

# Foster Youth Transition to Independence Study

Second Annual Report  
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Report prepared by Carol Brandford

# Foster Youth Transition to Independence Study

## Second Annual Report

### Executive Summary

The Foster Youth Transition to Independence Study is made possible through funding by Casey Family Programs, Washington State Chafee Grant, and Washington State DSHS, Children's Administration.

This is the Second Annual Report on the Foster Youth Transition to Independence Study (FYT). There are three main purposes of the FYT study: (1) to examine the characteristics of youth leaving public child welfare foster care in Washington state; (2) to examine how prepared those youth are for emancipation; and (3) to examine how the youth have fared after emancipation.

A complete description of the study background, purpose, design and other methodological details are available in the first annual report (Foster Youth Transition to Independence Study First Annual Report). In summary, the study first interviews youth approaching emancipation (their mean age was 17) who have been in out of home care at least 12 months, and re-interviews the youth 6 to 12 months post emancipation. The youth's Department of Social and Health Services (DCFS) social worker is also interviewed to obtain the social worker's perception of the youth's readiness for independence.

The first annual report provided preliminary information on youth's preparedness to emancipate. This report presents the complete data on Phase 1 (pre-emancipation interviews with youth and social workers). This data includes the

youth's readiness for independence, services provided to assist the youth toward independence, and youth characteristics that might influence readiness for independence.

Youth respondents in the pre-emancipation interview represent 71% of the eligible foster youth exiting care in Washington State. No differences were found between the eligible youth interviewed and those not interviewed based on race/ethnicity and length of time in placement. Ninety-three percent of the eligible social worker interviews were completed.

Males and females are equally represented in the study. A majority of youth self-identify as white (59%) and mixed race (30%) (see p. 10). Maltreatment histories include emotional maltreatment and neglect for most of the youth in the study, with about half of the youth experiencing physical abuse, sexual abuse and abandonment. Close to half of the youth had been in placement longer than five years. One-third of the youth experienced 1 to 3 different placements, one-third 4 to 9 different placements and one-third experienced 10 or more different placements. One-fourth of the youth were first placed at age 5 or younger, one-third were placed between ages 6 and 12, and 43% were first placed as teens. Over one-half of the youth had been removed from their homes and placed in out-of-home care more than once.

Most youth maintained contact with their biological families while in care, and most youth have a positive relationship with at least one adult. Risk behaviors exhibited by youth while in care include sex/pregnancy, drug/alcohol use, delinquency and mental health problems. Over one-fourth (29%) of the female foster youth report at least one pregnancy; Planned Parenthood estimates that nationally 10% of all 15 to 19 year old females become pregnant (Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1999). Nearly two-thirds of both genders report staying in jail or detention overnight; national data estimates 8% of teens have arrests. More than one-third of the youth scored high on a depressive symptom checklist

(Center for Epidemiologic Studies-Depression Scale), and social workers indicate that over half of the youth suffer from mental health problems. A national survey finds that 28% of 17 year olds have extended periods of sadness and hopelessness (Grunbaum, Kann, Kinchen, Williams, Ross, Lowry and Kolbe, 2001). Half of the foster youth report smoking cigarettes regularly, compared to national estimates of 17% to 35%. Little difference in risk behaviors was found for youth based on length of time in care and number of placements. One exception to this was found for physical aggression: more of the youth who were in care longer, and youth having multiple placements report physical fights. Racial/ethnic background made little difference in risk behaviors except sexual activity and pregnancy, with more minorities reporting higher rates of both.

Most youth received individual counseling, and close to one-half received drug/alcohol counseling during their stay in care. While in care, most youth also took an independent living class. However, 80% were found to be lacking some basic independent living skills. Less than half of the youth feel well prepared to live independently following emancipation, and their social workers estimate that 70% of these soon to be emancipating youth are not prepared to live independently. These youth identified gaps in their knowledge as they prepare to exit care which include: money management, finding housing, employment skills, and career building skills or knowledge.

## Summary and Conclusion

Seventy percent of the eligible foster youth completed an interview. Most youth are in high school (82%), but less than half expect to graduate by the time they leave care. Over half of the youth interviewed were placed before age 12 (57%). Youth who remained in care longer tended to have more placements than those in care a shorter time. Foster youth report more pregnancies, arrests, smoking,

and clinical level depression than do national estimates for youth in the general population.

