Aging Out of Foster Care:

Linking Funding, Organizations and Youth

Master of Community Development
Capstone 2010-2011 |

Capstone Group 2010-2011

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Table of Contents

04 Purpose
05 Definitions
06 Goals
06 Project Plan
07 Project Outline and Abstract
08 Research Method
10 Scholarly Articles
10 Human, Organizational, Physical and Economic Research
10 Human
12 Organizational
15 Physical
20 Economic
24 Diversity & Social Justice in the Aging Out Population
28 Trends in the Aging Out Population
30 Best Practices
CAIO
Achieving Independence Center
Common Ground
37 Interviews
37 Youth Interviews
40 Youth Interviews-Feedback
40 Focus Group Summary
42 Precedents
45 SWOT Analysis
48 Needs Assessment
51 Final Deliverable Opportunities
53 Final Deliverables, Recommendations and Methodology of Implementation
56 Expected Outcomes and Project Limitations
61 Conclusion

Reference

65 Appendix
95 Sources
98 Endnotes

Purpose

Twenty thousand youth age out of foster care each year in the United States.[i] During their stay in foster care, these children are provided with supportive services through foster families, residential living facilities and coverage of basic needs through monetary support allocated by Federal funding. When youth age out of foster care at age 18 they are then expected to support themselves. At this time, youth must make a transition to independent living. Without foster care services, they face obstacles in their transition to employment, further education, and independent living.[ii] Obstacles may include "limited educational attainment, homelessness, unemployment, mental health challenges, poverty, dependence on public assistance, and a lack of positive role models."[iii] Although post-foster care services are available to youth to help transition them to independent living some "youth who transition out of foster care fall through the cracks."[iv] It is imperative to increase access to services for youth in an effort to prevent some of the challenges that youth who aged out may face post foster care.[v]

Definitions

The following definitions help to frame the content in the subsequent pages.

1. **Foster Care:** "24-hour substitute care for children outside of their own home."[vi]
2. **Foster Care Youth**: "A youth on behalf of whom state or local government payments are made."[vii]
3. **Foster Care Funding:** Foster care Funding is a series of federal government and state supported funds that are reserved to help maltreated or abused children.[viii]
4. **Foster Care System:** A network of agencies, organizations and funds to support youth with care outside of their own home.[ix]
5. **Foster Care Agency:** A foster care agency "includes State or territory child welfare agencies or private agencies contracted by the State or territory that place appropriate care from the foster care (or child welfare) system."[x]
6. **Aging Out:** At the age of 18, youth are no longer considered under the care of the state government; they are considered to have "aged out" of the system. [xi]

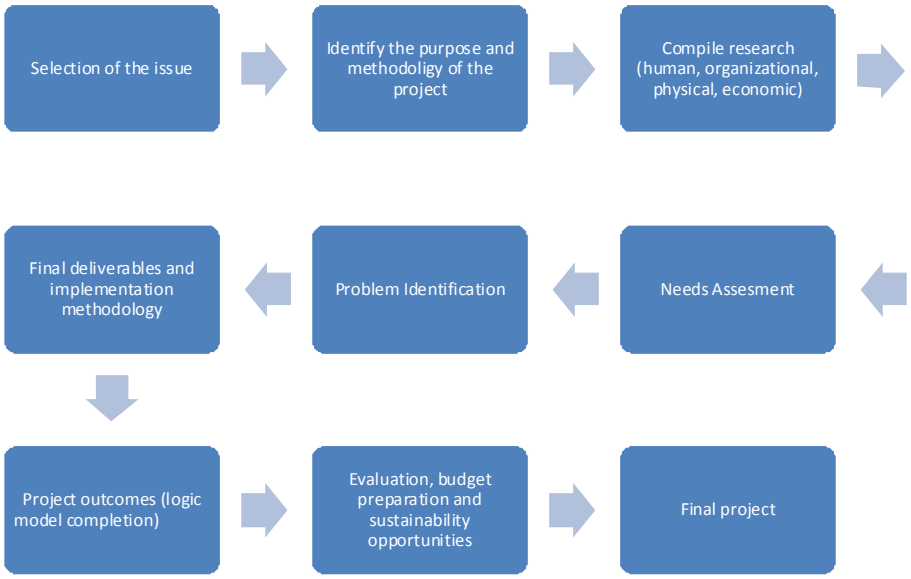
Goals

"Aging Out of Foster Care: Linking Funding, Organizations and Youth" seeks to enhance the lives of those who age out of the foster care system by providing foster care agencies, youth and their families with knowledge to navigate available funding resources and supportive services. To do this, the project investigates two main topics (1) programs that are currently available for foster care children who age out of the system and (2) available funding streams that support aging out of foster care programming.

The intention of the project was to understand the needs and assets of foster care youth who age out of the system. The next step was to propose a new program based on the existing strengths that responds to the needs of the youth. A collaborative process with a Detroit foster care agency (Catholic Social Services of Wayne County) and interviews with foster care parents, foster care youth, and foster care organizations was used to gain the information needed to develop an implementable project. Through this foster care community driven process it became evident that various resources are available for the aging out youth. Yet, the foster care community is unaware of most of the available programs and financial support. Through this engaged research process, the project intention above was defined.

Project Plan

A specific project plan was unknown at the outset of the project; however, a process of research and community engagement was determine to ensure a research driven outcome. The approach follows a path from identification of the issue through final deliverables and outcomes. The table below identifies the steps in the process. (Although the chart shows a linear process, some of the steps were re-tracked based on feedback.)



Action Plan

The plan to build and confirm a project proposal was to use research and have conversations with foster care youth and organizations that can provide first-hand advice as to where information can be shared. What and where is the best way to reach foster care youth who may or may not be working with an organization. Therefore, a series of meetings with aging out foster care youth and Catholic Social Services was an imperative part of the continued research process. The conversations act as a guide as to how to best fulfill information needed and the dissemination process.

Based on these goals, a specific plan of action was created. (See Gant Chart in Appendix). As stated earlier, a series of research tactics and engagements were complete. Based on research and community engagement, a set of basic needs was determined. After the needs were determined more detail regarding what organizations could best service these needs was also planned. The specific outcome was to be determined through the process.

An additional activity was to propose a budget. For the project to be successful, an understanding of the financial resources was needed for the project to operate and to be supported by other organizations was a necessity. Therefore, a budget that takes into

consideration the people and the products involved in running the proposed project was a necessary element. Further, the funding opportunities to support the project were determined in order to prove that there are organizations with funding and priorities that match the end product. Finally, to test the effectiveness of the proposed project, an evaluation was created. A plan for project evaluations was needed to ensure that the project proposed was capable of meeting the intended outcomes.

Research Method

Research was the first step to define the project and was conducted on many levels using both archival (quantitative) and interactive (qualitative) data. The initial archival (quantitative) data collected set the ground for further investigation by raising multiple questions. The questions were then brought to experts in the foster care community. The information learned through interactive research was used to confirm or challenge the archival data previously gathered. This continued to bring more questions to the table that was then research and questioned by the foster care community again. The cyclical processed allowed the project to take an organic and research rich project. Although, the end product of the project was unknown at the beginning, the goal to increase access to resources became clear through the process. Therefore, the potential to meet this need was the product of the research.

In the beginning, the topic, foster care, was researched in depth through existing resources containing statistical data. Through statistics, the group was able to define a population in need – youth who age out of the foster care system. From this point on, all research was based on youth who age out of the system and the needs of this population.

Due to the refinement in focus, another study of statistical information was needed. In addition to the overall statistics, data from the national, state and local level were collected with a focus on youth who age out of the foster care system. The information gathered suggested a need in the Detroit, Michigan area due to the high density of foster care youth in the city. Detroit also provides the opportunity for implementation as it is in close proximity to the researchers and relationship can develop between researchers and the foster care community. In addition to geographic convenience, Detroit is a challenging environment for youth aging out of the system. Not only is Detroit economically devastated, but it also highly segregated creating a tough conditions for youth aging out to seamlessly transition out of foster care support. Although the project focuses on Detroit, the process of research and engagement can be applied to any geographic location.

The next step was to identify organizations in the geographic location that serve the population being researched. The decision making process for which organization to partner with was based on the following factors: proximity to the organization so there could be physical engagement, willingness to meet and share information with students on a regular basis, passionate about helping youth who age out of the system, and a "seasoned" organization with experience and recognition in its field. Lastly, the organization had to be open and willing to help promote a final project with the students. After identifying the partner organization (Catholic Social Services of Wayne County), an analysis was done to compare a select number of organizations with Catholic Social Services of Wayne County. This helped to identify key components of agencies, specializations, available programming, and gaps in service.

The purpose of having a partner organization was to help understand the foster care system in a more detailed manner. The partner organization allowed for contacts and connections to

be made to gain more information. For example, from the partnership with Catholic Social Services, the group was able to conduct a focus group meeting to speak with foster care parents regarding their perception of foster care. The partner organization set up the focus group due to the relationship that already exists with the foster care parents. Through the entirety of the process, much of the information found from the quantitative research (statistics) was confirmed. However, the information provided from the interviews and conversations enhanced the research process with more needs and input from professionals and participants in the foster care industry.

After interviews and various conversations were complete, additional conversations with workers in the field was an important next step. A series of informational interviews with local agencies was completed to gain a better understanding of the foster care environment and the needs experienced by the experts in the field. These informational interviews allowed for a comprehensive assessment of available programming, while gaining personal contacts that was beneficial for future collaboration.

With a more defined goal and a better understanding of the foster care system, the group was able to speak with foster care youth throughout the course of the project. This was a critical step in compiling the data, as it allowed the group to hear the voice of the youth. This process validated findings that youth are disconnected from available programs and funding sources that have the potential to enhance an independent lifestyle. This process proves that both quantitative and qualitative forms of research were needed to set the stage for a program that could truly benefit the needs of the foster care youth.

The next step in the process was to brainstorm solutions to the identified gaps in service. Multiple methods helped to weigh the pros and cons of each solution and broaden the positive outcomes. Potential projects were identified as a result of the research and combinations of these were outlined based on having the highest potential for positive outcomes. Project ideas were then brought to the foster care youth and organizations to gain feedback. From their input a final project was able to develop. The project will be explained in detail throughout the paper.

Scholarly Journal Research

Article I:

Anderson, Gary. *Aging out of the Foster care System: Challenges and Opportunities for the State of Michigan.* Michigan State University, 2003.

This article focused on both the strengths and challenges of the foster care system in the state of Michigan. Anderson refers to the Adoption and foster care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) in his reporting as a tool for data completion on the subject of foster care. In the literature review presented in the article, Anderson speaks to specific obstacles to success for foster care children aging out of the system. Some of these obstacles include: job skills, education and problem solving skills, relationships with caring adults and a need for high quality placements.

Anderson conducted a careful review of aging out programs nationally, but focused on the available resources in Michigan. He speaks to the lack of postsecondary educational opportunities as a key need for foster care youth in Michigan. He states that Michigan does not have a statewide program that specifically addresses this need and that the access to the Tuition Incentive Program is challenging and hard to maneuver.[xii] In looking further at both the needs of foster care children aging out of the system, it is clear that a connection to higher education opportunities is key to success for these children and will need to be addressed in Michigan's program practices.

Additionally, Anderson conducted a comprehensive assessment of program offerings by state and found that Michigan did not offer tutoring programs or support groups for youth. These programs have both been linked to success rates in other states for children aging out of the foster care system and will need to be part of the program offerings in Michigan. With 20,034 children in foster care in 2003 and $6,109,567 allocated to Foster care programming, these programs could be added to the current offerings.[xiii]

The Chaffee programs offered in Michigan that have had positive results and outcomes include: counseling, homeless prevention services, educational support and employment services. Anderson speaks to these successes, but also expresses a need to continue to expand these services and their outreach efforts in order to meet the needs of the youth being served.

Article II:

Baugh, Abonni. *A Population at risk: Youth "Aging out" of the Foster care System and Implications for Extension.*

There have been numerous studies that suggest how to improve the outcomes of youth in foster care, but Eboni Baugh suggests policy change as well. Research has been done that suggest key areas needed to increase the positive outcomes for youth who age out of the foster care system such as education, training, housing options and continued mental and physical health care. This is common to most research, states Baugh; however, the article also suggests collaboration with institutions and communities to create a stronger bond between the youth and their environment.[xiv] For example, Baugh states "that collaborative

relationships with secondary and post secondary educations, health care providers and career counselors, juvenile justice child and family services and other community partners will enhance the effective programming for these youth."[xv] Such suggestions include family and counseling services that focus on financial literacy, budgeting and money management, nutrition, health care access, permanent housing options, career placement, and educational programs.[xvi] All of these programs are learned by experience and must be taught.

Overall, this article provides detailed insight regarding collaboration. The article states that collaborative services, systems and people are needed to provide the most comprehensive effort. Further, the article suggests that it is necessary to create a community of support for the children, not just one place or one program. The article is also quick to point out that youth need to start these habits well in advance of aging out so that they can make the transition much smoother.

Article III:
Time for Reform: Aging Out and on Their Own "More Teens Leaving Foster care without Permanent Family. *"MORE TEENS LEAVING FOSTER CARE WITHOUT A PERMANENT FAMILY, Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 2007.*

This article from the *Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative (JCYOI)*, describes how the current foster care system falls short in providing permanency for children, especially for children aging out of the foster care system. The JCYOI conducted a study involving five focus groups consisting of present and former youth in foster care. The article describes some of the problems that young adults face when leaving foster care without a permanent family support system. The literature review gives reference to the history of permanency in child welfare policy, recommendations for public policy reforms to decrease the number of youth aging out of care by implementing improvements to the federal foster care financing system, along with statistics that show a grim outlook regarding issues such as incarceration, homelessness, and the lack of education."[xvii]

The challenges that youth face when crossing over into adulthood is mentioned in this article. The article reports "for youth without any ongoing support, the outcomes are not positive. *The Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth* and the *Northwest Foster care Alumni Study* conducted in-depth interviews with youth who had been placed in foster care as a result of abuse and neglect and who subsequently exited foster care to live on their own. Both studies found that these youth often struggle to complete their education, have significant physical and mental health problems but few resources to obtain health care, are unemployed or underemployed and face poverty, experience homelessness, and in some cases come into contact with the criminal justice system."[xviii]

Also discussed in this article is the variance of the average length of stay in foster care and aging out from state to state, and some of the causative factors. Also mentioned is the aspect of youth leaving and re-entering the system more than once, the extension of foster care benefits to age 19, 20, and 21, and the problems of having enough funding to continue

providing benefits. They report that "youth in Nebraska stay in care about 2.5 years and young people in Illinois spend approximately 9 years in care on average.

"Some children and youth exit and reenter foster care a number of times. Many variables contribute to longer lengths of stay. Longer average stays in foster care in some states may be a result of a state having increased opportunities for permanent families for some of their foster care population—such as placing younger youth in reunited, kin, adoptive, guardianship, or families—and thus changing the composition of the remaining caseload. Some states have extended foster care benefits to age 19, 20 or 21, which can contribute to a longer average stay, but actually reflects an improved system to help young people better transition to adulthood. For example, Illinois currently covers young people to age 21."[xix]

As the article discusses the issues and challenges of aging out without permanency, it gives an explanation of why foster care was created, why it was never intended to be a long-term living situation for abused and neglected children, and the role of the Child Welfare system in finding another suitable living arrangement. "Foster care was created to be a necessary and important safety net for abused and neglected children. When reunification with birth families is not possible, federal law directs that the system work to find an alternate permanent family for a child, whether through adoption or placement with a legal guardian. When a young person is faced with leaving foster care's safety net without a permanent family, it is because the system has failed a critical part of its responsibilities for that child."[xx]

In regards to permanency planning goals, many children are able to continue living in the placements that they are in, and are able to benefit from having continued support while others are not. This is due in part to regulations that prevent foster families from remaining in contact with youth no longer tied to the foster care system. "Many foster parents provide this ongoing emotional support, foster home licensing policies often make it impossible for them to continue to provide a physical home for the young person once they leave care. Also, some committed foster parents may host many children over many years and cannot provide long-term support to all.

