

Employment

As reported in Table 9, the predictors accounted for nearly 30 percent of the variance in the employment outcome ($R^2=.301$), which is typical for this type of regression. The unstandardized regression coefficients (b) from Table 9 provide estimates of the percentage point increase or decrease in the likelihood of obtaining a particular outcome, such as an employment outcome, that is associated with a particular characteristic, holding all other factors constant. For example, older youth (age 17 and older) were 8.0 percentage points ($b=0.080$) more likely to get a job than were younger youth (under age 17, the comparison group). Tenure in the program was also significantly associated with improved likelihood of attaining an employment outcome. Youth who remained in the program 4–6 quarters were 19 percentage points more likely to get a job than those who were in the program 3 or fewer quarters. Moreover, those youth who remained in the program 7–9 quarters had a probability of obtaining a job that was nearly 35 percentage points higher than those who were in the program 3 or fewer quarters.

Analyses showed that race/ethnicity did not significantly affect the likelihood of a youth obtaining a job; youth who were white, black, Hispanic, or of another race/ethnicity did not differ significantly in their attainment of job outcomes. For schooling status at intake, only youth who were in postsecondary school differed significantly in their attainment of job outcomes from the attainment rates of high school youth. Participants who were in postsecondary school at entry were just over 17 percent more likely than youth in high school at entry to get a job while in the program.

Additionally, regression analyses demonstrated that youth in independent living were nearly 9 percentage points more likely to obtain a job than youth in stable housing at entry. It is not immediately apparent why this should be the case. Foster and parenting status were not associated significantly with employment.

Regressions showed that youth who received particular services were significantly more likely to attain a job than youth who did not receive these services. Specifically, those youth who received job preparation services had a probability of obtaining a job that was 10 percentage points higher than those who did not. Those youth who received college preparation services also had the probability of obtaining a job 11 percentage points higher, and although the link between college preparatory services and job attainment is not intuitive, the relationship was

statistically significant. Income support service also was found to have a positive impact on employment; those youth receiving income support had a probability of obtaining a job that was 8 percentage points higher than those who did not. Finally, receipt of substance abuse services was associated with a 16 percentage point lower likelihood of attaining a job, although this is likely because substance abuse problems may interfere with obtaining and maintaining employment.

GED/Diploma

As reported in Table 9, the predictors accounted for nearly 26 percent of the variance in the GED/Diploma outcome ($R^2=.256$). The regression results for obtaining a diploma or GED are fairly consistent with those for obtaining a job. Not surprisingly, youth age 17 and older had over an 8 percentage point higher probability of obtaining a diploma or GED than youth under 17. Moreover, tenure in the program also significantly increased the likelihood of getting a diploma or GED. Those youth who were in the program for 7–9 quarters had a probability of obtaining a diploma or GED that was nearly 10 percentage points higher than youth who were in the program for 3 or fewer quarters. Males and females did not differ significantly in their attainment rates of diplomas and GEDs, nor did participants of different racial categories.

As would be expected, high school dropouts were significantly less likely to obtain a diploma or GED than youth who were in high school at intake; those who had dropped out of high school had a 12-percentage-point lower probability of obtaining a GED or diploma than participants who were in high school at entry. Although it is not immediately apparent why, youth in independent living arrangements at entry were nearly 10 percentage points less likely to get a diploma or GED than youth who were in stable housing at entry. This is in contrast to the result for the employment outcome regression, where youth in independent living arrangements were more likely than youth in stable housing to get a job.

Although it is not apparent why, those youth who received parenting classes had a 15 percentage point higher probability of obtaining a diploma or GED than those youth who did not receive this service. It is possible that receiving parenting services is serving as a proxy for some other characteristic, such as a higher motivation level to succeed. As with the regression for employment outcomes, youth who received income support services were more likely to obtain a diploma or GED than those who did not; the probability of receiving a diploma or GED

was nearly 28 percentage points higher for youth who received this service than for those who did not.

