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Improving independent living skills training for youth exiting foster care in Monterey County

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Improving Independent Living Skills Training For Youth

Exiting Foster Care in Monterey County

By Christy Ann Scaife



Division of Humanities & Communication
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I pray all the world's children have safe and happy homes in the near future. The struggles of a childhood in out-of-home care will make you stronger if you fight hard enough for a brighter tomorrow. I know from experience.

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Improving Independent Living Skills Training For Youth Exiting Foster Care
In Monterey County

Introduction

Orphanages, adoption, foster care and kinship care all make up what is commonly known as child welfare. In researching Congressional Quarterly (CQ), Ebscohost, World Cat, Social Services Abstracts, and reading about places such as Hull House, one sees that child welfare has been in place since the beginning of time. The names have changed, the circumstances surrounding a child's removal from his or her biological family may have changed, but the fact that many children grow up without permanency and stability is still a major problem. For example, I was placed in foster care at seven years of age in South/Central Los Angeles California. I was initially placed with my grandmother, then with an aunt and in multiple foster homes, but I would always have to move. Court-ordered placement with family other than one's parents is kinship care. If not placed in kinship care, I might find a foster home I thought I would be able to call my home and I would be abused or have to move for some other reason. Thousands of children face the same reality of physical and sexual abuse, emotional abuse, instability and loneliness. No one is qualified in quite the same way as a former foster child to address and fight for a system reform. Believing in the power of personal stories to illustrate the severity of social injustice, one of my personal creative nonfiction short stories is included in this Capstone.

Another story comes courtesy of the focus group of seven social workers connected to the Adoptions Unit of Monterey County DSES. A young man left care and proceeded with his plan to go back and find his birth father. The young man was convinced that the System unjustly removed him from a father who loved him. The young man was promised a toy truck by his

father and was never able to collect it. The young man left his adoptive family to travel across the country and find his father and get his truck. Throughout all the years since this young man was removed from his biological father, his most enduring desire was to return home to find that truck. Many youth are trapped by similar burdens of not being able to let go of the past, because of a lack of answers.

Although an infinite number of areas of child welfare need to be addressed, this paper focuses on independent living skills training for teens in the system who are on the verge of emancipating or aging out of care. Independent Living Skills Program (ILP) is available in each county for illegible youth. Laws give general regulations for how these programs are to be run, but basically each state allocates money to the counties and each county decides which skills and information the specific youths in that county need to know. Since my Capstone focuses on Monterey County, I will use said county as an example. In Monterey County, when a foster child is 15 and a half, he or she is eligible for Independent Living Skills training. These trainings occur once a week for the Seaside youth and once a week for the Salinas area group. The classes teach foster youth about financial responsibility, applying to college and financial aid, job training and job interviewing skills, social medicate, cooking and other home economic skills, how to get an apartment, pay bills and other skills most people learn in the home. The youth are encouraged to continue participating in ILP in Monterey County until they age out of foster care (emancipate), or exit for some other reason. Later, a legislative history of ILP is provided, which explains the general workings of ILP in more depth.

Much research has been documented, which discusses the reasons for foster care/out-of-home placement, the history of child welfare, special needs adoptions and placement and the educational disparities of foster youth, but a lack of substantial research in the area of post-foster

care life has been documented. It is crucial that Social Services do a better job of tracking the success and failings of graduated foster youth. Without tracking these youth, services to foster youth cannot be improved to address the needs of foster youth. Gathering systematic data on post high-school education of foster youth, economic status of foster youth and employment status of youth will help assess ILP and improve future services. Therefore, I am part of a team within Monterey County Department of Social and Employment Services (DSES) working on a database to assist the department in keeping and using records of vital information on this population. In addition, this Capstone goes into some depth on the history of child welfare legislation and its impact on the System of today. This project combines fieldwork, life experience and research to examine the past and present situations in Child Welfare and proposes measures to improve outcomes for youth in the future. The research question to be answered is as follows: how can ILP training better the educational, employment, social and economic outcomes for former foster youth in Monterey County?

The first key to serving the youth involved in ILP is for the staff to keep in mind the mission statement of Monterey County DSES: “To excel at providing quality services for the benefit of all Monterey County residence while developing, maintaining, and enhancing the resources of the region” (Monterey County Department of Social and Employment Services). This Capstone works to ensure the resources of the community are available to former foster youth and that services delivered to these youth are relevant to their needs and sufficient to meet their needs.

I Can See You Crying (Personal Creative Nonfiction)

Simply to put a personal touch, a face on child welfare, here is my creative nonfiction short story about one family's struggles with out-of-home care. Though this story is based on personal experience, the names and some details have been changed to protect my family.

Diary Entry: October 6, 2000

Dear Diary:

I always thought the tears I cried were for me; they were not always. All of these years, the long years since 1985 when I was three, I have looked in the mirror and saw Momma cry whenever I have cried. I look like momma, you see? So every time I look in the mirror, I see her; my face is her face. Since I do look like Momma, I suppose more often than not I was crying for her and all she would never have. Since I was her splitting image, I feared I would never have. Just pondering it still makes me sad enough to this day that I cry lonely tears that are cold by the time they reach my chin.

Why are they cold? Cold is how Momma was toward me, but never toward him. There was always a "him". Someone, that man who Momma always made clear was more important to her than I could ever be. And so, I chose to cease trying to matter to her. In some deep part of myself, I still try to matter; try to measure up anyhow. I can still look in the mirror and see her cry whenever I cry. Oh diary, tell me that I am not like Momma, so then I can start smiling bright smiles that reach my eyes. ?

She still cries for the man in prison who beat all of us. She still cries because the doctors gave me medication that pitched my world into physical blindness. Now, I only have partial vision in one eye. She still cries for all of us children she abandoned. She still cries because she does love us. I cry because her love isn't enough now. Momma cries because she knows it.

Do not get me wrong, I do love her because she is my momma, and I forgive her because she is the weak one who has enough burdens without my hatred. Hate is too big of a burden for any of us to carry. Instead, with love came acceptance. I accept and feel such sorrow for Momma. Now she is broken by all of the men whom she loved and who didn't love her and she has very little love for anyone. I cannot reach her or begin to make her happy. I cry for that reason the most. When I look in the mirror, I think she is crying with me for the same reason. She will die not knowing how I love her so.

Not to forget my Lord to whom I am grateful forever. He has given me the strength to forgive if not forget. I thank my Lord because now, my world is only fuzzy, not pitch black. I thank my Lord for "My Angel on Earth". Here is my story.

With hope, faith and love,

Isabella Ranaldi

-End of Entry-

Isabella's Story

It is cold, so cold that the shivers that run through me, making my shoulders shake, my teeth chatter and my hands feel like ice cubes are visible to anyone who cares to see, but of course, no one's here but my sisters and they are in the same condition. At least, no one else was here until the banging on the door awoke me. I do not even push back the curly black hair from my face or scrub the sleep sand from my eyes; I drag to the front door wearing my oversized t-shirt. When I get to the door, the police stand there and I am not surprised, I have seen them there before: lots of times.

So, I asked the austere looking Sergeant to take me away from this mad house with burned food and skillet bottoms, burning flesh and hollowed eyes and empty rooms; he does take me away, he takes all of us away. I knew he would though, they always did. Even though I wanted to be out of that house filled with screams and alcohol breath, I distain how they would just barge in like they owned the place, now that I can see with much more clarity. No, I do not regret being removed from Momma's so much as I regret never knowing those sweet smiling little faces carefree and happy; they are my sisters. I only have sad memories for the six little "Dresden dolls" we were. I feel for them, the lonely children who never had a home. Sisters, I pray every night: may the lord provide you with a home. If I had known we would be separated forevermore, perhaps I would have told the sergeant and the social workers to go to hell.

Today I remember, I cry and I love. I remember my oldest sister, Adriana being thrown by one of Momma's men, flying and landing with shattering glass into the rose bushes that lay so prickly in front of the south Los Angeles house we lived in. Adriana and I have never spoken of it; we never will. Also, I remember that weak creature Momma night after night outside Adriana's and my window, the man who Momma wanted us to call Papa had thrown her out again. Of course we weren't asleep. We expected to hear the whimper, which always accompanied Momma's timid knock on our bedroom window.

