

Commission for Children's and Family Services

County of Los Angeles

PROGRESS FOR YOUTH AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE

Program Development, 1994-1999

A Report to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors

Issued by

Oversight Committee on Emancipation Preparation
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I. Introduction

This report is intended as a summary of accomplishments in terms of program development on behalf of adolescents aging out of foster care in Los Angeles County. In the last decade, Los Angeles County has developed a far reaching set of activities that, individually and in concert, are designed to assist vulnerable adolescents [in particular, those in the Dependency System] make the transition from out of home care under formal judicial

supervision to adulthood.

Yet, while Los Angeles has spearheaded a movement to take seriously the responsibility of public agencies to do what is needed for youths who have grown up or matured in foster care, it is also clear that this is just a beginning. It is past time for the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to fully operationalize its stated mission, which calls for a focus broader than child protection to a commitment to promote healthy child development. For youths who reach adulthood under DCFS's care, this translates into providing the opportunity to succeed.

While we can take pride in the steps that have been taken, the real test is in outcomes -- doing what is needed for each child, setting up effective systems that ensure youths are educated, have jobs, and keep hope. This report therefore also points up shortcomings in existing arrangements, and identifies important next steps that need to be taken to continue the process of finding a way to give the help needed, and that will work best, for each youth.

The issue itself is starkly simple. When the State intervenes in family life to rescue abused and neglected children, it assumes parental responsibilities. In the limited view, these are solely assuring the temporary safety of the child. But by public consensus, that limited view no longer suffices. Children remain in foster care too long, family dysfunction is often too great, so that when the State has adopted the parental role, it must discharge its responsibilities by assuring circumstances that help each youth develop into a functional adult. Decent families would not push a child out the door at 18 with no education, job training, resources, on-going support, or provision for housing or health services. Neither must the State.

In response to this imperative, federal legislation was passed in 1985 (The Independent Living Initiative, PL 99-272) that authorized funding for specific independent living services for eligible youth 16 and over, both in the dependency and probation systems. Los Angeles County moved to implement independent living services for youths, and several early evaluations suggested that the approach was promising, while suggesting needs for organizational changes and greatly enhanced service approaches (Waldinger and Furman, dates). The limitations of the early approaches as experienced by bench officers, along with grand jury and audit findings from that period, caused the Dependency Court Procedures Committee to organize a comprehensive planning process to identify needs and plan programmatic responses to meet those needs that culminated in a 1994 report entitled, "Emancipation from Foster Care; Recommendations for System and Program Improvement." (April 1994).

The planning group, including DCFS representatives, strongly supported maintaining an oversight committee to monitor implementation of the changes initially identified in the plan. By an order of the County Board of Supervisors (dated February 22, 1995) the sponsorship of that Committee shifted from the Dependency Court to the Board of Supervisors and the Commission for Children and Family Services. That committee has, remarkably, met continuously over the intervening five years, and become the institutional focus for struggling with the variety of implementation issues that need to be addressed in the program development process. This report is a tribute to the leadership and members of the committee, (including staff of DCFS and the Department of Probation) who have persevered in a long term commitment to bring opportunities to youth.

II. Original Recommendations

Attached as an appendix to this report is the Executive Summary from the 1994 planning process. That document may still serve as the roadmap for where we wish to go in program development, although there have certainly been alterations in the landscape over the years. In response to the rather comprehensive recommendations of the planning group (which numbered over one hundred) a set of high priority tasks were identified for early attention. The priority tasks identified by category were as follows:

II.1 Assessment, case planning, and documentation

- Development of an assessment system for DCFS youths, with initial assessment at age 13 or 14.
- A quarterly planning protocol for youths 14 and over.
- An enhanced court report when the youth turns 16.

These items were deemed of the highest priority when undertaking the required individualized assessment and planning to organize needed services for youths. The task force included here, and elsewhere, the idea that a “youth centered” and “youth involved” plan was critical to all efforts. Further, the adoption of CWS/CMS was to make available technology that would allow information on schools, and from various sources relevant to emancipation planning, to be entered, stored and utilized by DCFS staff in the ongoing case planning process. The task force worked closely with DCFS information services staff to insure adaptation of assessment tools to the CWS environment. Unfortunately, only now is CWS/CMS incorporating the Transitional Independent Living Plan (TILP) into the system. Additionally, the recommendation envisioned for an enhanced court report at age 16 was tabled as CWS/CMS court reporting protocols in general were under development. Of even greater concern is the

fact that CWS/CMS does not have any analytic capabilities.

II.2 Program elements

- A plan will be developed to improve working relationships with Schools at the District level so that educational services for children can be strengthened. The on grounds schools of group homes should be included in this plan
- A training plan

These two items were singled out for follow-up among a bevy of important program development items from the original report. Inasmuch as schooling was recognized as the single most important element in providing youths the skills they need for adulthood, emphasis was placed upon assuring a plan to enhance relationships between DCFS, caregivers, and school personnel at the District level. This recommendation was supplanted by broader educational initiatives within DCFS, and the hoped for educational improvements for emancipating youngsters were incorporated within those initiatives. However, the training plan – for line staff, caregivers, group home workers, and others, remained within the committee’s purview.