The final aspect of this article gives insight into the importance of youth and permanency and the realization that one is never too old to need a permanent home. It concludes with recommendations concerning policy revisions to help make the foster care system more efficient for youth aging out. "For older youth in foster care, child welfare agencies have historically seen their role as preparing the youth for independence"—life on their own—when they leave foster care. Frequently, youth are placed on an "independent living" track when they reach a certain age, often 14 or 15, at which time the agency may discontinue efforts to return the youth to parents or extended family or find a new family for the youth through adoption or guardianship.

Through independent living programs, states provide an array of services focusing on education (tutoring), every day activities (such as driving) and employment (career mentoring and interning), among other kinds of services that are designed to help youth live

successfully on their own after aging out of foster care. For example, programs help youth obtain high school diplomas, teach budgeting and money management and provide counseling as well as providing many other services. These independent living services should be continued in concert with permanency planning for every youth."

The following recommendations were noted regarding policy reform changes for improvements to the foster care system regarding children aging out of care, "establish a federal foster care financing system that states can rely on to be sufficient and flexible, help more children leave foster care by supporting federal guardianships for relatives and other caregivers, reward states for reducing the number of children in foster care and achieving all forms of permanence. Make all children eligible for federal foster care support."[xxi] These final recommendations are important to consider as the project moves forward.

Human, Organizational, Physical and Economic Research

There are many ways to analyze needs in the foster care community. This project examined the population of youth aging out of the foster care system (16-21 years old) based on the wide spread needs in this age group. Research on the needs of the aging out population was considered through four main topics; human, organizational, economic and physical. By looking at the needs of the aging out population through this lens, the project could analyze the needs of the aging out population in a holistic way to understand the interconnection between the human, organizational, physical and economic needs of the aging out population.

Human:

To analyze the foster care system through a human lens means to consider how the foster care system impacts human and social development. Research states that approximately 20,000 youth age out of the foster care system each year.[xxii] This means that about 20,000 youth leave the financial support of the state/government and must support themselves starting at the age of 18. The states now consider the youth as adults and no longer "wards of the state".[xxiii]

Nation-wide, children in foster care between the ages of 13-18 (those prone to age out of the foster care system) make up the largest age group at 40% of all the foster care youth.[xxiv] The remaining foster care youth is split between 0-5 year olds who make up 32% of the population. The final age group, 6-12 year olds, makes up 28% of the foster care population.[xxv]

This research raises an important question to the surface: "Where do the youth go who are no longer eligible for foster care funding support?" Research shows that "53% of the national youth population in foster care move home with their birth families, 17% are adopted by other families, 16% move in with relatives, 9% age out without a support system, 4% run away, and 1% is unknown."[xxvi] This means that there is a large portion of youth who leave the foster care system with no financial or social support. During the crucial years between the ages of 13 to18 youth are making important decisions on how to move forward in their life. Unfortunately, in many cases the youth in the 13 to18 age group are not prepared to make the transition successfully and therefore end up in undesirable situations.

Undesirable situations range from homelessness and unemployment to incarceration. For example, "14% of males and 10% of females who age out of the foster care system are reported to become homeless at least once since discharge out of the foster care system."[xxvii] Homelessness could result from many causes such as ill preparation for a job or lack of resources to participate in higher education. For instance, in a multi-state study, three-fourths of the "youth who aged out of the system reported not getting any type of career counseling and over 50% reported no training in regards to job application or interviewing."[xxviii] This suggests that those who were not in foster care are more equipped to get a job. These numbers also show a large amount of youth coming out of foster care who are not supported with the right resources. This is a problem as it indicates a disparity in the potential for success of foster care youth.

Additionally, the current economic context of Detroit posses a large hurdle for anyone trying to get into the workforce, especially foster care youth. Detroit is economically hurting with unemployment rate of 11.8% in February of 2011 while the national average is 8.9% unemployed.[xxix] Not only are jobs hard to find, well paying jobs are also rare. "One in three Detroiters, triple the national rate, lived below the federal poverty line in 2007 — before the economic crisis and auto industry bankruptcies and bailouts — making Detroit the poorest of the nation's big cities. Detroit's per capita 2009 income was estimated at $15,310, compared with a national rate of $27,041. And that was when the population was estimated to be more than 900,000 people when it is now estimated to be just over 700,000."[xxx] These statistics prove that individual and environmental conditions have an influence on the potential success of foster care youth.

Other challenges for youth aging out of the foster care may not be about providing skills to the youth, but providing an empowering environment to grow up in, as proven a challenge in the City of Detroit. While only a small percentage (relatively speaking) of the youth who leave foster care become homeless, a large number of youth get involved in criminal activity. Specifically, "60% of males reported going to jail for minor crimes."[xxxi] The large number of males incarcerated suggests that the communities that the foster care youth are placed in already have embedded in them social and economic challenges making individual success even harder.

A supportive environment is essential to all people's positive development. This need is proven with research that states "some of those who do not get involved in crime are reunited with their family."[xxxii] This suggests that those who go to live with a family have a higher chance of success. In fact, 53% of youth are reunited with their family. However this does not mean the youth are ready to move back with their family or have the resources to succeed even if they do move back in with a stable family. Research also shows that many do not have a driver's license or the ability to get a driver's license, limiting their ability to get a job or go to school.[xxxiii] Therefore, a supportive environment, skills and training are all needed in an effort to live independently post foster care.

Another way for youth who age out of foster care to move into a positive environment is to be adopted. It is found that there is a large population of youth throughout the nation that are adopted. Specifically, approximately 17% of youth are adopted by another family after or during foster care.[xxxiv] Those who are not reunited or adopted may go to live with relatives. These are all good solutions if the family is a supporting and empowering environment. If they are not, the youth still risk many challenges including higher education, employment and a lack of connection to their community which contributes to a lower quality of life.

The above numbers represent youth on a national level. In Michigan, the numbers paint a similar picture. Out of 510,000 children in foster care nationally, 20,500 of them live in Michigan.[xxxv] Of the 20,500 in Michigan, 30.3% are between 0-5 years old, 28% are between 6-12 years old and 41.6% are between 13-21 years old.[xxxvi] Further, 9,546 exited foster care in 2009 (287,691 national), of these 48% returned to their parents (53% nationally), 29% were adopted (17% nationally), 11.6% went to live with relatives (16% nationally), 5.4% aged out (9% nationally) and 5.1% left for other reasons (4%

nationally).[xxxvii] Overall in Michigan, the proportions of youth leaving foster care and where they go are similar to the national numbers. This means that Michigan does not present a unique situation in regard to how youth in foster care are determining to move forward with their life. This is not a positive or negative characteristic of Michigan, but rather a way to compare Michigan to national studies.

On local level, Wayne County also has proportions of youth leaving foster care that are similar to national and state proportions. Specifically, in Wayne County there are a total of 4,660 children in foster care. Of this total, 2,413 are males and 2,247 are females. This data shows that Wayne County holds nearly one-fifth of all foster care children in Michigan's foster care population. This would indicate that Wayne County needs more support and more attention than any other county in the State. Additionally, there are more foster care organizations in Wayne County than in other surrounding counties; however, the amount of youth that need to be served is still unmet by the available space and resources currently provided by the organizations in Wayne County.

The number of teens in foster care in Wayne County is larger than any other age population. Of the 4,600 children in foster care, 1,614 are 14 and older (the largest population and the age group that is most susceptible to age out), 1,139 are 0-3 years old, 868 are between 4 and 7 years old and 1,039 are between 8 and 13 years old.[xxxviii] These numbers show that the high numbers in the foster care system are teens suggesting the need to focus on providing needs for the youth that are aging out of foster care. Although these numbers are not specific to Detroit, the high percentage of those in foster care suggests socioeconomic factors that exacerbates the need for foster care and makes independent living for the aging out even harder.

Based on the statistics presented, it is reasonable to conclude that there is a need among the foster care system to provide for the ages between 14-21 as it is the largest population of kids in foster care and they are the ones who are most prone to entering into a new environment without the right financial and mental support. They are also the most prone to end up in jail or homeless. Therefore, it can be concluded that the environments and programs that are available to the teen age group are not being utilized efficiently. Resources may be available, but they are not being effectively used to provide the youth with the knowledge and encouragement to pursue a productive lifestyle post-foster care.

Organizational:

There are many organizations that seek to support foster care youth and those aging out of the foster care system. There are few (none that this project found) organizations that provide holistic approaches when it comes to the needs of children for full development. These needs include, but are not limited to, a place to sleep, financial literacy, budget assistance, money management skills, nutrition guidance, food/diet/safety, health care access and education, disease prevention, mental health resources, permanent and safe housing options, relationship adjustment, career placement and job training, educational programs and post-secondary education.[xxxix] This list of needs, if satisfied, would provide a set of skills and knowledge that has the potential to take youth into a successful, independent life.

However, it may not be reasonable to assume that one organization can provide all of the needs listed above due to financial and operational constraints. Therefore, it was important to understand what needs are most critical, what organizations are currently providing and the gaps in services.

To understand what programs and organizations are available to support youth aging out of the foster care system, an analysis was done to examine the organizations and programs in Detroit. Organizations were chosen based on their mission and program offerings for youth aging out of foster care. Twelve organizations were found in the city of Detroit to fit this criterion. The next step was to look at the programs available for youth. After documenting the programs, they were listed on a chart to compare against the other organizations in the city to see where the gaps in services lay. (See appendix pg 64 "Organization Matrix" for the chart). The documented programs are the following: housing long-term, housing short-term, life skills, higher education support, job placement support, community engagement, after care support, financial advising, group living, prevention care, and medical treatment. After completion of the matrix, it was evident that none of the organizations in the city provide all of the basic needs for youth aging out of foster care. Some have preventative programs (which start at the age of 13) with some programs for the youth after they age out; most do not have programs that support all the needs of living, education, funding, jobs, and transportation. This is not to suggest that an organization must provide for all of the needs of a youth aging out of foster care because it might not be economically feasible. However, it is reasonable to suggest that there be a known means to provide youth all their needs through a network of organizations that offer a holistic approach.

Through research on organizations, it was found that most organizations have a specific focus on the programs that they provide. For example, there are many organizations that work mainly to provide beds for the foster care youth. In Detroit there are currently 15 organizations that provide a place to sleep for the 4,600 plus youth in foster care. These organizations are Holy Cross Children Services, Catholic Social Services, Children's Center, Community Living, Evergreen Children's, Girlstown Foundation, Homes for Black Children, Methodist Children's Home Society, Starr Commonwealth, Vista Maria, Wayne County DHS, Wayne Center, Wolverine Human Services, Ennis Center for Children and Black Family Development. These organizations do not have the capacity to support all the needs and living arrangements for the foster care population. The limited availability of a stable place to live has an effect on how foster care youth develop which can lead to characteristics of how the youth live after they leave foster care. Further, unstable living arrangements may encourage the youth to leave the foster care system before they are ready to live independently. This is a weakness of the existing organizations in the city.

Weaknesses in the foster care community also point to gaps in programming for the youth. For example, based on the organization matrix after care, medical treatment and community engagement programs had limited availability. Life skills and short term living programs were plentiful. What is missing from all the organizations is a shared knowledge about the services other organizations are providing so that if one organization is not able to provide all the

services needed, the network of organizations would know where to send the youth for the desired service. In addition to organizations working together, the youth need access to the collective resources in order to be able to meet all of their needs.

It is always easy to point to the weaknesses in any system, but is also important to recognize the assets of the foster care system. One asset of the foster care system is Catholic Social Services (CSS) of Wayne County (this project's partnering organization). CSS is "primarily a foster care agency that helps place children in foster care homes" serving children from the ages of 0-18.[xl]. Located just outside of the Boston Edison neighborhood, CSS serves a large population of families in the city of Detroit. Although their location primarily serves the Detroit area, one of CSS's greatest assets is the ability to serve youth from all around Michigan depending on their needs.

In addition, CSS helps families by assisting in foster care placement. CSS also provides programs to train foster care parents, recruit foster care parents and monitor the outcomes of the programs. CSS also has programs for youth that need legal help. Lastly, CSS offers various life skills programs.[xli] Although CSS has a limited focus on the placement of foster care youth and family programs, they are a great resource for youth who need important services such as legal and living arrangement. Without these important steps to get foster care youth into supportive homes and into the foster care support network, other programs that are available to the youth as they age out are obsolete.

Catholic Social Services of Wayne County believes that assisting the aging out population is a large need within the foster care community. CSS also noted that there is a need to help find money to support youth after they age out. CSS staff stated, "We want to lead them to the right sources of funding but do not know where those funding resources are."

In addition to the need for funding resource assistance, CSS also expressed a need to be more connected with the community. CSS feels that their programs are too exclusive and do not afford an opportunity for the community to know about CSS. CSS believes that if more people understood the programs offered and the work that they do, more parents might volunteer to be foster care parents.

The organizational structure of CSS is determined largely by the Department of Human Services. Catholic Social Services of Wayne County acts as a "subcontractor" agency for the Department of Human Services and is granted a lump sum of money for services. CSS is responsible for allocation and distribution of these dollars as it relates to foster care. As a subcontracting agency for the state, CSS is responsible for the training of foster care parents, the placement of children, and the licensure for all foster care homes. In addition, CSS is responsible for all license needs that pertain to foster care children. In 2008-2009, CSS provided services to over 300 children, 42 of whom were reunited with their families and 18 were referred for adoption.[xlii] "The goal is always family reunification. However, CSS focuses on successful foster care parent homes in an effort to increase stability for children placed in

care."[xliii] Overall, CSS is a primary resource for providing supportive care before youth who age out of the foster care system.

Other organizations in the city have different program focuses. One example is Covenant House of Detroit. Covenant House offers a wide range of programs that are less focused on foster care placement and more focused on short-term assistance. Covenant House serves youth from ages 13 to 22 in various areas around Detroit. They offer shelter (short term), vocational, preventative and educational programs such as academic outreach, transitional living, career advancement, community service, counseling, crisis intervention, skills training, parenting skills, mentoring, and financial assistance.[xliv] This program might be read as an all-in-one organization; however, it only serves 13-22 year olds and is not connected to the youth as they grow up. Overall, Covenant House is lacking a way for youth to be informed about programs they do not offer and long-term care assistance.

The organization matrix suggests that there are organizations working to help youth, but that they are not working together to help provide all needs for youth aging out of the system. This lead to the question, even with the numerous organizations and programs, why are youth who are aging out of the foster care system ending up in unfavorable situations?

Physical:

The physical development of the foster care community is hard to define. One might ask, "Where is the geographic location of the foster care community?" In reality there are no boundaries to a foster care community. Instead, one can define the foster care community in a physical sense as the physical group of people that relate to one another because of a common connecting characteristic. In the foster care community it might be that a member is a foster care parent, a youth in foster care, a youth who aged out of the foster care system, an agency or organization who serves any of the mentioned groups and lastly the institutional and city resources that help all of these groups work together. These groups of people must work together to create a healthy physical and mental environment for all those involved. For example, organizations that help serve the youth should provide a happy and clean environment for the youth to grow up in so that they feel like they are important and deserve special attention. The same environment should be provided in foster care homes. Homes should be emotionally supporting and physically inviting so that the youth are not subject to additional stressors by the living environment.

