



FOSTER YOUTH DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

Final Evaluation Report: Executive Summary

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Executive Summary¹

According to a 2008 AFCARS report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/tar/report14.htm), over 26,000 youth age out of the foster care system each year. Research shows that youth who leave foster care are more likely to drop out of high school, to be unemployed, and to be dependent on public assistance when compared to other youth. Youth from foster care may also experience mental health problems, drug usage, and involvement with the criminal justice system—all at higher rates than average.² It is therefore not surprising that the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) Employment and Training Administration (ETA) chose youth in foster care and alumni of care, age 16–21, to be served in a five-state demonstration project.

In September 2004, ETA approached California, Illinois, Michigan, New York, and Texas, the five states with the largest number of youth in foster care, and offered funds for a demonstration project. The solicitation required the states to conduct the projects in areas of the state with the highest concentration of youth in foster care:

- California: Pasadena and South Central Los Angeles
- Illinois: Chicago
- Michigan: Detroit
- New York: New York City
- Texas: Houston

ETA funded each of the states at \$400,000 per year with matching funds required at an equal level. ETA provided two years of funding and no-cost extensions, so the grant period extended to June 30, 2007. Table A shows the state grant recipient, the local lead agencies, the program start dates, and funding information for the five states.

¹ Please see the main report at <http://www.casey.org/doleval> or <http://www.iel.org/programs/casey.html> for more information.

² See: Courtney, M. E., Terao, S., & Bost, N. (2004). *Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Conditions of youth preparing to leave state care*. Chicago: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago; Pecora, P. J., Kessler, R. K., Williams, J., O'Brien, K., Downs, A. C., English, D., White C. R., Hiripi, E., Wiggins, T., & Holmes, K. (2005). *Improving family foster care: Findings from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study*. Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs. www.casey.org.

Table A. Basic Grant Information for Each Site

State Grant Recipient	Local Lead Agencies and Service Providers	Program Start Date	Total Promised Funding Amount	Source of Matching Funds³
California Employment Development Department	Foothill Workforce Investment Board (Pasadena) and Community Build (South Central Los Angeles)	May 2005	\$1.6 million: \$800,000 federal+\$800,000 state and local	State Wagner-Peyser (50%); local Chafee Funds (50%)
Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity	Alternative Schools Network	January 2005	\$1.6 million: \$800,000 federal+\$800,000 state	State Workforce Investment Act (WIA) discretionary funds (50%); state Chafee funds (50%)
Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth	Detroit Workforce Development and the Southeast Michigan Community Alliance; Employment and Training Designs, Inc. (local service provider)	February 2005	\$1.6 million: \$800,000 federal+\$800,000 state	State Chafee funds
New York State Office of Children and Family Services	New York City Administration for Children and Family Services (ACS); Arbor Employment and Training (local service provider; also subcontractor The Door)	February 2006	\$1.6 million: \$800,000 federal+\$800,000 state and local	State Chafee funds (65%); local ACS funds (35%)
Texas Workforce Commission	Harris County Protective Services	March 2006	\$1.6 million: \$800,000 federal funds+\$800,000 local funds	State Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF); first year also included \$100,000 from state Chafee funds

In May 2005, ETA entered into an agreement with Casey Family Programs to collaborate on an evaluation of the demonstration project. In turn, Casey Family Programs contracted with the

³ Wagner-Peyser and Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funds are U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training funds; Chafee funds are funds for youth in foster care that may come from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services or the state match; Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds are U.S. Department of Health and Human Services funds for welfare assistance.

Institute for Educational Leadership to conduct the evaluation, along with the Johns Hopkins University and two experts on the experiences and outcomes of youth in foster care. This is the third and final report. It is based on two site visits conducted in the fall of 2005 and 2006 and phone interviews conducted in the fall of 2007. This report is also based on up to nine quarters of individual participant-level data through June 30, 2007 provided by each of the sites. All sites were required to report aggregate data on a quarterly basis to DOL. This report uses the individual participant data, however, as it is more complete and permits analyses based on more than one variable at a time.