In addition to the two noted priority areas, the original report called for program development in a number of areas – including housing, skill training, employment services, recreation, and tutoring, to mention a few. Progress in these areas is noted below.

II.3 Organizational or systemic elements

- Probation
- Group homes
- Internal DCFS issues

The report noted that there was a set of organizational and system elements that needed reform as part of the overall effort to improve service delivery. Singled out was the need to develop services within the Department of Probation that were comparable to the programs being developed within DCFS. Also singled out for special notice was the need to offer emancipation-related service in group homes. Finally, there was a felt need to organize services within DCFS in a way that would lead to coordination on behalf of involved youths. The task force had

noted that ILP services were at that time uncoordinated with line and other special services, and there was a recommendation that an organizational arrangement be implemented to overcome this dysfunction.

Please note that the progress report that follows pertains to both DCFS and Probation. However, the vast majority of the committee's work has been with DCFS, and only recently has Probation come to participate fully in the program development for these youths. Therefore, the majority of the status report concerns just DCFS. When an element pertains to Probation, it will be specifically mentioned as such.

II.4 Youth participation in emancipation plan/program

This point reiterates the importance that the planning group (which included teenagers) placed upon actively involving youths in their plan. Emancipation preparation services are truly voluntary, and while there can and should be expectations that participation is required, there is no legal mandate for such. So, services must be designed to enlist and engage youths, and ignoring this reality will doom the best of intentions. In addition to this general proviso, a number of services were planned with youth participation as primary, including the 'emancipation contract,' the emancipation assistant job series at DCFS, and the California Youth Connection activities.

II.5 Data system and evaluation

The report noted that a structure of information was necessary to track youths, to track services, and to evaluate whether we were actually making any progress. And while there has been some development in this regard, we regret that the basic information has not to date been systematically put together by the agency. Therefore, most of what we point to with pride in this report is qualitative and anecdotal. The information that is generally available states what programs were developed and, sometimes, about the number enrolled. But no basic facts and figures by which to monitor and gauge the service system have been assembled. This progress report will note the accomplishment to date in this area.

The next section of this report tracks progress made to date in implementing the various recommendations of the Task Force. We intend to provide a moderate amount of detail so that the reader can understand the specifics of what has been developed in the interim.

III. Program Development

The past five years have seen both the expansion of existing emancipation programs and the implementation of new services and activities. This has put Los Angeles County in the forefront of emancipation services statewide and nationally. For example, DCFS's revised emancipation policy now utilizes age 14 as the age for initiating emancipation assessment and services. The rest of the state has yet to adopt such a focus at an earlier age. The County was also one of the first to create post-emancipation housing beginning in 1991. What follows is a summary of the status of the Emancipation Program as it currently operates within DCFS.

III.1 Assessments

The importance of providing all DCFS foster adolescents with a comprehensive evaluation of their functioning and an assessment of resources available to them has been recognized from the outset of this program as critical if their life chances are to be improved. Towards this end, progress has been made in the development and implementation of three assessment components:

The Early Start to Emancipation Preparation (E-Step) Program provides assessments, educational services, and motivational experiences to youths in foster homes or kinship care starting at age 14. The focus of this program is to make foster youths aware of opportunities and choices they will encounter during the years leading to emancipation, teach them how to access available services and how to further their post-emancipation goals. In FY 99, the Community College Foundation (CCF), through a contract with DCFS, conducted 1627 assessments. Additionally, 197 of these youths attended motivational events, 938 attended on-going workshops, and 6355 hours of tutoring were provided. In FY 00, CCF's contract will be increased in each of those categories (1650 assessments; 450 motivational events; and 240 youths will receive tutoring).

Next steps

- Connect DCFS and CCF electronically to transmit assessment and follow-up information to CSWs
- Expand availability of ESTEP to all foster youth (i.e., those residing in group or foster family homes)
- Make tutoring resources available to all youths who need them
- Clarify and coordinate target populations for CCF and DCFS tutoring programs
- Improve the post-testing of youths leaving the ESTEP program
- Secure report cards of youths at the time they enter the tutoring program
- Track all outside tutoring in which youths participate
- Conduct follow-ups of youths who participated in E-Step to evaluate its efficacy
- Find ways to get more youths to Saturday Motivational events

Emancipation Preparation Contract. This is a written agreement signed by the youth (starting at age 14) and his/her care provider, and approved in writing by the CSW, that establishes an individualized plan for emancipation preparation. It identifies the youth's needs, services required and their availability to meet those needs, and time frames and persons responsible to see that those services are provided. DCFS contracts with CCF to conduct the initial Emancipation Contracts with 1500 youths each funding year.