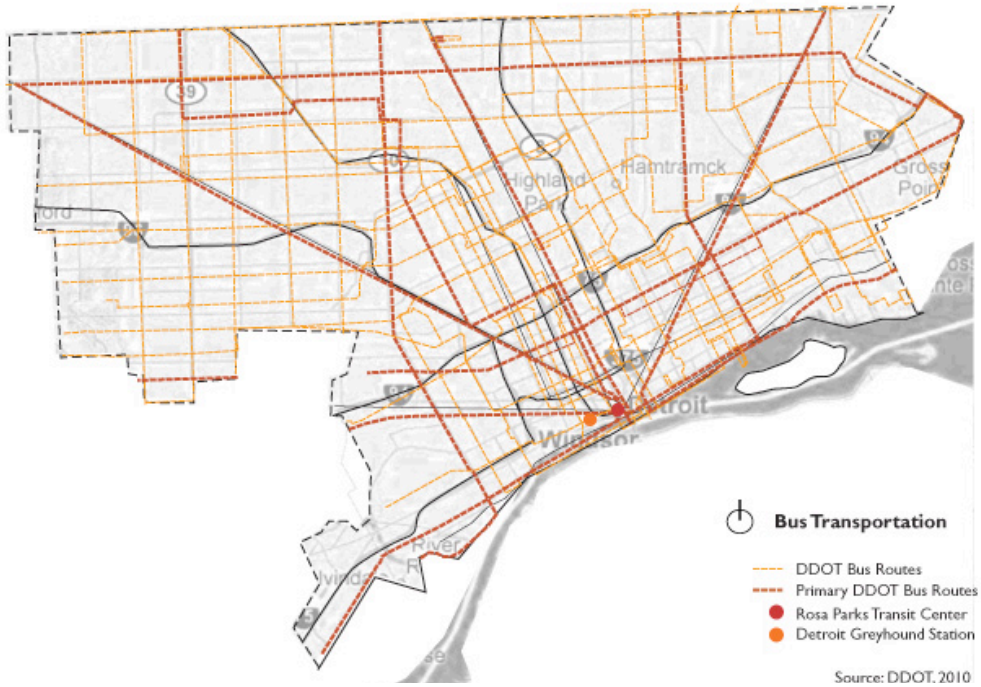
On another level, one can analyze the foster care community in the city by considering how the groups of people mentioned above (the foster care parents, youth in foster care, youth who have aged out of foster care and the organizations and systems that support the foster care) work together in a city to provide assistance. To understand if the city of Detroit is providing a supportive environment, a series of studies were done to identify where resources and people are located in the city and how effectively they work together. The categories examined were the following: foster care and aging out organizations, transitional living homes (for those that have aged out), the bus system, employment centers, Skillman neighborhoods (areas as a result of their youth funding priorities), and lastly, the youth population.

After looking at the systems, it can be concluded that in Detroit, the main foster care agencies lie in the heart of the city while the youth reside in the outlying communities. These communities in and of themselves have hardship. In 2007, Michigan held a poverty rate of 14.8%, but a poverty rate for African Americans of 30.3%.[xlv] And the communities of Detroit are heavily populated by African Americans. For example, one of the most densely populated neighborhoods with children is the Osborn community on the north east side of Detroit. This neighborhood has 28% poverty and 15% unemployment.[xlvi] Therefore, not only are the communities that they live scarce with foster care agencies, they are far from being a stable community. In addition, employment centers and transitional living places are not located where the kids live. However, the Skillman neighborhoods do seem to reflect where the youth are living. Overall, the obstacles presented creates a disconnection in the community and communication causing obstacles for the youth to get to basic needs and supportive services. This brings a series of questions to mind, "Are the main resources not located where the youth are because the communities do not want 'those types of places' in their community? Why is it that these resources are disconnected from the youth? And what are other ways of creating a network between the resources and youth if not a direct physical connection?"

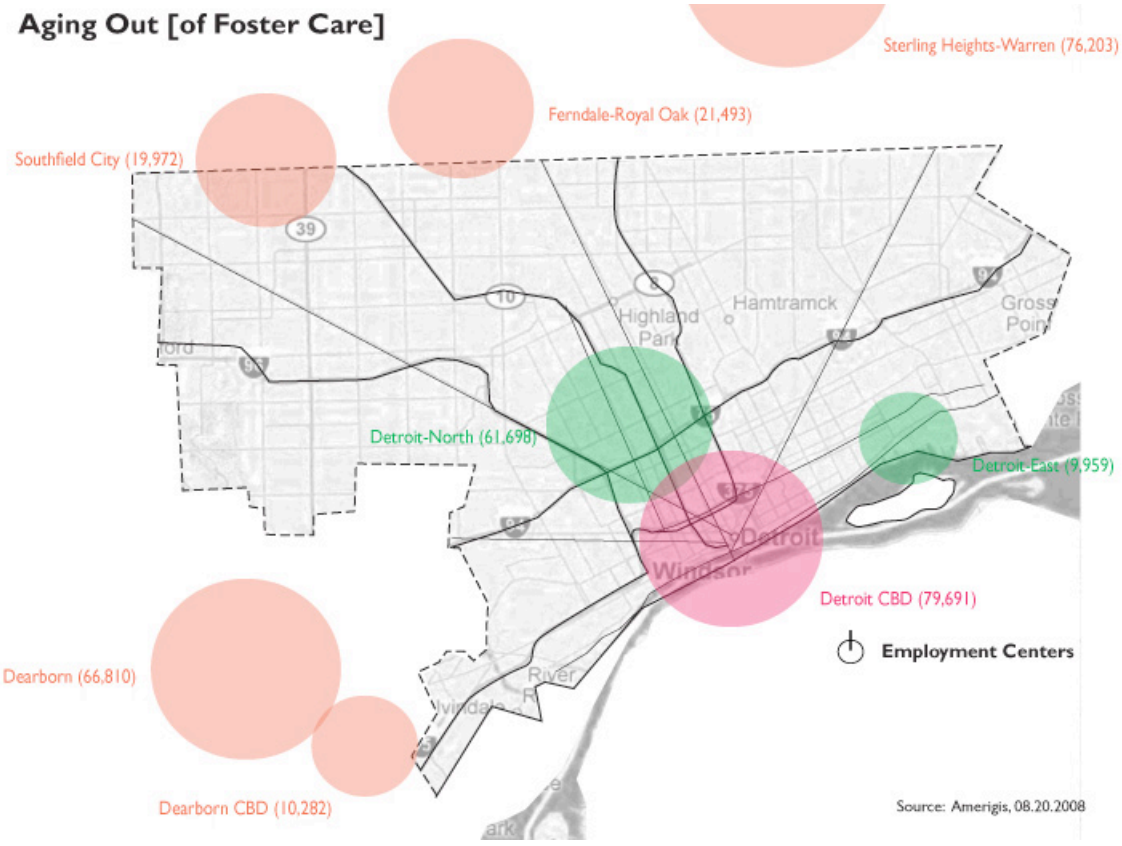
The following pages contain visual documentation of the collected research including the following illustrations:

- Bus Transportation
- Employment Centers
- Skillman Neighborhoods
- Transitional Housing Opportunities
- Foster care Agencies
- Age and Density of the Youth Population

Aging Out [of Foster Care]



Aging Out [of Foster Care]



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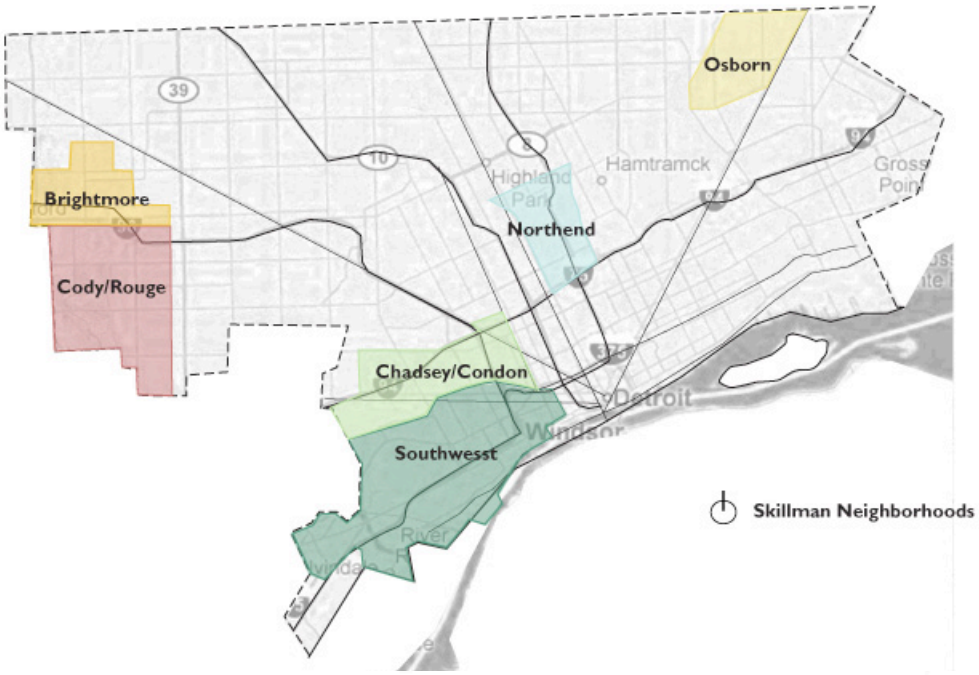

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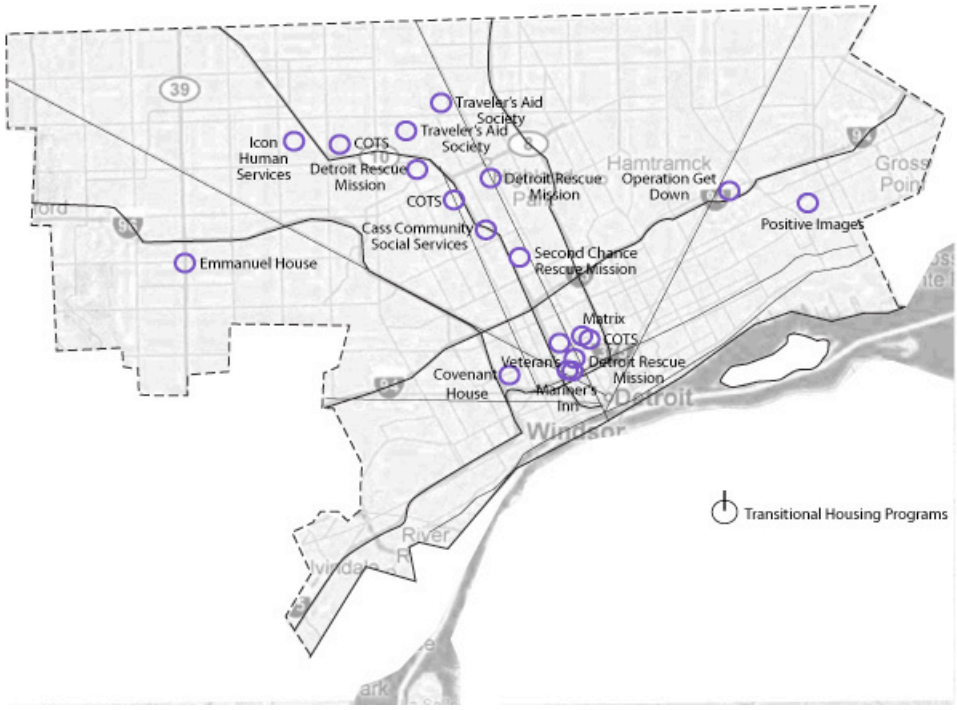
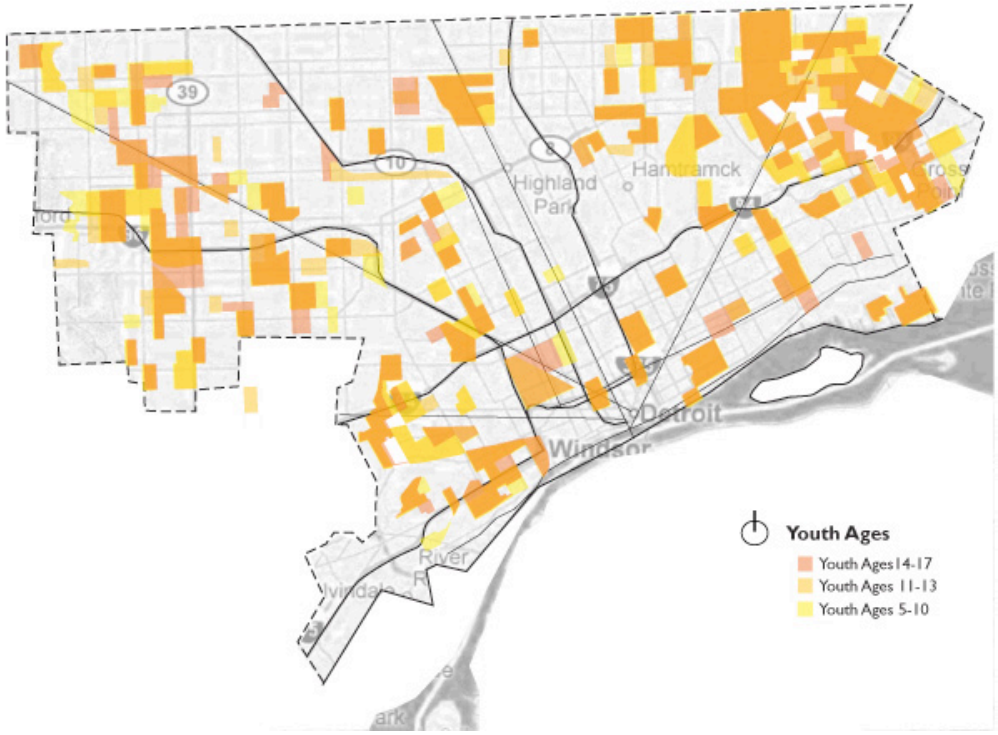
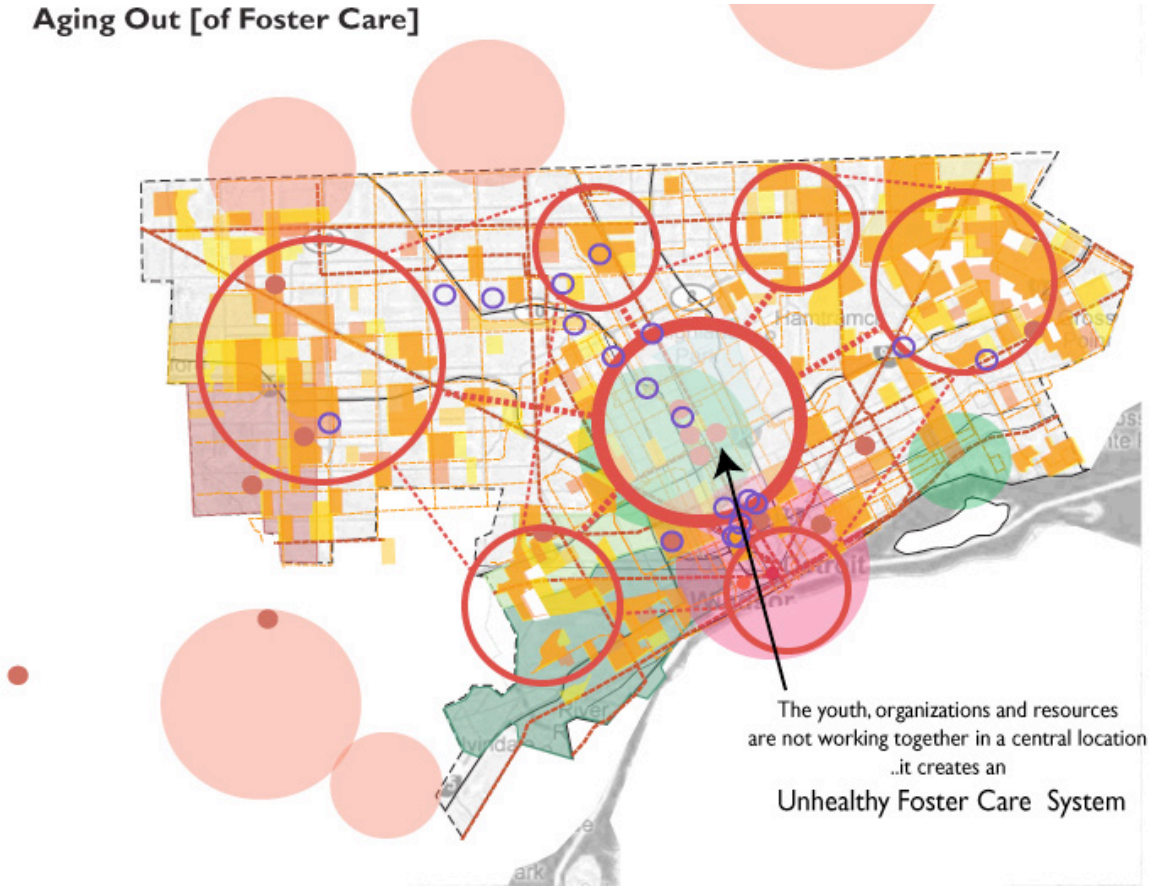


Aging Out [of Foster Care]

Aging Out [of Foster Care]





In conclusion, the youth, organizations and resources are not working together. This suggests an environment that is not physically or economically supportive for youth as they age out of foster care.