Overview of the local projects:

- ***Foothill Workforce Investment Board in Los Angeles*** oversees two sites, one located in Pasadena at the One-Stop Career Center and the other at Community Build in South Central Los Angeles. The Pasadena location is able to leverage the services available at the One-Stop Center, while Community Build is a well-established youth employment and training provider with many services available in the building to its participants. Collectively, these two sites together are known as the Self-Sufficiency Project.
- ***Alternative Schools Network (ASN) in Chicago*** is an association of alternative schools. Thirteen of them participate in this project, which ASN calls Project New Futures. Part-time transition counselors housed in the participating schools assist youth in preparing for postsecondary education and employment, and transition specialists housed at ASN provide postsecondary support and resources.
- ***Employment and Training Designs, Inc. in Detroit***, a for-profit company, operates the Creating Independence and Outcomes (CIAO) project. CIAO is located at the Rosa Parks Center, a city-operated property that also houses other youth programs and services. Many of these services are also available to the youth participating in the program.
- ***Arbor Employment and Training Corporation in New York City*** is a for-profit company that entered into an agreement with The Door to locate the program in its main youth center facility on Broome Street. The Door is a well-known youth services agency that provides programs and services to over 7,000 youth a year, in effect operating a one-stop center. The Door's youth development services and other social services are available to the youth participating in Arbor's program, which it calls Passport to Success.

- ***Harris County Protective Services for Children and Adults in Houston*** is a county agency. It operates this program as well as the state-funded transition program for youth in foster care. The Houston Alumni and Youth Center (the HAY Center) operates in a facility that was developed specifically for this project. The HAY Center has attracted a number of partners to provide services to the youth.

Observations and Lessons Learned Across Sites

Although the sites operated within a common framework of services, each brought its own strategy for improving transition outcomes. Listed below are critical dimensions present across programs.

Staff Relationships with the Youth—No single program component rose to the same level of importance in a young person’s life as having a caring adult who guided and supported the youth through this transition period. When we asked youth what they valued most about the programs, overwhelmingly, they pointed out the individual who worked most directly with them. One of the youth in a focus group said “I never had people care about me this much. I would definitely not be in college if it were not for this program.” The factors behind a positive connection between the project participants and the staff can be summarized in a few words: size (relatively low caseloads), mentoring, motivation, and staff accessibility (the value of adult mentors has been documented elsewhere).

Program Design and Services—To their credit, none of these programs have remained static. As they gained experience in working with the youth, each made changes in its approach. The biggest change is that several sites have moved away from a cohort approach to serving youth to a more individualized, open-entry/open-exit approach. Several of the programs were originally designed with a structured model of classes and activities for youth to follow. Those sites found that this didn’t work well; they have had to individualize more of the services they provided. Sites have also made changes in how they prepare youth to obtain and maintain employment, a particularly challenging area for the sites. All the sites, most notably Houston, regularly seek the input of their clients in all aspects of services and activities.

Program Staffing—Program staffing across the sites has remained remarkably stable, given the challenging nature of the work and the relatively low pay. All the sites report that many, if not

all, of the initial hires are still with the program. Stability in staffing is important for developing relationships with the youth. The limited turnover is a testament to the sites' good staffing decisions.

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

The sites report success in accessing the resources available to these youth through the Chafee funds.⁴ Yet there is little routine coordination between child welfare caseworkers and project staff. Meanwhile, the relationship between the programs and workforce is more developed. Employment and training resources are regularly accessed by all sites.

Sites have developed some notable partnerships in other areas. A few of the sites have established relationships with Job Corps. Other sites have established relationships with the juvenile justice system. Houston and Community Build (Los Angeles), as well as Chicago, also have developed good relationships with local community colleges. These seem to be particularly productive partnerships, as community colleges generally are able to provide youth with extra supports (academic counseling and tutoring, for example) they may need in order to successfully continue their education.

Job Placement and Follow-up—Sites have had little difficulty in finding entry-level jobs for youth. Detroit, with the highest unemployment rate of any of the sites, reports that there are still entry-level jobs available. Job placement specialists at the sites work directly with employers and provide post-placement follow-up and support to both employers and to the young people.

⁴ Chafee funds are provided to states by the federal government to support independent living programs helping youth in the transition to adulthood.

The sites face two large issues around job placement, however. First, many of the youth are unprepared for work, even for part-time employment. Second, many, if not most, of the placements are temporary or short-term.

Management Information Systems (MIS)—DOL required quarterly reporting from the sites. Sites had a great deal of difficulty accurately capturing the required data. The sites lacked both a common system for capturing the information and a complete understanding of how the data elements were defined. There was considerable confusion around the definition of some outcome measures; as a result, the sites did not capture every outcome possibility, particularly as they relate to part-time work. Staff from all the sites indicated that the outcomes and measures did not fully reflect the progress and interim accomplishments of the youth.

Youth Outcomes among the Sites

Staff from all five sites collected data on demographics, services, and outcomes. DOL gave the sites discretion in how they captured the data as long as they could provide the aggregate quarterly reports. This resulted in the sites using different methods. In some cases, the sites were not able to provide participant-level data for a particular variable or could provide these data only for certain participants. Nonetheless, because extensive work was undertaken with sites to replace missing information, we have confidence in the overall integrity of the participant-level data and the results they captured.

