution Data for Coping and Self-Esteem Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coping &amp; Self-esteem Factors</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Areas of personal difficulties</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance abuse</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer relationships</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation anxiety</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family relationships</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of a loved one</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taught useful ways of coping</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs more information on...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job training</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family planning</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dental</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial aid</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutoring</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Things about me are...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the same</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am no good</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There’s a lot wrong with me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am not good at anything</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m no good at all</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Self-esteem factors (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How happy with the kind of person you are?</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I don't know</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little happy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So-so</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very happy</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely happy</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rate current level of self-esteem</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I don't know</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very high</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An overwhelming majority of ILP participants (96%) indicated the ILP program teaches useful ways of coping. Only one respondent (4%) stated “no”.

Regarding needing more information, job training was selected by the majority of the respondents (44%). There was an equal reporting of 8% in the areas of mental health, counseling, and tutoring.

In terms of self-esteem, more than half of the respondents (56%) indicated that more things about them were good, while only one respondent (4%) stated that more things about them were bad. In terms of feeling like they are no good, the majority of respondents (72%) responded “no” while 28% answered “yes”.

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In response to the statement, "Another teenager told me, "There's a lot wrong with me, respondents were asked, "Do you ever feel like this?" More than half (64%) of respondents answered "no" while nine respondents (36%) answered "yes".

The following statement was given to respondents, "A teenager said, I'm not much good at anything and respondents were asked, "Do you ever feel like this?" Seventy-six percent answered "no" while six respondents (24%) stated "yes".

According to the results (Table 4), when respondents were asked the question, "Are you happy with the kind of person you are, the mean reported was 4.240 and the S.D. was 1.012 which indicated that slightly less than one-half of respondents were extremely happy with themselves.

When asked to rate their current level of self-esteem, almost half rated their self-esteem at the high level (Mean 3.840; S.D.=.987). (Table 4).

**Qualitative Data Analysis**

Several open ended questions were used for the qualitative and quantitative inquiries on such areas as: departure date, preparedness for independent living, educational/occupational interests, interpersonal
relationships. The open ended questions allowed participants to express their thoughts on the Independent Living Program. These answers varied and were a little more difficult to code yet they provided the researchers with insightful meanings. Overall, the majority of adolescents responded with positive criticisms of the program.

In terms of the respondent’s departure date from ILP, some respondents stated the date was “unknown” while others listed a specific month and day that the researchers believed may coincide with their turning age eighteen. The earliest dated listed was October 11, 1996 and the latest date was September 1, 1998.

Some respondents stated their departure date did indeed coincide with their eighteenth birthday while others indicated “none”. The researches believe the “none” responses may be from participants who are in a relative foster care home and will be provided for by their relatives after state and federal funds are no longer appropriate. This belief also pertained to the respondents who stated “never” and “not applicable”.

The topic of preparedness for independent living covered the areas of: current educational goals, occupational area(s) of interest, current/previous employment, residence after emancipation. In this section,
respondents gave more detailed explanations when they opted to answer “other”.

The area of current educational goals yielded two responses. One participant indicated the “military as a current educational goal while another participant’s goal was to “graduate from cosmetology school”.

In regards to occupational area(s) of interests, one participant stated they were interested in the occupation of a “public defender”. Others stated an interest in the helping fields; one participant stated “helping people” as an interest while another was more specific in listing “registered nurse” as a possible occupation. Additional respondents were interested in the athletic areas. One stated “sports” and another listed the sport of “football” as an occupational area of interest.

Residence after emancipation yielded one response of “other“. The participant stated they plan to live in a “group home facility”.

When asked about interpersonal relationships between themselves and a particular person, one respondent listed she had a “very positive” relationship with the “father of her baby” while another respondent stated they had a “very positive” relationship with their high school coaches.

In terms of needing more information, one respondent wanted more information on “football” while another had a
critical remark and stated, “You can never get information about anything”.

Regarding coping, respondents were asked to explain how the Independent Living Program teaches them useful ways of coping with stressful situations. Those that responded to this question provided some very interesting and insightful explanations. Based on the patterns that developed upon analyzing these open ended questions, answers were categorized. The majority of respondents stated they would “think before acting”. One respondent stated, “I think before I speak”. Some respondents expressed one useful way of coping is to calm down. One participant stated, “Because I now know how to calm myself down”.