Services need to be tailored to meet the needs of youth emancipating from foster care. Most of these youth are participating in independent living training; however, only 20% to 30% rate themselves currently as being prepared to live independently upon emancipation. Additionally, there is a high rate of clinical level symptoms of depression and other mental disorders among this population of youth. Refinement of services could help address these important issues for foster youth so they can become functioning adults in our communities.

## **Introduction**

Foster youth in long-term care are thought to have many risk factors for difficult transitions to independence, such as poverty, homelessness, criminal activity and out-of-wedlock pregnancy. The Foster Youth Transition to Independence study (FYT) is designed to determine the preparedness of foster youth in Washington State transitioning out of care and the outcomes for them at 6 to 12 months post emancipation. Three interviews are included as part of the overall study: a pre-emancipation interview with youth, a DCFS social worker interview and a post-emancipation interview with youth. This Second Annual report examines the results of the pre-emancipation interview including background and placement histories of the youth in care as well as their risk behaviors prior to emancipation.

## **Methodology**

The pre-emancipation interview is administered to youth when they are 17 years of age. The youth's social worker is also interviewed at this time. The post-emancipation interview takes place 6 to 12 months following the youth's emancipation from placement. All three interviews were developed with guidance from an advisory committee consisting of representatives from Casey Family Programs, the Children's Administration (CA) Independent Living Program Manager, CA Independent Living Regional Coordinators, and current or former foster youth (when available). The

instruments included sections of the with measures that have been field tested in other studies as well as some site developed questions. See Appendix B for a complete list of survey questions and their sources. All interview materials and procedures were reviewed and approved by the Washington State Institutional Review Board (WSIRB) prior to administration. An additional data source is arrest data for youth participating in the study about 6 months post-discharge from foster care. A data sharing agreement with the Washington State Patrol has been established to obtain any arrest information available for the study sample.

A list of eligible youth names, dates of birth, and identification numbers are downloaded on a quarterly basis from an administrative database, the Case and Management Information System (CAMIS). Interview staff search for recent address information for each youth and enter this information into a tracking database. The initial contact with the youth is made with a letter explaining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of the study, information that an interviewer will contact them by telephone a week later to provide more details about the study and a request for participation (see Appendix C for a copy of the youth introduction letter).

Youth are informed they will receive a \$25.00 gift certificate to a department store as an incentive for participation.

Based on the youth's preference, the pre-emancipation interview is conducted either

in person or by telephone. Previous research involving focus groups with youth (Office of Children's Administration Research [OCAR, 1998]) indicates that youth would be more likely to participate in a survey of this type if they were able to meet the person conducting the interview. Regardless, some youth prefer to complete the interview by telephone. After a youth completes the pre-emancipation interview they are asked for contact information of four people who will know how to reach them for the follow up interview. To obtain information about their maltreatment and placement history, youth are also asked for permission to interview their DCFS social worker.

Interviews with social workers are conducted by telephone only with the written permission of each youth. Social workers are informed prior to the interview that their participation is voluntary.

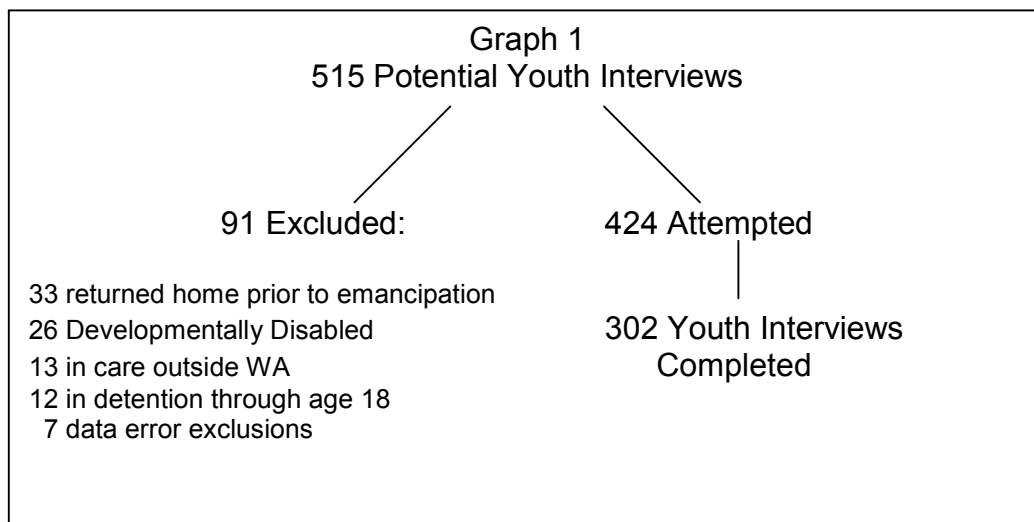
Post-emancipation interviews are conducted

by telephone six to twelve months following the youth's emancipation from placement. At the time of the follow up interview, youth are located using the contact names they provided during the pre-emancipation interview and/or through their last foster home and social worker. Post emancipation interviews with youth are currently ongoing. Data for these interviews will be discussed in the next report.