Postsecondary Enrollment

As reported in Table 9, the predictors accounted for nearly 23 percent of the variance in the postsecondary enrollment outcome ($R^2=.226$). As shown in Table 9, a number of factors were significantly related to a participant's chances of beginning a postsecondary education, all other factors held constant. For example, enrollment for 7 or more quarters significantly increased a participant's probability of entering postsecondary school by 12 percentage points compared to enrollment for 3 or fewer quarters. Age, gender, and race or ethnicity did not have a statistically significant effect on whether or not a youth entered postsecondary school, holding all other factors constant.

As would be expected, youth who had dropped out of high school at entry were significantly less likely to enter postsecondary school than those youth who were enrolled in high school at entry. Specifically, youth who had dropped out of high school were nearly 7 percentage points less likely to begin postsecondary school than were youth who had been in high school at entry.

In terms of services, those youth who received college preparatory services were 7 percentage points more likely to enter postsecondary school than similar youth who did not receive such services. Further, youth who received income support had a 15 percentage point higher probability of enrolling in postsecondary education. Those who received other services, which included transportation and childcare, had their probability of enrollment in postsecondary education increased by 6 percentage points than those who did not.

Any Positive Outcome

As reported in Table 9, the predictors accounted for nearly 32 percent of the variance in any positive outcome ($R^2=.318$). Gender and race or ethnicity were not associated with achieving any positive outcome. In contrast, youth age 17 and older were 13 percentage points more likely to achieve any positive outcome than youth under age 17. Remaining in the program for 4–6 quarters was associated with an 18 percentage-point higher probability of achieving a positive outcome than for youth in the program for 3 or fewer quarters. Youth who remained in the program for 7 or more quarters had a 31 percentage-point increase in the probability of

achieving a positive outcome than youth who had been in the program for 3 or fewer quarters. It is noteworthy that, holding all other factors constant, the longer youth remained in the program, the higher their likelihood of obtaining a positive outcome. In terms of services, job preparation and income support services were shown to significantly increase a participant's likelihood to obtain a positive outcome by approximately 16 and 14 percentage points, respectively. Lastly, participants who received substance abuse services were approximately 17 percentage points less likely to attain a positive outcome than youth who did not receive such services.

IV. Observations and Lessons Learned across Sites

Although the sites operated within a common framework, each brought its own interpretation to improving transition outcomes through provision of services. Lead service providers represented a mix of child welfare, workforce development, and education providers. The characteristics of the youth served varied among the sites. These sites offer a unique opportunity for learning about practices that show promise and the many challenges involved in helping youth from foster care make the difficult transition from the child welfare system to independent living and adulthood. Following are some observations about these challenges and practices organized around some common themes and a common framework of service.

Staff Relationships with the Youth—We have deliberately listed this first. According to youth focus groups, no single program component rose to the level of importance in the young person's life than having a caring adult who guided and supported the youth through this transition period. One of the youth in the focus group said, "I never had people care about me this much. I would definitely not be in college if it were not for this program." This is not new information, and it is consistent with the evolving definition of and focus within child welfare of the importance of permanent lifelong relationships for youth exiting the foster care system. In each of the first two years of the evaluation, we held focus groups with youth at each site. We asked the youth what they valued most about the programs. Overwhelmingly, the participants said that it was the individual who worked most directly with them.

The staff was clearly more than case managers. The youth workers assisted the young people in developing and implementing their life plan and in accessing services, and they served as mentors. Interestingly, the staff/youth relationships were not limited to the youth's designated

youth specialist. Many of the youth commented about how they felt they could talk with any of the staff and that the entire staff was there to help them.

Several of the sites employ alumni of foster care. For example, in Detroit and Los Angeles, peer advocates help strengthen the connection between youth and project staff. The positive connection between the project participants and the staff can be summarized in a few words: size (relatively low caseloads), structure, mentoring, motivation, and accessibility.

Some of the staff comments reinforce the strength of these relationships. A number noted that many of the youth leave the program, often for months at a time, but seem to find their way back when they are struggling or need some assistance. Unlike traditional child welfare services, which are time-limited, this model is what some would refer to as a recovery model where you return to obtain services when you need them.