Another theme found on the topic of coping with stressful situations was to talk to someone. One statement made by a participant was, “They show us how to talk with someone”.... Another statement was, “I talk about it to handle situations...”. One participant felt that the instructors were very helpful and stated, “Many times I come to the classes and the instructors talk to me about what I should do about my peer problems”.

One respondent learned useful ways of coping by participating and stated, “ILP allows us to do skits and plays that gives us good examples on how you should and should not cope with stressful situations”.

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One of the most meaningful responses came from a participant who stated, "ILP has made it known that there will always be options open to me as far as help with emancipation, school, college and housing arrangements which if not available can be very stressful".

In terms of any criticism, one respondent stated, "ILP needs to get more input from us to understand and talk to us about stress. Overall, the respondents expressed many ways in which ILP has taught them useful ways of coping with stressful situations.

When asked the question, "When faced with a difficult situation, what do you do?" Many respondents answers resembled those in the previous question on useful coping techniques. Some of the respondents stated that when they are faced with a difficult situation, they talk to someone. One participant stated, "I talk to someone and get help with my problem" while others stated, "When things get to the point where I can't handle what is going on then I talk to someone....."I talk to my girlfriend".

Several respondents make insightful comments regarding anger. One participant stated, "I cry and have angry outbursts" and another stated, "I talk to social workers, explore alternatives and have angry outbursts occasionally". Some respondents expressed themes of withdrawing. Some comments were, "I go and sit in my room"...."I walk away or
get loud....I write poems or spend more time with nature". One respondent wrote, "I play football to get it off my mind".

Based on the responses in the coping section of the survey, the concept of discussing one's problems appears to be well addressed in the Independent Living Program. The majority of the participants' comments expressed healthy positive ways of responding to difficult situations.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore whether or not independent living program participants perceived the ILP class as helpful in improving their skills in the areas of interpersonal relationships, coping, self-esteem.

Regarding interpersonal relationships, ILP participants indicated positive relationships with their male and female caretakers; however, the most positive relationships were found with non-family female caretakers. This would indicate that the majority of positive relationships reported qualitatively and quantitatively were amongst non-family members. Also of interest, was that negative relationships were reported with their biological parents(s). In addition, almost one-fourth stated they did not know what type of relationship they had with their biological parent(s). This is not surprising in that Barth
(1986) states that many foster children whose basic needs are not met feel betrayed by their biological parents.

In terms of coping, the findings in this section were supportive of those found regarding interpersonal relationships. According to Howing, et al (1990) abused and neglected children have difficulties coping due to being exposed to frequent and severe stress. Over one-half of respondents reported having difficulties with family relationships. Almost one-fourth of respondents indicated they have difficulty coping with the loss of a loved one. It is important to note that the loss may be a result of death or the respondent may no longer have any contact with their loved one after they were removed from the home.

Overall, most respondents indicated ILP increased their ability to cope with their feelings and with difficult situations. Of all the survey's qualitative responses, this area generated the most comments. The majority of comments praised the program and its leaders for their guidance. The comments were very insightful and served as a reminder of the importance of subjective data. From the amount of responses and the meaningful comments, we think that coping is an important and very personal area for the participants.

Self-esteem, in foster children is often found to be low. Salahu-Din & Bollman (1994) state that low self-esteem is the most pervasive chronic problem of the foster child
due to earlier negative experiences with their family. This particular section solely consisted of quantitative data that reflected the importance of building good self-esteem and the benefits of participating in the ILP program.

In terms of self-concept, this section received the highest positive ratings which indicated the participants viewed themselves positively. Almost one-half of participants reported being happy with who they are. Furthermore, an equal one-half of participants rated their self-esteem at the “high level”. According to most researcher’s, self-esteem in foster care children is usually low (Salahu-Din & Bollman, 1994). However, the reports of high levels of self-esteem were reported after the adolescents received ILP training.