**Interview Rate:**

Nearly three-fourths (71% or 302/424) of the eligible foster youth preparing to leave care completed the pre-emancipation interview (see Graph 1 for participation rate and exclusion reasons).

Based on WSIRB requirements, youth are asked for permission to interview their social worker to collect information about their maltreatment and placement history. Eighty-eight percent (266/302) of the youth interviewed consented to allow OCAR to interview their social worker for this study.





Out of the total possible social worker interviews, 93% (247/266) were completed.

**Demographics:**

The youth interviewed were equally divided between male (50%) and female (50%).

More than half (59%) of the youth identified their race/ethnicity as Caucasian, and 30% self-identified as more than one race/ethnicity (See Table 1 for further detail).

**Table 1.  
Race/Ethnicity of Youth Interviewed**

Race/Ethnicity	No. of Youth	Percent of Youth
Caucasian	178	59%
Mixed Race	90	30%
Hispanic/Latino	12	4.0%
African American	9	3.0%
Native American	8	3%
Asian/Pacific Islander	3	1%
Other	1	<1%
Missing	1	<1%

Comparing the race/ethnicity of the study sample to all youth in long term foster care in Washington State, a similar percent of Caucasian youth (61% state vs. 59% FYT) was found, but significantly fewer mixed race youth were found in the state sample (8% state vs. 30% FYT). This could possibly be attributed to the fact that, the state youth data are collected slightly differently than the FYT sample in that Hispanic youth are not included in the mixed race category. In the final study report we will conduct more detailed analyses comparing these populations.

**Education:**

A majority of the youth interviewed (82%) report being enrolled in school at the time of the interview, and just under half (48%) expect to graduate from high school by the time they leave care. Nationally, 75% of young adults between 18 and 24 years of age graduated high school (year 2000 Census). Having a longer follow up study would capture these findings for foster youth.

**Placement Experiences:**

The subjects in this study represent youth who were first placed in out of home care at varying ages. One-fourth of the youth (24%) were first placed at age 5 or younger, 30% were first placed between ages 6 and 12, and 43% were placed at age 13 or older. Just over one-half (54%) report they have been placed in out of home care more than once.

Looking at the overall length of time youth were separated from their families, just under one-half (46%) report being separated for more than five years (See Table 2).

Nearly half of the youth were in foster care five or more years prior to emancipation.

**Table 2.**  
**Time Separated from Birth Family**

Years	Number of Youth	Percent of Youth
1 – 2 years	44	15%
2 – 3 years	40	13%
3 – 4 years	46	15%
4 – 5 years	32	11%
More than 5	138	46%
Don't know	2	<1%
Total	302	100.0

The number of placements is evenly distributed among the youth. One-third of the youth (33%) experienced 1-3 different placements, one-third (33%) had 4-9 placements, and one-third (33%) had 10 or more different placements. A significant positive correlation ( $r=.559$ ) between the length of time in care and the number of different placements was found. That is, the longer a youth spent in care, the greater the number of different placements they were likely to experience. This variation in length of time in foster care may be an important predictor of post emancipation outcomes and will be examined in greater detail in the next report.

The youth were asked, *“Of all the types of living situations in which you lived, which place do you feel you did the best in or were most successful?”* Three-fourths (74%) said they did the best in a foster home, 7% felt they did the best in a group home, 6% felt they did the best with their birth family, 4% said on their own, 2% said a residential treatment facility, and 7% gave other responses. A majority (88%) of the youth felt that their medical and dental needs were met in their most recent placement.

Three-fourths of the youth felt they did best in a foster home.

### **Social Worker Experience:**

Table 3 shows the number of social workers each youth had over their entire time in care. More than half (61%) of the youth in our study had three or fewer different social workers during their stay in care. As expected, there is a significant positive correlation ( $r=.379$ ) between the length of time a youth was in care and the number of social workers they had assigned to their case.