We huddled together there in that room, Adriana and I, and we would give Momma the covers because that was all we could do. "Momma, why are you outside?" We always asked. She would cry and say, "Isabella and Adriana, Momma has been bad again." Now just imagine two little girls ages five and six grasping the idea of "Momma has been bad again?" Only children got punished, not mommas. We would say come in, you'll get sick. She could never come in on

those long cold nights, but she also could not leave for good. On and on the cries, shouts and violence went until again, my sisters and I were taken into foster care.

Another time after we'd been placed back with Momma and that hateful grisly bear she wanted us to call Papa, anger and frustration led my dear Adriana to an act that had us removed once more. My sister took a scorching iron to my arm while I was eating my cereal on the ironing board, and she did it on purpose; we were home with a momma who didn't even wake up.

Momma didn't know about the incident until one of my teachers from school called days later inquiring about the huge, circular burn scarring the bicep of my tiny right arm. This time it was off to Grandma's house for Adriana, the other two dolls, Shannon and Keri and me. There were only four of us back then; Sarah and Rena were born five and six years later respectively.

Momma left that man, finally, and another chapter began. How long would it take for Momma to take him back this time?

First, it was Grandma's though. My sisters soon left, shipped off like so much luggage to foster homes where they would be know more than someone's source of income. I know that world, because I was soon to leave grandma's house and ship off to a different foster home. I guess one would say I had it easy in comparison to my beloved siblings, because I was returned to Grandma's house whenever she was well enough to take care of me, whereas my sisters were finally simply returned to Momma. I might have to agree to a point. Still, when pain and loneliness are endlessly deep, how do you measure? I never went back to Momma.

At Francis Blend elementary, I had a special teacher who would visit me in my various foster homes and feed me gram crackers when I was hungry. Still, I believe that everyone has troubles and pain and no one's sorrow is any worse than anyone else's. Everyone's tragedies are just as severe to him or her as the next person's is to them. In fact, kindnesses from teachers and friends

just made things worse when I had to move on as I always did. Throughout my childhood, I was placed in foster homes, two of them and a group home. I wished that I had stayed in the group home. The hard girls and tough guys filled a part of me that needed brothers and sisters and made me stronger somehow. I determined there that I wasn't as weak as I had thought myself to be. A lot of them were bloods and crips and I understood that. At least they had the elusion of love, which is more than I had. In the group homes, I was never alone.

Yes I know: you are going to get bored if I don't get on with my story and stop with the background. Surely, you want to know where I, Isabella Ranaldi am coming from.

Well, I am 18 now and I am a freshman at USC, I am a survivor, which is the point. Every night I think about where I come from in relation to where I am. Momma I still cry for us. Do you know what I hate the most, Momma? I hate your long hair and I hated it even more when your hair was short. Why? Because you cut it short to keep him from dragging you by it. I hate that you never could love your own children enough to leave him. I hate the mettlesome plate you cannot afford to have taken out of your arm. You would not have it if he had not broken your arm in the first place. I hate that you defend the bastard who broke your arm even now. I hate that you considered going to the prison to marry that punk after you got the guts to testify against him. Yes I know momma, you will never forget anyway. So now look, know how Adriana hurts still.

The phone is ringing one, two, three times, and my sister answers finally. I prepare to tell her how I feel, ask her how she feels. But I lay there in my bed with the checkered blanket up to my chin and Adrianna still cannot let the hurt go. Perhaps, I cannot either, none of us can. Damb it! I should not have called!

“Hay Adriana”! I say this with enthusiasm that I do not feel, voice pitching just a bit higher at the end.

“Hi Isabella, what do you want”? Of course, this hurts me. I know that she always answers the phone this way when I call.

I say “I just thought that we could talk. We never talk anymore.” Then my throat squeezes shut, my lids close in an attempt to keep the tears from falling, but she knows that I am crying anyway. “Adriana,” I choke out, “I just always thought that we’d be close someday. I feel like I have never had a big sister.”

“I don’t want to hear this,” Adriana spits through the phone angrily. “If we are not close, it is Momma’s fault, not mine. We are just different. There is nothing wrong with us being different,” she explains.

“Still, I wish that we could talk. We did not grow up together. I don’t even know you,” I say to Adriana as I valiantly try to stop the rainstorm of tears.

We talk on for another hour or so with nothing getting resolved, and my head hurts now anyway. As on everything else, we don’t agree about Momma. She wants to argue; “I had it worse off than you.” I want to argue, “You are who you are, because momma was who she was.” Of course, the suggestion that everything had worked out for the best enrages Adriana. But I am just trying to help. I am just trying to make her see that she can only control the now, not the then. She is so gone, so angry that she is beyond logic, beyond love and beyond me ...just like Momma. Maybe she is angry because she is not happy with who she is because of Momma,

To Adriana, I am the lucky one. To her, I escaped while she chose to stay there in that hell with Momma. It is somehow my fault, all of it. I am lucky for being forced into foster care

and even spending some time with Grandma before she died in 1999. I am lucky because I have the brains; I have everything she does not, she argues. But, she, Adriana is so much more beautiful than I am. When we are together and I am in my jeans and black boots, and her in those high hilled sandals and short skirt, I feel drab. She is the one who is five feet five inches tall, three inches taller than me. She is slim and perfect, though she has no boobs to fill those "A" cups, but I am lucky? Well, if not being angry at the world, not having a pity party all day everyday, going on to make something of myself and believing in a God that she does not makes me lucky, then perhaps she is correct. I just wish that I were lucky enough to have my big sister love me. See Momma, you ripped the love from my sister's heart. I have to forgive you for this too.

So then I call Momma. "Hey Momma!" I called Momma because I have found it in my heart to forgive her, to be able to talk to her. I even dare to hope that I might help her now. He's in prison for life now, the man who beat us. There is another one now though, but he does not slap, punch, throw, kick and drag her at least.

"Hi stranger," is her opening line. I hear my youngest half sister in the background, and so I ask the first question that comes to mind. "How is Rena"?

"She is great and she misses you. When are you coming over"? I love my little four-year-old sister and so I smile.

"I am calling to tell you that I will be done with my Psych 5 class tomorrow around 2 p.m. Will that work"?

"Of course. I have nothing better to do," she says. "I am always stuck in the house. "

"Alright then. I will be over tomorrow and we can walk to the bakery," I tell her. She tells little Rena and now there is four-year-old screaming going on.

“I will talk to you later Momma,” and I hang up after her pitiful “bye.” She always tries for the guilt trip. For her, I never have enough time. I cannot please everyone, especially not Momma or Adriana, but perhaps I can still help Rena.

After talking to Adriana and then Momma I go into the white marble bathroom with the deep sink into me tub in my boyfriend’s still married parents’ house. I run a fragrant bubble bath with steaming hot water. Seeking down into the water, I close my eyes and think about the way the water and bubbles feel as they lazily caress my face, my breasts, my arms and legs. I listen to nothing but my own regular breathing and the crackling of bubbles stuck in my hair. Inside my head, I still see Momma, Adriana, Keri and Shannon crying. They are being dragged away by their long, dark ponytails, and I cannot do anything but run in the opposite direction for my own salvation. Will I ever forgive myself?

Literature Review

Outcomes for youth raised in foster care/out-of-home care are consistently reported to be significantly lower than those of their peers who live at home (Courtney, Piliavin, Grogan-Kaylor & Nesmith, 2000). On top of the status of being a foster youth, these youth are often minorities, often have behavioral problems, suffer from educational deficiencies and lack the social networks/social connections people normally develop throughout the course of childhood and continue into adulthood, Courtney argues (2001). One of the problems sighted by researchers is society’s tendency to view the population predominately in terms of statistic: “The numbers themselves often fail to capture the hardships, isolation, hope, and despair many of them may face as they attempt to adjust to life after foster care” (Iglehart & Becerra, 2002). Crime rates are also disproportionately high amongst the male foster youth population due to a number of factors, including a lack of permanent connections. According to Courtney (2001),

policy-makers must effectively work on lowering crime rates and address the factors contributing to crime committed by male foster youth if any significant dip in underage crime is to occur. The problems of social, educational, employment, medical and behavioral deficits are linked. These relationships must be realized and a multipronged approach has to be taken in any effective solution is one point of agreement amongst authors Iglehart, Becerra and Courtney to name just a few experts.