In addition to the areas listed above, respondents were asked various questions regarding their plans and level of preparedness upon emancipation. Regarding educational goals, the majority of respondents plan to graduate from high school and almost half plan on attending college. The remaining youth listed military as an area of interest. In terms of earning a living, three-fourth of participants plan to earn a living via employment. No information regarding this topic was found in the literature review.

One area of interest and concern was the respondents’ listing of “none”, “unknown” as well as those who did not
answer when asked their departure date. We speculated that these individuals are currently in relative foster care and may be able to remain in their placement after turning age eighteen and no longer are court dependents.

In terms of the main reason the respondents participated in the ILP class, an overwhelming majority of the youth indicated that they participated to better prepare themselves for independent living. Overall responses indicated that the program did indeed help to prepare them for emancipation.

Overall, the respondents gave favorable responses in all of the categories. The ILP class appears to have had a positive influence on increasing the adolescents' soft skills. It is important to acknowledge outside influences that may be contributing to these youth's social skills as support from their foster parent(s) or school personnel.

The negative findings regarding relationships between the adolescents and their biological parent(s) is problematic but not so surprising given the common problems found in these abusive families. Furthermore, the respondents' report of family relations being a difficult area to cope with is also not a surprise considering the removal of these youth from their own home is often as result of abuse and/or neglected by the parent(s).
The road leading to independent living can be a difficult one, especially for children in out-of-home placements. These wards of the court are at the mercy of the system which removed them from their parents. Because of the actions of this system, it is responsible to prepare these adolescents to care for themselves once they age-out of the system.

In terms of policy, the ILP program has been in existence in San Bernardino County for seven years and by state regulation, participation is voluntary. The minors' social worker must assess each teen by age sixteen and offer ILP services to them unless they are physically or mentally not able to benefit from such services. According to the results of this study which show that ILP classes are beneficial to the teen, one implication for social work might be making participation mandatory. This would ensure that the foster child receives some training that might improve their daily functioning and increase their chances of being self-sufficient.

Limited literature is available on independent living programs and their effectiveness. However, according to the results of this study, all participants are in the adolescence stage (Table 1) which current theory suggests is often a time of overwhelming stress which is exacerbated by their inability to adequately cope with frustrating
situations (Salahu-Din & Bollman, 1994). This research found that although the youths report they are having difficulties in various areas, the ILP program did help to improve their coping skills by teaching them useful ways to cope (Table 4).

One area of difficulty that was listed by most respondents was family relationships (Table 4) which the literature review indicated may be due to earlier negative experiences the child endured while they were with their family (Rice & McFadden, 1988). ILP addresses this issue by encouraging the students to openly discuss their feelings.

In terms of interpersonal relationships, a growing body of research has established that problem solving with adolescents to help generate alternative solutions (Howing, 1990). ILP addresses this by giving the adolescents scenarios and asking them "What would you do?". They are then guided by the instructors to think the problem through and arrive at an appropriate response.

In regards to separation anxiety, sixteen percent of participants (Table 4) reported this as an area of difficulty and in reviewing existing literature, it was found that the separation of child from parent(s) is perhaps the most tragic occurrence in a child's life (Barth, 1986). The ILP program utilizes skits, journaling or open group discussion to deal with this issue. Participants reported
this as helpful and previous research suggests that when foster care adolescents were given the opportunity to talk openly about their feelings, their relationships with others improved.

In terms of self sufficiency after aging-out of the system, no information was found on how these youth are doing. Barth (1986) estimates that less than twenty percent of these youth will return to their families of origin. The results of this study indicated that 84% of the youths participated to better prepare themselves for independent living (Table 1 continued) and, most report that they are well prepared to carry out their emancipation plans and are very ready to assume responsibility for their actions.

Literature indicates that the need for self-esteem is a basic need that, due to earlier adverse experiences with their families, many children in foster care do not have met (Timberlake & Verdieck, 1987). This research reported overall high levels of self-esteem after completing the ILP program.

In terms of practice, the ILP program is very relevant to the profession of social work. Social workers play multiple roles in the delivery of ILP services. The social worker: refers the minor, develops policy guidelines and programs as well as instruct the actual course. On one or more levels, they are a resource for their client and
Interestingly, most respondents reported a positive relationship with their social worker (Table 2).