**Table 3.**  
**Number of Different Social Workers**

Number of Social Workers	Number of Youth	Percent of Youth
1	44	15%
2-3	141	47%
4-5	60	20%
6-7	17	6%
8-9	6	2%
10 or more	22	7%
Don't know	12	4%

The youth were asked how often their social worker visited them over the previous year. One-half (51%) of the youth who spent time in a foster family home report their social worker visited them at least once every 90 days. And a little over half (59%) of the youth in group homes report their social worker visited them at least once every 90 days. Some youth answered this question for both family foster homes and group homes if they spent time in each during the

year previous to their interview. Half (51%) of the youth felt they had seen their social workers enough while in care, and an additional 18% said more than enough. One-third of the youth do not feel they saw their social worker enough (31%). A majority of the youth (64%) said they would call their social workers if they need help.

### **Mental Health:**

Over one-third (36%) of the foster youth respondents score high on a scale of depressive symptoms. Depressive symptoms were measured with a standardized instrument<sup>1</sup>. Youth depressive symptoms range from 0 to 49 out of a possible 60. A score of 16 or higher is indicative of depressive symptoms. In a national survey conducted by the Center for Disease Control (CDC), 27% of 12th graders report feeling sad and hopeless for extended periods of time (Grunbaum, Kann, Kinchen, Willimas, Ross, Lowry and Kolbe, 2001).

Over one third of the foster youth had high scores of depressive symptoms.

### **Sex and Pregnancy:**

A majority (71%) of the youth report sexual activity and most (70%) of these report use of birth control. Another 12% report

<sup>1</sup> Based on the Center for Epidemiologic Studies-Depression Scale (CES-D), L.S. Radloff (1977). [The CES-D is a 20-item questionnaire that measures depressive symptomatology.](#) Cut score of 16)

occasional use of birth control. Over one-fourth of the females report being pregnant at least once (29% n=43), and 11% (n=16) of the males report contributing to a pregnancy. Additionally, 11% (n=32) of all the youth in this study report having at least one child. Planned Parenthood reports that 10% of young women age 15 – 19 have had pregnancies. So, older youth in foster care have experienced higher pregnancy rates than the national rates for similar aged youth (females FYT 29% vs. national 10%)

Nearly one in ten (9%) of the youth report they contracted at least one sexually transmitted disease.

Interestingly, little difference was found for risk behaviors between racial/ethnic groups except for sexual activity and pregnancy. Minority youth reported more sexual activity than white youth ( $p < .05$ )<sup>2</sup> (72% vs. 66%) and had significantly more ( $p < .001$ ) pregnancies than their white counterparts (24% vs. 7%).

### **Drugs and Alcohol:**

Youth respondents are asked a series of questions about their use of alcohol and drugs. Half of the youth (52%) report using tobacco products, one-fourth (28%) alcohol and one-fourth marijuana (23%) in the previous three months. Looking at weekly

<sup>2</sup> An association is considered statistically significant if there is less than a 5% chance that the relationship was due to random fluctuations in the data. This is conventionally expressed by a “p-value,” where  $p < .05$  means there is less than a 5% chance of this kind of error and  $p < .01$  means there is less than a 1% chance, and so on.

or more frequent usage, close to half use tobacco products, 8% use marijuana and 3% use alcohol regularly (See Table 4). The American Lung Association estimates that in the United States 28% of high school aged youth smoke, and the CDC reports 35% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders are current smokers.

**Table 4.  
Youth Reported Use of Tobacco, Drugs,  
or Alcohol by Frequency**

	<b>Used in Past 3 Months</b>	<b>Weekly Use</b>	<b>Daily Use</b>
Tobacco	52% (156)	46% (139)	39% (117)
Alcohol	28% (83)	3% (8)	<1% (1)
Marijuana	23% (69)	8% (23)	3% (10)
Cocaine	2% (5)	<1% (1)	<1% (1)
Speed	3% (10)	2% (5)	<1% (2)
Other drugs	4% (11)	---	---
Other's Rx	4% (12)	<1% (2)	<1% (1)
Inhalants	<1% (2)	---	---

**Delinquency:**

Youth are asked a series of questions about participation in delinquent behavior. One-fifth (21%) of the youth report that they have been in at least one physical fight, 4% shop lift, and 5% report they were involved in gang activity in the three months preceding the interview.

When asked about delinquent activity over their lifetime, 36% said they have carried a weapon and 19% have threatened someone with a weapon. Close to two-thirds of the youth have run away from home overnight

(65%). Over half of the youth report they have been arrested (64%) and have had to stay in jail or detention (60%).