Program Design and Services—To their credit, none of these programs have remained static. As they gained experience in working with the youth, they have made changes to their programs. The biggest change that several of the sites made was to move away from a cohort approach to serving youth to a more individualized, open-entry/open-exit approach. Several of the programs, most notably New York and Los Angeles, had designed their programs so that youth would follow a structured program model of classes and activities. The sites found that this didn't work well. The youth who come to them have a multitude of needs and are at very different places, both academically and emotionally. Sites found that they had to individualize the services provided to youth.

A number of sites have struggled with the work preparation component of their program. For example, after the first year, Chicago found that the in-school mentors were not paying enough attention to job preparation activities. As a result, the site added a career exploration and preparation curriculum, and each youth is guaranteed a summer job as well as opportunities for internships. Houston has continued to refine its job-readiness *Blueprint* program. The Houston site has tried to address the youth's inconsistent attendance by making it a "job" where youth are paid for on-time and consistent attendance. Still, staff members feel that the program needs further refinement and improvement. Incentives are also an important part of New York's programs. Youth who reach specific milestones are rewarded.

The Detroit site has struggled with its GED preparation program as staff members found that many youth were not prepared to pass the GED exam. Over the past year, they restructured their program and made staffing changes to individualize the GED preparation. As a result, the staff reports that it is seeing progress in the educational attainment of the youth, although many are still not ready to take and pass the GED test.

Houston, in particular, prides itself on being a youth-driven program and seeks the input of its participants in all aspects of the services and activities provided at the Center. A youth leadership group meets regularly to discuss operations at the Center and to make recommendations. Other sites also seek youth input although not in as formal approach as Houston.

Program Staffing—Program staffing across the sites has remained remarkably stable, given the challenging nature of the work and the relatively low pay. All the sites report that many, if not all, of the initial staff are still with the program. Stability in staffing is important for relationship development with the youth, and it is a testament to the good decisions that sites have made regarding staffing that there has been limited turnover. The three sites with the fewest staffing changes were Houston, New York, and the Community Build site in Los Angeles. Both the Chicago and the Los Angeles Foothill sites have increased their staff over the past year. In Chicago, the staffing increases occurred at ASN in response to the growing number of youth who had finished the alternative school and were in need of postsecondary support and services. Foothill increased its staff in order to provide more individualized attention to the youth.

Sites have also given added attention to staff development, some more than others. For instance, during the second year, Houston saw that more of the youth coming into the program had anger management issues that the staff was not well equipped to address. In response, project leadership arranged for a series of staff development sessions on how to address this issue. The leadership noted that it wished it had foreseen the need for this training earlier, a lesson applicable to all the sites.

Several of the sites, notably Detroit, have hired alumni from foster care to assist with the program. Sites have found that these alumni relate particularly well to the program participants, and, although these staff serve different roles, they are particularly effective at guiding new

participants through the enrollment process and explaining the services the program has to offer.

Program Partnerships/Collaborations across Agencies—Three of the five program providers (Detroit, Los Angeles, and New York City) have their deepest institutional experience in employment and training or in youth development. In Chicago, the program agency is an association of alternative schools, experienced in youth employment, but bringing a principal focus on education. Only one site, Houston, is a child welfare program provider, although the entity funding the project is the state workforce agency. Thus, for four of the program providers, developing a relationship to the child welfare system is critical both for accessing child welfare funds and coordinating additional services. These relationships, for the most part, appear to have been difficult to build, particularly as they relate to cross-agency coordination of services. The sites report that they have been successful in accessing the resources that are available to the youth through the Chafee funds. There is little routine coordination between child welfare caseworkers and project staff, however.

On the other hand, while access to employment and training resources seems to have been more direct for the four agencies with deeper experience and contacts in that arena, even Houston seems to have done pretty well, primarily through the advocacy of the state-based Texas Workforce Commission.

The sites report that they have been successful in accessing the Chafee resources available to youth. Success facilitated by strong interagency relationships.

Relationships between agencies did not always run smoothly, however. In New York City, the relationship between the project and the city's Administration for Children Services (ACS) was particularly strained because of the long period of time it took for the city to award the contract and program transition issues. Over the last year, though, the relationship has improved. Last year, youth from the program participated in an internship program sponsored by the child welfare agency and staff now participates in cross-agency/service provider meetings sponsored by ACS.