While information acquired from adolescents participating in the program is valuable, true measurement of the actual effectiveness of the program cannot be accurately measured until some years later. The future outcomes of these participants can only be measured after they age-out of the system and assume their status as adults. This type of longitudinal study would be costly and time consuming, yet beneficial for future program development.

The Independent Living Programs focus on a number of subjects, both soft and hard skills. Self-esteem, coping and interpersonal relations are considered soft skills. Some hard skills taught are job preparedness, apartment hunting, and learning budgeting. The literature examined indicated that self-esteem was usually found to be low in foster care dependents (Salahu-Din & Bollman, 1994). However, although our research found this to be true, the provision of programs such as ILP, may improve it. This may suggest that the adolescents who had higher levels of self-esteem were more likely to participate in the program while those who suffered with low self-esteem were less likely to participate. Further study comparing the two groups is
recommended as well as an examination of a statistical significance of means.

Furthermore, the findings in this study indicated an overall positive relationship between participation in the Independent Living Program and perception of preparedness for independent living on the part of the participants.

One area that needs to be looked at more closely is the area of family relations. Over one-half (56%) of the respondents indicated that the participants had difficulty in this area. Further study of the existing program to measure more fully its' effectiveness in the areas of "family relations" "loss of loved ones" and "peer relations" is needed. This study had limitations which warrant further examination of the effectiveness of the program in this area.

Also of interest is the researchers' realization that female caretakers appeared to have a more favorable response for building ILP skills. This may suggest that the child welfare system may need more females working with the ILP program. This is an area where a study comparing male and female responses could be beneficial in program development.

Another area requiring a closer look is the area where respondents were asked to select area(s) they felt they needed more information on. Forty-four percent of the respondents felt they needed more information on job
training suggesting that a closer look is warranted. A closer look at what information is available through the program and what information, if any, should be added. The results indicated that the participants were not given enough information in this area. This may suggest that social workers need to access to information of job training.

According to Table 1, the results indicated that and the qualitative data, it appears that a few topics should be addressed in future studies. Overall, the majority of the adolescents responded with positive comments about their participation in the program.

Limitations

The findings in this study may have been influenced by various factors. These factors include the construction of a new questionnaire, the limited scope of the questionnaire, sample size, and type of sampling.

When a survey questionnaire is newly developed, there is always a possibility of researcher subjectivity occurring. Guba (1990) states that newly constructed surveys by the researcher requires the researcher to be objective and to control for researcher bias. However, the fact remains that the researchers own thoughts and experiences play a role in the development of the questionnaire.
Although the Independent Living Program focuses on an array of subjects, this study only focused on the specific aspects of: self-esteem, interpersonal relationships, and coping with feelings. As a result of this limited focus, one cannot generalize the findings of this study to the entire program. There may be other factors present in the program as well as the respondents' personal lives that are influencing the variables this study explored.

In terms of the sample type, by using convenience sampling, the researcher relies on available subjects such as those in the independent living program class. The researcher should exercise caution in generalizing the data due to the representativeness of the sample. Rubin and Babbie (1993), state that the results derived from convenience sampling are only valuable to those sampled and therefore only relate to this particular ILP group.

Summary

Children and adolescents who are court dependents have been removed from their homes for any number of reasons. Some of the reasons are neglect, physical/sexual abuse, and/or emotional abuse. Because of laws in place, Child Protective Services is given the legal responsibility for them and is responsible for their well-being. It is their responsibility to prepare these adolescents for what lies
ahead in adulthood. Although it is the duty of the parent to provide for and prepare the children for adulthood, the Agency must assume it.

Most of the respondents in this study were age 17, female, of African-American descent and English speaking. The majority live in foster homes in the San Bernardino region, plan to graduate high school and then attend a four year college. Their occupational interests varied with athletics being most popular and most were currently or previously employed in food services. Most report they are currently not work and want a part-time job. After emancipation, they indicated plans to reside on their own, to earn a living by working and that they participated in the ILP program to better prepare themselves for independent living.