Length of time in care had little bearing on reported risk behaviors. Youth in care longer than 5 years had a slightly higher rate of physical aggression than youth in care less than 5 years ( $p=.033$ ), but other risk behaviors were similar for all youth.

Similarly, the number of placements a youth experienced did not influence most of the risk behaviors except physical aggression. Twice as many youth with three or more different placements report physical fights than those youth with fewer than three placements (26% vs. 12%). However, this study could not determine if the youth's aggressive behavior results in increased placements or if the reverse is true.

**General Population Trends vs.**

**Foster Youth**

In the general population, it is estimated that 8% of youth are arrested as juveniles compared to 64% of foster youth based on self report in this study (National Center for Juvenile Justice, 1999). In Washington State the adolescent arrest rate is 7% (Governor's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee). Table 5 compares adolescent risk behaviors for FYT youth to national rates.

**Table 5.**  
**FYT vs. General Pop. Risk Behaviors**

Risk Behavior:	FYT Study	National Data*
Had Sex	71%	29 <sub>2</sub> – 60% <sub>1</sub>
Pregnant	29%	5 <sub>2</sub> – 10% <sub>3</sub>
Smoke Cigarettes Ever	52%	42% <sub>2</sub>
Last 30 days	49%	17 <sub>4</sub> – 35% <sub>1</sub>
Drink Alcohol Ever	28%	39 <sub>2</sub> – 78% <sub>1</sub>
Last 30 days	9%	21 <sub>2</sub> - 55% <sub>1</sub>
Marijuana Use Ever	23%	21 <sub>2</sub> - 52% <sub>1</sub>
Last 30 days	13%	9 <sub>2</sub> – 27% <sub>1</sub>
Run away	65%	11% <sub>2</sub>
Stealing	4%	8% <sub>2</sub>
Arrested	64%	8% <sub>2</sub>
Depressive symptoms	36%	27% <sub>1</sub>

\*National data sources include: Youth Risk Behavior Survey<sub>1</sub>, National Center for Juvenile Justice<sub>2</sub>, Alan Guttmacher Institute<sub>3</sub>, and Child Trends Databank<sub>4</sub>.

### Services:

Almost all (93%) of the youth report receiving individual counseling while in care. Just over half (57%) participate in group counseling, and 46% receive drug/alcohol counseling. A majority (63%) report participating in Independent Living services (See Table 6 for a list of services received).

**Table 6.**  
**Services to Youth\***

Service	Percent
Individual counseling	93%
Independent Living Training	63%
Group counseling	57%
Drug/Alcohol counseling	46%
Tutoring	42%
Youth Organizations	38%
Employment services/training	38%

\*Youth were asked if they received any of the above services during their entire time in foster care.

For youth who report regular (weekly or more) use of drugs or alcohol in the previous three months (n=25), 76% received drug/alcohol counseling.

### Social Support:

Most of the youth (86%) report visits with their biological family while living in out of home care. About one-third (30%) visit with their biological families at least weekly, and almost two-thirds (61%) visit at least monthly. Close to three-fourths (73%) of the youth have contact with other family members, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins while in out of home care.

Youth listed a wide variety of support contacts when asked who they would contact if they need help after leaving care.

**Table 7.**  
**Who Youth Would Call if They Need Help**

Person Youth Would Call	Percent
A friend	73%
Foster family	61%
Relative	54%
Biological parent	40%
Another adult	34%
Social Worker	33%
Teacher	23%
Church member	19%
IL program leader	17%
Youth group leader	14%
Neighbor	13%
YMCA staff	8%
Big Brother/Sister	7%
Other	11%

Youth may indicate more than one support person, so percents do not total to 100.

Almost all of the youth (97%) report having a close positive relationship with at least one adult.

### **Independent Living:**

The youth were asked how prepared they feel to get a steady job and make money. Less than half (44%) feel very well prepared, 46% feel somewhat prepared, and 9% don't feel at all prepared.

Over three-fourths of the youth (78%) had an opportunity to participate in independent living (IL) training and 61% have actually taken independent living classes. Of those who had taken an independent living class, 50% had been involved less than 6 months, 20% from 6-12 months, and 30% over one year. Most participants (68%) said that the IL classes made a difference in their lives.