Economic:

A. Child Welfare Funding: *the basis for aging out funding*

Child Welfare Funding is a complex system of funding streams deriving from several different sources. The total national budget for Child Welfare Funding in 2009 was $3 trillion with more than $1 million in discretionary funds.[xlvii] Funding streams include discretionary funds such as Social Security ($694 billion) and Medicaid ($215 billion). Allocated funding sources also include 20-25% non-federal matches for the state. In the near future, funding for child welfare will likely continue to decrease both nationally and locally.

The main funding sources for Child Welfare include: the Chaffee Law (also known as the Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative), Title IV-E, Title IV-B Parts 1 and 2, Medicaid and Social Security and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.[xlviii] The Chaffee Independence Program, otherwise known as Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative was

signed into law in 1999 with more that $200 million dollars allocated to the funding stream.[xlix] Chaffee Law focuses on independent living service for youth preparing to exit the foster care system and for youth that have "aged out". Currently, the Chaffee law funding is $140 million nationally, with an average amount of $500,000 per state.[l] Additionally; each state must match these dollars with non-federal money at a 20% match. Michigan is allowed to use up to 30% of their funds towards room and board for former foster care children and is allotted 20% to be used towards Medicaid coverage for youth 18-21 years of age that have aged out.[li]

Additionally, the Chaffee Law covers the Educational Training Voucher Program Education and Training Vouchers (ETV). In Michigan, this program is administered by Lutheran Social Services of Michigan. Funding covers the following allocations and is available to each youth aging out with a $5,000.00 cap: rental assistance, financial assistance for college, vocational school or adult education courses, and independent living support programming. [lii] The disbursements of the ETV vouchers are made directly to the postsecondary institutions, vendors, or in some instances, the youth.

Another part of the Child Welfare Funding is Title IV-B. "Title IV-B Part 1 was established in 1935 as part of the Social Security Act and originally allocated more than $325,000,000."[liii] Today, the allocation is $282,000,000 and targets Child Welfare Service Plans. This means that each state is required to complete a five-year plan for each youth in foster care and those aging out.[liv] The system uses these plans to allocate dollars to each state. In Michigan, the dollars cover foster care maintenance payments, adoption assistance payments, and childcare payments for foster care parents.

B. Educational and Training Voucher (ETV)

The Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program provides funding for current and former foster youth to attend post-secondary institutions up to age 23. The ETV amount can range up to five thousand dollars. This money helps to cover items such as: housing, transportation, computers, employment services, tuition, books, miscellaneous living expenses, and childcare. According to the Child Welfare League of America report for 2009, "The Education and Training (ETV) allocation for 2010 is $1,948,803. This money also includes the Casey Foundation scholars program, which totals $10,000."[lv]

The 2010 Michigan League for Human Services Report states that new changes will affect ETV funding in the following manner: "Full-time students are eligible for up to $4,000 for a school year and part-time students are eligible for up to $2,000 per school year. Awards will be split into two semesters. For example, if a student is awarded $4,000 for the fall semester, then the student would receive $2,000 for the fall. Then, after showing that they have passed their fulltime classes, they would receive the other $2,000 per semester of their award."[lvi]

Although this program has good intentions, $2,000 is a minimal amount to buy books and all other school expenses. If youth who aged out of the system want to go to college, there is little chance they will have the ability to survive college expenses with ETV funding.

C. Youth In Transition (Michigan)

The goal of Youth in Transition (YIT) is to help youth transition from foster care to independence. Independence can be defined as the ability to take care of oneself physically, socially, economically and psychologically.[lvii] YIT funds may be used to provide services that are not available through other funding sources or agencies for an eligible youth. YIT funds may be used to provide the following goods and services after all other resources for the same good or service has been exhausted: education, vocational/employment training, independent living training, mentoring and family connection and housing. Funds to support these needs can be done through payments up to $600 per request.[lviii] Services exceeding $600 require prior written approval from the county director or designee. This process delays and complicates the processes suggesting that many youth may not follow through with obtaining the funds. Another challenge to receiving YIT funding is the "life time" limits that are placed on each youth. For example, the first month's rent, security deposit and start-up goods have a lifetime limit of $1,000 and do not require an exception approval.[lix]

Overall, YIT had good intentions to help cover finances needed when youth try to gain independence. However, YIT has many obstacles and systematic procedures needed before funding is granted. What needs to be done is to make YIT accessible to the young adults that are making their transition. Another point to add to the YIT program would be to track the successful outcomes from the individual.

Diversity and Social Justice in the Aging Out Population

Diversity

Diversity plays a large part in the likelihood of youth entering into foster care and those who age out of the system. Analyses show that the likelihood of entering foster care and the likelihood of leaving foster care vary widely based on race. For example, in 1999 black children accounted for only 15% of all children under the age of 18, while they accounted for over 30% of children entering foster care.[lx] This suggests that black children are entering into foster care at double the proportion of their overall ratio in the population. Although at a lesser degree, "Hispanic children are also overrepresented in proportion to their share of the overall population with 16% of children under the age of 18, Hispanic children account for 18% of the children entering foster care."[lxi] However, "non-Hispanic white children were underrepresented. The study states that 64% of all children are white, but only 47% of children entering foster care are white. The end result of these disparities is a population in the foster care system that looks very different from the overall population."[lxii] This comparison of the overall population to the population of those entering the foster care system is important as it suggests what populations are in the greatest need.

What might cause this disparity? The overrepresentation of black children in foster care is partially due to the fact that more black children enter the foster care system and fewer children leave the foster care system than any other race.[lxiii] For example, only 33% of black children left the foster care system compared to 53% of white children who left in 1999.[lxiv] Thus, the population of black children in foster care is large and has a direct relationship to the population that ages out of the foster care system. This condition of a larger population

of blacks in foster care who stay for a longer amount of time than any other race might suggest a different type of need when they exit from the foster care system such as mentors of their own race, more life skill practices, ways of developing skills that relate to their culture, or finding supportive communities of their culture. The factors studied in regard to foster care children directly relate to the needs of youth who age out of the foster care system.

The study, CRS Report for Congress, also suggests that a "higher prevalence of poverty, single parenthood and incarceration among black families could also be a reason to the high number of black children in foster care."[lxv] In addition, conscious or unconscious stereotypes may lead social workers to "judge black parents suspected of child abuse or neglect by a different standard than other parents which could also be a cause to the high number of black children in foster care."[lxvi] This is not only a diversity of race issue but it is also an issue of social justice. Therefore, to address the reasons for why racism is playing a part in the disparity of foster care youth, the systemic cause of the problem needs to be addressed in order to make a long term affect on aging out youth. The systematic cause is embedded in social justice issues where minorities are challenged with more obstacles and hardship because of their race. (See Social Justice section below)

The issue of disparity of race in foster care is also present in Wayne County. There is a large population of black children in foster care than other races, 3,527 out of 4, 600 to be exact.[lxvii] There are 923 white children and 178 who are multi-racial. Macomb County has the opposite disparity.[lxviii] There are 798 white children in foster care compared to 337 African American children out of the 1,216 total children in foster care.[lxix] Macomb has the second highest population of youth in foster care, but is still significantly less than Wayne County. The third highest population in foster care is in Genesee County with 1,158 children.[lxx] Here the amount of white and African American children is very close in numbers with approximately 593 African American youth and 476 white youth. [lxxi] Overall, these numbers suggest that there is a large disparity within the foster care youth based on race. This disparity affects the programs needed and how they are provided because races can have different needs and respond to services in various ways.

Social Justice

The issue of social justice is important to consider regarding needs of youth aging out of foster care. As seen through the research, the disproportionately racial socioeconomic environment in which foster care youth are exposed to (especially in Detroit) inhibits their ability for success. Without stable communities and strong support system, it is hard for youth to make it "on their own" after foster care.

Those in foster care struggle every day. Furthermore, those in foster care are prone to becoming homeless and have difficulties finding jobs. There are multiple reasons for these circumstances. One might be due to the lack of foster care programming available or programs that enable foster care youth to develop proper life skills. But more importantly the socioeconomic factors that have been discussed such as poverty and unemployment also

suggest causes to the cycle of the environment that they grow up in and then end up returning too. Thus, no only does programming need to be addressed, but the racial disparities that exist within communities. Addressing this issue would take years, therefore, at least understanding that it is not just the foster care system, it is also socioeconomic factors that exist in the communities helps to put the challenges aging out youth face in context. With an understanding of the larger environment that the youth must face helps to challenge the cycle that the aging out youth seem to constantly live within-poverty and hardship. For example, in an article, "A Population At Risk", it states "that those who do obtain employment are forced to work in low paying jobs making them susceptible to poverty, exploitation, and limited skills training giving them an unfair disadvantage when facing the job market."[lxxii] This is unjust as it is explains a reoccurring cycle of unemployment for aging out youth.

Additionally, foster care youth are more susceptible to substance abuse. There is substance abuse due to "experimentation and peer pressure, self-medication due to lack of health care and because drugs are used as a coping mechanism to stress."[lxxiii] Stress also is a cause of mental issues that cause further health issues such as depression and anxiety. As one might suspect, "these become large hurdles for the youth as they try to leave the system on their own."[lxxiv]

In summary, the issues of social justice for those brought into the foster care system under no fault of their own will deal with systematic issues for a lifetime. As the above research shows, the majority of the youth will struggle to obtain the proper skills to live a successful independent life. In addition, a large portion of those who were in foster care will fight mental illnesses due to unstable environments.

Regional Issues

Regional forces have a large effect on the success of the aging out population in foster care. Macrosystematic issues, life funding allocations, funding cuts and program determinations (both state and national) have the power to make overarching decisions that have implications for local program administration.

In addition to the discussion of the funding resources that are available, it is important to note the Department of Human Services is in control of the money that gets allocated to programs around the nation. These programs then use the money granted to them to directly support the youth. The programs that get funded are determined by economic and regional forces. For example, each economic and regional environment has a different financial focus that might sway how the money is allocated. Therefore, the laws and acts put in place at any given time is what determine what programs are able to run and what programs are granted the most money.

Overall, the largest regional influence of aging out and foster care programs is the need for federal laws, money and resources. There are not enough resources to support the large number of youth who are in great need of help.

Trends of Aging out of Foster care

Trends

The numbers of youth in foster care continue to rise, influencing the number of youth who age out of the foster care system. Based on US Census data, between the years of 1980 and 2000 there was a rise in the number of youth in foster care.[lxxv] In 1980 there were approximately 302,000 youth in foster care, but in 2000 there were over 556,000.[lxxvi] This explains the ratio increase of "4.7 for every 1,000 youth in 1980 to 7.7 youth in foster care for 1,000 youth in 2000."[lxxvii] This has a direct impact on the number of youth who age out of the system and the resources that will be available to them.

In relation to the increase in the amount of youth who enter into the foster care system, a national study found a rise in the number of youth who aged out of the system in the past decade. During 1999, "56,593 children ages 16 and older left the foster care system. Among these were 18,554 foster children who aged out of the system by becoming legally independent."[lxxviii] It was also found that similar racial and ethnic disparities that are evident in the foster care population as a whole are apparent in the population of those youth who age out of foster care.[lxxix] For example, more than "35% of youth aging out of foster care in 1999 were black, even though black children account for only 15% of children under age 18."[lxxx] Conversely, "non-Hispanic white children were underrepresented, accounting for 45% of children aging out of foster care non-Hispanic white children account for 64% of all children under age 18."[lxxxi]

In a more detailed and recent report, a similar trend of an increase in the aging out population was found. However, the study found a decrease in the amount of youth who entered the system. The study reported that, "in 2005 the number of entries into foster care reached its highest point to date with 307,000 entries reported that year. Since that time, however, the number of entries has declined to 255,000 in 2009, the lowest number since AFCARS data have been reported."[lxxxii] The reason for the flux in numbers is unknown at this point, but the economy could play a part in the increase. Due to the poor economy, families may not have the opportunity to support another child or take on more financial responsibilities. Organizations that support foster care youth might also be in the same situation. The following table helps to track the trends of those in foster care and those who aged out between 1998- 2005.

Table 1: Trends in Foster care 1998-2005

Year out	# aged out	# in foster care	% of those in foster care who aged
1998	17,310	559,000	3.1
1999	18,964	567,000	3.3
2000	20,172	552,000	3.7
2001	19,039	545,000	3.5
2002	20,358	533,000	3.8
2003	22,432	520,000	4.3

2004	23,121	517,000	4.5
2005	24,407	513,000	4.9

This table helps to demonstrate national numbers. In the nation, Michigan is ranked 27th in regard to how many kids are in foster care, according to the U.S. Children's Bureau. It was found that in 2005 there were 9, 234 who exited foster care, and of those 7.2% aged out of the system. This ranking suggests that Michigan is somewhere in the middle with the numbers of youth that need to be cared for; however, the overall population and geographic location needs to be considering when looking at this data. As stated earlier in the report, geographic location does play a part in the numbers of youth in foster care and aging out of foster care.

Other trends that the Children's Bureau examines between 1998 and 2008 show interesting results. For example, "the amount of white children entering the foster care system has increased from 2000 to 2008. On the other hand the amount of black youth in foster care has decreased overall from 2000 to 2008."[lxxxiii] However, of those entering foster care, the Hispanic population has increased tremendously from 2000 to 2008.[lxxxiv] The length of stay in foster care has also shifted since 2000.[lxxxv] In 2000 the length of time spent in foster care was fairly well distributed between short term (less than or equal to two years) and long term (up to five years). In 2009, the majority of youth in foster care are staying in homes approximately one to two years. The reason for the change in length of stay is unusual given that the placement (i.e., if the youth go to foster home, group home, etc.) numbers have not changed greatly between 2000 and 2008. The amount of youth that are emancipated from foster care has risen. (Graphs to shows these trends discussed can be found in the appendix.)

From this data, it can be concluded that although the number of youth in foster care went down nationally since 2000, the number that aged out has grown 1.8%. This suggests an opportunity to address the needs of those who have aged out, in addition to examining the preventive care programs that are in place to decrease the numbers of those aging out overtime.

Best Practices

Local Example:

The "Creating Independence and Outcomes" otherwise known as CIAO of Wayne Country, Michigan was a great resource in the city. It was one of five programs of its kind nationwide that "helps current and former foster youths aged 17 to 20 obtain critical career related skills."[lxxxvi] CIAO specialized in connecting youth with resources to find and retain jobs. In fact, CIAO was able to help at least "500 youth find jobs since opening their doors in 2005 with programs such as mentoring, higher education application assistance, ACT/SAT mentoring along with many other programs that encourage youth to purse an educated and career driven lifestyle."[lxxxvii] CIAO also helped countless others with emotional support. CIAO was a "joint project by the Michigan departments of Labor and Economic Growth and Human Services and was funded by an $800,000 Casey Family Programs grant."[lxxxviii] However, CIAO has closed due to the cut in recent funding. Although, their services are not currently available, their model of services and organization is still one to be recognized.

It is important to remember the mission of CIAO when analyzing the services provided. CIAO was not a housing or transportation provider. Their main focus was to help connect youth with other organizations around the city that provided funds for housing and transportation, but they did not do it themselves.[lxxxix] This is an example of how organizations are more successful when providing smaller amounts of quality programming and collaborating to offer all potential resources to youth. CIAO is a best practice example that shows how a program can inspire and connect youth who have aged out of the foster care system.

National Example I:

The Achieving Independence Center (AI) in Philadelphia County, Philadelphia is a "one-stop self-sufficiency center in Philadelphia that helps young people achieve their goals through a supportive environment."[xc] A project of the Philadelphia Department of Human Services and the Philadelphia Workforce Development Corporation, the "AI center uses the programs and services of many Philadelphia-based groups dedicated to providing quality programs for youth in the city."[xci] The Achieving Independence Center expects to serve around 500 youth a year out of the 2,500 youth in Philadelphia who fit the target population of the organization.[xcii] That population would be those who are between 16-21, who have been or are in out-of-home placement, or have been adjudicated dependent or delinquent with shared case management responsibility between DHS and the juvenile probation office.[xciii]

The AI program started in 2002 where it partnered with 12 agencies and sponsored by the Department of Human Services. The main programs at AI are education, life skills training, employment, technology, housing, mentoring, healthy relationships and linkages to other resources. One of the unique aspects of the AI center is that it uses young adults to coach other youths to achieve individual goals.

The Achieving Independence Center is an exemplary program showcasing how to use youth

as a way to connect and empower other youth. AI is also an example of how to partner with other organizations in the city to make one successful resource center that is easily accessible thus providing an example of how to market and educate in the foster care community.