Of the respondents, most reported positive relationships with non-family members, specifically peers/friends and female caretakers. The average length of time in placement was two years and eight months with most being placed in foster care for the first time at age nine and eight months. Most reported that ILP provided them well with social skills and information on safe sex practices. The majority of participants reported the felt ready to assume responsibility for their actions and are prepared to carry out emancipation plans.
The area most listed as an area of personal difficulty was family relations and respondents stated that they were taught useful ways of coping. Most of the youth needed more information on financial aid which is in congruence with their educational aspirations.

In terms of self-esteem, most of the participants felt things about them are good, that they are good and there is not a lot wrong with them. The majority felt they were good at some things and disagreed with the statement they are no good at all. Most also reported they are happy with the king of person they are and rated their self-esteem at a high level.

Overall, according to the information the population profile shows, the ILP program does help to improve their soft skills. Child Protective Services' provision of the ILP program appears to be a positive influence in these adolescents' lives. Given the existing theories and research, without this program, what chance do these children have to become independent successful adults?
APPENDIX A
SURVEY FOR ILP PARTICIPANTS

A. Age: ______

B. Sex: (1) Female ___ (2) Male ___

C. Date of birth: ______________

D. Ethnicity:
___ (1) African American
___ (2) Caucasian
___ (3) Latino/Hispanic
___ (4) Native American
___ (5) Asian American
___ (6) Multi-ethnicity (please specify: _____________)

E. Placement Location
(mark one)

___ (1) Relative Placement
___ (2) Foster Home
___ (3) Foster Family Agency
___ (4) Group Home
___ (5) Parent
___ (6) Other:

F. Length of time in current placement

G. Planned departure date: ______________

H. Primary Language: (1) ___ English, (2) ___ Spanish, (3) other

I. Region: ___(1) San Bernardino ___ (2) Desert
J. At what age were you placed in foster care for the first time?

K. My current educational goal(s) are to:

(1) Stay in school  (5) Get career counseling
(2) Receive tutoring  (6) Vocational training
(3) Get my GED  (7) Take college preparatory classes
(4) Graduate High School  (8) Other:__________________

L. My long term goal is to:  M. My occupational area of interest is:

(1) Get a part-time job  (1) Military Service
(2) Get a full-time job  (2) Job Corps
(3) Attend Community College  (3) Calif. Conservation Corps
(4) 4-year college  (4) Other__________________

N. Current/Previous Employment

(1) Food Service  (3) Clerical
(2) Retail  (4) Other ____________________

O. Where will you live after emancipation? (Mark one only.)

(1) Live in own housing?
(2) Live with friends?
(3) Live with mother or father? (Specify which: ____________)
(4) Live with relative?
(5) Live in college dorm or residence?
(6) Live with boyfriend/girlfriend?
(7) Other? (Specify: ______________________________________)
(8) Don't know

P. After emancipation, I will earn a living by.....

(1) Working
(2) Being on public assistance
(3) College/Training Financial Aid (Scholarships/Grants)
__ (4) Savings Account (Amount currently in savings: $   )
__ (5) Social Security
__ (6) Other:
Q. Employment Status:
__ (1) Want a full-time job
__ (2) Want a part-time job
__ (3) Am now working
__ (4) Have had a job in the past
__ (5) Completed pre-employment training

R. INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

1. Using the scale below, rate your relationship with each of the following person(s):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I Don’t know</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Somewhat positive</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Very positive</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. __ Male caretaker
2. __ Female caretaker
3. __ Biological father
4. __ Biological mother
5. __ Male foster siblings
6. __ Female foster siblings
7. __ Grandparents
8. __ Male Biological siblings
9. __ Female Biological siblings
10. __ Other male relatives
11. __ Other female relatives
12. __ Social worker
13. __ Teachers
14. __ Peers/friends
15. __ Others (explain)

2. How well has the ILP Program provided you with social skills?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I don’t know</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Very little</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Well</td>
<td>Very Well</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Regarding safe sex practices, how much information has the ILP Program provided you with?