Next steps

- CCF will prepare a report to the DCFS Oversight Committee on the differences between the first and subsequent assessments and contracts.
- Incorporate the Emancipation Contract into the care providers' agreement (kinship, foster parent and foster family agency).
- Review and standardize the protocol being used to complete the Emancipation Contract. Ultimately, the emancipation team (youth, care provider and CSW) should work together on emancipation activities.
- Conduct regular case record reviews to assess the quantitative and qualitative level of implementation of the Emancipation Contract.

Emancipation Preparation Assessment Guide. This Guide was developed as a tool to assist CSWs in their assessments of youths age 14 and over. It covers five basic skill areas: 1) Basic academic knowledge and skills; 2) Career and vocational development and skills; 3) Daily living skills; 4) Survival skills, and; 5) Interpersonal and social skills. It was anticipated that this Assessment Guide and supporting documents would be integrated in the State CSW/CMS computer system. The CSW would then take the partially completed Guide into the field for in-person discussions with the youths and their caregivers. In anticipation of the State installing this DCFS-specific enhancement to CSW/CMS, a pilot of this Emancipation Assessment instrument in a single office was proposed, but never implemented. Instead, responsibility for initiating the assessment for some youths ages 14 and 15 years has been assigned to CCF staff. CSWs are then held accountable for updating the assessments.

Next steps

- Determine how many of these assessment guides have been completed by CCF staff.
- Determine the level of compliance in keeping it updated.

III.2 Emancipation Preparation Programs

Ease-In. This DCFS unit of UCLA Graduate Social Work students was initiated in 1992-93 to test the effectiveness of providing intensive casework and early emancipation preparation services to youths ages 14 to 16.

"E"(mancipation) Stations. This is the designated space in each DCFS region/field office that provides staff with the most current emancipation-related services and resources such as transitional housing, scholarships,

job referrals, ILP referrals and information, master emancipation planning calendar, youth event activity transportation coordination, after care support, etc. ILP Coordinators, assisted by Emancipation Assistant/Community Workers, are responsible for maintaining the E-Stations.

Mentoring Program. In the fall of 1998 DCFS entered into a collaborative relationship with the Los Angeles County Bar Association to establish the “Bridges to the Future Mentorship Program.” In March 1999 the first mentors were paired with foster youths, aged 17 to 19 who volunteered to have a mentor. Mentees are likely to be characterized as follows. They have experienced multiple placements, multiple schools and/or multiple caretakers. They are functionally illiterate or lagging academically. They have low self-esteem, no history of successful relationships with others, and have no support system other than their foster care provider. They have expressed an interest in some guidance or feedback from an adult. Currently, 25 mentor/mentee pairs have been matched. The program involves individual and group event as well as training and support for mentors.

Next Steps

- Expand recruitment into various culturally-based Bar Associations to get a more diverse group of attorneys and judges for mentors.
- Develop recognition events for mentors.

DCFS Scholarship Program. Established in May 1995, the goal of this program is to provide opportunities for post-secondary education to each youth emancipating from foster care. It involves two components: pre-emancipating information and preparation, and post-emancipation assistance and follow-up. DCFS distributes information about scholarships, financial aid, college preparation courses and college entrance exams to regional staff and caregivers. Informational events for youths dealing with financial aid and scholarships are jointly conducted with CCF. DCFS’s Scholarship Planning Committee reviews and evaluates funding requests for youths whose educational costs can not be covered by other sources.

Next steps

- Determine how many youths are currently funded and at what level.
- Establish goal for expanding scholarship resources.

Tutoring. [Still awaiting data on tutoring offered through DCFS]

Specialized Accredited Educational Programs. Los Angeles County Office of Education’s (LACOE) Division of Juvenile Court and Community Schools provides fully accredited educational programs for diverse student populations in the L.A. County juvenile justice and child dependency systems. Programs and services are

delivered in five distinct settings: Juvenile Hall, Probation Camps, Community Education Centers, Residential Community Education Centers and MacLaren Children's Center. It should be noted that CCF also provides instruction at MacLaren Children's Center, and plans to double its instructional hours to 160 per year.

ILP Program. DCFS's ILP Program includes a broad range of services including those described below. Probation has not yet incorporated this full complement of services for its ILP eligible youths, however it does offer over two dozen specialized programs for learning and personal development to its students enrolled in Juvenile Court and Community Schools.

Independent Living Program Coordinators. In terms of staffing, there are currently two ILP managers and 13 ILP Coordinators (one position is assigned to Probation and one is vacant). Three more ILP Coordinator items have been budgeted in the coming year, one of which is designated for Probation.

Independent Living Skills Workshops. DCFS contracts with CCF to provide financial aid workshops and classes focusing on emancipation skills for youths. In FY 98, 56 workshop series, of 27 hours each, were held at 18 community college sites. CCF has moved forward to evaluate its workshops by collecting outcome data on its ILP program. Pre- and post-questionnaires were administered to all enrolled youths covering five different skill areas that correspond to the curriculum. The instrument consists of 75 questions, responded to on a five-point rating scale. The data have been analyzed, yielding the finding that "overall, ILP training appears to have the intended effect of increasing foster youths' skill level, knowledge and attitude regarding independent living. In addition a majority of youths reported that they found the training to be helpful in terms of providing information that would help them prepare for emancipation. They also found it helpful being in an environment with others in similar situations, finding it easier to identify with them than their peers who were not in out-of-home care. They also found their ILP staff (Outreach Advisors ILP Coordinators, and training facilitators) to be very helpful, and at times, more accessible than their county worker. These statements mirror those of foster youth in several other states that have participated in their state or local Independent Living Program."