The youth were asked several open-ended questions about independent living skills. Youth were most concerned about gaining more employment training and better skills through the independent living program (e.g., by starting the program at a younger age). These concerns were followed by the desire to have out-of-home placements more conducive to the transition (e.g., not being in a situation that prevents them from working and interacting with the community). Considering specific skills they would need for a successful transition, the most popular response was money management skills. This was followed by skills to obtain

housing, plan for college or a career, and skills to obtain immediate employment.

### **Preparedness for Independent**

#### **Living:**

The Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment - Short Form (ACLSA), an instrument developed by Casey Family Programs designed to assess preparedness for living independently, was included as part of the survey packet (see [www.caseylifeskills.org](http://www.caseylifeskills.org)). The ACLSA assesses preparedness for living independently in the following areas: daily living skills, housing and community resources, money management, self care, social development and work/study habits. The Short Form of the ACLSA has been tested for reliability using Cronbach's alpha. The alpha coefficient for this survey was 0.86, which is in the reliable range.

Calculations of youth "mastery"<sup>3</sup> of preparedness for independent living indicate that 20% of the youth scored in the "mastery" range. See Attachment A for a complete listing of responses for each item on the ACLSA. Interestingly, comparison of ACLSA scores and participation in Independent Living training did not appear to have a strong relationship. Similar percents of youth who took Independent Living training scored in the mastery range on the ACLSA compared to youth who did not take IL training (22% and 23.5% respectively).

### Exit Plan:

A majority of the youth (80%) said they know where they will live when they leave care. The most common plans are to live in their own apartment (19%), with a friend (14%), and with relatives (7%).

Many of the youth (86%) have plans for education after they leave care. Of those with education plans, 44% hope to earn a bachelor's or higher degree, 23% hope to earn an associates degree, 20% hope to get their high school diploma or GED, and 18% plan to gain vocational training (youth may have answered yes to more than one goal). Over three-fourths (80%) of the youth said they have employment plans for after they leave out-of-home care.

Most youth either have, or expect to have, important personal documents by the time they leave care (see Table 7).

**Table 8.  
Concrete Youth Needs**

	Youth have now	Youth expect to have at exit	Youth do not expect to have at exit
Driver license	11%	55%	28%
Photo ID	82%	17%	1%
SS Card	75%	21.5%	2%
Birth Cert.	70%	24%	2%
Medical Ins.	47%	34%	10%
Dental Ins.	45%	34%	11%
Bank acct.	49%	36%	8%
Library Card	61%	17%	21%

<sup>3</sup> "Mastery" on the ACLSA- short form is calculated using the percentage of questions answered at the highest possible level that is over 74%.

### Social Worker Interview

A 93% completed interview rate was achieved with the social workers. The purpose of this interview is to obtain placement, maltreatment and service information about the youth in this study as well as information on the youth's preparedness to exit care. The Washington State Institutional Review Board requires that we obtain permission from the youth to interview their social worker for the study; 266 (88%) youth provided this permission. A majority of the possible social worker interviews were completed (247/266, or 93%) with 137 different workers. Some social workers had more than one study youth on their caseload. The percentages in this section will be based on a total of 247 youth.

Almost three-fourths (73%) of the youth interviewed for this study were dependents of the State of Washington at the time their social workers were interviewed. A dependent child is someone who is a ward of the state due to: abandonment; abuse or neglect as defined in chapter [26.44](#) RCW by a person legally responsible for the care of the child; or has no parent, guardian, or custodian capable of adequately caring for the child, such that the child is in circumstances which constitute a danger of substantial damage to the child's psychological or physical development. The remaining quarter of the youth fit into the following legal categories: 17% were 18

years old at the time their social worker was interviewed, 7% were legally free from both parents, and 2% were CHINS (Child in Need of Services).

**Maltreatment History:**

All but 6% (15) of the youth in our study were victims of child abuse or neglect. Emotional maltreatment and physical neglect are the most common types of maltreatment experienced by youth. Table 8 shows the percent of youth who experienced each type of maltreatment.

**Table 9.  
Maltreatment Experienced by Youth**

Type of Maltreatment*	Percent (N=247)
Emotional Abuse	81%
Lack of Supervision	75%
Physical Neglect	73%
Physical Abuse	64%
Failure to Provide	64%
Sexual Abuse	51%
Abandonment	52%
Medical Neglect	40%

\*Maltreatment categories are not mutually exclusive, youth may have experienced more than one type of maltreatment.

