Advocate Resource Manual CASA Voices for Children

elvia perez

California State University, Monterey Bay

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Advocate Resource Manual

Elvia Perez

CASA Voices for Children, Jackie Steakley and Edna Chin

Collaborative Health & Human Services

Department of Health Human Services and Public Policy

California State University, Monterey Bay

December 1, 2017

Author’s Note: correspondence concerning this report can be sent to: Elvia Perez, Collaborative Health and Human Services, California State University Monterey Bay, at:

elperez@csumb.edu
Project Abstract

Title: Advocate Resource Manual

Abstract

Teens in foster care are more than twice than their peers not in foster care to become pregnant by the age of 19. Even more troubling, many of those who become pregnant experience a repeated pregnancy before they reach the 19 years old. In California, there were approximately 463,000 foster youths who were pregnant. A study conducted by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago found that 26 percent of those foster youth become pregnant at least once by the age of 17. The Advocate Resource Manual will be an essential tool for Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) to use while working with foster teens who are pregnant. Furthermore, the manual will provide all sorts of resources that are available within Monterey County for all of the CASA of Monterey County agency’s pregnant foster youths. Next, the Advocate Resource Manual will be utilize during the agency’s training for all of their new CASAs in order to become familiarized with the resources available to them so they can be equipped with proper tools to provide services to their youths.

Keywords: CASA of Monterey County, Foster Youth, Foster Pregnant Youth, Advocates Manual.
AGENCY AND COMMUNITIES SERVED

The primary population that CASA of Monterey County serves are children and youth that have been removed from their home due to abuse or neglect. According to Edna Chin as of January 2017, there are 130 active children that are being served, 125 that are on a wait list, 915 cases that have been closed, 7 new cases have been assigned to a new CASA volunteer as of March 2017. From those children that are currently receiving services, 83 are females, and 54 are males, ten are of African-American descent, thirteen bi-racial, fifteen Caucasian, ninety-five are Hispanic/Latino descent, three their race is not-known, and one is from other race. When it comes to the ages of these children that are being served fifty-two percent are ages one to ten, and forty-eight percent are ages eleven to twenty-one years old. (Chin, 2017)

The agency’s mission statement is “To train and support community volunteers who advocate for abused or neglected children placed in foster care, upholding children’s rights while pursuing a safe and permanent home”. In having volunteers be part of these children’s lives until their case is closed, which sometimes can take up to eighteen months, can be meaningful and impact children and youth’s life in a positive way.

PROBLEM, ISSUE OR NEED

The population in need are foster youth that become pregnant at an early age.

PROBLEM DESCRIPTION

In a study that was conducted about teen pregnancy among women in foster care found that women in foster care are more than twice than their peers not in foster care to become pregnant by age 19. (guttmacher.org) Even more troubling, many of those who become pregnant
experience a repeated pregnancy before they reach age 19. (guttmacher.org). In a study conducted in the longitudinal study of more than 700 young people in Iowa, Wisconsin, and Illinois, 33% of females in foster care had been pregnant by age 17 or 18, compared with just 14% of their peers in the general population. (guttmacher.org). Moreover, repeated pregnancies are common, by age 19, 46% of those who had ever been pregnant had experienced more than one pregnancy, compared with 34% of the general population. (guttmacher.org). In the state of California, there were approximately 463,000 foster youth, and there was a study conducted by the Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago in this study, it was found that 26 percent of those foster youth become pregnant at least once by the age of 17. (Alcala, D.)

Due to the high rate of foster youth, there is a high rate of foster youth that are pregnant but because it is hard to track the number of foster youth and due to confidentiality there is no data to represent this numbers. According to a study conducted by UC Berkley and USC researcher found a very large number of teen pregnancy within California welfare system. (Daily.org) The study, released Nov. 12 and titled “California’s Most Vulnerable Parents: A Population-Based Examination of Youth Involved with Child Protection Services,” revealed that one in four female foster youths gives birth before age 20 and that 40 percent of these mothers give birth to another child while still in their teenage years. The study also found that four out of every ten teen mothers are victims of abuse before pregnancy. (Alcala, D.)