National Example II: Common Ground

"Common Ground is a pioneer in the development of supportive housing and other research-based practices that seek to end homelessness. Common Ground's network of well designed, affordable apartments, linked to the services people need to maintain their housing, restore their health, and regain their economic independence, has enabled more than 4,000 individuals to overcome homelessness."[xciv]

Common Ground was established in 1990 by MacArthur & Ashoka Fellow Rosanne Haggerty. Their philosophy is to "create attractive and affordable environments and foster respectful and supportive relationships among all members of our communities."[xcv] Common Ground's belief is that these are essential to a life of dignity and contribution. "We exist to make these environments available to those in our society who are in the most extreme need of them."[xcvi]

Common Ground expresses these beliefs in their actions and decisions, as employees and volunteers, and as an organization. As a group, "Common Ground holds each other accountable for exemplifying the following, a commitment to excellence in all aspects of our work, the responsibility to provide client and tenant focused services, a passion for continuously improving our thinking and our work, a supportive and challenging environment for professional and personal development, confidence that ending homelessness is within our reach."[xcvii]Common Ground's success is attributed to their focus on affordable housing, outreach and prevention.

The accomplishments of Common Ground are vast. In 2009, Common Ground opened their 3,000th unit of permanent and transitional housing in New York City, Connecticut, and upstate New York. They have a goal of creating 4,000 additional units of housing for the homeless by 2015.

In conclusion, Common Ground is working diligently throughout the country addressing homelessness through various programs and community resources. With its aid, more than 4,000 individuals have been able to overcome homelessness. Not only does this organization rely on its employees but also on the community. Volunteer and partnership initiatives are key to Common Ground's success and are driven by the mission of the organization.

Interviews

Interviews with Foster Care Organizations & Employees

A series of interviews were conducted with foster care agency representatives from the Metro Detroit area. The group connected with these agencies after researching the foster care serving agencies and identifying groups that offered services for the target population of youth aging out of the foster care system to gain a greater understanding of the needs and assets that exist in the foster care community. The interviews sought information based on resources available to the youth who may be aging out of the population and the trends that workers in the field identified. Details can be found in the appendix (pg 79), but a summary of the results is presented below.

The eight interviews highlighted many resources, needs, strengths and challenges of the current foster care system in Michigan. Many of the current trends and resources were attributed to the recent policy changes within the Department of Human Services, including case load size decreases, an increased focus on safety in the foster care home and family reunification. In contrast, the challenges highlighted a need for preventative measures within the foster care system. Allowing children to remain in the home while offering support, both financially and socially were offered as suggestions for change to the system.

Many interviewees also spoke to the collection of funding and financial opportunities available to youth aging out but spoke to the disjointedness of the system in tandem. A need to connect youth and their families to the available resources was a key observation. It was also suggested that the youth become more connected with the community to help ground them in life skills.

The needs identified by the interviewees focused on educational and basic life skills. While there is funding available, it is not easily accessible, making it challenging for youth to apply for funding. The low employment rate and lack of continued education among youth growing out of the foster care system point to a specific need to focus on education for this population.

The interviewees also spoke to the challenges in the system. The recent trends in case load size decreases combined with an increase in children entering the system due to the current economic climate pose a very real challenge to the system. Many of the interviewees spoke to this challenge and the urgent need to address some prevention methods as a result.

In conclusion, the combination of challenges and strengths portray a system that is functioning and improving in several areas, but still needs assistance. The overarching observation by the interviewees was the need to connect the continually changing funding opportunities and rules of the foster care system in an effort to educate staff, state employees, the public, families and youth.

Interviews with Foster Care Youth

To understand thoroughly the challenges of youth aging out of foster care, youth who aged out of the system were interviewed to get their perspective. Six interviews were conducted with youth that had aged out of the foster care system and were either living in homeless shelters or had recently experienced homelessness. Of the 6 youth interviewed, 2 were young men, both of whom had recently been incarcerated, 3 young women were homeless and one was homeless with two children. All 6 youth (ages 19-26) were asked the same series of questions regarding foster care programming.

The first question that was asked regarded resources that had been helpful to their success. The responses ranged from financial assistance when leaving the foster care system (in many cases a $900.00 check for housing was made available), to food and clothing assistance post aging out of the foster care system, to employment assistance from certain agencies (Don Bosco Hall and Michigan Works). Each youth had/has a different need and therefore, used different sources of help to assist their needs. This suggests that a variety of services should be offered to all youth because their individual needs differ.

The second question that was asked regarding resources that would have been more helpful. The youth responded by suggesting more financial literacy, basic life skills programming, how to cook, clean your home and maintain utilities. Many youth had never lived on their own before and had difficulty maintaining housing, education and gaining employment. A database of information regarding group living opportunities for aged out youth, and financial assistance for job uniforms, housing and education.

The third question that was asked to the youth was what skills and training are still needed. The youth expressed a need for financial literacy, housing maintenance, positive relationships/conflict management, and vocational skills (carpentry, electrician). These suggestions reflect a desire to learn how to be a contributing member of society and a desire to have a talent. All people want to feel valued; based on the responses it seems that foster care youth are not getting the training and education that they need.

Lastly, a question was asked in order to better understand the youth's perceptions of available funding in the city of Detroit. Each youth questioned was unaware that there was available funding for housing, education and basic needs and did not know where they would go to find this information. This response reflects the need and purpose of this project.

Overall, each youth interviewed referenced their frustration with the complexities of the foster care system. It is challenging to maneuver and in many cases they were unaware of available resources (i.e. Western University's foster care program). In conversations concerning needs of the foster care system, each stated that they would not be in a homeless situation currently if they had been better prepared for independent living while participating in foster care. Some interviewees saw a need to increase training for foster care parents, while others thought that the foster care agencies should offer more programming

for youth. Each spoke to the need for a coordinated understanding of programs, funding and eligibility for youth 18-21 in the city of Detroit.

After the interviews were conducted, it was found that a follow-up conversations would be most effective to define how to accurately address how to address the needs that were found in the earlier research. Therefore, a series of youth focus groups were completed in the second phase of the project. The results are documented in the following section.

Youth Interviews-Feedback

In an effort to best meet the needs of the youth aging out of Foster care, it was critical to continually involve them in the research process. After the initial interviews were completed, follow-up interviews were administered to gain feedback on the project. This feedback from youth aging out of the foster care system, allowed the project to continually improve.

Conversations: Youth Interviews

Youth interviews were conducted with three different community organizations that work with foster care youth. These organizations included Alternatives For Girls (AFG), Catholic Social Service of Wayne County (CSS), and Matrix Human Services-Off The Streets (OTS). AFG's Transition to Independent Living program provides shelter for young women that are in need of housing and looking to complete their education in high school, G.E.D, or trade. Off The Streets is a program of Matrix Human Services. OTS is a short-term emergency shelter for youth between the ages of 12-17 that have become homeless, a "throwaway", or a runaway. Building Strong Families of Catholic Social Services has been utilized by families with foster children or families that are in the reunification process of foster care. This program reaches families and individuals that are within Wayne County.

The goal of the interviews was to get feedback from the youth in regards to the services that the youth are currently receiving and those that they need assistance with. In addition, very important feedback was also gained on where information is retrieved by the youth. All youth were asked the same question and in the same manner to get comparable results. Responses to what services they needed remained consistent with what was previously found in the research process. Overall, the youth stated that food, housing, and mentoring were all largely needed. Mentoring stood out as the most desired need by the youth. Most of the youth felt that even though the case workers really want to help, they are busy with their jobs and the youth felt "left behind". The youth interviewed expressed a need to have someone to talk with that could act as a support system.

In response to the question of where youth find information, all youth responded that they get most of their information from the organization or program that they work with for foster care assistance. However, some youth said that the information that they get from their assisting organization is not always enough. One teen stated, "Something is missing." While another woman stated that she does not need additional information because she gets it all from the organization she works with. Thus, it seems as though each youth's needs are different and reflect where they retrieve their information. Further, youth stated that

information is gained from Facebook, text messages, or friends within foster care. Only one youth received information through their family. The responses suggest that each youth has their own way of getting information, but use the organization with which they are working as a foundation for the information they garner.

Beyond the two main questions asked, it was found through the interview process that youth like to gain information in a private way. Many of the youth do not want to advertise that they are a youth in foster care. As one youth said, "Why would I want someone to know that I'm in foster care? I have to deal with enough stuff." Because of that concern many felt as though the only place they could go to talk to someone was the organization with whom they were working. Without these organizations, youth felt life would be more difficult. The positive side of these responses is that the youth are utilizing organizations.

Overall, the results from the youth interviews support the need for more than one way of providing information regarding the basic needs identified. With the compilation of the entire research process (Refer to Logic Model in Appendix page 88) a project plan and method of implementation developed.

Focus Group Summaries

A focus group was set up with foster care parents with CSS of Wayne County to get information from those who are most acutely familiar with the workings of the foster care system as parents and guardians. The goal of the meeting was to gain information about how the foster care parents experience the foster care system, the resources, and the information that is provided to them regarding available resources. The results varied, but an overall census was clear by the end of the meeting.

The participation in the meeting was facilitated by CSS. CSS was able to convene five current foster care parents participated in a focus group session on November 17th, 2010. Foster care parents experience ranged from 8-12 years. Each parent had a different number of children, some with foster care children, some with adopted children, but in all cases they were all grateful to have beautiful children in their home.

Responses from the parents varied, but all generally supported the research that was found in the beginning stages of the project. For example, suggestions regarding what resources have been beneficial were, "early-on programming focusing on children 2 months old, especially for children with disabilities, case workers that were quick with responses to needs and questions, case workers that were highly involved in the process and willing to share resources, the children's center acted as a significant resource for this population." These were new ideas heard by the parents of foster care children bringing new information to the research process.

Many needs were discussed over the course of the meeting, but a few stood out as ones that should be addressed. There is a need for mentorship, specific to boys in the foster care system, there is an overarching lack of resources within the city of Detroit, groups that offer

programming for youth in foster care are underused because parents are not aware of the resources, and there was a need for youth to become more connected with higher education opportunities such as college tours. The parents expressed a need to be given more training and parenting courses.

One of the largest needs expressed by the foster care parents was the need for training in specific areas that reflect the children's needs. For example, there is a need for training to work with children that have been sexually molested, to work with older children that are sexually active, to teach financial management for youth, to manage care for Medicaid, to understand the resources available as it pertains to scholarships and to help provide job opportunities for youth in foster care and dissemination of information regarding these opportunities. Some of these needs were new to the research and should be incorporated into the program proposal.

In summary, the focus group described the specific needs in foster care and what would help improve the success of youth who age out of the system. A few of the most important ideas that came from the meeting were the need for training parents and information regarding funding, sexually abused youth, financial assistance and higher education opportunities. These needs directly reflect and add to what has been found in the interviews and research, confirming that addressing these needs would be a great improvement to the foster care system and the youth who age out of the system.

Precedents: How to spread information to a wide user group

As the project developed, multiple ways of spreading information were discussed based on feedback from youth and the advisory group. Many ways of sharing information were suggested such as through web-based sites, text messaging and digital documents. Based on interactions with youth, some advisors found that even though youth who have aged out of foster care might have a hard time paying bills, they keep a cell phone and utilized this as a main source of communicating. This information led to a series of investigations such as how to reach people of all literacy rates and different ways of using digital information sharing.

During the age of digital information sharing, multiple ways of spreading knowledge is still used to address the diversity of users based on age, literacy, or access to technology. Many programs still use hard copies to share information with communities while other projects use digital information sharing. In both cases, the information only reaches certain users based on the medium of information sharing. Therefore, it is hard to reach everyone through one medium.

Medical research shows that even though health care information is "starting to go mobile" it is not the only source by which knowledge is shared. For example, "The Pew Internet Project's latest survey of American adults, conducted in association with the California HealthCare Foundation, finds that 85% use a cell phone. Of those 17% of cell owners have used their phone to look up health or medical information and 29% of cell owners ages 18-29 have done such searches. 9% of cell owners have software applications or "apps" on their

phones that help them track or manage their health. Some 15% of those ages 18-29 have such apps."[xcviii] These numbers show that most people still turn to other source to get their questions answered.

On the other hand, many projects continue to use printed media to disseminate information. For example, *Michigan Campaign to End Homelessness* used printed material to master their campaign. This plan is a statewide plan to end homelessness and explained their plan through a visually pleasing brochure that can be delivered to a wide range of user groups. However, the information is text based making it difficult to attract youth or those with literacy challenges. For those that can read and want to read, the pamphlet provides information from the project's vision to details on different components of the campaign. The precedent suggests that if a pamphlet is to be used, it should be designed to be fun, inviting and filled with images. Another downside to this design is that it is static. If information needs to be updated, a lot of financial resources and time to update and reprint all the pamphlets would be needed.[xcix]

Another way to spread information is seen through a project called "TEXT4BABY". This project can be considered a modern way of spreading information. This project uses text messages to inform and update future moms about how to properly care for their child to be.[c] The caveat to this is that the future mom must know about the program and have a computer to sign up for the text messages. An assumption of this project is that the population that needs information regarding the proper pregnancy procedures wants to properly care for her child and her own health throughout the pregnancy and has access to technology. Many mothers-to-be in these situations are not worried about what medical advice they should be seeking, as there is a larger concern about meeting basic needs.

Precedents: How to spread information to low literate populations

Another piece of the research was to communicate with low literacy rate populations. For example, a report done by the United States Department of Transportation (Federal Highways Administration) and reported by PBS looked to contact low-literacy populations. They found that making alliances with existing organizations, attending special events, visiting local stores, using word of mouth and the radio were successful to reaching low literacy rate populations. In addition, the study suggests involving school students and incorporating color, symbols and photographs to reach multiple populations.[ci] This research led the final project product to consider multiple ways of disseminating information that reflects the research found.

Precedents: Electronic Information Dissemination Analysis

As learned from the process, printed material cannot be the only way to provide access to basic needs. To reach the youth and their parent's as needed, additional forms of information dissemination has been found as a necessity. In today's digital age, many people use technology to gain information in addition to tangible documents. In addition to printed material it was recommend that a website and a texting system be implemented to reach the

youth and that reflects the way they live. The information produced through the project could be re-used and inserted into a website template. On the website a place to insert a phone number would allow users to receive free information on their mobile device. There are a few models have been identified as precedents for a new website bringing information to aging out foster care youth, organizations and foster care parents.

Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative (MYOI) provides a good example for an engaging and informative website. The home page is colorful and inviting clearly identifying what MYOI's mission is and who can benefit from MYOI. The home page also clearly identifies the themes of resources MYOI can help provide such as education, employment, finances and housing. These needs reflect the basic needs that the project identified as important. There is a plethora of information organized in categories; however, the links provided lead to more websites with more information to sift through. Also, the eligibility of the suggested resources is not identified, leading users to more research. If the eligibility and a contact person's name are clearly identified with the organizations or resource is available this would greatly help all users to streamline their research. The other missing element from the website is the location of the suggested resources. These pieces of information should be clearly identified to help relieve frustration for users. The other downside to this website is the inaccurate data. Many of the links don't work or provide outdated information. This is a turnoff to users and could create distrust for the website. In a new model, there needs to be a system suggested for keeping the links and information updated and current in addition to the quick information pieces that help the user.[cii]

The Casey Foundation was another website analyzed to help create a user friendly and exciting website. The Casey Foundation website is dense with information, but it is not a website that allows for quick information gathering. The front page, advertises the "successes" of the Casey Foundation rather than giving the impression that the website is a resource for youth and their parents. Also, the website provides booklets of information rather than a list of resources that are easy to read and quick to get information. Overall, the Casey Foundation website seems to be a resource for organizations and other individuals who are in the business of foster care rather than for those who are facing the challenges of foster care. [ciii]

The Foster Care Club is a site for foster care youth to connect and gain support. Their website is colorful and inviting. Unfortunately, the website is not geared towards providing direct information. Rather, the resources are based on state programs or places for youth to get involved in activities or social groups rather than connections to help assist in their needs. Further, the resources target a larger audience by focusing on the entire state rather than a specific set of needs such as those of the youth in Detroit. Expanding the reach might be helpful in some situations, but if a youth is in need and wants to get help right away, the website is not designed to do that. Overall, the website reads more as a social support group rather than a point of information. This is a great asset to youth and if combined with a way to easily access information the website would be even stronger.[civ]

In conclusion, if the positive qualities of each website analyzed were incorporated into a website template, it would prove to be a beneficial site for youth aging out of the foster care system. Suggested qualities to be used are a colorful template, an inviting and clean home page that is dense with information. At the same time the website needs to provide quick information regarding the users needs and organized by need categories. These qualities, combined into one website, would be a great asset to the youth, parents and foster care organizations.