**Placement/Social Worker**

**Experience:**

The youth and their social workers were in close agreement about the number of placements for youth. Social workers report that 30% of the youth experienced 1-3 placements, 33% experienced 4-9 placements, and 31% experienced ten or more. According to social workers, 78% of the youth have a positive relationship with their foster parents, 16% a fair relationship, and 5% of the youth are thought to have a

poor relationship with their foster parents. Most social workers (80%) report visiting youth in placement every 90 days. This is higher than the frequency of visits that youth report (51% of youth in foster care and 59% of youth in group care report social worker visits every 90 days). It is unclear why there is a difference in opinion on the frequency of social worker visits.

**Education:**

Social workers indicate that 79% of the youth were in school at the time of the interview, 10% already have a GED or High School diploma, and the other 11% were not in school for different reasons (dropped out, expelled, or are transitioning between schools).

**Mental Health and Services:**

According to social workers, over one-half (60% or 148) of the youth have a mental illness or suffer from mental health problems and one-third of the youth have a clinical DSM diagnosis. More than one-half (57%) of the youth with mental health problems received counseling within the year prior to the interview.

According to their social worker, the youth received a variety of other services during the year prior to the interview (see Table 9 for services received).



**Table 10.**  
**Services Youth Received in Prior Year**

Service	Percent
Independent Living Training	83%
Mental Health Services	75%
IL funding	41%
Drug/Alcohol Treatment	35%
Group Care	33%
SSI/SSA	27%
After Care	14%
Counseling	13%
School scholarship	5%

### **Independent Living:**

Considering the youth on their caseload, social workers think that 70% of the 17 year olds are not prepared to live independently, although they indicate that 80% of the youth were involved with Independent Living services at the time of the interview (only 61% of the youth report participating in IL services). Social workers report that Independent Living services are readily available to 71% of the youth. Over two-thirds (68%) of the social workers think that the Independent Living services in their area are good (25% said “excellent”, 42% “good”, 17% said fair, and 3% said poor).

Social workers considered positive attributes the youth possessed that could help them successfully transition to independence. The majority of social workers gave their youth low scores for successful transition based on these attributes. Table 10 identifies the percentage of youth thought to possess each attribute.

**Table 11.**  
**Positive Youth Attribute**

Youth’s Attribute	Percent
Communication Skills	20%
Intelligence	36%
Personality	52%
Support Network	24%
Work or Volunteer experience	23%
Maturity	2%
Attitude	14%
Motivation	25%
Goal Oriented	11%
Resilient	20%
Lack of Obstacles	6%
Use of Resources	14%
Realistic expectations	11%
Accepts Responsibilities	16%
Academic Achievement	16%
Good Decisions	11%
Independence	9%
Attractive	6%
Self-esteem	15%
Social Skills	15%
Other	13%

### **Exit Plan:**

Social workers report that 66% of the youth have housing plans for after they leave care (80% of the youth report having housing plans). Table 11, shows the percent of youth (according to social workers) with plans for each of the listed living situations.

**Table 12.**  
**Housing Plans for Youth**

Youth Plan to Live:	Percent
On their own w/ friends	23%
Biological family/relatives	18%
Foster family	8%
College Dorm	6%
Job Corps	4%
Military	4%
Supervised IL Home	2%
Other* location	2%
Don’t know/ no plans	34%

\* Other includes a shelter, mother-baby home and traveling abroad.

Finally, social workers considered how likely the youth on their caseload are to transition successfully to independence. One-half (51%) of the social workers said the youth is likely, 35% said somewhat likely, and 13% said the youth is not at all likely to transition to independence successfully. Table 12 shows a comparison between youth, social worker and ACLSA responses for youth preparedness for living independently.

**Table 12.**  
**Youth Preparedness for Living Independently**

Youth	Social Worker	ACLSA
44% Very well prepared 46% somewhat prepared 9% Not at all prepared 68% IL classes made a difference for them.	51% likely 35% somewhat likely, 13% not at all likely to transition to independence successfully.	20% mastery of IL skills

## Summary

Interviews were completed with 7 out of 10 eligible youth. Most are Caucasian (59%), with the next highest group reporting as mixed race (30%). Most youth were in high school at the time of the interview (82%) although less than half expect to graduate by the time they leave foster/group care. Over half of the youth were placed before age 12 (57%) and were therefore in long term foster care. Youth who remain in care longer tend to have more placements than those in care a short time. In addition to multiple placements many youth also had multiple workers.