While Collins (2001) argues that foster youth are more likely to leave care because of dissatisfaction with services, she asserts that other populations of youth are more likely to leave home because they are ready for independence or are going away to college. While Collins focuses primarily on social, emotional and educational outcomes for youth, Courtney (2001) reports more on the failings of ILP Programs. According to Courtney (2001), youth are leaving foster care without knowing how to cook, pay bills, find housing and employment, locate employment training programs or maintain social connections, which could further their success. These social, economic, educational and social issues lead in turn to mental and emotional instability, Courtney (2001) reports.

Scholars generally agree that the loss of strong family ties is one of the most important contributors to foster youths' socialization failings. For instance, Collins (2001) argues that families and communities teach children the most about social skills and without stable families and communities, foster youth are put at great risk of breaking laws, becoming isolated and being unaware of available resources available. Collins continues by pointing out that people are not generally ready to leave home permanently when they graduate from high school and expecting foster youth who have had limited stability and nourishment to automatically become self-sufficient at that time is unrealistic. The transition into adulthood, therefore, is difficult and

frightening. Collins (2001) asserts that young adults need safety nets in order to make the transition smoothly.

Educational outcomes for foster youth are poor as well. Altshuler (1997) argues school social workers are needed on campuses to help integrate foster youth into the academic setting and facilitate healthy learning environments for youth. One problem as Altshuler states is that the demand for school social work services is far greater than the demand. Even when a school social worker is involved, Altshuler continues, services are often disrupted and fragmented, because of a lack of communication between field social workers and school social workers. Individualized learning plans (IEP) are not transferred from school to school efficiently nor are other student records, which cause foster youth to fall behind in school and/or not receive the special educational services they require, Altshuler (1997) reports. A solution Altshuler proposes is improved and systematic communication between the education and social services systems. Field and school social workers are all working for the child, but the different systems often fail to work in collaboration. According to Collins (2001), the shortage in school social workers and the lack of communication between school social workers and field social workers lead to high drop-out rates, which in turn results in high unemployment and public assistance for former foster youth. Zetlin, Weinberg, and Kimm (2003) agree that youth in foster care seem to have lower academic achievement rates, the damage of which would be minimized by getting guardians involved in the education of youth. According to Zetlin, Weinberg, and Kimm (2003), if foster parents/care givers are involved in the education of children, the heightened investment in the child might contribute to children remaining in one home for longer and forming close and healthy ties with the caregiver.

A different kind of education foster youth need is ILP, which if done correctly will provide graduating foster youth with the skills, abilities and knowledge needed to take care of themselves. One of the reasons ILP does not always reach its full potential, Collins (2001) argues, is that staff exercise vast amounts of control over the foster youth and this lack of youth empowerment strategy turns many youths away from ILP. By involving youth Collins (2001) insists, programs will be better suited to the particular clients in that program and the youth will learn more as a result of feeling important to the process. Therefore, clients of ILP ought to be included in the planning of the workshops. Iglehart and Becerra (2002) gathered that youth desire the following in ILP workshops: people with whom they can talk to and identify with, open forums to discuss family issues, lessons they will clearly remember and benefit from, housing, finances, fears and regrets they might have and the lessons they have learned. So, social aspects are often most important to youth and including these suggested topic areas in ILP will gain youth participation in and learning from the ILP experience. The same authors also sight discussing future plans and goals with youth as something they desire. Collins argues that the flexibility states have in offering the services they choose may contribute to the inconsistency in program delivery. For example, many programs are classroom-based and rarely do the youths receive hands on employment training through an actual job or volunteer position gained through ILP. Collins also sights a lack of knowledge on the part of youths about available transitional housing, which might prevent some homelessness and provide continued ILP training and goal development. Youths must be made aware of community resources and know how to access the resources on their own.

Collins goes on to identify a need to change the focus from independent living skills to interdependent living skills, which acknowledges the youths need for connections with people in

the work force, community resource providers, family and mentors. According to Altshuler (1997) and Collins (2001), it is unreasonable and impractical to assume foster youth will be able to be completely independent after foster care. These and other critics of current ILP recognize an importance for foster youth to feel part of the community and interact with it. If ILP enables young adults feel confident in accessing resources and developing connections, which may be permanent, foster youth will be able to achieve self-sufficiency (Lenz-Rashid, 2005) reports. Each youth must have a strong investment in his or her own future for ILP to work.

Legislative History of Child Welfare

As early as the 1800s and into the 1900s, orphanages existed in the U.S. as a cultural practice of child welfare and caring for society's children. "In Colonial America, children were regarded as miniature adults in need of training rather than innocents to be nurtured. Consequently, children were commonly indentured to other families, where they could live and learn a trade. Initially, the practice was employed at virtually all levels of society, but it was especially common for orphans and other children in need of care" (Cox, 1998). In the late 1800s, the government began paying people to take care of children and indentureships began to disappear and the child welfare system of today began to immerge. "While asylums never completely supplanted family placements, they became the predominant mode of caring for dependent children between 1830 and 186" (Cox, 1998). Private organizations and religious institutions ran orphan Asylums for the expressed purpose of taking care of children without parents who could care for them. Agencies who gave children over to farmers they could work for, if they were old enough, "often recruited placement families unscreened, provided no follow-up and often swept children away from parents they deemed "unfit" with little attention to legal process" (Cox, 1998). Then the government started pushing for family reunification and as

recently as 1993, former president Bill Clinton supported this push. Now, with the 1996 Safe Families and Adoption Act, the emphasis has changed again. Safe families are desirable and children should be returned home when the conditions are safe for the child to do so. Family reunification needs to happen, but it needs to be safe.

The Adoption and Safe Families Act is designed to hasten the adoption of children in foster care by putting more emphasis on children's safety rather than returning them to dangerous biological family situations. In doing so, the legislation addresses one of the leading criticisms of existing child-protective law: that it overemphasizes family preservation rather than protecting abused and neglected children (Cox, 1998). The legislation also gives states new financial incentives to find adoptive parents for youth in out-of-home care (Cox, 1998). In short, this piece of legislation, passed on November 9, 1996 makes it easier to adopt children, pays adoptive parents \$5000.00 for adopting a child and takes the priority off of returning a child to their parent(s). Through such measures, the bill is meant to provide security and stability for children. However, the high number of youth in the Child Welfare System indicates the goal of stability has not been realized. Focus groups conducted with the Permanency Planning and “Adoptions Units of Monterey County DSES (2006) give evidence that youth are not stable, emotionally or physically, by speedy adoptions and miss their biological families. In fact, the youth often return to birth families after care. Research by Courtney (2001) finds this to be phenomena and asks the question whether the permanent removal of children from family homes is a mistake. Because of these concerns and others, new policies and amendments to those policies continue to emerge.

Here is a quick mention of past legislation meant to protect the welfare of children: Aid to Dependent Children, or Title IV of the Social Security Act, passed in 1935 was the first law to protect children's rights, Congress in 1961 passed an amendment to the Aid to Families with

Dependent Children program. AFDC, Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) in 1974 passed when society realized that child abuse was a huge issue. The Federal Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 marked the federal government's first attempt to level the financial playing field for adoptions, reimbursing states for adoption expenses just as it did for foster care costs so that adoption rates would increase (Cox, 1998). The Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993 inputs "regulations" that require employers to provide health insurance for adoptive children regardless of pre-existing medical conditions (Cox, 1998). By assisting adoptive families financially, families who believe they are financially unable to care for a child or ensure that child now may feel able to adopt.