Interestingly, even though Chicago's alternative schools receive funding from the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) for educating youth from foster care, the relationship

among the schools, ASN, and DCFS is not particularly strong, and for the most part, the project staff and the caseworkers have little contact. This is true at most of the sites: there is little coordination between child welfare caseworkers and project staff.

Houston clearly has an advantage in this regard as their staff serve as the child welfare transition caseworkers as well as the project staff. They have, however, experienced some difficulties in defining and solidifying their relationship with the local WorkSource Center, Houston's One-Stop Career Center system.

Sites have developed some notable partnerships in other areas. For example, the Los Angeles Foothill site has a relationship with the local office of Casey Family Programs, allowing the youth to participate in both programs. Houston has been successful in tapping into the services provided by the local mental health agency, which sends staff to the Center to work with the youth, individually or in groups. Community Build, which has always housed multiple service providers, recently entered into an agreement with the local mental health agency to increase its presence and services at the Center. A few of the sites have established relationships with the Job Corps. This would seem to be a good option for youth, particularly the many who have difficulty finding housing. Yet, all the sites report that few youth want to participate in the Job Corps as they find the structure too difficult after their experiences with the regimen of the child welfare system.

Sites have also had some success in establishing relationships with the juvenile justice system. A number of youth in foster care have been involved in the juvenile justice system. Several of the sites, including Houston and Los Angeles Community Build, have been successful in having a probation officer at their site. Community Build also provides youth from care with legal services.

Houston and Community Build (Los Angeles), as well as Chicago, also have developed good relationships with local community colleges. These seem to be particularly productive partnerships as community colleges generally are able to provide youth with extra supports they may need to successfully continue their education.

Job Placement and Follow-up—Sites have had little difficulty in finding entry-level jobs for youth. Detroit, with the highest unemployment rate of any of the sites, reports that there are still

entry-level jobs available. Job placement specialists at the sites work directly with employers and provide post-placement follow-up and support to both employers and to the young people. These specialists tended to develop relationships with specific employers in the community and have been able to make multiple placements with the employers. In the first two years, Chicago relied on the alternative school staff and other programs it operated for job placements. This past year, however, a job placement specialist was hired to work for the project.

Two larger issues center on job placement. First, many of the youth are unprepared for work, even for part-time employment. Second, many, if not most, of the placements are short-lived. We acknowledge that young people typically move from job to job before settling in a career track. The fact that the youth tend not to keep their first job is not, therefore, the major concern. Rather, it is the fact that the sites have continued to tell us how unprepared the youth are for work, in spite of the work-readiness program offerings of the sites. One way that sites have tried to address this issue is through their job developers, who follow up with the employers and the youth on a regular basis to try to resolve issues while the young person is still employed. Internships and summer employment are a part of the program offerings across the sites, and they serve as a way to introduce youth to work. It appears that more needs to be done so that the first job is a positive experience for both young worker and the employer.

Management Information Systems (MIS)—DOL instituted quarterly reporting from the sites. These reports covered characteristics of the youth, activities, and outcomes. In addition, performance measures were established around placements in employment and postsecondary education; attainment of a high school, occupational, or postsecondary credential; and retention in placements six months after the placement. Sites had a great deal of difficulty capturing the data accurately. The sites lacked a common system for capturing the information, as well as a complete understanding of how the data elements were defined. Further, there was considerable confusion around the definition of the outcome measures; as a result, the sites did not capture every outcome possibility, particularly as it relates to part-time work. Staff from all sites indicated that the outcomes and measures did not fully reflect the progress and interim accomplishments of the youth. Casey Family Programs is addressing this issue. It has developed an Internet-based system that will capture more complete service and outcome data.

V. Conclusions

We have had the opportunity to follow these projects from their beginning in late 2005 through our last phone interviews in September 2007. These sites have taught us, the evaluators, much about the needs of this population and how to address them. This evaluation was always intended to be instructive to state and local policymakers and practitioners across the many systems who touch the lives of these youth. We offer the following conclusions that sum up what we have learned. We hope they will serve as useful advice to individuals who are part of insuring a successful transition of youth from foster care to productive adulthood.