Next steps

- In FY 99-00, the number of series to be offered will be increased to 72.
- Increase the number of pre-and post-training responses by making it an easier and more user-friendly tool;
- Expand the number of skills areas being covered from five to seven;
- Develop other means to measure student master of content;
- Develop countywide training competencies to ensure that ILP training remains consistent, focused, and relevant throughout L.A. County and the State.

Independent City. The Community College Foundation (CCF) receives funding from the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to provide ILP programs at colleges throughout the state, including 11 colleges in Los Angeles County. CCF uses some of these funds to sponsor the Independent City program, a daylong-simulated exercise to enable foster youths to experience and practice, in a protected setting, the skills they will need to help them succeed as adults. In FY 1998, 10 Independent Cities programs were scheduled, but only 6 conducted because of difficulty in securing sufficient volunteers and participants.

Next steps

- Raise awareness of program's availability.
- Notify CSWs of program schedules and the importance of youths attending.
- Involve more DCFS personnel in facilitating Independent City Saturday events.

Skill Centers. Community based skill centers provide employment training, life skills training and job placement for youths ages 16 to 21. During 1998, 299 youths completed Skill Center training; 87 of these were successfully placed in jobs.

Next steps

- ILP staff is conducting site visits to 12 new sites to review curriculum content.

Employment Opportunities. The L.A. County Board of Supervisors, in support of DCFS's Vision Statement that "children should reach adulthood having experienced a safe, healthy and nurturing childhood which prepares them to become responsible and contributing members of the community," directed each of the County Departments to give priority to the hiring of former foster youths.

DCFS has taken a leadership role in this initiative, employing 22 former foster youths as Emancipation Assistants. They work directly with foster youths, encouraging them to get involved in the emancipation process. They refer youths to emancipation activities operated in the Department, e.g. E-Step, ILP, etc., and also monitor their school performance. The Emancipation Assistant position was recently reclassified to Community Workers, recognizing their responsibilities, compensating them at a higher level, and creating a career path for former foster youths.

Next steps

- Transfer an additional 11 Youth Workers to the Bureau of Specialized Programs to work in the Emancipation Preparation Program.

- Fill behind the positions of these Youth Workers.

Job Development Section (JDS). JDS provides employment training and opportunities for youths preparing to emancipate and those already emancipated from DCFS. Youth, from ages 14 to 21, are eligible for JDS services. JDS works with both the private and public sectors in identifying and recruiting jobs. During the summer of 1998 over 1800 foster youths were employed by the JTPA Summer Youth Employment Program. Over 2,500 youths received employment services, counseling, were referred to employment training programs, and received employment information through JDS. Over 120 youths were employed by the JTPA Year-Round Work Program at MacLaren Children's Center. One hundred and ten youths were employed through public agencies, and 106 through private businesses.

Next steps

- Determine how DCFS youths will be impacted when JTPA changes to the Workforce Investment Act on 7/1/00.

Annual Graduation Celebration. Celebration One is a ceremonial event for high achievers, which marks graduation from high school, completion of ILP, anticipated enrollment in a further vocational or academic program, and emancipation from foster care. This event is held annually at the Music Center with the financial support of various foundations, charities and private citizens, and DCFS.

Celebration Two is a festive event for a larger group of emancipated foster youths who did not participate in Celebration One. Celebration Two also recognizes these youths' graduation from high school and their scholastic achievements. Some of these youths may receive the same college funding opportunities as Celebration One youths. This event has been held annually at amusement and theme parks, in Catalina, etc.

Exit Interviews. These interviews are conducted by ILP Coordinators in the Regional offices no later than six weeks prior to the emancipation date, to review with the youth his/her accomplishments, review life goals, provide important documents and information, confirm educational, housing and income resources, and provide the names and addresses of relative, if appropriate. Youths are also asked for feedback on their experiences while under DCFS care and supervision.

Next steps

- Determine how many youths actually participate in these interviews.
- Review their feedback in order to make program revisions and innovations.

Aftercare. Aftercare services are now recognized as an essential right of youths who emancipate from foster care. L.A. County has opted to provide a range of services and activities to former foster youth up to age 21. Based on availability, some services can extend beyond age 21. The continuum includes the following:

Alumni Resource Center (ARC). ARC provides services for youths age 18 to 21 who are about to, or have already emancipated from foster care. Sponsored by the Weingart Foundation, ARC's goal is to equip these youths with the skills and resources they need for self-sufficient adult living.

Next Steps

- Determine how many youths request/are provided service through the ARC.
- Determine extent to which Probation youths access ARC services.