Still, barriers to adoption and placement of some children continued to pose major concerns. The Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) was enacted to eliminate prejudice and institutionalized racism still exists after all the blood that was shed to ensure its abolishment. Martin Luther King Jr., Julio Cesar Chavez and Malcolm X amongst thousands of others in the U.S. alone dreamed of equality for people from diverse ethnicities, yet the neglect and abuse of minorities in society as well as in institutions still thrive today. The MEPA of 1994 demanded that no child or his or her adoptive family was to be chosen with race as a main criterion for matching children with families. Unfortunately, reports indicate that social workers and adoption agencies continued to follow their own prescriptions for deciding what constitutes a suitable family (Cox, 1998). So, Metzenbaum's amendment to MEPA called the Removal of Barriers to Interracial Placement, which emphasizes that judging parents and children on the basis of ethnicity or race is unconstitutional. The amendment required agencies actively seek potential adoptive families that somewhat equal the proportions of children who comprise the child Welfare System. Well, none of these efforts have been met with great success for special needs

children, which brings forth the reality of the situation: specific policies need to deal more efficiently with a group of children which comprise the majority of children in the system: ethnic minorities, children over the age of 12 years old and disabled children.

ILP Legislation

Above, a general history of Child Welfare Legislation is discussed in order to give context for the review of ILP Legislation. In 1985, the Independent Living Initiative (Public Law 99-272) amended Title IV-E of the Social Security Act meant to provide federal funds to states to help adolescents in foster care develop independent living skills (Collins, 2001). The federal government distributed funds to states through a formula based on the percentage of children in the state who received federal foster care assistance in 1984. States are allowed substantial flexibility in the design and implementation of their independent living programs. The basic services outlined in federal law include outreach programs to attract eligible individuals, education and employment assistance, training in daily living skills, individual and group counseling, integration and coordination of services, and a written transitional independent living plan for each participant (Collins, 2001). Supplemental services states can provide include mentoring, training for foster parents, financial stipends, and youth advisory committees. Monterey County does have a youth advisory committee as well as many of the other above services, but the counseling does not take place although 9 of the 27 participants who opted to take the survey indicated an interest in partaking of counseling services. Also, some sort of community organization collaboration is needed to give the youth in Monterey County educational, employment, social and volunteer opportunities, which is a topic that arose during a focus group with the social workers of the Permanency Planning Unit and ILP Coordinators. A recent GAO report (1999) documents the substantial variation and limitations in services

provided in different states, the unknown effectiveness of independent living services, and the limited federal monitoring of state implementation of independent living programs (Collins, 2001). These are the issues my Capstone is working to address. The recommendations section will suggest ways of improving services and improving program evaluations based on research, focus group results and survey responses.

The Independent Living Program was reauthorized indefinitely as part of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1995 (Public Law 103-66). Prior to this, the program did not have permanent status, states depended on Congress to reauthorize funding and so limited the resources committed to the program (Collins, 2001). At last, the government is coming to see that ILP is crucial and needs funding set aside for it. Without effective ILP, the system will continue to be viewed as a failure contributing to many social problems.

One of the latest milestones in independent living services is the passage of the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (Public Law 106-169), which amends Title IV-E to provide states with more funding and greater flexibility in carrying out programs designed to help children make the transition from foster care to self-sufficiency. This law authorizes \$700 million over 5 years. It doubles funding for the Federal Independent Living Program, allows states to use up to 30 percent of program funds for room and board, enables states to provide assistance to 18-21-year-olds who have left foster care, and allows states to extend health insurance coverage under Medicaid to former foster children up to age 21 (Collins, 2001). This addresses many criticisms of foster care, such as youth are ejected from care far sooner than most young adults are capable of taking care of themselves even when having experienced safe and stable homes, (Permanency Planning Unit Focus Group, Courtney, 2000). Though 18 years of age is when youth start leaving home, frequently these young adults are not prepared for

complete independence from family units. Regardless of the positive intentions of the policy, implementation is difficult, because supervision is still loose and many argue there are still not enough funds to meet the goals of ILP. Those who argue such include the social workers included in my focus groups and ILP faculty in Monterey County and Collins (2001).

Into The Field: Addressing ILP in Monterey County

In the next sections of the paper, the results of the youth surveys and social worker focus groups are presented. In addition, the finished result of the ILP Tracking Database, which was created as a result of problems identified within Monterey County is presented. In spite of legislation in place to ensure youth learn the life and social skills they will need to succeed, youth are not succeeding, as indicated by available research. Within Monterey County, the problem has been identified as youth not learning all that they should as well as a failure of ILP to keep track of youth once they leave care. Because the system loses track of most youth after they exit care, program evaluation for ILP is all but impossible. With the help of the input of all valuable key stakeholders and the ILP Tracking Database, the hope is that ILP services and service delivery will improve in the future. ILP staff will know who is thriving in life after foster care and who is not thriving and the reasons for these outcomes.

Results of Foster Youth Surveys

The best way to get a large group of foster youth between the ages of 15-21 years of age is to attend an ILP class. Therefore, I obtained my sample by attending an ILP session, receiving permission from the ILP coordinator and offering the youth incentives for their participation. The week the surveys were administered, 36 youth were in attendance at the ILP training and 27 (75%) participated in the survey. The breakdown by number and gender is shown in the table below.

Table 1. Number and Percentage of Youth Surveyed

	Total Youth Surveyed By Gender	Percent By Gender
Female	18	66.67%
Male	9	33.33%
Sample	27	100.00%

In the area of comments, questions and reactions, the youth were interested, of course, in the incentive. This incentive was free additional raffle tickets for the prizes won every ILP session. Also, the youth had questions in regard to attending college in general and CSUMB in particular. As shown in the results, 70% of the youth indicated an interest in college. That percentage may be higher as indicated by previous surveys. The youth also had questions about this project, which were answered prior to and following the surveys. Since the surveys were administered in the middle of a very busy ILP session, the surveys only took approximately 15 minutes. Another consideration was the age and mental capacity of the youth. From past experience, we knew the youth would be more likely to answer the questions fully if they were not bombarded with too many questions and if the survey did not take too long to complete, therefore, a relatively condensed yet effective survey instrument was required. All of the respondents were thoughtful in their responses and conscientious about answering all applicable questions, plenty of information was gathered to come to some conclusions.

For example, much data were collected on services the youth need and plans after foster care living as shown in the table below.

Table 2. Services Needed by ILP Respondents

Services Needed	Percent	Number
College or University Support	70.37%	19
Housing Assistance	55.56%	15
Healthcare	44.44%	12
Employment or Occupational training	70.37%	19
Finances	51.85%	14
Counseling or therapy	25.93%	7
Other	11.11%	3

70% of students want employment/career training and academic support, which indicate the need for self-sufficiency and stability. Only approximately 26% indicated a need for counseling. The reason for this would be interesting to know. Some questions might be is there a difference in gender as to who admits to needing counseling? Have the ones who failed to mark that option already had counseling or are the youth simply hesitant to admit to needing counseling. Research indicates high levels of emotional, behavioral and psychological challenges within this population, so it seems that the percentage would be higher.

Results of the surveys also revealed the mean age of the group to be 17-years-old. 70% of youth planned on remaining in Monterey County after exiting care and 75% responded that they had learned something from ILP: Usually how to pay bills, how to cook and how to get a job, although the last was the least frequently given response. These responses assisted in painting a

general picture of the population and how easy or difficult tracking the youth after care would be. If the youth are remaining in Monterey County and/or have permanent connections in the county, tracking them will be more convenient. Also, if the majority of the youth report having learned something from ILP or have had a positive experience with ILP, those youth might be more inclined to stay in contact with ILP staff. So, the results look promising. A good percentage of youth chose to participate in the survey and those who did not choose to participate exercised their right to refuse to be included. This refusal is a positive sign as well.

The purpose of conducting the survey was to give the youth a voice, a prospective, a choice in the ILP lessons they will learn. As research shows, active participation of the youth will be more likely to lead to the program's success (Courtney, Piliavin, Grogan-Kaylor & Nesmith, 2000). The results of services needed and what was learned from ILP also provides information for further recommendations. Because some youth are leaving the county, recommendations are also needed for maintaining contact with those youth. Lastly, the ideas the youth provided for improving ILP are also data for recommendations and conclusions.