Foster youth become pregnant at an early age. In Monterey County too many foster youths are pregnant, and not enough resources are available to them to explain services within their community. When youth are removed from their home and they end up pregnant these youths do not know their rights, choices or services that are available to them. Teenage girls in foster care are 2.5 times more likely to become pregnant by age 19 than those not in foster care.
By age 21, a full 50 percent of foster youth will have given birth to at least one child, a rate more than double the same-age population. (Harlan, 2013) There has been success in reducing the number of pregnancies among teens in California, but when it comes to reducing the number of pregnancies among foster youth it has been a challenge. (Harlan, 2013).

Teen pregnancy is one of the most prevalent sexual activity risk among this population, approximately 1 out of 6 women in foster care ages 13-21 are either mothers or pregnant. (Hazen, 2013) These pregnancies are perceived negatively by social workers because they blame these pregnancies to the “cycle” of foster youth mothers who are repeating reckless patterns from their mothers and inadvertently reinforces class and race stereotypes. (Hazen, 2013)

**PROBLEM CAUSES/CONTRIBUTING FACTORS**

There are many causes for pregnancy among foster youth, in this essay we will demonstrate some of the contributing factor including; lack of sex education, depression, and substance abuse.

First, due to the lack of sex education among foster youth some of the contributing factors are due to lack of policy, or guidance for caregivers, lack of accurate information for youth regarding sexual health is a contributing factor. Care providers such as social workers, independent living providers may not feel comfortable providing information about sexual health due to lack of knowledge, and policy guidelines. Some agencies may not allow staff to discuss sexuality issues with youth in their care due to religious or political foundations. (Rowland, 2011)

Second, research indicates that due to stressful events foster youth experience prior to placement they experience depression. Some stressful events include; removal from home, separation from familiar social circles, and constant transitions to different homes, and schools it affects their engagement in school. Social activities can help foster youth, but one study reported
that only 40% of youth in foster care participate in in-school activities that focus on honing leadership skills, helping improve communities, and creating positive peer mentor relationships. However, when youth in foster care are not engaging in these types of activities, they are more likely to exhibit internalizing symptoms, including depression. (Hazen, 2013)

Last, substance abuse among foster youth is a deadly battle. In one study 19% of adolescents surveyed reported drinking alcohol while in out-of-home care, a rate compared to a random sample of high school students. Reports also indicated that 94% of states cannot identify the number of child and youth in out-of-home care who have substance abused problems. Only 13% of states have a written policy requiring parents in foster care to report a child’s substance abuse. (Spark action, 1999).

Consequences

Due to the number of foster youth that become pregnant every year, there are consequences that many foster youths are currently facing. Early school dropout, low self-esteem and becoming parents at an early age.

First, school dropout. According to a study conducted in the state of Illinois for pregnant and parenting teens, found that 30 percent of those teen mothers had not earned a high school diploma or GED, and were not enrolled in school, however 8 percent of these young women attributed this to maternity leave. (Manlove, 2011)

Second cause, low self-esteem, affects foster youth in many different ways. Severe anxiety and depression, suicide and nutrition, and low self-esteem (NCSL, 2017). When a teen becomes pregnant they feel the stigma associated with being a foster pregnant youth that has been removed from their home has no connection with family member, and now is having a baby and no connection with someone they can trust.
Last cause, foster youth are becoming parents at an early age. In a study of 700 youth conducted by Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster, one third of these young girls have been pregnant at least once. By the age 19, that had risen to nearly one half. (Dworsky, 2009). At the age of 17, teens are still attending high school this prevents them from receiving a high school diploma, and for most of them to continue to a higher degree.

**PROBLEM MODEL**

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<th>Consequences:</th>
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<td>School drop out</td>
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<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
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<td>Low self-esteem</td>
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<td>Substance abuse</td>
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<td>Young parents</td>
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**PROJECT TITLE**

CASA Monterey County Advocate Resource Manual

**PROJECT PURPOSE AND JUSTIFICATION**

The advocate help guide is a tool to help those that have been assigned to a foster youth that is pregnant, staff, volunteers, and interns that might need information about services available to foster pregnant youth in Monterey County. In addition, there will be collaboration with other local non-profits, and other agencies that have the same interest to provide services to improve the lives of foster youth in our communities. Not knowing what services are available to foster youth can be challenging for advocates and having an advocate help guide can help relieve stress and guide them in the right direction.
Currently, CASA does not have an advocate help guide to assist with question or guide about services for foster teens when they are pregnant. This advocate help guide is desperately needed, and it will a great resource that can even be used during training for new CASA advocates. When trainings are conducted for new CASA advocates this is a topic where there is little to no information that is shared with new advocates, granted that there are not too many cases that the agency had seen too often, it does not mean it does not happen. Currently, the agency is dealing with two foster youths that are pregnant, and their advocates are having to find the resources that are available within the community to help these two new moms. By creating advocate help guide will create positive image of the agency within its advocates because it will relieve some of the stress that is created by all the research that needs to be done in order to find services for foster youth.