Drop-in Resource Center. Located in ARC, the Drop-in Center provides an array of need-based concrete information and referral services for all emancipated youth. Referral services include employment, medical, legal and mental health services. Information services include college and financial aid, employment, vocational training, military service, housing, California Conservation Corps and Job Corps. Occasional computer classes and specialized workshops are conducted in response to assessed needs of these young adults.

Next steps

- Determine what services are requested/offered to these emancipated youths.

Warmline. A 24-hour emergency number has been set up to respond to the critical needs of emancipated youths. (The number is 1-800-654-4571).

Medi-Cal and SSI Coverage. A judgment in the Edwards vs. Kizer lawsuit established the eligibility of children emancipating from DCFS out-of-home care to independent living for continuing Medi-Cal benefits for a three month period, at which time application must be made for continuing Medi-Cal coverage. DCFS policy states that "Each youth emancipating from out-of-home care to live independently shall have a Medi-Cal card ... and an income from at least one of the following: employment, GR, SSI, trust fund, scholarship, Job Corps, financial aid, Conservation Corps, etc." DCFS recognizes that in the event a youth is physically or mentally unable to benefit from the formal emancipation program, appropriate alternative arrangements, e.g. board and care, SSI, relative placement etc. must be secured by the CSW after consultation.

Housing. The development and expansion of traditional housing resources and collateral supportive services for emancipating youths have been one of the major achievements of the past five years. The program now includes the following elements.

THPP (Transitional Housing Placement Program). THPP began as a grant-funded pilot program in February 1996 to provide pre-emancipating housing to foster youths age 17 and older in scattered site apartments. It became a permanent program on January 1, 1999, made possible by redirecting AFDC-FC funds, and now has 9 vendors, primarily Foster Family Agencies. Since its inception 129 youths have participated. Concerns regarding this program, such as adequate funding, program models, and availability of appropriate referrals given limitations on payment levels, have led to an assessment by the auditor controller.

Next steps

- A policy review of all aspects of the program is warranted, as there continues to be a consensus of a general demand for appropriate service-enriched housing for youths exiting both Dependency and Probation systems.
Transitional Housing Program. DCFS's Transitional Housing Program is a collaborative effort with United Friends of the Children, Bridges to Independence (UFC Bridges) and the Community Development Commission (CDC). It is funded through Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and non-profit financial resources, providing many services to youths leaving DCFS who would otherwise be homeless or living in marginal housing situations. Youths may remain in UFC Bridges housing for up to 18 months. Youths who enter the program are required to work and may also attend school or vocational training. UFC Bridges established a Career Center, and collaboration with Alliance for Children's Rights now provides access to an array of physicians for youths without medical resources. Participating youths are also eligible for free membership in YMCA facilities. Currently, 200 young adults are receiving housing through Bridges. DCFS has been awarded 11 HUD grants and 2 renewals since 1992. UFC Bridges, Weingart Foundation, USC and the Alumni Resource Center are presently conducting a study related to participants in the Transitional Housing Program.

Next steps

- Increase the number of housing sites through apartment rehab and leasing options.
- By September 30th, 1999 enroll another 100 youths.
- Hire a Public Health Nurse, Mental Health Specialist and Drug Counselor.
- Open a specialized transition facility for program participants who are alcohol and drug dependent.

Transitional Housing/Mental Health Program. DCFS, in partnership with DMH, has been awarded a three-

year grant from HUD to provide a Mental Health Transitional Housing Program for “severely emotionally/behaviorally disturbed” youth with a history of placement failures and serious deficiencies in their preparation for emancipation and economic independence. Located in the South Los Angeles area, the program is designed to provide mental health, emancipation and transitional housing services in a therapeutic environment for these foster youth upon turning 18 years of age. The ultimate goal is to assist these youths in integrating into the community, access community resources and achieve emancipation. The program is now in its conceptual and developmental phase.

In June 1999 DCFS and UFC Bridges opened a six bed Transitional Housing facility for emotionally disturbed emancipated foster youth. A private mental health services provider will run the program.

IV. Organizational/Systemic Elements

The task force recognized that improved organizational arrangements would be required to implement and sustain an across the board, coordinated set of services for youths in care. The recommendations in this area included a single position for service coordination within DCFS, coordination of line and special projects, inclusion of youths from all types of placements in emancipation preparation programming, and renewed emphasis on working with the Probation Department to find ways to assist probation youths with emancipation. Many of these goals have been achieved.

DCFS successfully undertook development of a policy manual that embodied the new program guidelines that control emancipation policy in the Department. This policy, No. OHC 96-01, was issued in November 1996. It is a major underpinning for all of the program development, training and case interventions that have ensued, and has been used by the statewide strategic planning group of CDSS as a model of service development.

In accord with the policy framework, a series of changes were undertaken that seem to have made emancipation services both more coherent and comprehensive in DCFS.