A multisystem approach is needed, as no single agency can meet all needs. Not surprisingly, the sites have come to understand that the best approach to working with this population is a multisystem one. This approach is especially important to help youth navigate the rocky waters of transition. Many youth exiting foster care lack both the skills and maturity to be successful in the adult workforce because they have not had employment role models while growing up and the employment connections that family can sometimes provide. However, because they must provide for themselves (and in many cases for their own children or younger siblings), they need full-time employment for survival. They need an integrated multisystem wraparound approach to support them while they acquire the skills necessary for succeeding in the adult workforce.

Clearly, the most significant challenges across the sites—housing, physical and mental health, transportation, substance abuse, teen parenting, low academic skills, and effective legal representation for youth—require more partnerships than the sites have generally been able to create. Partnerships are critical design elements for these types of programs and, as such, need to be part of the original program plans. Many of these relationships were formed after the programs were launched. Some never came to fruition.

Communities seeking to begin similar programs or improve existing programs for youth from foster care are advised to take note of the experience of these sites and make sure that at least the following critical partners are in alignment and in agreement about how they will collectively serve this population of youth: child welfare, secondary and postsecondary education, workforce development (both One-Stop Career Centers and youth service providers), physical and mental health care providers, transportation, juvenile justice, and other legal advocacy providers. To the

greatest extent possible, it is recommended that multiple providers be co-located in a single location, as they are in Houston, at The Door in New York City, and at Community Build in Los Angeles.

Staffing, including specialists who work directly with the youth, is resource-intensive but highly valued by the youth. As noted earlier, focus groups of youth were conducted in each of the first two years that sites were visited and youth were asked what they liked most about the program. Their first response was the project staff, particularly their youth worker. These were not case managers in the traditional sense but rather mentors, who model behavior for the young people, provide unconditional support, maintain high expectations, and expect them to stay on track. Further, some sites employ former alumni of care. Youth participants are encouraged to know there are individuals who have shared their experiences and will not give up on them. For their part, the staff noted that they see many of the youth “disappear” for periods of time but then come back when they need help, attesting to the value of these relationships. These five sites have gone a long way in creating a practice model that combines the roles of social worker, counselor, mentor, navigator, teacher, and listener.

Not surprisingly, staffing was the biggest cost for most sites. Houston was able to mitigate this expense because it also administers the state-funded Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) program for youth transitioning out of foster care. The youth transition counselors under the PAL program served a dual role, allowing their staffing costs to be absorbed by the PAL program. This model holds promise for other communities that want to implement similar programs or merely want to improve how they deliver transition services through their child welfare systems.

The sites lacked complete data and comprehensive outcome measures. The sites were unanimous in observing that the DOL data reporting system was confusing at best and that the measures did not fully reflect youth outcomes, particularly around part-time employment and milestones in the youth’s development. DOL launched the program quickly, and few people in the employment field are familiar with the unique needs of youth in foster care. Performance measures for demonstration projects such as these should capture the progress of the youth and reflect the interest and needs of both the child welfare and workforce development systems.

In retrospect, sites would have benefited from having a comprehensive management information system that captured individual youth characteristics,

Highlighted practices from across the sites:

- Creating a center where youth feel comfortable and where a variety of services are available on site, rather than through referrals.
- Focusing on mental health by providing additional training for staff and more services to youth on site.
- Implementing a youth development approach where youth are involved in the design and operation of the center.
- Sticking with the youth as they come and go from the program when they are in need of assistance.
- Focusing on asset building by developing the youth's ability to live independently.
- Identifying job developers who place youth in jobs and who work closely with the employer and the youth to provide post-placement follow-up and support.
- Providing paid work experience as part of a work-readiness program.

services, and activities provided, including referrals to other agencies, milestones, and completion of activities, as well as outcomes. This issue is being addressed with the sites' move to Casey Family Programs funding and support. Casey Family Programs has provided the sites with a comprehensive system, developed in consultation with the sites, and has provided extensive training in how to use it. This is an important lesson for future demonstration and new program implementation efforts. Good data inform work, are a vehicle for tracking and following up on individual progress, and are needed to sell the program to the community and to prospective funders.