### *Placement Experiences:*

Of all the places youth have lived, most think their best living situation has been in foster care. A difference in perception was found between youth and their social workers about frequency of social worker visits; however, most youth think the frequency of visits was enough and plan to call if they need help in the future.

### *Risk Behaviors:*

Half of the foster youth smoke. This is close to twice as many as the American Lung Association estimate of high school aged youth. One-third use alcohol and one-fifth use marijuana at least monthly. In the three months preceding the interview, one-fifth of the youth report physical fights, one-third carried a weapon, and one-fifth threatened someone with a weapon. Two-thirds of the youth report they had been arrested

(compared to 8% in general population), and one-third have clinical level depressive symptoms (compared to 27% in the general population of youth).

Length of time in care and number of placements had little effect on risk behaviors except for physical fighting. Youth in care longer and those with multiple placements had higher rates of physical aggression. Racial/ethnic differences with risk behaviors are minimal except for sexual activity and pregnancy. Minority youth report more sexual activity than their white counterparts and report significantly more pregnancies than do Caucasians.

### *Sexual Activity and Pregnancy:*

Sexual activity is high for this group (71%) compared to the national average of 29 to 60% (depending on the source). Most of the youth reporting sexual activity also report use of birth control (70%). Yet nearly one-third of the females had at least one pregnancy, and 10% have a child. This is higher than national estimates (Planned Parenthood estimates that one in ten teens have been pregnant). One in ten of all youth report contracting a sexually transmitted disease.

### *Services:*

Most youth (9 in 10) received mental health counseling while in care, and about one-half drug/alcohol counseling – three-fourths of those using drug/alcohol had previously received counseling.

*Social Support:*

A majority of youth have a relationship with their biological family, and most also have a relationship with extended family members. Almost all youth have a positive relationship with an adult.

*Preparation for Living Independently:*

Less than half (44%) of the youth feel well prepared to live on their own following emancipation. Two-thirds took Independent Living classes, and half of these were involved less than six months. The ACLSA identifies one-fifth of the youth as prepared to live independently. Youth identified skills they are still lacking including money management, housing, and job skills. Eighty percent of the youth indicate they have a plan for housing and employment upon exit. Education is a priority for most of these youth with 86% indicating they want to continue their education following emancipation.

Youth in foster care have higher rates of arrest, pregnancy, depressive symptoms and smoking than the general population of youth. Additionally, foster youth are not perceived as prepared to live independently at emancipation. Services designed to address these needs do not appear to be as effective as they should be to prepare foster youth for independence. Adjusting services to achieve better youth outcomes (i.e., reduce pregnancy, smoking, and drug/alcohol use, and increase education, and job preparation) is needed.

The next annual report will present outcomes for these same youth once they are out of care and living on their own. This should provide some additional direction for services and programs with foster youth.

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## Attachment A – ACLSA Short Form

	ACLSA Short Form Items	Not really like me	Like me	Very much like me
1.	I ask questions to make sure I understand something someone has said.	9%	46%	45%
2.	I can explain the education or training needed for my career options	17%	50%	33%
*3.	I can name three ways to find out about job openings	8%	36%	55%
4.	I can explain why good job references are important	11%	35%	54%
5.	I think about how my choices now affect my future a year or more from now.	9%	40%	51%
*6.	I get help if my feelings bother me	24%	43%	32%
*7.	I deal with anger without using violence.	13%	38%	48%
*8.	I know how to wash my clothes according to the label (for example, hand wash, dry clean, cold water)	5%	24%	72%
*9.	I fix breakfast, lunch, or dinner	15%	27%	59%
10.	I follow the basic fire prevention and safety rules for where I live	10%	37%	53%
11.	I can contact places around where I live to get information on sex or pregnancy	10%	32%	58%
12.	I can explain how to establish and maintain a good credit rating	43%	31%	26%
*13.	I can name two ways to save money on things I buy	6%	35%	60%
14.	I talk over problems with a friend	13%	39%	48%
15.	I talk with an adult I feel close to	10%	44%	46%
*16.	I am polite to others	1%	37%	61%
*17.	I respect other people's ways of looking at things, their lifestyles, and their attitudes	2%	35%	64%
18.	I look over my work for mistakes	16%	52%	32%
19.	I prepare for exams and presentations	31%	44%	25%
20.	I use the library, newspaper, phone book, or other resources to get information	15%	38%	47%

- \*Does not add to 100% due to rounding.
- "mastery" is calculated using the percentage of questions answered at the highest possible level over 74%