Summary of ILP Tracking Database

After conducting the social worker focus groups and deciding which information on the clients were most valuable in an endeavor to assess the success of ILP in promoting positive outcomes for young adults, the ILP Tracking Database was created. Common themes for all three focus groups supported certain database categories: client name, date of last contact, last known address, phone number or other contact information, educational status and parenthood status. Other categories in the database include employment status, goals, current situation and number of children. The ages of the young adults are recorded along with their birthdates. Also, the dates at which the youth entered and exited care are included. Basically, the database is

meant to be updated anytime information changes. Hopefully, an introductory social worker will be hired, as recommended by ILP and Permanency Planning staff, who can take care of contacting and updating client files. Another category on the database is resources, because the resources needed and the resources accessed by youth allow ILP and DSES to know how self-sufficient young adults who leave care are, if there is any improvement over time, and some of the improvements (if they occur) might predict ILP success. In a year or two, the database will provide answers to some of the questions of ILP's effectiveness. In conjunction with continued surveys of youth about what they have learned and their satisfaction with ILP, the new ILP Tracking Database has the potential to help keep youth and young adults connected to social networks, therefore improving their overall transition into adulthood.

Major Learning Outcomes (MLOs) Addressed

By creating and conducting the youth surveys, creating and conducting the social worker focus groups, creating the tracking database for ILP and organizing the Capstone project, skills, knowledge and attitudes were demonstrated in six Major Learning Outcome (MLO) areas for the CHHS major and three for the HCOM major.

CHHS MLOs

MLO 1 is Collaboration. I have worked with a variety of Monterey County employees, including policy analysts, program and departmental directors and social workers to develop the ILP Tracking Database for Monterey County DSES. The research, focus groups and surveys will assist the department in figuring out which data to track and how best to gather the information. Collaboration includes building consensus with others and compromising on the final project. Working with social workers, youth, program coordinators and other professionals, I was able to create the database and construct recommendations for future improvements.

MLO 5 is Information Management, which is a huge part of this Capstone. I have learned how to create a database in Microsoft Access, analyze survey results using Microsoft Excel, create surveys using Microsoft Work, how to access client files in the CWS Database and search the data for the target information. Power Point is also a skill necessary for giving presentations, which is a part of the requirements of the project. Managing and organizing the massive amounts of research collected was challenging.

MLO 7 is Leadership. I was responsible for how the Capstone project was achieved. I lead social worker focus groups, and conducted surveys, analyze the findings, decided which service categories to include in the database, and determined ways to report back to my field mentor and the community.

MLO 8 is Personal and Professional Communication. I have enhanced my knowledge of professional communications by combining knowledge from classes, prior field and life experiences and knowledge gained from working with professionals to learn most effective ways to communicate in a professional setting.

MLO 11 is Public Policy. I have remained up-to-date with policies impacting foster youth. Furthermore, I have worked with policy analysts to learn more about the process of policy-making and change. Also, I have developed policy recommendations for improving the tracking database and ILP service delivery.

MLO 12 is Research Methods. The majority of the task areas for this MLO are addressed above. The surveys, focus groups and research conducted are all examples of research methods used. Resources include primary and secondary material. Sources are both academic and nonscholarly. Information was gathered from the World Wide Web, Journals, and personal contact with professionals and clients. Research was done using databases as well.

HCOM MLOs

MLO 2 is the same as CHHS MLO 12, Research Methods. This skill assisted in the collection of legislation, literature review materials and policy recommendations.

MLO 5, Critical Cultural Analysis was important for my purposes, because I needed to investigate which ethnic groups populate the child welfare system, why and at which levels. It seems that it is crucial to identify where the problems lie and why? For instance, if I were to argue that the structure of U.S. society makes it difficult and even impossible for certain groups of people to thrive, numbers will, somewhat, prove my argument. Questions needing answers are numerous: throughout history, which children have populated the child welfare system? Why? Have things changed for these groups?

My final incorporated MLO is MLO 8: Creative Writing and Social Action. Most of the research I have compiled for Capstone comes from projects completed in MLO 2 and MLO 8 for HCOM and the MLOs for CHHS. I have use creative writing in the form of a creative nonfiction short story based on my own childhood and experiences as a foster youth. This MLO is important, because a face needs to go along with the facts of ILP and Child Welfare. Policies are not simply in place as symbols; they are in place to serve and protect. Through the creative writing presented in this Capstone, the reader is forced to see what can happen to a family once they have been swallowed up by the System. Through meeting MLO 8, I have more respect for the impact t creative writing can have on society.

Recommendations and Conclusions

Although the road to improving outcomes for former foster youth is bound to be a long one with numerous obstacles, convincing program and policy professionals to look at the whole picture is a huge step. For this reason, this Capstone seeks to make clear connections between

involving all stakeholders actively in the ILP training of foster youth: school social workers and staff, Child Protective Services (CPS) workers, foster parents and birth parents, extended families and communities, foster youth and their peers and counseling personnel. One of the most important recommendations for professionals working with foster youth is to make sure ILP training is specially designed for each unique cohort of youth (Iglehart & Becerra, 2002). For this to take place, foster youth are to be given the autonomy to decide what skills and knowledge sets ought to be of priority in their ILP training (Iglehart, & Becerra, 2002). Another key component to offering superior ILP training is having an ILP client database with updated, clear, and thorough client information. ILP staff must have the tools to track the outcomes for foster youth once they have become independent (Courtney, Piliavin, Grogan-Kaylor & Nesmith, 2000). Now that the tracking database has been created, it is up to the ILP staff to see it stays active and accurate. The information collected and data collection methods need revamping and the cooperation of the clients is paramount. ILP program directors and staff must employ methods of obtaining the support and active participation of foster youth in voluntarily giving accurate and complete contact information. Foster youth need to have faith that the system is working in their best interest. No longer can foster youth and young adults be allowed to fall through the cracks of the system and end up homeless, on the streets, on public assistance, on drugs and/or surrendering their offspring to foster care. Options are available to foster youth, because they have unique strengths: resiliency, creativity, resourcefulness, independence, courage and a strong will to live (Elias, 2005). All of the recommendations and research presented in this paper support the need to empower youth and young adults to improve their own educational, employment, economic and social outcomes (Collins, 2001, Elias, 2005,

Iglehart & Becerra, 2002). The youth simply need encouragement and support. Youth have strengths, which must be utilized.

A new focus should be placed on “interdependent living” (Collins, 2001). This will provide youth with a sense of community and improve their outcomes. A community approach will help youth in their socialization skills (Jonsson, 2005). Building these bridges between foster youth and society will make the transition to adulthood smoother for youth (Jonsson, 2005). Of course, this is the primary logic behind the Permanency Planning Unit. The next steps are to incorporate this principle into ILP for every youth. Social workers and ILP staff must be constantly vigilant of youth and their permanent connections. In fact, the focus group conducted with the Permanency Planning and ILP staff brought forth many ideas about how social workers and ILP staff could work together to ensure youth contact information is up-to-date in the tracking database. Some recommendations include requiring the social worker of the day or someone hired specifically for ILP tracking purpose collect information from clients when they call in for assistance or are contacted for updates.

If the database is successful in tracking former foster youth, the county will have data with which to conduct meaningful program evaluations. The impact of the database is meant to be long-term. Keeping the lines of communication open with social workers and youth will also improve the effectiveness of ILP. Focus groups and youth surveys must simply become routine in Monterey County. The future of Monterey County ILP is promising.

Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources

Scaife, C. A. (n.d.). *I can see you crying: My personal creative nonfiction short story.*

Created 2004.

Isabella is one of six children in a broken home. She does not understand her mother's apparent disinterest in her and her siblings and mourns the relationships they are unable to have with one another. This short story lends human interest to the topic of Child Welfare and ILP.

Secondary Sources

Altshuler, S. J. (1997). A reveille for school social workers: Children in foster care need our help. *Social Work in Education, 19(2)* 121-128.