Furthermore, those that will benefit from this advocate help guide are new, and current advocates working with pregnant foster youth, agency staff members, and most important of all foster pregnant youth. First, new and current advocates will have the information available to them in the event they are assigned to a teen that is pregnant. It will contain information about services within Monterey County that will be instrumental to connect foster youth with services. Second, staff will have information available for future trainings, for new or current advocates about services for pregnant teens this way they can continue with their work and not have to worry about looking for this information. Finally, foster pregnant youth because they will be connected to the right services they need in order to have a healthy pregnancy and delivery. Once they have the baby they need to continue to receive service for baby and mother, birth control, breast feeding and other services available to them.

**Project Implementation**
The plan is to set up interview appointments with foster youth that have had their babies to find out from them what type of services they wish they have had received prior, and after delivery of baby. This information will allow me to then set up interviews with other non-profits, and agencies that provide the services that would provide the services that would be beneficial to foster youth. There is currently 3 foster youth that I will interview. First, I will get written permission to be able to interview them because they might not want to participate, once they agree I will set up a time and date that work for them and proceed with interview. Next, I will contact agencies within Monterey County to find out who would be my contact to be able to do interview about the services that are available for foster youth. Some of the agencies would be; Planned Parenthood, W.I.C, La Leche League, Family Resource Center, Kinship Center, Peacock Acres, and Department of Social Services. Once I have my contact person I will set up interviews. After the interviews are completed for all agencies I will compile the information to start the advocate information guide.

**Scope of work and Timeline:**

To create my project Jackie my mentor and I will get together to get permissions to interview foster youth mothers to set up interviews, and to find out from them what type of information would have been helpful to them while pregnant and after delivery of baby? I will be conducting interview in English and Spanish because we need to get feedback from different backgrounds if available. Agencies will be contacted, and interview dates will be set up to gather information to create resource binder. Once the information has been gather I will analyze it to create a successful advocate help guide for foster pregnant youth.
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<th>Deliverables</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Estimated Completed Dates</th>
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<td>Important element to have a successful research youth/agencies</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>June 16, 2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>Set up interviews youth/agencies</td>
<td>Complete interview youth/agencies to make sure all date is gathered</td>
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<td>Analyze Results</td>
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<td>October 13, 2017</td>
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<td>Completed Capstone</td>
<td>Advocate Resource Manual</td>
<td>October</td>
<td>October 30, 2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**OBSTACLES AND UNEXPECTED CIRCUMSTANCES**

**PROJECT RESULTS/FINDINGS**

While conducting the project the student intern was surprised, disappointed due to her findings. When the student intern initially decided to create the Advocate Resource Manual she did not think it would be difficult to have agencies participate or help create the resource manual everyone in the Monterey County provides services to teens that become pregnant, therefore she thought how difficult could that be. To her surprise there were some obstacles that made it difficult to make this a successful project, but with her perseverance and determination she was able to finish her project successfully.

Some of the obstacles faced were lack collaboration from agencies due to scheduling, unwillingness of some agencies to provide information that was asked during interviews, and
lack of response within timely manner to request interviews. First, the student intern knew there would be obstacles while performing her interviews for the manual (refer to appendix A), but never imagined that collaboration would be one of the contributors. Why would such an important topic not be a priority for our community? When agencies that provide the same services to a pregnant foster youth why would it be so difficult for them to collaborate, and come together to try to solve the issue. There are many agencies that provide services for foster youth but not all focus or provide services for those that have become pregnant, and those agencies that do are to busy or do not want to talk about their services. Second, while conducting interviews many of the agencies believe that one in specific would have all the answers the intern needed or that this agency was the one that the intern needed to go see. This agency provides many services for foster youth, and also focuses on the care of pregnant parenting teens. When the student intern wanted to know about the services that were available for foster pregnant youth those agencies that gave her the opportunity to do a face-to-face interview and even a couple that answer her questions via email referred her to the same agency. When the intern went to the interview she had her questions ready therefore, she was under the impression that she was going to get all her questions answer but her interview did not go as planned. The Program Manager did not want to answer the intern questions, he had his own agenda and whenever she asked him one of her questions he would tell her a story of something he had done in the past while working with the agency. The student intern kept trying to ask him other questions from the list that she had and again no luck. Third, the lack of response in a timely manner from some of the agencies or no response to help collaborate for such an important project was incredible. As the student intern and from prior working experience it is difficult to make time for everyone that
ask for interviews due to busy schedules but why not return a phone call to help a student with such an important capstone.