0--------1--------2--------3--------4--------5--------6
I don’t None Very little Some A lot More than Not
know enough applicable

S. COPING

1. What areas have you had personal difficulties with?

  (1) Substance Abuse  (6) Loss of a loved one
  (2) Substance Abuse Recovery (7) Serious Illness
  (3) Peer Relationships  (8) Delinquency
  (4) Separation Anxiety  (9) Other:
  (5) Family Relationships

2. When faced with a difficult situation, what do you do? (Such as talking to someone, withdrawing, angry outburst, etc.)

Explain: ____________________________________________

3. How ready are you to assume responsibility for your actions?

0--------1--------2--------3--------4--------5--------6
I don’t Not ready A little Somewhat Ready Very Not
know ready ready ready applicable

4. How prepared are you to carry out your emancipation plans?

0--------1--------2--------3--------4--------5--------6
I don’t Not at A little Somewhat Well Very Not
know all prepared prepared prepared prepared applicable
5. Has participation in this ILP program taught you useful ways of coping with stressful situations?

(1) Yes
(2) No

Explain:

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

T. Check the area(s) you feel you need more information on:

(1) Mental Health
(2) Job training
(3) Education
(4) Counseling
(5) Family Planning
(6) Medical
(7) Dental
(8) Financial Aid
(9) Tutoring
(10) Other:

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

U. From the list below, please check the main reason for your participation in the ILP program.

(1) Social Worker/Probation Officer/Caretaker(s) made me participate.
(2) Monetary incentive (Money given to you to participate in the program.)
(3) To better prepare myself for when I'm out on my own.
(4) Nothing better to do.
V. SELF ESTEEM

1. Everybody has some things about him/her which are good and some things about him/her which are bad. Are more of the things about you:

   (1) GOOD
   (2) BAD
   (3) ABOUT THE SAME

2. A teenager said, "I am no good." Do you ever feel like this?

   (1) YES
   (2) NO

3. Another teenager told me, "There's a lot wrong with me." Do you ever feel like this?

   (1) YES
   (2) NO

4. A teenager said, "I'm not much good at anything." Do you ever feel like this?

   (1) YES
   (2) NO

5. Another teenager said, "I think I am no good at all." Do you ever feel like this?

   (1) YES
   (2) NO

6. How happy are you with the kind of person you are?

   0---------1--------2--------3--------4--------5--------6
   I don't Not at All so-so happy very happy extremely Not
   know all happy happy applicable

7. Rate your current level of self esteem.

   0---------1--------2--------3--------4--------5--------6
   I don't None Low Medium High Very high Not
   know applicable
APPENDIX B

SURVEY COVER LETTER/INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are about to participate is designed to explore your perceptions of the Independent Living Skills Program in terms of its helpfulness in developing your soft skills. This study is being conducted by R. Marlene Evans and Sonja Flowers, graduate students in Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino and supervised by Dr. Lucy Cardona, professor of Social Work.

This study consists of a survey questionnaire. You will be asked to answer each question to the best of your knowledge. Questions are designed to get your experiences, attitudes and thoughts about such topics as self-esteem, interpersonal relationships and coping techniques. How the program meets your needs as an ILP student will be explored. Some questions are multiple choice and others you will answer in your own words. There are no right, wrong answers or "trick" questions. The survey will take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Please be assured that any information you provide will be held in strict confidence by the researchers. At no time will your name be reported along with your responses. At
the conclusion of this study, you may receive a report on the results.

Please understand that your participation in this research project is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time during this study without penalty, and to remove any data during this study.

I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and understand the nature and purpose of this study and I freely consent to participate.

Participant’s Signature

Date

Researcher’s Signature

Date

Researcher’s Signature

Date
APPENDIX C
Agency Letter of Consent

Dr. Lucy Cardona
Dept. of Social Work
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, CA. 92407-2397

Dear Dr. Cardona:

This letter serves as notification to the Department of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino, that Sonja Flowers and R. Marlene Evans have obtained consent from the Department of Social Services, San Bernardino County, to conduct the research project entitled "A Study of An Independent Living Skills Program." This letter also serves as notification to the Department of Social Work that the Department of Public Social Services, San Bernardino County, is giving consent to allow minors under the jurisdiction of DPSS to participate in this research project.