This article gives voice to school social workers. This article provides a lot of recommendations as to how foster parents/care givers, teachers, child welfare workers and children themselves can work together to lower the educational deficits of children in the foster care system. The dedication a child puts toward education has a lot to do with what he or she does after emancipation and that is the main reason this article is included in my research.

Collins, M. E. (2001). Transition to adulthood for vulnerable youths: A review of research and implications for policy. *Social Services Review, 75(2)* 271-292.

This article details ILP legislation since the 1960s. As the authors of the article state, the legislation that exists is not enforced, is nonspecific and is open to a lot of interpretations. One of the largest problems is that states have the choice of services to offer and many simply choose not to provide services. So, policy enforcement and policy direction is needed. The policy makers need to be sure they know and address the issues. The article states that the policies are currently formatted in such a way as to be unable to improve outcomes for youth even when evaluations are done. So, this article gives me some

direction when looking at gaps in service delivery. Also, the article provides socialization theories.

Courtney, M. E., Piliavin, I., Grogan-Kaylor, A., Nesmith, A. (2000). Foster youth transitions to adulthood: A longitudinal view of youth leaving care. *Child Welfare*, 80(6) 685-717.

This article details studies conducted with young adults who had recently graduated from foster care. The major strengths of the article are that many youth were surveyed and the group was a multicultural one. Also, a lot of recommendations are given for improving outcomes. ILP has a lot of untapped potential.

Cox, R. S. (1998). Foster care reform. *CQ Researcher*, 8, 1-24.

This article provides a legislative history of child welfare in the U.S. The legislative review of child welfare is important to the understanding of where the System is and how far it has come. ILP does not make much sense without first understanding the main principles of child welfare.

Elias, M. (2005). Hardship follows children after foster care. *USA Today*. Retrieved February 2, 2006 from <http://search.epnet.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=afh&an=J0E348824173205Database>.

A study done by the Casey Foundation shows Post Traumatic Stress Disorders to be higher in young adults who have spent a minimum of a year in foster care to be higher than the rates of this disorder in war veterans. This sounds like a war on children. This study was conducted on 479 young adults from ages 20 to 33 years of age who had been in foster care. The study shows that Transitional Living Plans are only required by nine

states although law mandates the plans. This article has bearing on my Capstone, because I give a legislative history on ILP legislation, and it is important to assess the differing reasons the law is not a success in many cases. This supports my endeavor to ensure ILP Databases across the state are connected. California is one of the states that require the Plan, but the effectiveness of the Plan is not at optimal levels. I will need to make recommendations in this area.

Ferrell, F. (2004). Life after foster care. *State Legislatures*, 30(9) 28-30.

As much research indicates, this article also talks about the financial, educational, employment and health disparities of former foster youth. In addition, the reader is given a good idea of support services young adults from foster care need. Many young people, the article points out, have families, teachers and friends who can help them out, but foster youth are parented by the state, which rejects them at age 18 years. So, because of the ideas for support services needed for emancipated youth, I need this article in my research. This article will help me make recommendations in addition to revamping the ILP Database.

Group of Teenagers. (2006). Retrieved November 30, 2006 from <http://flickr.com/search/?q=Interracial+Teens>.

This is a public domain picture of ethnically diverse teenagers. The youth represented in the Monterey County ILP are diverse and a photo that somewhat depicts that is important. The face of child welfare is multiethnic.

Iglehart, A. P., & Becerra, R. M. (2002). Hispanic and African American Youth: Life after foster care emancipation. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 11(1/2) 79-107.

Instead of lumping foster youth together, this article attempts to look at issues, which may be more specific to Latino and Black youth. In the study of 10 Latinos and 18 Blacks, the people running the ILP were important. The youth often could not recall lessons learned in ILP. It shows that people, not materials make the difference in the lives of others. This article is important for my Capstone, because it highlights the need for support services and permanent connections. I will also be able to make recommendations specific to populations of high concentration in foster care.

Jonsson, P. (2006). New bridges to life after foster care. *Christian Science Monitor*, 98(30), 1-12.

In an effort to enable former foster youth to purchase homes and find stability, the Jim Casey Foundation helps lucky individuals purchase homes. Statistics found in this article say that in the entire state of California, 25% of foster youth go to jail within two years of emancipation and only about 1% graduates. This source informed me of agencies who deal with ex-foster youth as well as national agencies who have statistics on this population. In order to do well on Capstone, I need to know these statistics and I need to know about programs available across the nation as well as in Monterey County.

League of Women Voters of California Education Fund, Juvenile Justice Study Committee. (1998). Chapter VI: Life after foster care. *Juvenile Justice in California Part II: Dependency System*. Retrieved February 5 2006 from <http://ca.lwv.org/jjds/chap6.html>.

This article presents issues of emancipated foster youth in San Francisco and Sacramento, California. 40-50% of foster youth are found to end up homeless. In addition, they have emotional, mental, social, financial, legal and behavioral challenges. This article confirms

the need for better Transitional Living Skills and Independent Living Skills Programs. As a way to address the homelessness and lack of access to resources and human contacts, my Capstone will work on bridging service delivery gaps and creating a uniform ILP Database. This article gives me a lot of statistics and studies from different parts of the country.

Lenz-Rashid, S. (2005). Employment experiences of homeless young adults: Are they different for youth with a history of foster care? *Children and Youth Services Review*, 28(3) 235-259.

While many of my other sources focus on housing or the lack thereof, this article presents the findings of a study that compare the employment rates of foster youth and non-foster youth. The study found that after an employment training, the participants, foster and non foster care youth, usually found employment within three months, but that non foster care youth were paid about \$0.60 more an hour. Also, ethnicity played a role in the results. Employment skills are part of what ILP is supposed to train youth for, but this does not always happen successfully. This article sites the main obstacle to successful employment for foster youth is mental health problems. But, the intervention did find some success. So, for my Capstone, I see it is important to look at different options for employment training, which is one of the current components of my Capstone.

Maluccio A. N., Krieger R, & Pine, B. A. (1990). **Preparing adolescents for life after foster care: The essential role of foster parents.** **Child Welfare League of America, Washington D.C. 1990.**

This book addresses the roles that families and foster families need to take in the lives of youth transitioning from dependency to adulthood. The reason this book is most valuable

for my purposes is that it addresses culturally competent practice and policy. This book, though 16 years old gives a well developed prospective on emancipation service delivery. The support needed is still the same today; it may just depend on the severity of the need.

Unity Care Group. (2003). Unity Care brings transitional housing to Monterey County.

Retrieved February 1, 2006 from

http://unitycare.org/about/news_10_20_2003.shtml.

Unity Care is the only Transitional Housing Program (THP) in Monterey County. The one home in the county is located in Salinas, California. Unity Care also provides group homes and homes for foster youth with behavior and substance abuse problems. Services they provide to the youth, ages 17-22 include goal planning, cooking, balancing schedules and support in whatever goals each individual youth wishes to accomplish. Unity Care is an important source for Capstone, because one service delivery gap is in getting the youth who need such programs connected from DSES to private agencies such as Unity Care. In ILP legislation, states were given money to fund these private agencies to do what DSES cannot do. This is a rich source, I have a contact, the program director, and I am looking into how to coordinate services more efficiently between the county and private agencies that are designed to take up some of the slack from the public sector. .

Zetlin, A., Weinberg, L., Kimm, C. (2003). Are the educational needs of children in foster care being addressed? *Children & Schools*, 25(2) 105-120.

This article supports the stand that parents/guardians need to be involved in the education of the children in their care.