SWOT Analysis

A SWOT Analysis was completed to comprehend the research and input that was found throughout the research process. A SWOT analysis identifies strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of any given topic or situation. The analysis was used to synthesize the different components of data collected. The analysis can help researchers to identify items under each of these themes and then ask, "How can this weakness become an opportunity?" This allows the research to become more objective and brainstorm possibilities outside of pre-conceived intentions.

Strengths

There are many strengths in the foster care community. Some of the strengths found through the research process include the following. There are organizations that provide important needs for youth aging out such as the Independent Living program. Specifically in Detroit, there are many shared living environments, also known as residential living spaces. Group living situations such as these help youth stay in-touch with others in the same situation and keep them connected to potential resources.

Another strength is the federal money that is made available for foster care programming. Some of these opportunities are the Youth in Transition Program, the Educational Training Voucher system, the Chaffee Law, Title IV-E and Title IV-B, and lastly Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative (The Casey Foundation). These are all available sources of funding to provide services for youth aging out of foster care.

The community within foster care organizations is a strength of the overall foster care community. The direct services workers are committed to helping find solutions to the needs of youth who are aging out. Direct care workers work closely with foster care parents, youth and programs and are most knowledgeable about the system and its opportunities. This acts as a significant strength for the system as their commitment to the youth is directly connected to their success in independent living.

Additionally, there are several program opportunities that act as strengths for the foster care system. For example, college support programs such as Western Michigan University that provide incentives for foster care youth who want to pursue higher education are available and underutilized.

Lastly, due to recent changes in the law, smaller caseloads have been administered. This has been a benefit to the youth because the caseworkers have the ability to provide intensive case management and can offer more specialized services on an individual basis. In summary, the strengths of the foster care community provide a foundation for making improvements in the future.

Weakness

Weaknesses also exist in the foster care aging out community. One of the most obvious weaknesses is the limited amount of funds. Although there are working programs and services available for youth, the funds are limited and do not cover all the youth who need help. In addition to the limited amount of funds, the funding stream is always changing making it hard for organizations and their employees to help youth find money to support their needs. As a result, staff at foster care agencies appear under trained in the available programming and funds. Although this might not be true in all instances, there is a gap in what is available and how much staff personnel know about the available funds. To further complicate this issue, when the staff is not properly up-to-date on information, the foster care parents also miss opportunities for valuable information in regards to funding and available programs.

The lack of centralized programming is also a weakness in the foster care community, especially in Detroit. This creates a challenge for youth to easily access the organizations that can best serve them. The lack of coordinated programming in a central geographic area makes the system challenging to access and maneuver. This also creates a weak social support network for the youth, critical to their success in independent living.

Although there is a vast amount of programming options, there are still services that could be enhanced. First, there is a lack of basic needs for youth who exist in foster care. Prevention is typically under emphasized, but could make a difference in the number of youth who are able to make positive choices when they leave the foster care system. For example, more collaboration with the education system while the youth are still in middle and high school would allow youth to be educated in school about available resources and programs to utilize after school hours. Programs that need more funding and attention are life skills programs, financial literacy (specific to youth) programs, prevention programming and training for foster care parents. In the research, there was also little mention of foster care communities partnering with faith-based organizations. This is an opportunity to provide both life skills and faith mentoring.

Overall, there are many weaknesses that exist within the foster care community. However, many of the weaknesses provide an opportunity to fill a need. The opportunities for improvements are vast, but any efforts need to be directly correlated to external forces (funding, legislation) in order to be sustainable.

Opportunities

There are multiple opportunities that exist external to the foster care community that could play a role in helping to improve the aging out community. For example, there are multiple funds available to use outside the foster care system such as scholarships and grants that non-profits provide. However, this takes initiative to find the funds. Fostering initiative in foster care youth is another potential opportunity for improving the success of aging out youth.

This also provides the opportunity for youth to gain experience in leadership roles. Youth may help disseminate information about foster care and create more community awareness about the positive aspects of foster care.

Some programs have the potential to be empowering and life changing if connected to a more holistic approach of prevention, support, and outreach. This approach could also provide the potential to have a centralized area for information that parents and youth can access. Further, involving the youth in the holistic approach is one way to sustain the skills and knowledge that can be gained from a program such as this. Another opportunity to help improve the mental stability of foster care youth is through families. Creating more connections with relatives and family members as support agents is one way to create a stable and empowering environment.

Opportunities also exist in future programming. There is potential for creative and innovative programming with new funding opportunities. Lastly, there is a missed opportunity to market to state and federal representatives to get funding for improvements to the system. From this, one can conclude that there are various ways to connect with the community and create a more holistic approach to foster care by expanding programming, involving the youth and outside community. However, there are threats that complicate the opportunities discussed.

Threats

Threats to the foster care community can come from uncontrollable circumstances. However, they should be considered in the planning process. First, an economic downturn can lead to possible funding cuts to human service programming. An economic downturn also can lead to an increase in youth entering into foster care because families may lose basic needs such as heat, water and food, resulting in removal of children from birth family homes. This might also cause a decrease in foster care parent interest due to the additional costs that may occur with supporting a child. Therefore, the lack of safe and affordable housing can pose a large threat to the future of foster care.

Another existing threat that can cause challenges in the foster care community is the limited knowledge about foster care in the general public. The community perception of foster care is not always positive and thus can pose a threat to people wanting to help or participate with the foster care system. Lastly, there is an on-going threat to the foster care community that the youth will not be engaged. This poses an opportunity as to how to market a program or set of programs, so that youth are engaged and interested in the programs and services.

In conclusion, there are many threats to the success of foster care; however, many of the threats provide an opportunity to make change. For instance, the threat of the perception of foster care can be managed by linking up with one of the strengths of foster care such as the proactive caseworkers. Using strengths to help manage the threats is just one way to propose realistic and helpful solutions to the needs found throughout the research process.

Needs Assessment

In addition to the SWOT analysis, a needs assessment was compiled in order to better understand and analyze the information collected. The needs assessment is based on a multi-tiered analysis of information. Information has been gathered from fact, scholarly research, and interviews with those in the foster care system, those of the foster care system, and an analysis of the system through the researcher's perspective. Through this multi-layered investigation, a deep understanding of the needs can surface.

While looking for the needs, assets were also uncovered. Assets of the foster care community can be thought of as the existing programming, the interest of the direct caseworkers, and the successful organizations already making improvements in youth's lives. These assets are considered as a base or building ground to improve the foster care community by addressing the following needs. Below is a documentation of the needs found from the various sources of information. It is important to understand that each method of research lent itself to identifying certain needs. Therefore, it was essential to know what identified needs came from what method of research.

Needs Based on Fact

There is an overarching need for foster care youth to better transition into a more independent living and self-sufficient lifestyle. Twenty thousand youth age out of the system each year with limited or no financial support, and face many obstacles. Furthermore, many youth age out unprepared to face the obstacles that lie ahead. Reports state that 50% of the youth age out without employment training, which might contribute to high occurrences of homeless and incarceration of foster care youth. Thus, there is a definite need to address the large number of youth who leave foster care without the knowledge and support to move forward in a successful and empowered life.

There is a significant need in Wayne County, Michigan with over 4,600 youth in foster care and of which 1,614 are 14 years old or older. There are only 15 organizations in Wayne County that support the 4,600 plus youth (some of who are in foster homes).

Youth need more than just a place to sleep. They need a holistic approach to programming. They also need guidance in financial literacy, budgeting, money management, nutrition, food/diet/safety, health care access and education, disease prevention, mental health resources, permanent and safe housing options, relationship adjustment, career placement and job training, educational programs and post-secondary education. Medical treatments and community engagement are also two programs that are lacking in availability base on the organizational matrix analysis. All of these programs also need to be made available to all households regardless of incomes, race, and cultures.

Through the physical research a need was found for programs to be in closer proximity to each other and closer to the youth, employment and skill centers, especially in Detroit. Physically services are not located near where youth are living and when the youth seek services, the offerings are disjointed, making it challenging to access.

Found through scholarly articles, there is a need for shared knowledge among organizations, youth and parents. It was also recognized as Baugh states, "that it takes a collaboration" of organizations to serve the aging out. In addition to a collaboration of programs, it was also suggested that a community of support should start before the youth age out. Other articles thought that tutoring and employment training is also a need. In addition skills to converse with adults were suggested.

In summary, factual based research leads to a conclusion that there is a need to help youth aging out of the foster care system, to provide the opportunity to be connected with systems, programs and funding so as to enable an independent life. Suggestions to help provide such an environment were to provide more training for both parents and the youth-before and after they age out creating a closer network of information and mental support.

Needs Based on Interviews

From the information gleaned through the interview process several needs from the foster care community were identified. Of the organizations and workers, they sought the need to connect the constant changing funding opportunities and rules of the foster care system in an effort to educate staff, state employees, the public, families and youth. These needs reflect what was found in the needs from fact-based research; however, the overwhelming response that programs for the youth do exist was interesting. Based on this information, it was assumed that there was a gap in the overall services available to the youth.

Interviews with the foster care youth were also informative and reaffirmed much of the already established needs. Specifically, each interview reiterated a need for a comprehensive look at the foster care funding, programs and services. Additionally, the youth interviews highlighted the interest of foster care youth to gain knowledge about existing programs. This vested interest in available programs and funding acts a driving force for potential success in foster care programming, if this information were made available. Lastly, the youth interviews also spoke to a specific need to offer congregated services and housing opportunities for youth. This opportunity to serve a large number of youth in a specified area is one that could be very effective in the Detroit foster care community.

Needs Based on Focus Groups

Needs that were identified by the focus groups were also a source of information. From the foster care parents, a need to provide resources and training to foster care parents was expressed. The parents especially stressed a need for help to deal with sexually assaulted youth. Mentoring, higher education funding opportunities and financial management were also sought as a need. Further, based on how the parents described the mental condition of the foster care youth, services that would support and help heal mental and physical abuse could be amplified. Overall, the needs expressed by the parents were specific and detailed. These items were not found through research based on fact. Therefore, this step in the process, of talking to those who are in the system proved to be a beneficial part of the research process.

Needs Based on the Organization Matrix:

When looking at organizations and the services that they provide, one can assume from looking at the research which needs are and are not being met. By looking at what is being provided in Detroit, Michigan, one can conclude a need for a communication network that connects organizations and youth. More specifically, organizations seemed to lack ways for the youth to engage with communities or offer medical assistance, community engagement and after care support. This set of needs found through researching organizations specific to Michigan highlighted by a need found in the factual research. This helps to put a usable program together for the youth and supporting organizations.

In conclusion, the assessment found point to options for improving the foster care system. There are multiple options and ways of interpreting the data found. For the purposes of this research project, one overarching challenge was identified and then addressed with potential solutions. The needs assessment helped to identify the gaps that need to be addressed in the foster care system, but how to effectively address these needs could benefit from additional feedback from those who deal with the needs first had such as youth aging out of foster care and organizations that serve foster care youth. Therefore, the second phase of the project will focus on getting feedback from foster care youth and organizations on how to most effectively provide the youth with the services and information that they need. Thus, the conversations with key stakeholders (youth and organizations) will guide and may slightly alter the project proposal described below.

Final Deliverable Opportunities

From the research gathered, many challenges face the youth aging out of foster care. The one that is researched and further explored in this project is the problem of getting information out to the youth, foster care parents and foster care organizations regarding available services. Therefore, the purpose of the project is to raise awareness about the needs of foster care youth who age out of the system and the resources available to meet those needs. There are many options that could help to alleviate this problem, but not all of them have the same potential.

One option to help provide information to youth, foster care parents and organizations about available resources is to provide all programs in a central location. This option could be imagined as an "all-in-one" building where all services needed by aging out youth could be found. A youth could walk in and "shop" around to find the organization that meets their needs. This program has many benefits such as easy access to programming, it captures the youth's attention with all the resources in one area and this type of program suggests a holistic approach. The downside to this option is that with such a big program and the vast amount of space needed, it would be hard to get the project funded. If the project is not fundable then the goal to help alleviate some of the challenges of the foster care youth is almost impossible. In addition, foster care youth are a transient population, making it challenging to centralize a program. It would also be hard to convince organizations to move their exiting office into a new building or create a satellite office in the "all-in-one" building. Moving is costly and operational dollars are not readily available. Lastly, non-profits are all competing for the same dollars and collaborative efforts can be challenging as many non-profits are not readily willing to work together. Overall, the "all-in-one" option has some benefits but if it were to become obsolete in a few years it is not practical to pursue such an option and secure funding for such a large project.

Another solution to the project problem is to create a centralization of people rather than a centralization of programs. This could be thought of as a network of employees who work in the field and/or a reoccurring conference where people with a similar background come together to share ideas. This solution could help build knowledge and resource sharing and provide for the potential for collaboration and creative idea sharing. This setting would also create a sense of belonging to a certain group of those who work in the foster care field. However, it is hard to get everyone together at the same place at the same time. There is no way to guarantee that attendees will go back and spread the information and there are limited resources for agencies to fund their employees to attend such a conference. Therefore, a community of people coming together has many benefits but it would take a lot to make this option have positive outcomes. This program would also be hard to fund because of its sporadic interaction, the need to have a concentration of active foster care organizations in one area, and inability to create visible change.

A centralized point of information is another option to help bridge the communication gap between organizations, youth, and the funding opportunities. This type of program could be

an electronic web source that provides organizations, foster care parents, youth and the general public with one source to learn about all of the funding possibilities based on need. This program has challenges such as access to a computer. Thus, those that do not have access to a computer would not be able to access the information, not resulting in any change from the current environment. The information would also have to be updated at intervals, meaning there would need to be continual funding to support the initiative. This program also has the potential to not reach the youth directly because the youth may not be interested in looking at funding or program opportunities. Therefore, an additional way to reach the youth would be needed. However, if the website is done right, it might empower the youth to help themselves and get them excited to be proactive about their own situation. Another benefit of a centralized point of information is that all of the information would be in one spot. If the program was electronically based, the information could be updated easily and could be accessed on people's own time. Therefore, there is a mobile aspect to the program that markets its potential to funders. It is also a replicable model that could be used in any location, urban or rural, whereas centralized programs or a centralization of people will not work. Overall, a centralized point of information allows for the different stakeholders to be able to gain access to the information that they need at any time. This helps to break the communication barrier that exists between youth, foster care parents and the organizations regarding funding and program opportunities.

The last option explored in this section is the possibility for a community liaison to spread information. This type of program uses a staff person as the source of information and then that person goes to the people in need. A program where a person or group of people go and talk to others about foster care could help to market a positive image of foster care at the same time as educating the population about foster care. However, promoting foster care in this fashion might encourage people to become a foster care parent for the wrong reasons (financial compensation). Another challenge to this program is the need to fund a staff person for outreach efforts and the need to constantly update and reproduce the information that is being given out or shared with the public. This is costly and time consuming. Therefore, there are a lot of hidden costs that are needed to successfully execute a program based solely on community outreach.

After identifying the pros and cons of each option it seems as though a combination of two was the best solution. Based on the fact that the project needs to be implementable to actually help fight the problem identified, it must have the opportunity to be funded. It also must have the ability to be mobile and have the ability to be implemented in any given area. With that said, a combination of a centralized form of information with a component of community engagement would be sure to reach all audiences with knowledge that could help the youth achieve a more independent lifestyle after foster care. However, the program combination suggested must be created in a way that was both efficient and effective in marketing and informing. It must be able to reach the youth and foster care parents while making sure to always have the most current and comprehensive information for the foster care community to use.

External and political forces that may hinder the program suggested may be the surrounding community. For example, this project will need the foster care community be willing to listen and learn. Although the need to provide more information and a specific set of programs was heard throughout the research, it was not guaranteed that parents and youth would actually use a new set of resources if given to them. The fortunate part to this program was that the information provided also seeks to serve foster care agencies. This means that even if parents and youth do not follow through with their expressed desires, staff members at the organizations can still utilize the information to better serve with the youth.