If you have any questions regarding this letter of consent, you may contact:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name/Title</th>
<th>Phone Number</th>
</tr>
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</table>

Sincerely,

__________________________________________
Signature

__________________________________________
Name (printed)

__________________________________________
Date

__________________________________________
DPSS title
APPENDIX D

DEBRIEFING LETTER

The study you are about to participate in will explore how helpful you perceive the Independent Living Program to be. The researchers plan to use the findings to gain insight into the program. Please answer all the questions. Be as honest as possible and feel free to give your opinions and explanations in the spaces provided. Immediately following the completion of the survey, the researchers will collect them. Your participation of lack of participation will neither help nor hinder your involvement with the Department of Public Social Services nor the Independent Living Program.

The results will be available to the Department of Public Social Service and to the individual participants.

If you wish to obtain the general results of the study or if you have any questions, please contact the researchers, R. Marlene Evans and Sonja Flowers or Dr. Lucy Cardona at the Department of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino, at (909) 880-5501. If you have any questions regarding the Independent Living Program or issues relating to preparing for independent living, please contact your social worker or the Independent Living Coordinator with the Department of Public Social Services, Lory Klopfer at (909) 945-3807.
APPENDIX E

REQUEST FOR RESEARCH APPROVAL

October 16, 1995

Department of Public Social Services
County of San Bernardino
San Bernardino, California 92415-0080
494 North "E" Street

To The Department of Public Social Services:
We are writing today to ask for consent to conduct a research project entitled "A Study of An Independent Living Skills Program." This research project is a requirement for graduation for the Master of Social Work program at California State University San Bernardino. We are third-year MSW students. We are presently serving as interns at Child Protective Services at 494 North "E" Street, San Bernardino, California. Our Supervisor is Patty Liles, LCSW.

The purpose of this study is to measure the relationship between participation in the Independent Living Program and the adolescent’s perception of preparedness for independent living in the areas of self-esteem, coping skills, and interpersonal relationships. A questionnaire will be administered to a group of 16-18 year old adolescents who are currently in out-of-home placements under the jurisdiction of San Bernardino County DPSS: adolescents who have volunteered to participate in the ILP program. Through self-administered, written questionnaires, information will be gathered which identifies the participants’ perception of their level of preparedness for independent living, their perception of the level of influence of the Independent Living Program, and their opinions of how ILP and DPSS can better assist them in preparing for independent living. The participants will be randomly selected from classes held in the Winter months.

Each questionnaire will take approximately 30 minutes for the participant to complete. The data gathering period of this study will occur between January 2, 1996 and March 31,
1996. The results of the study will be available after June 30, 1996.

The rights and welfare of all the participants will be protected in this study. Participation will be voluntary, and all participants who decide to participate will need to sign a letter of informed consent. Because the participants will be minors and dependents of the court, an additional informed consent will need to be signed by DPSS, acting as their legal guardian. No significant risks are apparent in this study. This study is a nonmanipulative, nonstressful study of individual perceptions. DPSS will be provided with a copy of this study's results. However, individual information given by the participants will be confidential, and each participant's identity will not be revealed to DPSS nor any other person or agency. The findings of this study, in aggregate or anonymous data only, will be shared with DPSS in order to benefit adolescents in out-of-home placements through improved programs and future research. Any information that would link data with an identity will be destroyed at the conclusion of this project, no later than July 1, 1996.

A copy of our research proposal is attached for further information. If the Department has any other questions, Sonja may be contacted at 941-6648 and Marlene at 783-1280. The Department may also contact our supervisor, Patty Liles at 387-4956 or our research advisor, Dr. Lucy Cardona, at 880-5501.

We are requesting that we obtain written consent from the Department by December 20, 1995. We have provided a consent form which you may return in the self-addressed, stamped envelope enclosed, or you may create a separate letter of consent.

Respectfully,

Sonja Flowers
11879 Mt. Gunnison Ct.
Alta Loma, CA. 91737

R. Marlene Evans
P. O. Box 6941
San Bernardino, Ca. 92412
REFERENCES


Juarez, J. Foster care youth in higher education: What support is needed?. *Daily Living*. 8,2, 1-5.