As mentioned before there were limitations while creating the Advocate Resource Manual, for example; no interest or lack of collaboration, one agency supervisor forgot the meeting time and never showed up, but she called the student intern later on the same day and reschedule the interview for another day. Whenever supervisors were not able to meet with the student intern, she asked if they would be willing to answer her questions via email or phone call, during interviews the student intern would also ask if they knew of any other agencies that provided similar services to obtain referral. Some of the agencies never called back or replied to her emails, so the student intern had to move on with her project and made a note of what had taken place. Trying to set up interviews sometimes would take up to 20 minutes, and for others the student intern would be told they would call her back and no one did but she did not give up intern called back until she was told they were not interested on her project.

PERSONAL REFLECTION/ FINAL THOUGHTS:

CONCLUSION/INTERPRETATION

At the end the student intern believes there is still a lot more that needs to be done in order to have all agencies collaborate and find out more on exactly what each agency is supposed to be doing. When the student intern asked the questions she was under the impression that some of the agency representatives felt under pressure, afraid, and not willing to talk about what type of services they offered for foster pregnant or parenting youth. Is it because of the money the agency is receiving and what they are supposed to be doing with it for these teens? That was the feeling the student intern was getting from some of these agencies but she could be wrong.
Future recommendation to CASA Voices for Children would be to have current and new advocates utilize resource manual and provide them with feedback about the manual and the information that it includes. If the manual is utilized for any services was it what they were looking for and were they aware of all these services listed on manual for pregnant/parenting youth our community.

After the manual has been utilized and the agency has received some feedback the student intern recommends this project can be continued. There were many agencies that did not have the time to meet up for interview, or maybe there are some agencies that she is not aware about and are not listed on the advocate resource manual therefore having someone else review the manual and possibly finding an interest on improving it would be great.

The social problem in our community is that there is a lack of services in Monterey County for foster youth and less services for those that are parenting or pregnant, so how can we educate them and better service these youth? Another issue is that many of these foster youth are Hispanic so maybe having a student work on their capstone project creating a manual with these services both in English and Spanish would be a great project that way it would be easy for an advocate to have this new tool on their hand to deliver to youth as needed.

In conclusion, the student intern believes that having the advocate manual will be an effective tool to have not only for advocates but also for foster pregnant youth in Monterey County. By working on the Advocate Resource Manual there were many members in the community that were involved, and for many this will be an opportunity realize the lack of collaboration there is among them to provide service to a social problem that keeps increasing in our community.

PERSONAL/ PROFESSIONAL GROWTH:
Since the beginning of my internship I have had the opportunity to learn about foster youth care and during this time I realized that there was a gap in services for teens that become pregnant at an early age. Not only are foster teens suffering due to the fact that they have been removed from their homes but now they have become pregnant with no idea of how to access services that are free within Monterey County. Agencies that provided the same services for teens due to different goals the agencies have do not collaborate and that is a problem that is not being addressed. While conducting my research on what agencies to contact and how to access them it was challenging because not every agency is willing to participate in this type of projects. I can understand that it must be overwhelming for agencies who receive more than one request for an interview but when there is interest in the type of services they provide should be something to be proud of. During the planning and implementation of the project I had the support of my mentor Jackie Steakly and professor and what I learned during this time was that even though there are many services for pregnant youth the collaboration among them is challenging. Being able to schedule an interview without having a direct contact was not an easy task, doing an interview over the phone was impossible but e-mail contact did work for some agencies. Overall by creating the Advocate Resource Manual current and future advocates will be able to focus on providing services to their youth not on trying to navigate through out Monterey County finding resources for foster youth that become pregnant. Before the project was implemented CASA staff did not think about this project because there is no record of the number of teens that become pregnant in Monterey County. Due to the high rate of foster youth, there is a high rate of foster youth that are pregnant but because it is hard to track the number of foster youth and due to confidentiality there is no data to represent this numbers, moreover CASA of Monterey County does not track the number of youth that are pregnant or have become
pregnant and that is a problem because this population is at high risk. The agency does a great job providing services that are within their scope and now that the Advocate Resource Manual is available advocates, volunteers, and staff will be prepared in the event a teen becomes pregnant.