These changes include:

- Having a single DCFS administrative staff member responsible for all elements of emancipation programming. Brian Berger was the first individual to take on that role, and in 1999 Trish Ploehn has succeeded him (on an interim basis). That individual coordinates both ILP funded and non-ILP funded elements of emancipation programming, and it appears that this role indeed furthers the aim of coordination and uniform program development.

- Emancipation programming was expanded to MacLaren Children's Center (MCC) by installing a resourceful ILP coordinator there.
- A system for mandating and monitoring the delivery of Emancipation Preparation Services at Group Homes has been instituted. Elements of this system include new provisions in the Group Home contract that require ILP type services for youth, and inclusion of this program emphasis among the priorities of the Group Home Monitoring unit. There has also been established an Ombudsman for youths in group homes, in order to allow youths, family and others to safely and conveniently bring to public notice possible problems experienced in the group home environment.

DCFS, along with certain community based support groups, has taken a leading role in the necessary advocacy and public information activities to publicize and gain support for emancipation related activities. DCFS, along with the Community College Foundation, has facilitated youth attendance and public testimony in a great number of venues, including the California Assembly Committee on Health and Human Services, the California Judicial Conference (Oakland, 1998), Town Hall meeting with Tipper Gore (5/99), the 1998 Children's Defense Fund Conference, and the White House ILP Announcement in 1999, to name just a few. DCFS has published a newsletter by and for youths emancipating from care. Further DCFS staff have made numerous presentations to national and state level hearings, professional associations, and community conferences. We like to believe that Los Angeles' participation at local, state and national levels has been important in bringing recent renewed attention and resources to emancipation preparation programs.

Court oversight. The Dependency Court was an early supporter of the Emancipation Preparation Initiative, as then Presiding Judge Stevens initiated the Task Force, which spawned the oversight committee. While formal court participation in oversight committee activities has ceased, judicial interest in and monitoring of plans for individual emancipating youths remains one of the keys to assuring both program development and delivery. While we have no systematic data on the topic (alas, true for most claims in this report) there has been repeated training of bench officers¹, and consistent anecdotal evidence that the judges now expect to see emancipation preparation services contained within each case plan.

Probation. The Department of Probation has participated in the ILP program since its inception. Probation

Youths in suitable placement are eligible for ILP services, and Probation has had one ILP coordinator on staff, and in 1999 has moved to add another individual to this function as well. Yet the caseload for the coordinator has been many hundreds (up to 500-600 at times), so that detailed individual work on emancipation needs of youths was not possible. Referrals to ILP classes were made. This year, Probation is designing a new needs assessment survey, and plans to use results from that survey to design program enhancements.

Training. A comprehensive training plan was necessary to implement the emancipation initiative.

Overall, the committee believes that the training program that was delivered substantially met the guidelines set down.

A major element of the training was the special team at DCFS to train staff regionally in the new policy and program guidelines. Starting in November, 1996, DCFS developed and provided training for all participants in the emancipation process – CSWs, caregivers of all types (kinship and non kinship foster homes, small family home providers, group home providers, Foster Family Agencies), Juvenile Court personnel (hearing officers, CASAs, county counsel and DCLS staff) as well as community groups. A special three person training team operated for over two years, and designed and delivered a unique curriculum, reaching over 2,000 DCFS staff and over 1,000 substitute caregivers. Curriculum guidelines from that training are appended to this report. These efforts were augmented by the 1998-99 Inter University Consortium Training Conferences. Six one-day conferences were held, involving approximately 2,000 CSWs plus other management staff, with a focus on emancipation preparation services. These conferences also included a resource fair to social workers to access available resources that they might need for youths on their caseloads. A program from the June 1999 conference is appended to this report. On-going training for new CWS's in ILP and other Emancipation Preparation services is included in the Core Academy Pre-Service Training offered by the IUC. DCFS produced an Emancipation Video, which has been provided to Juvenile Court personnel, and is available as a training resource for all.

Caregiver. Care provider – during 97-98, 10 community colleges receiving state ILP funds hosted emancipation training to 900 caregivers in Los Angeles.

¹ An example is the presentation to the Juvenile Court Task Force of the Los Angeles County Bar Association.

Emancipation video. An emancipation video series has been distributed to each Regional Administrator for in-house training, etc. These video includes: “DCFS Foster Youth”, “Scholarship Program”, “Emancipation Assistant Program”, “ESTEP”, “Emancipation Contract”, “Transitional Housing Placement”, “Transitional Housing Program”, “Teen Club”, “Runaway Adolescent Project”, and “Street Outreach Service (SOS) for Youth”.

