

Evaluating a Transitional Living Program for Homeless, Former Foster Care Youth

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This study describes an assessment of transitional living programs used by foster youth to determine effectiveness. Larkin's Street Youth Services in San Francisco was used for this assessment, as their "Avenues to Independence" program focuses on strengths-based recognition and skill building for development. Specific focuses included evaluating the relationship between: length of time in the program and the savings/financial stability of the youth once programs were completed; the impact of youth using an employment training program against those youths who do not based on wage rates/minimum wage comparisons; and the stability of housing upon exit and then again at 6-month check in. Despite youth voicing the need for Independent Living Skills (ILS) as a core aspect of transitional living programs, it was found that there are currently very few independent living programs that include supervised "practice" living from a safe environment after leaving foster care. Youth frequently comment on the need for transitional housing programs that allow them to develop ILS while receiving financial support, as they cannot return to their families of origin.

Information at a Glance:

- 23 youth participated in this study, all homeless at entry, with a 6-month commitment.
- 13% were employed at entry; 100% were employed at exit; 83% maintained the same employment when exiting (the other 17% moved out of state after discharge).
- 13 of the 23 youth completed a job readiness certification with the Hire Up program, including a mentor-match for monthly monitoring- all 13 showed higher hourly pay.

- 20 of the 23 youth responded to 6-Month follow up; of those respondents, 90% (18) had stable housing situations (independent or with family), 5% (1) were incarcerated, and 5% (1) had returned to living on the streets.
- 70% of the youth left the program with more than \$1,100 saved (56% with more than \$1800 saved); the most and least money saved directly correlated with the youth who stayed in the program the longest and the shortest amount of time respectively.

Proposed Program Solutions:

It is clear from this study that transitional living programs best serve foster care youth by implementing a comprehensive Independent Living Skills program including job preparedness, financial literacy, and mentoring. Areas to consider:

- Follow ups with youth after exiting have been challenging in the past due to lack of connection options- many have historically not had access to email. Consider providing an in-house email to youth upon entry to the program for access to follow ups.
- Implement a mandatory savings program structure into ILS programs to assist youth in key areas of navigating housing costs.
- Implement a mandatory mentorship both for supervised “practice” living and for job preparedness. This training (possibly including navigating housing search, dealing with leasing agents/paperwork, etc.) will provide youth with safe area to learn what is necessary for independent living while preventing a return to high risk situations.