**BORADER SOCIA SIGNIFICANCE:**

The broader social problem that my project relates to is teen pregnancy, and my project addresses the problem by providing information for advocates on birth control. During my interview I asked one agency who talks to teens about birth control and it is their case manager but when I asked a teen I was told by her that she has never been asked or given any information about birth control.

In order to educate young girls about how to prevent pregnancies there needs to be education provided to them, there are so many organizations that provide trainings. Planned parenthood is an organization that is willing to go and talk to teens about comprehensive sex education in a non-judgmental way, and discuss the fact and consequences associated with youth’s choices in a respective way. CASA might not be the right organization to provide training for foster girls but collaborating with agencies to prevent pregnancies of foster youth is worth the effort.

For future students that would like to continue working on this project I would advice them to start contacting the agencies with plenty of time, continue calling those agencies that I was not able to get an interview with a director and see what type of services they provide that would be helpful for pregnant teens. Also, what other agencies are in our community that provide services for pregnant teens and add them to the Advocate Resource Manual. Moreover, having a pamphlet that provides a list of all the agencies both in English and Spanish would be a tool for CASA of Monterey County to have not only to include in their training guide that’s
provided to all new CASA Advocates but also for current CASA’s that are working with teens that are pregnant or have become pregnant. According to Edna Because 95% of children in CASA’s waiting list are Hispanic/Latino descent having the pamphlet in Spanish would be beneficial to not only youth but to advocates working with pregnant teens. (Chin, 2017).

Working at CASA was a very rewarding experience for me, I would advise those students that have time, money, and are passionate about helping children, youth to become one and be out in the field. Having the opportunity to be with a youth, learning about the experiences and knowing that I have made a difference in the life of someone is rewarding. Collaborating with social workers, agencies, and being able to attend court hearing to know what happens during court trial has been an experience that if I had not become an advocate I would have not experience. Always ask questions, reach out to your mentor and complete monthly reports on time, and most important of all have fun with your child or youth.

In conclusion this report provides information about problem statement, consequences, and recommendations about teen pregnancy.
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Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. What services does your agency provide for foster youth mothers?

2. Do you provide any classes for new mothers? If so, what type of classes are offered?

3. Does your agency currently collaborate with other agencies in our community to provide services for foster youth mothers? If you do, which are the agencies that you are collaborating with? What is the goal?

4. Are you aware of any services to prevent teen pregnancy among foster youth in Monterey County? If yes, how is it being promoted? If not do you know if this is something that is being considered?

5. Who in your agency talks to youth when they become pregnant about their choices? Keeping the baby, adoption, and abortion? Is that something that can be talked to foster teens? Are there laws that prevent this topic from being discussed?
6. When a foster youth is pregnant who is involved in care? Appointments, nutrition needs, and clothes?

7. Does foster teen continue with her education at her current school? How far into her pregnancy does she continue attending school?

8. Does the foster youth living arrangements remain the same while she is pregnant?

9. Who pays for baby supplies? Is there an amount spend on baby prior to the delivery of supplies?

10. How many months in advance does the youth get supplies for baby?

11. Who is responsible for taking youth to hospital once she's in labor?

12. Once baby is born, does youth get a monthly allowance for herself and baby for supplies? How much?

13. Is youth required to attend parenting classes?

14. Does youth have nurse visits after delivery? For how long? Who sets this visits up?

15. When does youth return to school after delivery?

16. What is required from youth to remain in home with her baby?
Sample Agency from Advocate Resource Manual

Peacock Acres Inc.

830 Park row

Salinas, CA 93901

(831) 754-3535

www.peacockacres.com

Services:
Peacock Acres has transitional housing for young adults, ages 16-24, who have aged out of foster care or have been separated from their families. Case management, educational support, and life skills development also provided. In addition services and support is provided for youth that become pregnant during and after pregnancy.