Some program models are better defined than others, and these tended to be more successful in leveraging other services. Programs that start out as demonstration projects, such as these, use what they learn to refine and improve their service models. All of the sites have done this, as noted above. After more than two years of programming, the program model needs clarification. What are the program components? How do youth move from one component to another? What does completion look like? Of the sites, New York, Los Angeles (particularly Community Build), and perhaps Houston seem the farthest along in this regard. Interestingly enough, of all the sites, both Los Angeles Community Build and the New York City site are located within existing youth service providers, allowing the youth-from-care participants to also take advantage of the range of services and activities that are available at the facility. Locating these programs within existing agencies seems to provide benefits both in leveraging resources and in helping to structure and define the programs.

What constitutes formal program completion should be defined for all programs. Sites continue to explore the criteria for closing a case, and as a result, sites reported few youth exiting their programs. Typically, youth exit the program when they leave the area or reach an age when he or she can no longer be served. Program completion should be a goal and a milestone for youth that is defined and recognized through a graduation ceremony of some sort or a certificate of completion.

Program completion or exit should not mean that the young people who exit the program can no longer be served. As noted in the report, youth frequently leave the program for extended periods and then come back. Even youth who successfully leave the program for a job or full-time education or training might benefit from services after they formally terminate their participation. Thus, provision should be made for youth to retain access to the program, even after their formal participation ends. Both Houston and Detroit support peer groups of program alumni that come together periodically to learn about resources and for peer support. In addition, Detroit produces a newsletter for its former program participants. Alumni groups show promise as a way to transition youth away from the program supports that they have grown used to as well as to address some of the unmet permanency and relational needs these youth frequently experience.

Sites value and need well-defined, intensive technical assistance. Sites unanimously found little value, aside from encouragement, in the technical assistance provided through DOL. Sustained technical assistance was inconsistent—it started and stopped and started again—and the resources weren't sufficient to support in-depth assistance. In addition, most of the local service providers had no, or limited, experience working with this population of youth and with the child welfare system. DOL did not have technical experts with sufficient background in the child welfare system. DOL's federal partner at the Department of Health and Human Services, however, might have been the appropriate source for providing this type of assistance to the sites.

All the sites noted that they were open to a more substantial level of technical assistance and were encouraged by the help that is beginning to come from Casey Family Programs. The sites particularly found value in the peer learning opportunities.

Technical assistance with this type of project is critical and should be a required part of the partnership agreement between the funder and the sites. Sites need to have an important role in determining what kind of technical assistance will be most useful for them, beginning with an inventory of the existing resources and expertise available locally and identification of gaps. The assistance should include a focus on the many challenges the young people who have been in foster care face as they struggle to become independent and productive. An effective technical assistance strategy is especially important for replicating the promising approaches and for sustaining the projects. Future technical assistance elements should be customized for each site and combined with the opportunity for cross-site learning.

Sustainability is an elusive goal. None of the sites have yet created a credible plan for sustainability. This was evidenced by the significant jolt that occurred within all of the sites when DOL discontinued their funding support. This action took the sites by surprise, and many were still refining their model. Although Casey Family Programs has assumed funding, few sites have taken the opportunity to generate a sustainability plan. This plan should include how the program will highlight its efforts in the community and across the state, if not nationally. Specifically, the role of public and private partnerships, possible new funding sources, and fund-raising options need to be articulated in this plan.

States clearly have a role in this type of program, but this role was inconsistent across the sites. States supported the sites in terms of funding and in their interest in seeing the programs succeed. In several of the states, these projects have informed state policy. For example, Illinois and Michigan state workforce development agencies are now more focused on the foster care population of youth, and they are pursuing avenues for replication across the state. Yet, with the exception of Texas, it is hard to see how these projects have brought the child welfare and workforce systems together in a truly collaborative way. In a few of the states, while Chafee funding contributed to the matching funding, the state public welfare agency was largely a silent partner. In New York, the state and local child welfare agencies held the grant relationship with the project, and workforce development agencies at both the state and local levels were not a part of the equation. Texas showed the most progress in this regard. Texas has the benefit of state legislation to support their efforts and a strong commitment on the part of the leaders in both state agencies to work together.