V. Youth Participation

It is now accepted in both DCFS policy and practice that successful emancipation from foster care requires the active participation and involvement of youths in both formal and informal activities from the time they enter out-of-home care. Over the past five years progress has been made in operationalizing this goal:

Emancipation Preparation Contract. The Emancipation Preparation Contract represents one component in the development of the needs assessment that establishes the foster youth’s Transitional Independent Living (TLIP)/Case Plan. The TILP is mandated for youths age 14 or older who reside in out-of-home care. The Contract is a written agreement signed by the youth and care provider, and approved and signed by the CSW, identifying the youth’s needs, services to be provided to meet those needs, available resources, time frames and persons responsible for seeing that those services are provided. In advance of the face-to-face interview with the youth and caregiver, a copy of the Contract and a cover letter explaining its value in developing a successful, goal-oriented plan for the future are sent to the youth. The letter stresses the importance of the youth’s active involvement in the process. One completed copy of the Contract remains with the youth and the care provider, and another is kept in the DCFS case file. The Contract is to be updated on a quarterly basis.

Next steps

- Audit compliance, quality and utility issues.
- Develop and implement corrective action as needed.

California Youth Connection (CYC). **CYC** is a statewide organization under the auspices of the California Community Colleges Foundation, which serves current and former foster youths, ages 14 to 24 years. The primary goals are to: enhance the image of foster youth by educating the public; to participate in the legislative process by advocating for laws to improve the quality of foster care for current and future generations of youth in care; and, to

serve as a supportive network for youth by providing them with resources, information and personal contacts throughout California. Regional delegations of DCFS foster youth have evening meetings at local regional offices or community sites on a weekly or monthly basis.

DCFS and DDF staff serve as adult supporters.

VI. Data System/Evaluation/Audit

Lack of capability to track clients, the services they use, and the outcomes of those services is a problem that goes far beyond DCFS's emancipation programs. On July 6, 1999, USC Professor Jacquelyn McCroskey submitted a proposal to the Commission on Children and Families for improving the overall information systems and research on child welfare in L.A. County. She notes that "while the implementation of CWS/CMS appears to be proceeding reasonably well, DCFS information systems still have a number of problems..." A number of these directly apply to the concerns of the Emancipation Oversight Committee.

The long delay in developing the Statewide CWS/CMS system has caused DCFS to develop a "patchwork" approach to tracking information. The State has put DCFS's request to put The Emancipation Preparation Assessment Guide on CWS/CMS on hold until the system is fully operational. Only then will consideration be given to prioritizing the special requests of individual counties.

The development of a number of "stand alone" information/billing systems has made it impossible to integrate the data collected in these systems with CWS/CMS. A "stand alone" system for the Emancipation Program was proposed in 1996, and is said to be under consideration.

McCroskey makes a number of recommendations including the establishment of an ad hoc advisory committee to review the current status of DCFS's information systems, recommend improvements and develop a plan to improve the department's capacity for statistics, evaluation and research. We strongly support this recommendation.

In addition to the CWS/CMS data system, there are a number of research initiatives being conducted that have been undertaken by DCFS in conjunction with emancipation-related efforts now underway. They include the following:

Longitudinal Study of Former Foster Youth. A five year longitudinal study (beginning in 1995) of emancipated youths is being conducted to evaluate DCFS' efforts to improve the quality of care for foster youths and to measure the effectiveness of the Department's emancipation planning process. Those youths that participate in the survey will be paid \$20.00 per phone interview. The interview will cover topics such as the youths' experiences in foster care, current job or school situation, current living situation, support network, need for aftercare services, etc. DCFS reports that this data is being monitored and maintained at the Alumni Resource Center. No findings from this longitudinal study have been made public to date.

UFC/Weingart Housing Study. The United Friends of the Children/Bridges to Independence, Weingart Foundation, University of Southern California and the Alumni Resource Center are presently conducting a study related to participants in the Transitional Housing Program. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the impact of specialized interventions that prepare former foster youths for adult self-sufficiency. No findings from this study have been made public to date.

Probation Survey. The Probation Department is currently developing an Emancipation/Transitional Housing Survey that will cover the following areas: special medical, psychological or physical needs, prior placements, post-discharge housing options, personal family situation, immigration issues; educational status, and job experiences. Data from this survey will provide the Probation Department with a fuller understanding of the need of the young adults they serve.

VII. Summary

Highlights of Accomplishments

The Oversight Committee on Emancipation Preparation is gratified to acknowledge the progress that DCFS (and to a lesser extent, Probation), has made in moving towards a more comprehensive model of service for emancipating youths. This brief summary highlights just some of those accomplishments.

DCFS' updated handbook policy directive, Emancipation Planning for Youths in Out-of-Home Care, clarifies and substantially strengthens the responsibilities of core members of the team that works with these adolescents. The establishment of the position of emancipation "czar" brings the range of emancipation activities under the oversight of a single administrator, making it possible to assign accountability.

Emancipation preparation is no longer seen as the narrowly defined ILP program serving a limited number of 16 to 18 year olds. The widely expanded array of services now is available to a broader age continuum, starting earlier and continuing post-emancipation. Additional DCFS staff, serving as ILP coordinators, and a cadre of Emancipation Assistants (former foster youths) are assigned to DCFS offices and MacLaren Children's Center. The program's visibility is further enhanced by E-Stations that bring information about emancipation events and resources to line CSWs in every office.