A steady stream of funding is another potential threat to the program. Therefore, a partnering organization or a secured grant would be needed to ensure the program's sustainability. Looking for money outside of the foster care-funding stream might be beneficial due to the complexity that tends to occur within the foster care environment.

Overall, this project seeks to bring agencies and their programs together in a way in which they can interact to create a more holistic set of programs and resources for the youth who are ready to age out or have aged out of the foster care system. This includes a way to get information to the youth, foster care parents (as a part of prevention to help youth before they age out) and foster care organizations that can help direct youth to find programs that they need. This wide audience suggests that not one form of marketing and education will be a useful to all stakeholders. Instead, a variety of ways of accessing the information must be sought out. In the end, the project focuses on the education and marketing of programs and resources in the foster care system for the aging out population by providing a way to access and navigate the available funds and programs with ease.

Final Deliverables, Recommendations and Methodology of Implementation

After the various forms of research it was concluded that more than one option was needed to be able to reach the goal to provide foster care youth with information and access to organizations and programs that would assist youth aging out of the foster care system in gaining basic needs that would result a higher quality of life. For the youth to meet this outcome, other support systems such as the organization's efficiency and foster care and birth parents ability to be a more positive influence would also need to improve. (See Logic Model in Appendix page 88.

There are many activities that have been identified that can help to realize the goals of the project. The first step in accomplishing the multiple goals set out by the project was to create a printed booklet ("The Resource Book") of information that provides a list of organizations with contact information, hours of operation and eligibility requirements. (The full booklet can be seen in the accompanying document). This list is a user-friendly, quick resource guide that can be used by organizations to refer their clients to resources that will best meet their needs. The "Resource Book" is designed to use icons, and will have colorful information that is clearly laid-out. For example, the service organizations listed are organized by the categories of basic needs identified throughout the research. The final list of basic needs that were explored through this project are the following; assistance in basic skills training, job

obtainment assistance, education placement assistance, food assistance, clothing assistance, housing assistance and mentoring services. In addition, parenting resources for both birth parents and foster care parents are also listed as the parents are a vital part of a youth's success in foster care. It should be noted that there is a distinction between the needs of foster care parents and birth parents. Each parent has a different role to play in the youth's life, and therefore, has different needs. The "Resource Book" supports the idea that parent's need assistance and should work towards providing a better environment for the youth to learn and grow.

The "Resource Book" also maps where each of the organizations listed are located within the city of Detroit. The location of the organization is important when referring a family or youth to an organization to ensure that the organization is accessible to the person being referred.

The "Resource Book" is housed in organizations that serve foster care youth and families throughout Detroit. The "Resource Book" can then be used by case workers to refer their youth and families to specific places based on their need. The same information can be accessed by the youth and their parents through a website. The website reflects the need for youth and parents to be able to access the resources as well and a website is a great way to provide wide spread access. The design of the website must also be considered, just as the design of the "Resource Book" was. A website that is colorful, inviting, and easy to use. A website is a great way to allow youth and their parents to access information on their own and feel empowered to find ways to fulfill their needs without calling an agency. (Refer to website research on page 59 and proposed website template in Appendix page 93-94).

The website can also serve as a base to get information sent to a mobile phone through text message. Users can input their email or phone number and receive upcoming events or news regarding supportive services. The use of text messaging responds to the vast majority of youth who need assistance and have phones to receive text messages. These activities work together to increase access to resources (the over arching goal of the project). It is assumed that the organizations will share the website address in order to make it more accessible to the larger community. It is also assumed that youth and parents have access to a computer. If a computer is not in the home, organizations and libraries are available to use the web. While this might deter some, others would still use the website and spread the work through text message or word of mouth.

These suggested forms of information dissemination require labor to manage and keep information current. Therefore, the proposed project must be understood in terms of the dollar amount required to update and run the program. The budget of the "Resource Book" and its counter parts is minimal with an effective outcome. The budget assumes that the project tasks can be completed within an organization's existing job descriptions. The costs are embedded in start up costs and the printing of "Resource Book" binders. Only a small percentage of the costs are allocated to an employee's time. However, there is still a cost to run and manage the project. Therefore, potential funding sources such as The Community

Foundation of Southeast Michigan are identified as organizations that could support the mission of the proposed project. The full report of the budget can be found on page 89-91).

Lastly, an evaluation of the project was needed to measure the success and effectiveness of the project in terms of its ability to increase access to resources for foster care youth who are aging out as they pertain to basic needs (food, housing, clothing, jobs/education and mentoring) The method proposed for the evaluation happens through two different tools. The tools are 1) a telephone screening process and 2) a parent satisfaction survey. Specifically for the telephone screening, the social service agency that is being contacted for resources will utilize a telephone screening survey to identify the basic needs of the youth contacting the agency. The name and contact information of each youth will be documented along with all referrals made for future-follow up. The agency will then randomly (potentially 20% of all callers) contact the caller for follow-up within 60 days to document their ability to connect to the resources. The telephone screening tool will allow the agency to compile data as it relates to 1) highest needs of youth aging out of foster care and 2) feedback from youth as it pertains to documented referrals. This data will allow the agency to continue to update the referral book based on the greatest needs of the target population and provide feedback to partner agencies. (The proposed form for the telephone survey can be found in the Appendix on page 92). The evaluation tool is a simplified screening tool that will capture, name, age, race, contact information and referral information. This same tool will be used for follow-up with youth to gage their ability to access resources.

The foster care parent survey was specifically created to increase access to resources for foster care parents as it pertains to parent trainings and resources for foster care youth living in their homes or preparing to exit the foster care system. Satisfaction surveys will be administered to foster care parents during mandatory trainings facilitated by the social service agency. This tool will allow the agency to 1) Document the referral and resource needs of foster care parents and 2) Understand the strengths and challenges that foster care parents are facing as it pertains to the referral process. Satisfaction surveys will be administered on a rolling basis throughout the course of the year to capture the most information from a variety of foster care parents. (The evaluation tool can be seen on page 91 in the Appendix.) These short surveys will ask foster care parents about their ability to connect to referrals, their specified referral needs and their experience as it related to the referral process.

Expected Outcomes and Project Limitations

Human Development Outcomes

The expected human development outcomes of the project reach beyond the short-term goals of improving access to basic life skills, mentoring, jobs and education assistance. Other short-term goals include food assistance and housing assistance for youth. Although the short-term goals of the project do have an impact on the human development of the youth and their parents because the outcome of the short-term goals bring access to the most basic human needs, the long-term goals can have a more lasting effect on quality of life. Long-term goals of the project that affect human development for the youth are to increase youth independence, increase the number of foster care youth who feel they have a positive support system, increase self confidence in youth, increase the number jobs and higher education in foster care youth and lastly, to improve the number of foster care youth who feel they have a stable home. These larger goals seek to positively impact the way youth live. When a youth has a stable home and an education, there is great potential that the youth can develop into an adult who has the resources to provide a good life for him or herself. The initial access of resources increases the potential for a user to create a foundation for success.

The project goals also affect the human development for foster care parents and birth parents. For example, in the short term the expected human development goals are to improve knowledge about foster care parent training programs and to increase the ability for foster care parents to be a positive support system. The same is true for birth parents. Birth parents of foster care children need to participate in parent training, addiction programs or other programs needed to provide a healthy environment for themselves and their family. It is important to involve the birth parents in the process so the child can be reunited with their parents or have a healthy relationship with them after their time in foster care has ended. The long term goals include an increase in parental involvement in training programs, a decrease in the movement of foster care youth between families and work to improve the number of youth who feel their foster care families are a positive support. These intentions positively affect the human development of not only the youth but the parents as well. The positive improvements, however large or small, have a greater impact on the human development of the parents and youth as part of a larger support system.

The organizations that help to make it possible for youth and parents are the catalysts for human development. Without the organizations that provide access and knowledge for the tools to make improvements, it would be nearly impossible for the youth and parents to access the services they need immediately and the skills they need to live stable lives.

Overall, when parents, organizations and youth work together they can create a more supportive and positive environment for foster care youth who can later become productive members of society.

The organizational outcomes of the project can be described in both short-term and long-term goals. In terms of the short-term goals, the project focuses on how the partnering organization, Catholic Social Services, can be a greater help to its foster care families. The organizations hope to be able to connect youth and foster care families with more resources and meet their needs. The project was created by categorizing the highest needs and the eligibility of the programs that might serve the youth and their parent's needs, it will help Catholic Social Services' stream line their time finding resources for their clients. Thus, the project has the potential of improving the efficiency of caseworkers assisting foster care youth who may be aging out. Outside of Catholic Social Services, the organizations that are referenced as organizations that can help assist aging out foster care youth and their families could see an increase in users, therefore, helping other organizations fulfill their mission.

In the long term, an organization such as Catholic Social Services can help increase stability in youth and parents and families. Long-term goals also include the ability for the project to reach other organizations that can further provide access to youth aging out of foster care and foster care families. The cycle of connecting youth with organizations who can meet their needs and parents with organizations improves the connection between organizations that seek to help those in need. Non-profit organizations such as Catholic Social Services can greatly benefit from a project that helps to create positive relationships between organizations and refer clients to them because their organizations are set up in a way that typically does not have a marketing budget. Therefore, existing or new relationships are needed for continued collaboration. In conclusion, the organizational benefits that are expected by the short-term and long-term outcomes of the project can benefit the workings of a single organization, but more importantly, positively impact the working relationship between organizations that work to support the needs of others.

Expected Physical Development Outcomes

The outcome of the project "Aging Out of Foster care, Linking Funding, Organizations and Youth" does not measure its outcomes on the positive impact of physical development. However, in the long-term, the physical development could be impacted by found needs of youth aging out of foster care. If more youth come to organizations with needs, the size and capacity of organizations might need to increase or the number of organizations that serve foster care youth may also increase. In addition, where organizations are located might also change after realizing where youth are coming from in relationship to where organizations are located. Overall, the physical development was not greatly impacted by the goals of the project. But rather, it was the projects intention to better connect youth and organizations with resources. With this, physical development needs might arise and should be taken into account by the network of organizations that are all working together to serve the needs of aging out foster care youth and their families.

Expected Economic Outcomes

The economic impact of the project benefited both the individuals and the organizations that assist foster care youth and their families. In regards to the youth, it is expected that they would gain assistance with little or minimal fees which would relieve some financial stress. The parents of foster care youth who might also be using the suggested organizations would be provided with their needs for little or minimal costs. Organizations using the proposed "Resource Book" would also expect to see a financial benefit by increasing efficiency in terms of cutting down on research. Also, the project and budget was created to fit within existing funding streams and job roles. Therefore, the implementation of the project would not be a financial strain on an organization. For example, an existing secretary or caseworker could do the updating of the "Resource Book". The skills needed to update and research are well within existing capabilities of organizations that would be utilizing the proposed "Resource Book". Still as in the short term, an expected economic impact would be better utilizing the money that is allocated to the organizations that provide resources for foster care youth and youth aging out of foster care and their families.

In the long-term, the economic impact would affect the youth and organizations. The hope would be that the youth would be able to contribute to the economy by participating in the work force. As for organizations, a well-defined process and outcomes that address important needs of the foster care community can help organizations obtain grants. This can help decrease financial stress on the organization. In addition, the project proposes a budget that can help to keep the organization on track with how much it would cost to deliver the goals and outcomes of this project. In conclusion, the economic impacts are expected to impact the individual first and then the larger economy.

Expected Impacts on Social and Economic Justice

"Aging Out of Foster care, Linking Funding, Organizations and Youth" has a great impact on social and economic justice. Through the research and outcomes of the proposed project, much can be learned about the inequalities that are experienced as a foster care child and the challenges that go along with the inequalities. By proposing a way for foster care youth to have a set of resources that was geared to their specific needs addresses the fact that there are social injustices that neglect the specific needs of youth aging out of foster care. In particular, the proposed project expects to help fight the injustices of being exploited as a foster care youth or being neglected from government support because of their age. The proposed "Resource Book" provides services for all foster care youth regardless of race or ethnicity. The other quality that the "Resource Book" has is its ability to service those with low literacy rates. The "Resource Book" is to be read and understood by organizations, youth and parents. Therefore, multiple ways of displaying information was used such as color, icons, and text. The "Resource Book" also seeks to provide resources of support both in mental (Mentoring) and physical ways knowing that youth not only need food and housing but they also need someone to talk to.

Economic justice was addressed through the ability for youth to be provided with services that can open up their opportunities to become a part of society. Through research it was

found that foster care youth are subject to low paying jobs due to their limited ability to get a higher education. However, if the "Resource Book" is utilized correctly youth can get a college education with a significant amount of the tuition paid through scholarships and grants.

Expected Regional Development

The project described can have a regional impact after many of the short-term goals are successfully completed. The project and research is based in Detroit, Michigan due to the goal to make a tangible impact for the community from which the research originated. After the system of information dissemination is tested and a budget is created to expand the area of influence, metro Detroit areas or other cities would be able to implement the system and strategies created by the proposed project. The process and procedures could be replicated in any city to best fit the foster care, organizations and foster care parents of that area. The same basic needs found in this project will most likely not fit the basic needs of different areas or cities. In addition, it was found that regional forces have the ability to control funding for programs that serve foster care youth. Therefore, the project takes the approach to work within what is already being funded and supported to ensure that the proposed project is realistic. In conclusion, the impact on regional development would not be seen for many years down the road. However, the project takes into consideration the power of regional forces to ensure that the project can have an impact in the short-term.

Opportunities for Partnership with Other Organizations

"Aging Out of Foster care, Linking Funding, Organizations and Youth" has great potential to create partnerships with other organizations. The character of the project inherently creates partnerships, as its goal was to provide youth with access to their basic needs. To provide access the proposed "Research Book" houses hundreds of organizations that can help provide the needs expressed by the parents, youth and organizations.

The utilization of an evaluation process will also allow Catholic Social Services to show success towards outcomes that could be utilized by other agencies. This could ultimately help to strengthen the overall system and formulate collaborations between youth serving agencies. The intention of this project was to create a pilot program for Catholic Social Services and the Detroit foster care community, with the intention that it can be replicated for other communities. The tangible evidence towards success as measured by the evaluation tools will help to make this possible and replicable for other communities.

In addition, partnerships can be created with funders who may then be partners for the life of the project. Funders such as The Woman's Foundation, The Sojourner Foundation, The Community Foundation of Southeastern Michigan, The McGregor Fund, The Colina Foundation, The Tigers Foundation and The Toyota Foundation all already possess the abilities to be a partner of the proposed project. This suggests that the project has the potential to be sustainable through the support of multiple organizations.

Impact on Public Policies

There are many potential political impacts "Aging Out of Foster care, Linking Funding, Organizations and Youth" could instigate. For example, the project could influence policies to support foster care youth with a larger budget through proving the need of more money to create a network and information base for youth, parents and organizations. To help continue supporting the research, a policy might also be created that requires better tracking of the youth by each organization. This might help to increase the efficiency of each organization so they know exactly what the needs are and what their money will best influence. In addition, the project has to potential to increase access to money funds in ETV, YIT, JCYOI programs. Access could increase because organizations could better understand how to create programs that would utilize the money efficiently.