This has been one of the more disappointing aspects of these projects. Strong partnerships and leadership at the state level—especially between the workforce development and child welfare agencies, however how these partnerships are organized—can translate into aligning systems and services at the local level. Moreover, it is clear that these local programs need the help of the state to sustain their efforts.

It is not too late. With Casey Family Programs continuing funding for at least another year, states have the opportunity to step up and provide leadership and support. State agencies need to demonstrate to their local areas that state and local agencies can work together effectively to make policies that remove barriers to local level system alignment. The state agencies can jointly provide staff development across agencies and sponsor planning sessions for local partners leading to a better understanding of the different systems and to agreement on how best to coordinate services.

Policy changes in other arenas are needed to ensure success for youth transitioning from foster care. Many times, policies concerning high school graduation requirements, financial aid for postsecondary education, liability for obtaining drivers' licenses, or eligibility for subsidized housing directly affect youth transitioning from foster care and their opportunities for success. For example, without uniformity in policies regarding the transferability of high school credits, many youth in foster care find themselves attending more than four years of high school and still not showing enough credits to graduate. Once they do graduate, many of the youth served at all five sites have their sights set on college, although frequently they have to take remedial (non-credit-bearing) courses or participate in bridge programs to prepare them for a full college load. During this time, they have challenges meeting the criteria for typical college financial aid programs, which often require students to carry a minimum number of credit-bearing courses to receive financial aid. Thus, their opportunities to graduate are reduced.

Strong long-lasting adult relationships are not a “given” for this population, and assisting youth in building these relationships is vital at all stages of their lives. At all sites, several of the individuals interviewed recognized the important role that lasting adult connections can make in the lives of these youth. The lessons from this project should be built into strategic planning for reforms in services to younger children in foster care so they are less likely to reach this stage of their lives without the connections they need for stability and success in their adult lives.

“If we were starting over,” a child welfare official at one of the sites explained, “we would definitely create an expectation that assisting the youth in obtaining stability and permanency in their lives must be a priority.” To an extent, the project staff fills part of this gap and work toward developing “deep and strong” relationships with the youth. Even the best staffs realize, however, that they cannot be there for a young person at all hours of the night, or every weekend. “A family IS there 24-7,” one person noted, “unlike any agency under the sun.” The kind of safety net that only a family or other supportive, lifelong adult relationships can provide can often make the difference as to whether a young person can successfully transition into the adult workplace and take on his or her role as a contributing adult member of the community.

The sites show promise in serving youth in foster care and alumni, but it is too soon to draw conclusions about their success. A number of promising practices have been identified, and the sites have demonstrated flexibility by altering their programs so that they better meet the needs of the youth they serve. Sites are working to meet the multiple needs of this unique client group, whether by addressing academic and workforce preparation deficiencies, by teaching life skills, by providing adult guidance, or by meeting their varied supportive service needs. Yet the data present a mixed picture. Only one of the sites reports a positive outcome for more than half of the participants. Two of the sites report positive outcomes for less than one-third of the youth. As one person noted, “I believe it is wonderful to have good atmosphere, but we also need to have high expectations and service structure delivery. As a group, we need to move beyond the excuses that ‘youth are unreliable’ or ‘youth aren’t capable of coming to a meeting’ and develop systematic plans to address the issues that are affecting success.”

On a more positive note, the data show that the longer youth receive services, the better their outcomes. As an example, 100 percent of the youth who received job preparation services for 7–9 quarters were placed in a job. The site that has operated the longest, Chicago, had the highest rate of positive youth outcomes, while the site that has operated the shortest period of time, New York City, has the lowest rate. We draw from this data that most youth need intensive services over a longer period of time if they are to achieve successful outcomes. This is not surprising given what we know and have learned about this population of youth. Accordingly, if these programs are to achieve lasting success, they must move beyond demonstration projects to stable programs with sustained funding support.

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