Appendix A- Interdisciplinary Essay

Interdisciplinary Reflection Essay

Journalism was to be my concentration when I enrolled at California State University, Monterey\ Bay (CSUMB) in January of 2003. I loved creative writing, interviewing people, sharing important news with people and fight for social justice for the disadvantaged, disabled and abused. After attending one session of Human Communications (HCOM) Major Proseminar, I changed my concentration. Though I had earned an AA in Journalism from El Camino College, I decided teaching might be a better alternative. After all, I cared most about disadvantaged youth and young Adults. A concentration in Literature and Culture studies seemed like a great way to indulge multiple passions at once: creative writing, reading, literature, multicultural studies and a neat way to tie all of these topics into one huge multidimensional topic. By following a course in Literature, I could teach at a community college and encourage economically depressed/low income young adults to apply to four-year college. Literature, especially multicultural literature would give ethnic minorities, in particular, a sense of culture and belonging. History and Literature are not often were not often taught in such a way to be positively inclusive of minorities when I was growing up and with an education, I could see that others would not have that problem. Teaching in high school was even a career path I pondered on and rejected. Though I have changed my career path somewhat, I will have earned my B.A. in HCOM with a concentration in Literature and Culture Studies come December 2006. I To reflect the change in career paths, I will also have earned a B.A. in Collaborative Human and Health Services (CHHS) with a concentration in Social Work. Once I explain my Capstone (Senior) Project and major are of focus for the past 3 years, you will understand I did not really stray from my original path all that much.

Beginning with HCOM Major Proseminar, I began to study the history of Child Welfare and the impact of this legislation on the lives of foster youth. So when I took my first course in social work a year later, it was no surprise to anyone that I decided to double major. I had done too much work for HCOM and still loved literature and the study of culture. I simple discover that the way I could help young people the most would be to inter the arena of social work and/or social policy. My concentrations may have changed, my approaches my have altered, but knowledge, skills and attitudes gained from both majors contribute equally to who I am today. Literature, policy, history, social work, community health, financial and systems management and research methods are all skills needed by today's helping professionals.

One connection I have made between HCOM and the career path I have chosen that increased knowledge of writing and speaking will allow disadvantaged populations to move out of the ruts they might find themselves in. I found great power, for example, in writing about my experiences in foster care in my Introduction to Creative Writing Course. Through taking Multicultural History, I discovered histories of U.S. populations richer than I could ever imagine. Few people would ever be held down and made to believe they are less than anyone else if they had the honor to read Ronald Takaki's "A Different Mirror". Children need to know that their cultures are filled with pain, yes, but also success and victory. Knowledge leads to courage and empowerment and those are the gifts we need to impart to future generations. The question is, for me, how do we help abused, neglected and abandoned children gain confidence and pride in which they are? How do we let children know that their experiences are as rich as the next persons and that learning how to speak about those experiences and/or write them down will not only build them up, but it will build up others as well?

This is where Capstone comes in. As mentioned above, foster youth are of utmost interest to me. Educational outcomes for foster youth are poor, which probably indicates they are not learning about these rich heritages. Drug abuse is high in the parents of foster youth as well as in foster youth. Life is confusing, unstable and often swamped in depression. By creating and enforcing social policy, which takes into account the expressed needs, desires, strengths, weaknesses and experiences of foster youth, we can paint a brighter future for a large segment of children in the U.S. Therefore, my Capstone is centered around finding methods of improving the economic, social, employment and educational outcomes for former foster youth. I have narrowed the scope to the foster youth in Monterey County most specifically, because that is where we are and where my internship with Department of Social and Employment Services (DSES) is located. So, you see there is no disconnect between my two majors. I am conducting focus groups with social workers, surveys with the youth and creating a tracking database for the Independent Living Skills Program (ILP). This is more the social science and research methods portion of my Capstone. The literary/cultural part of the capstone includes one of my personal creative nonfiction essays about my own experiences and the fears and victories that brought me here. I have also looked at movie, such as "Antwone Fisher" and read his autobiography, Finding Fish. So many stories have been told by former foster youth who have survived, and this is a part of the culture of foster care, which needs to be available for the general public to see. Foster youth need to see and hear these stories for encouragement and identification purposes. Researchers say art, music and other forms of creative expression promote the healthy development of children, and when stability and nourishment is missing from a child's life, these arts must be that much more crucial.

As for negative experiences I have encountered at CSUMB, the length of time and strain it has put on my physically has been overwhelming. Of course, this has a lot to do with my own high expectations and strenuous demands. I know what it is to be homeless and poor. In addition, I have seen grown people who are unemployed and/or uneducated. It hurts to see and it hurts even more to have been brought up in those sorts of conditions. Much time when I feel like giving up, that fear keeps me going. Secondary, it is difficult to participate in Capstone with a cohort who all know one another, but who have no idea who you are. Since I completed my HCOM course work in 2004 and started my CHHS work at that time, I know my CHHS cohort, but the student I took classes with in HCOM are mostly graduated. Many of my professors are gone to for one reason or another. The lack of connection makes it a lonely road at times. Also, since my Capstone is so focused in the social welfare arena, I have found a lot of difficulty with peer-review. Of course, I also see this as a good thing, because it challenges me to talk to the general population and not solely social service professionals. If I want to help children, families, young adults and perhaps the elderly, it is important I say grounds and able to talk to people who will not know what my project is. This process keeps me thinking in innovative ways. I look at the world from multiple viewpoints as a result. Fortunately, my peer-review group is diverse in the subject matters covered too, so that makes it less awkward. Still, they mostly seem to know each other. It is somewhat like being biracial: you have to talk a different way, think a different way and even adopt different mannerisms when you are with one side of your family versus the other. As I am also biracial, I should be use to this complexity by now. I guess you could say different disciplines have different cultures. In HCOM, we are learned to embrace a diverse culture. Double majoring in HCOM and CHHS makes me even more versatile. changing world superbly.

Appendix B- E-Poster

HCOM Senior Capstone Digital Poster

Fall 2006

Name:

Christy Ann Scaife

Project Title:

Improving Independent Living Skills Training For Youth Exiting Foster Care
In Monterey County

Concentration:

Literature and Culture Studies

Project Abstract

Improving outcomes for former foster youth is a multipronged social problem. This paper discusses ways to improve employment, educational and socialization outcomes for former foster youth. Focus groups with social workers provided ideas for the new ILP Database created as part of this Capstone and youth filled out surveys, which provided insight to services needed and changes in service delivery.

Additionally, a legislative review of ILP and child welfare is provided.

Project Context & Contributions

Monterey County DSES needed a creditable and effective method of tracking youth once they leave foster care. This database created as a part of this project will allow quality ILP



Group of Teenagers. (2006). Online Image. Retrieved November 30, 2006 from <http://flickr.com/search/?q=Interracial+Teens>.

Research

Evidence

ILP professionals need to know the laws, which guide their programs and methods of training proven to work.

MLOs I used include HCOM MLO 2 (Research Methods). MLO 8 is Creative writing, which was fulfilled by my addition of my personal creative nonfiction. MLO 5 is Cultural Analysis, which is met through the study of the foster care population and cultural factors contributing to foster care rates.

Project Format

APA is the style used, because of the social services nature of this Capstone. My Capstone is 28 pages excluding the annotated bibliography and four appendixes. The topics of the paper are separated by headings.

of this project will allow quality ILP program evaluations to take place. Also, the young adults will have a contact person within the system to assist them transition into adulthood. The surveys of the ILP youth, focus group results and legislative review provide background and research for future study. Also, recommendations are given to reform ILP in a manner to youth will be more willing to participate in ILP, because they will be able to see the benefit them.

Relevant Links

<http://www.co.monterey.ca.us/dss/childrens/>

<http://www.cwla.org/advocacy/financingtimeline.htm>

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/mepa94/index.htm>

Questions

1. What are the long-term employment, educational, socialization and emotion impact of foster care on former foster youth?
2. How can ILP improve to increase positive outcomes for former foster youth?
3. What do educational, policy, academic and child welfare professionals say about ILP training?

Key Findings

Current ILP youth in Monterey County sight needing employment and educational assistance now and after foster care.

ILP training often fails, because the trainings are not customized to the clients.

The focus needs to be changed to interdependent living over independent live, which calls for youth to maintain social networks. Permanent connections are crucial.

the paper are separated by headings.

Selected Bibliography

Altshuler, S. J. (1997). A reveille for school social workers: Children in foster care need our help. *Social Work in Education, 19*(2) 121-128.

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Courtney, M. E., Piliavin, I., Grogan-Kaylor, A., Nesmith, A. (2000). Foster youth transitions to adulthood: A longitudinal view of youth leaving care. *Child Welfare, 80*(6) 685-717.