The development and implementation of the E-Step program deserves special recognition. E-Step acts as a wake-up call to 14 year olds in out-of-home care, their caregivers and social workers, to the reality that at age 18 these youths will no longer be eligible for the range of supports provided by the foster care system. Youths now are engaged at an earlier age both in assessing their own readiness for independence and in signing an agreement to work towards acquiring critical post-emancipation skills. Remedial action is identified and responsibility to providing needed services is clearly assigned.

Emancipation-related training is now offered as part of the core new worker orientation program, as part of the regular in-service programs offered, as well as through more intensive trainings and conference presentations. Caregivers, including relatives providing kinship care, group home providers, etc., have also been offered trainings on emancipation preparation. Group home contracts now clearly spell out responsibility of these care providers to deliver age appropriate emancipation preparation services to their residents.

The expansion of transitional and post-emancipation housing is one of the most significant new services to emerge over the past five years. The public-private collaboration that has made this innovation possible is remarkable. Once an impossibly difficult resource to locate, it is conceivable that in the foreseeable future a satisfactory living arrangement will be available to every youth in need of housing who is emancipating from foster care.

Shortfalls

This section of the report underscores areas where the committee believes program development has been inadequate. There are two levels to this assessment. The first level is to assume that reasonable policies and objectives have been adopted, but implementation has fallen short for various reasons that can and should have been overcome. The second level of this assessment concerns areas in which it appears with hindsight that policies and program approaches were inadequate for the task at hand, and the problem is not simply lack of performance in implementation.

The failure to develop a set of timely and informative quantitative management reports seriously hampers

program implementation and monitoring. In the past five years, a set of management reports has been suggested that would track how many youths on the caseload become eligible in each period, and then monitor service receipt for the target population up through termination from care. These reports have not been produced, so any assessment of program adequacy (the extent it reaches eligible and/or interested youths) is impossible. For example, in the present report, an appraisal that generally celebrates accomplishments, this lack of measurement ability is a major drawback. Nor does this concern ignore the contributions that DCFS and its contractors have made in tracking certain deliverables for youths. With the advent of CWS/CMS, more can be expected, and more is needed.

A second concern pertains to the lack of outcome measurement for emancipating youths. This again has the element of lack of available data on what has been accomplished when youths leave the system. Policy indicates each youth is supposed to have stable housing, and a source of income, prior to discharge. But the committee has seen no tracking data on the achievement of this admittedly difficult to achieve as well as to track objective (e.g. some youths leave precipitously). At another level, outcomes research for what happens to youths after and due to emancipation preparation programs is woefully deficient on the national level. The field as whole, that is, the overall structure of organized attempts to improve outcomes for emancipating youths, suffers from a lack of well designed outcome relevant research. This failure hampers the search for best practices, and knowledge of what works, for whom, under what circumstances, and with what degree of potency. Los Angeles County ought not to bear the burden of establishing this research initiative, but we should join forces with CDSS and federal agencies, and use the expertise and leadership available within the County, to further such an initiative.

We further believe that service development should consciously take into account needs of the various groups of youngsters aging out of DCFS. While this has clearly occurred to an extent, that extent is unknown, so that there is no metric to decide if there is greater further need for services for disabled children, college bound youth, 300/600s, or others. Program development has to meet the specific needs of youth when assistance can be helpful -- otherwise it is ineffective. The planning and the program development to meet such needs would, ideally, be community based. Youths reside in a community, and their need for services, concrete support, and timely assistance throughout the pre and post emancipation process would best be met within the community and school district they call home. It would be appropriate for DCFS to try out a model of community-based organizations taking responsibility for the development and implementation of a range of needed services in a defined geographic area.

VIII. Strategic Plan

The Committee upon review of the materials submitted, make the following suggestions for consideration.

- Emphasis should be placed upon the strengthening of emancipation preparation programs in the Department of Probation.
- Data system and evaluation reports must be upgraded.
- Program coordination and integration issues should be addressed.
- More Emancipation assistants should be trained and hired.
- Efforts with kin providers to enroll youths in programs and strengthen in-home training should occur.
- An on-going plan for training should be developed and implemented
- The adequacy of pre and post emancipation housing stock should be assessed, and increased as needed.
- The structure, process and outcomes of the Transitional Housing Placement program warrants review.
- A model of community based efforts – such as family to family -- for emancipating youths should be developed and tested. Consideration should be given to nominating a community based organization in each region or SPA to take the lead in developing, coordinating and delivering programs for emancipating youths. Funding would be required.

There are a number of additional items not addressed in this report that will, nonetheless, impact significantly on services available to youths emancipating out of the Dependency system.

These include:

- The Foster Youth Services Initiative created by the State legislature this year. This program is funded by the California Department of Education to provide liaison and other services for youths in group homes.
- Still unknown is what will happen to Kin-gap foster youths who exit the system when their caregivers exit the system. Will those youths remain eligible for ILP services?
- Additional funding for Independent Living Program services will be coming to Los Angeles County in the coming fiscal year. This will provide an opportunity to create new and innovative approaches to reach all eligible youths in the county.

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