Efficiency might also be seen as organizations create partnerships. For example, banks and foster care organizations could work together to get youth set up for financial success. Also, universities and foster care organizations could put youth in an environment where they could be surrounded by opportunities and education. All of these policies that could be created suggest that organizations should make a point to reach youth before they are in trouble. An article by Wagner and Woncott states the following in support of creating policy that enforces organizations to reach youth before they leave an organization, "Youth aging out of foster care are eligible for WIA youth services (WIA §101(13), 20 CFR 664.20). Because they often lack education and occupational skills, they are excellent prospects for WIA. It is important to reach youth before they completely transition out of foster care." The following are some of Wagner's and Woncott's suggestions on how to accomplish this; contact staff responsible for foster care programs and Chafee programs, contact those staff to share information about foster care programs, Chafee programs, and WIA programs, work with foster care staff to identify foster youth before they leave the foster care system, work with Chafee program staff to identify Chafee foster youth who might benefit from WIA youth services, agree on referral procedures among programs, ask staff to identify other agencies and programs that might serve youth aging out of foster care particularly other foster care agencies and foster care group homes but also Youthbuild, Job Corps, social services agencies, managers, school guidance counselors, and community or faith-based organizations. Lastly, invite foster youth in group homes to visit the WIA youth agency or attend a WIA youth event such as an orientation to WIA, a booth at a job fair, or an open house.[cv]

Conclusion

In conclusion, the project "Aging Out of Foster Care, Linking Funding, Organizations and Youth" has the ability to make a difference in foster care youth's life now and in the future. Youth who are preparing to age out of foster care or those who have already aged out of foster care can receive information for their basic needs with the "Resource Book" and its counter parts. Foster care and birth parents can also benefit from the identification of additional resources; such as parenting classes. In addition, the project has lasting effects on the way that organizations work together to provide the needs for foster care youth and their families. Immediacy was also considered when determining the funding process. Instead of relying on a large grant or a specific government funded project, the project works under the premise that the project can be worked into an organization's existing fiscal allocations and job descriptions. All of these improvements lead to a greater good where the foster care youth will be provided the opportunity to be given life long skills that can propel them into the future with the knowledge and resources that they need to provide a healthy and good quality of life. The project outcomes challenge the social, economic and environmental struggles that seem to inherently come with being a participant in the foster care community. With the resources and connections provided by the "Resource Book" and its supporting activities, foster care youth will have the ability to receive the resources that are needed to be successful participants in their community.

Appendices

This section gives more detail to the information presented in the formal paper.

I. Analysis of Data Compilation (Semester I)

To complete the research and needs assessment a multi-tiered data collection was used.

1. Utilize a multi-tiered data collection
   a. Multiple groups
      1. Focus group of youths
      2. Focus group of parents
      3. Interview lawyers who represent
      4. Ex-foster care that fell through the loops
      5. Ex-foster care that have not fallen through the cracks
      6. Multiple organizations
   2. Multiple data collection
      a. US Census
      b. Articles
      c. Local data
      d. Focus groups
   3. Data-
      a. Archival
         i. Demographics
         ii. Census
      b. Communicative non-interactive
         i. Observations
         ii. Written questionnaires
      c. Communicative interactive
         i. Community groups
         ii. Interviews
            1. Foster care Organizations
            2. Foster care Youth
         iii. Focus groups
      d. Analytical-interpretation of data
         i. SWOT
         ii. Trends- what is happening now, and where is it going

II. Project Deliverables (Semester II)

1. Gant Chart
2. Logic Model
3. Budget
4. Evaluation Tools
5. Web Site Template Suggestion

II. Interviews

Interviews: Methodology & Summary

Outcome of Interviews With Foster care Organizations:

To gather information from foster care workers, parents and youth regarding the needs as they relate to available resources for youth aging out of the foster care system.

Method:

Eight interviews were completed during the months of October and November, 2010. Interviewees included; foster care workers, parents, review board participants, administrators, residential facility employees and trainers. Each interviewee was asked the same 14 questions in an effort to collect comparable information as it relates to the Foster care System.

Interviewees ranged in their experience level from 10-15 years of experience in the foster care system to 2 years in a residential based environment. This compellation includes all answers from the interviews. The Interview Questions can be found in Figure 1 A. Responses to the interview questions can be found in Figure 1 B.

Figure 1A: Interview Questions:

1.) What programs have been successful in your experience with youth aging out of foster care?
2) What are some educational resources or marketing needs that you could identify as it relates to this population?
2) What are some of the most positive / helpful changes that have occurred recently in outreach efforts for this population?
3) What is the best resource that the kids are using now?
4) What would you define as the greatest need of the foster care programming presently?
5) What are some the recent trends in foster care programming?
6) What Youth In Transition resources (funding) have been the most useful to your agency and the youth that you serve?
7) What is the greatest funding need for foster care children exiting the system
8) If you are working in residential treatment; what is the greatest need as it pertains to family reunification
9) How could the foster care system be more effective in your opinion
11) Where do you see the largest opportunity in the funding/programming?
12) Why do you feel kids are ending up pregnant and in jail even after all of these programs?
13) What do you think would get them to keep with the skills they have been taught.
14) Are there any other programs around the country that seem to be working really well

Interviewees

1. Foster care Administration
2. Foster care Administration

3. Vista Maria Foster care Parent trainer
4. Foster care Parent
5. Matrix Human Services
6. Genesis House
7. Juvenile Detention Representative
8. DHS representative
9. Foster care Review Board
10. Foster care Direct Worker
11. Youth-In-Transition Representative

Figure 1B:Responses:

Programs Needs:

- Independent Living Center and Transitional Facilities are considered to be more successful
- Educational opportunities; only 30% of the young adults in the Midwest study had completed any college compared with 53% of the 21 year old peers.

Education and Marketing:

- Foster care workers are not aware of all available programs
- Foster care parents are not aware of the programs available to the children in their homes or themselves
- Information needs to be made available in all languages
- Information should be made available at schools
- The Department of Human Services should be more engaged in the training processes of foster care parents in order to better understand the system
- Scholarship opportunities at the college level (Western University has a program).
- Professionals studying social work, community development, etc…should include child welfare as part of their curriculum in an effort to train the next generation of child welfare workers.
- Marketing at present delivers the bad news about what happens to children aging out of the system. More emphasis needs to be upon the good that happens. The positives need to be identified; also identification of people, agencies, community, etc., that are interested in providing services, especially those that want to help offer independent living services.
- Permanency Planning process utilized as a team approach to formulating a "permanency pact" for young people that cannot be reunified with family, relative or adoption. Youth transitioning from foster care are often unsure about who they can count on for on-going support.

Positive/Helpful Changes that have occurred in outreach:

- Independent Living Programs
- Michigan Youth In Transition (on some levels)
- Increased funding for youth aging out

- The Foster care Parent Outreach campaign (2009-2010)
- "Programs such as YIT, ETV, and MYOI have put a big emphasis on children aging out of services in the past three to four years. These are the best resources offered at present.
- Youth participation on boards and other leadership opportunities. Also, youth are able to serve on boards
- Opportunities for youth aging out to live together in a shared environment (At present, Vista Maria offers this option)

Best Resource:

- Independent Living programs
- Financial Assistance
- Foster care Parent Support Groups
- The automated system for Child Protective Services
- Their workers. The caseworkers are great resources for the youth, if they take advantage of them, as they can assist them in developing the skills they identify as necessary to reach their personal goals.
- The best resource for each child is the developing of positive relationships in the community that support and sustain their daily living. Mentors are helpful in this matter.
- All students must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)
- TIP (Tuition Incentive program) helps pay for tuition and fees.
- ETV (as listed above)
- Casey Family Scholars Program provides scholarships of up to $10,000 for young people who spend at least 12 months in foster care and were not subsequently adopted at www.orphan.org
- The Children's Benefit Fund provides educational supports that include the purchase of computers for MCI wards. (children's whose parents rights have been terminated and they are part of the Michigan Children's Institute)
- Michigan Indian Tuition Waiver pays tuition for students who are at least ¼ American Indian. The Inter – Tribal Council of Michigan approves this award.
- Aquinas College offers a Fostering Success Scholarship which ensures that total assistance from scholarships and grants will cover tuition, room, board, and book cost.
- Ferris State University in Big Rapids offers services to youth through the local DHS (Department of Human Services) office to those interested or attending FSU.
- Lansing Community College now offers the Theresa and Frederick Junger Scholarship for students who were in foster care.
- Macomb Community College has a YIT Scholarship Program for all youth interested in attending MCC for free.
- Michigan State University offers the Jim and June Grant Expandable Foster care Scholarship Fund.

- Other schools offer similar opportunities such as MSU East Lansing, UofM, University of Phoenix and Western Michigan University.
- MI Works (Michigan Works) It is required that social workers ensure that all foster care children ages 14 and older are referred to Michigan Works for employment opportunities. These referred youth receive priority status for age appropriate employment.
- MRS (Michigan Rehabilitation Services) This service is designed to help people with disabilities get and keep a suitable job.

Greatest Need:

- Grant writing at the agency level
- Financial Assistance (in the form of bank accounts for each youth that is aging out)
- Mentorships
- Collaborative partnerships
- Connect to the community
- Funding for driver license
- Housing
- Access to bus passes
- Transportation
- The greatest need presently is the emphasis on reunification. The system puts too much emphasis on terminating parental rights which presents orphans. More emphasis needs to be placed on what the program was designed to do; and that is to unify families.
- Policy issues related to Supportive and transitional housing (ie…case load sizes should be smaller as the program is more intensive case management)
- One of the greatest needs is continued health care and it is currently being addressed effective Oct-Nov 2010. This is Transitional Medicaid which is medical coverage for youth who have aged out of the foster care system but under the age of 21. If the youth reached their 1^{8th} birthday while in an out of home placement under the supervision of DHS (Department of Human Services) and not currently incarcerated, they are able to maintain their health coverage (Medicaid Health Plan) up to age 21.
- Birth control and sex education

Recent Trends:

- Lack of focus and determination on the part of agencies
- Homelessness in youth aging out
- Youth in Transition budget has been cut. The number of requests are more limited. The most frequent request granted are graduation expenses, and driver's training. Some youth have received first month's rent and deposit; but most youth have not met the requirements to receive these.
- Youth that have aged out living in central locations that agencies are not connected to.

- FC is forever changing right now due to the consent decree (federal law suit). As of 10/01/10, the caseload sizes were decreased to 1:20 (from 1:22, which went down in 10/2009).
- The increase in children being placed in foster care due to the economic downturn. Families are presenting without heat, water, electricity and children are removed from the homes as a result.
- The # of children remaining in the system for extended periods of time is decreasing.
- The number of children waiting to be adopted is decreasing.
- Monitoring safety of children in foster homes has increased.
- Michigan conducts a Child and Family Services Review (CFSR). This is a Federal Government's program for assessing the performance of State child welfare agencies with regard to achieving positive outcomes for children and families.

Youth in Transition Funding:

- Challenging to monitor because the youth are very transient
- The Jim Casey Foundation; They match up to $5,000 dollars when youth are contributing to an account that can be utilized/specified for approved services – housing, education, cars, etc.
- Drivers training funding

What is the greatest funding need or youth aging out of the Foster care system?

- Educational opportunities (funding)
- Financial Education
- Basic Life Skills
- Home ownership or renting skills
- Healthy Relationship classes/sessions/retreats.

Family Reunification Needs:

- The lack of safe housing that is available for the amount of children in the system is a problem.
- Families need to be engaged in the process and time/money needs to be spent on ensuring their role in the process.
- Families need to know that reunification is still an option (legal assistance).
- Michigan has a program that allows family members to take children into their homes that have been removed. This program is underutilized and needs to be advertised.
- Changing the mindset of foster care – making a paradigm shift to reconnect families instead of creating new ones.

How could the system be more effective?

- Youth aging out should be given bank accounts and financial assistance.

- Youth aging out should be connected to one another (mentorships).
- Youth aging out should be given more educational opportunities.
- In my opinion, we could make the foster system more effective by offering birth parents some of the same incentives that are offered to foster care parents. For example, if we offered birth parents financial assistance for maintaining children in the home, it might help children to remain in the home instead of ending up in foster care.
- Assisting families while children are still in their homes, prior to removal. Preventative models would be effective.

Opportunities in Funding/Programming

- Skills/Education
- Financial Assistance
- Basic Life Skills.
- Life skills seminars for youth.

Pregnancy/ Jail Time:

- Lack of a community/support system
- Lack of Education
- Lack of Basic Life
- Focus on survival mode

Where are skills learned now:

- On the streets
- In gangs

National Best Practices:

- New York Cities Harlem Project involved Foster care
    - Is an educational based program that focuses on providing wrap around services with mentors to guide the process
- Innovation Café in Chicago
- There is a program in Iowa (Des Moines) where social workers, welfare workers, attorneys, foster care parents, judges, and other persons interested in foster care, work together in teams to diminish the number of children in the foster care system. For example; the state of Iowa has decreased the number of African American and other children of color in the system from 9% to 2%. (She has other data to support this if needed).
- California has a system in which foster parents are treated as employees. They receive payment as well as benefits which helps to make them feel that they are vested in the program
- Foster Club is a national network for youth in foster care located at fosterclub.com
- Foundations such as John Chafee funding and Annie Casey Foundation

Conclusion:

These eight interviews highlighted many resources, needs, strengths and challenges of the current Foster care system in Michigan. Many of the current trends and resources were attributed to the recent policy changes within the Department of Human Services, including case load size decreases, an increased focus on safety in the foster care home and family reunification. In contrast, the challenges focused on a need for preventative measures within the foster care system. Allowing children to remain in the home while offering support, both financially and socially were offered as suggestions for change to the system.

Many interviewees also spoke to the collection of funding and financial opportunities available to youth aging out but spoke to the disjointedness of the system in tandem. A need to connect youth and their families to the available resources is a key observation.

The needs identified by the interviewees focused on educational and basic life skills need. While there is funding available, this is not easily accessible, making it challenging for youth to apply for funding. The low employment rate and lack of continued education among youth aging out of the foster care system point to a specific need to focus on education for this population.

The recent trends in case load size decreases combined with an increase in children entering the system due to the current economic climate pose a very real challenge to the system. Many of the interviewees spoke to this challenge and the urgent need to address some prevention methods as a result.

The combination of challenges and strengths portray a system that is functioning and improving in several areas, but still needing assistance. The overarching observation by the interviewees was the need to connect the moving pieces of the Foster care system in an effort to educate staff, state employees, the public, families and youth.

III. Interviews with Youth

Six interviews were conducted with youth that had aged out of the foster care system and were either living in homeless shelters or had recently experienced homelessness. Of the 6 youth interviews, 2 were young men, both of whom had recently been incarcerated, while 3 young women were homeless and one was homeless with two children. All 6 youth (ages 19-26) were asked the same series of questions regarding foster care programming.
Responses included the following:

Available Resources that were helpful:

-Financial Assistance when leaving the foster care system (in many cases a $900.00 check for housing was made available)
-Food and Clothing Assistance post aging out of the foster care system
-Employment assistance from certain agencies (Don Bosco Hall and Michigan Works)

What resources would be more helpful?

-Financial Literacy
-Basic Life Skills programming; how to cook, clean your home and maintain utilities. Many youth had never lived on their own before and had difficulty maintaining housing
-Education and employment opportunities; a database would be helpful
-Group Living opportunities for youth that have aged out of the system to live together.
-Financial assistance for uniforms (jobs), housing and educational needs

Skills/Trainings Needed:

-Financial Literacy
-Housing Maintenance
-Positive relationships/Conflict management
-Vocational skills (carpentry, electrician)

Perceptions of available funding in the city of Detroit?

-Each youth questioned was unaware that there was available funding for housing, education and basic needs and did not know where they would go to find this information.

Conclusion

Each youth interviewed referenced their frustration with the complexities of the foster care system. It is challenging to maneuver and in many cases they were unaware of available resources (i.e., Western University's foster care program). In conversations about needs of the foster care system, each stated that they would not be in a homeless situation currently if they had been better prepared for independent living while participating in foster care. Some interviewees saw a need to increase training for foster care parents, while others thought that the foster care agencies should offer more programming for youth. Each spoke to the need for a coordinated understanding of programs, funding and eligibility youth 18-21 in the city of Detroit.

Organization Matrix

This matrix below compares twelve different Detroit organizations and the programs that they provide-specifically for foster care youth and their families. The chart helps to organize what programs are offered and what are not offered in terms of services for youth aging out of foster care or preparing to age out.

DETROIT FOSTER CARE ORGANIZATIONS

THE SERVICE	Black Family Development	Starrfish Family Services	Homes for Black Children	Capacity Developrers Incorporate	Covenant House	Matrix	Catholic Social Services of Wayne	Lutheran Child and Family Services	Boysville-Holy Cross	Vista Maria	Don Bosco	Children's Aid SocieTY	Children's Center of Detroit
Foster Care-Long Term		●					●	●		●		●	●
Foster Care-Short Term	●						●	●	●	●	●	●	
Life Skills		●	●	●	●		●				●		
Higher Education Support		●			●	●			●		●	●	
Job Placement Support		●			●	●						●	
Community Engagement	●				●	●					●		
After Care Support	●		●			●			●				●
Finacial Resource Assistance													●
Group Living					●			●	●				
Prevention Care/Counseling Family Involvement	●				●	●					●		●
Medical Treatment											●		