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Appendix C- Focus Group Script

Focus Group with Monterey County DSES Social Workers

Focus Group question

How Can Monterey County better track the educational, social and employment outcomes for former foster youth?

Overview of planned intervention and focus group purpose

Foster youth are leaving care in Monterey County, because they are aging out, they have simply tired of the system or they are returning home or being adopted. The current data collection methods in Monterey County are insufficient to keep up with key information on exited foster youth, which inhibits any attempt to assess and improve independent living skills programs (ILP), or other services for foster youth. The failure to collect key data from foster youth during care and after care contributes to system failure. If we are unable to ascertain the outcomes for foster youth who have gone through ILP, it becomes impossible to accurately gauge the success of the program. The purpose of ILP is to improve the odds that a young adult is able to achieve academic, employment and other goals in his or her life, but if the young adult falls off the radar of helping professionals and/or is not utilizing resources available, ILP is not reaching it's potential.

Therefore, I am working on developing an ILP database, which will be clear and ask fundamental questions. Methods will be developed to get information about resources and how to use those resources to youth. Also, a plan will be put in place, which will help the ILP staff secure the active participation and cooperation of the participants. In addition to actually installing the database, recommendations for using the data and involving the youth in program evaluation are key to the intervention. Eliciting the expertise of key stakeholders is imperative, and this is why the focus group is being conducted. This focus group of social workers, managers

and ILP staff in Monterey County is meant to provide ideas, information and insight to help in the development of the tracking system and ILP Database.

Methods for selecting participants, time and location of focus group

Through talking with my field mentor, other social workers and managers in Monterey County Department of Social and Employment Services about how I could conduct focus groups with social workers around improving the effectiveness of ILP, I determined that attending a unit meeting of the unit of interest would be the best idea. Social workers are difficult to gather into one place for any significant amount of time, and reserving time within unit meetings ensured I would have the time and attention of the workers. Also, it would be possible to get the ILP staff to attend the focus group in this setting as well. Now that a plan for independent living is required for older youth, social workers have a better idea of the needs, desires and goals of clients. To get a complete picture of how social workers view independence and the issues facing emancipating foster youth, I chose to conduct focus groups with the three units within DSES that are most likely to have dealings with foster youth long-term: the Permanency Planning (PP) Unit, Adoptions Unit and the Court Unit. Each unit has between six and 10 social workers and a unit supervisor. All of the social workers in each unit were invited to participate, but participation was dependant on training schedules, visiting with clients out of town and social workers calling in sick. Since workers often move between units, this method insured I would speak to social workers who had experiences with various aspects of child welfare at various times in their careers. This method of selecting and conducting focus groups is inclusive of most social workers and has the potential to gather wide-range support for the project.

The time and location of each focus group was also selected to convenience the social workers, ILP staff and managers. I went to the unit meetings at the place and time set by the unit

managers. Also, the block of time provided for the focus groups had to fit within the time of the unit meetings. For example, the focus group with the PP Unit was scheduled at the Seaside DSES Office for 9:45 a.m. on October 12, and lasted about 1 hour.

Discussion Guide for focus group

<p>Moderator’s Introduction (2 minute)</p>	<p>My name is Christy Ann Scaife and I am Wayne Moses’ intern (a social worker in the PP Unit of Monterey County DSES). I have been working on the California Permanency for Youth (CPYP) Project and locating permanent connections for youth for the past year and a half. Now I am also working with the Independent Living Skills Program to develop a database, which will keep us up to date on how foster youth are doing after they leave care.</p> <p>Before I go any further, I would like to thank you for participating. I know you all are busy working with clients and that dedication to your clients is why I have come to you for your thoughts, opinions, attitudes and expertise on issues dealing with emancipation. I will take no more than an hour of your time.</p> <p>I am not here to persuade you to think anyway. I am open to your ideas and any information or insight you can provide. You have worked with foster youth and have varying degrees of knowledge of what foster youth need from ILP and how they can be helped after ILP. Some of you keep in touch with former clients and/or have relationships with current clients, which would make you privy to their knowledge, skills and abilities. You may have ideas about what clients want or need, and I hope you will share some of that.</p>
<p>Ground rules (1 minute)</p>	<p>In order to get as much information as possible relevant to the topic and ensure everyone is able to contribute, I would like to lay down some rules of conduct for this focus group. 1) No identifying information about any of you will be included in the discussion or write-up of my project. 2) Please do not speak at the same time as anyone else? 3) Feel free to voice any thoughts, opinions or corrections on any topic of discussion. I am here to learn from your expertise. 4) If you need to leave for any reason, please do so quietly and feel free to reenter as well. 5) You are welcome to eat while we hold our discussion and the trash receptacle is right beside the door. I encourage you all to participate and enjoy this experience.</p>
<p>Introduction of group members (8 minutes)</p>	<p>Now that you know who I am and what I am doing here, let’s go around and introduce the rest of the group? Please share your name, how long you have been working for DSES, how long have you worked in the PP Unit, and approximately how many of your clients</p>

	are 15.5s or older.
General questions ‘ (10 minutes)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) What is your favorite part of the day? 2) Why did you choose to go into social work? 3) How long have you been a social worker, or in your current career?
Specific Questions (30 minutes)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4) What do you think about the services offered to teens in this county? 5) What do you know about ILP? 6) What are the strengths of ILP training in this county? 7) What improvements might the ILP program need? 8) What feedback do you receive from clients about what they gain from ILP? 9) Do you help out or participate in ILP training? 10) What is some important information you would want to gather about a former foster child? 11) Why do some foster youth fail to stay in contact and update social workers or ILP on their status? 12) How can we get youth to keep in touch and provide updated status information once they leave care? 13) What are some good methods you know of to be successful in gaining the active participation of foster youth in ILP? 14) What areas of independent living do you feel your clients need most concentration in? For example, <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Cooking b. Cleaning house c. Personal hygiene d. Finances (paying bills, banking, etc.) e. College preparation and financial aid f. Searching for that first place to live after g. Apartment searching h. Socializing/communication skills i. Locating and using medical and dental resources j. Locating and using other community resources k. Other _____ 15) Research shows that taking ILP youth into the community for hands on training and exposure to the world would make them more likely to participate in ILP: how do you feel about that? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. I strongly agree b. I agree c. I disagree d. I strongly disagree 16) Why did you rank the previous statement the way you did?
Group Game (8 minutes)	Now to round up the discussion, we are going to play a little game where I put a statement out there and I want each of you to complete it. Please just respond as honestly as you can and you might even just

	<p>reply as if the situation was ideal.</p> <p>If money were no obstacle, I would provide emancipating teens with</p> <hr/>
Closure (1 minute)	<p>Thank you all for your participation and enthusiasm. Please feel free to contact me with any further input, questions or ideas. I hope we can contact you for follow-up or with further questions. Have a nice day.</p>

Appendix D- Survey Instrument

Capstone Survey
Improving ILP For Youth Exiting Foster Care In Monterey County
By Christy Ann Scaife, CSUMB Senior and Wayne Moses' Intern

1. How old are you? _____
2. What is your Gender? Male Female
3. What support or help do you need after high school, or after you leave foster care? (Put a check mark by all areas of interest)
 - a. Community college or university support (filling out Financial Aid Applications, finding academic counselors, mentors or campus resources);
 - b. Housing assistance (locating housing, applying for Section 8, purchasing housing, furnishing housing and/or interviewing with landlords);
 - c. Healthcare (insurance, finding doctors and dentists, talking to doctors, etc);
 - d. Employment (other than what you have learned in ILP);
 - e. Careers (occupational training programs)
 - f. Finances (How to pay bills, how to balance your checkbook, opening investment accounts).
 - g. Counseling or therapy (For anger management, substance abuse, emotional difficulties, etc.)
 - h. Other _____

4. Do you plan to stay in the county of Monterey after foster care? Yes No
Why or why not?

5. Has ILP taught you how to live independently? Yes No
If yes, what helped?

Great! Thank you for your willing participation in my research. This information will help us improve how we help people. It will also help me complete my graduation project. Good luck to you!