Table B provides characteristics of the youth who were served at all five sites (Variable definitions can be found in Table 2 of the main report). The five sites served over 1,000 youth in total; the number of youth served varied from 127 in New York City to 358 in Houston.

Table B. Participant Characteristics at Entry and Quarters Enrolled in Program—by Site and Overall

Characteristics at Entry	Category	Chicago	Detroit	Houston	Los Angeles	New York City	Total for All Sites
Age	Under 17	4.3%	3.9%	20.5%	35.4%	27.9%	19.0%
	17 & older	95.7%	96.1%	79.5%	64.6%	72.1%	81.0%
Race/ Ethnicity	White	0.5%	7.2%	23.0%	2.9%	0.0%	9.5%
	Black	87.3%	88.2%	54.1%	72.3%	70.9%	71.3%
	Hispanic	9.0%	0.0%	15.7%	19.9%	28.3%	14.4%
	Other	3.3%	4.6%	7.3%	4.9%	0.8%	4.8%
Gender	Male	35.5%	35.5%	47.5%	44.4%	37.8%	41.6%

Characteristics at Entry	Category	Chicago	Detroit	Houston	Los Angeles	New York City	Total for All Sites
	Female	64.5%	64.5%	52.5%	55.6%	62.2%	58.4%
School status at entry	In high school	69.6%	18.5%	27.2%	54.9%	46.8%	42.3%
	In postsecondary	2.3%	4.0%	18.8%	0.0%	10.3%	8.6%
	Dropout	4.7%	47.7%	23.8%	19.4%	27.0%	22.9%
	High school graduate but not enrolled in postsecondary education	23.4%	29.8%	30.3%	25.7%	15.9%	26.2%
Housing at entry	Stable housing	49.1%	65.6%	26.8%	68.3%	84.0%	51.9%
	Independent living	27.1%	8.6%	51.4%	18.5%	10.4%	29.0%
	Temporary/homeless	23.8%	25.8%	21.8%	13.2%	5.6%	19.2%
Foster care at entry		91.5%	55.3%	26.3%	74.8%	52.0%	56.3%
Adjudicated or Incarcerated		20.6%	No data	25.7%	17.2%	26.8%	21.9%
Parental status	Not a parent	56.9%	69.7%	85.8%	No data	88.2%	80.6%
	Noncustodial	8.7%	7.2%	7.0%	No data	6.3%	5.9%
	Custodial	34.4%	23.0%	7.3%	No data	5.5%	13.5%
Received public assistance and not in foster care		6.0%	3.3%	14.8%	1.9%	No data	7.1%
Quarters in program	1–3	3.2%	2.0%	30.0%	30.0%	40.9%	22.3%
	4–6	17.5%	22.4%	40.1%	21.3%	59.1%	31.9%
	7–9	79.4%	75.7%	30.0%	48.8%	0.0%	45.8%
Number of youth		214	152	358	207	127	1,058

Note: Variable definitions can be found in Table 2 of the main report.

All of the sites served a significantly higher percentage of youth over 16, most of whom were African American. Lack of stable housing, being parents, and having a juvenile record can all be considered significant barriers to employment for the youth served by the five sites.

The sites provided academic preparation, job preparation, and college preparation as well as a variety of support services to participants. Youth participated in these services for varying lengths of time. A large percentage of the youth, 46 percent, participated in the program for over 7 quarters, suggesting that the sites are providing long-term services to a significant number of youth. Just over 20 percent of the youth participated in the program for 1–3 quarters, and 32 percent participated for 4–6 quarters. The data for specific sites reflect differences in the start-up timeframes and decisions about how long to continue enrolling youth. For example, New York City did not begin enrolling participants until February 2006. Accordingly, New York participants could participate for a maximum of 6 quarters; and in fact, 59 percent participated for 4–6 quarters, while 41 percent participated for 1–3 quarters. In contrast, other sites tend to

show longer participation periods. In Chicago and Detroit, about 3 percent of the youth have been enrolled for less than 4 quarters, and in Houston and Los Angeles, 30 percent of youth have been enrolled for less than 4 quarters.

Table C shows the percentages of youth in each site and overall who received particular services, such as job or college preparation.

Table C. Services and Participation Received—by Site and Overall

Services & Participation Received the Following	Chicago	Detroit	Houston	Los Angeles	New York City	Total for All Sites
Job preparation	82.6%	96.7%	77.1%	71.5%	46.5%	76.3%
College preparation	80.7%	27.0%	8.1%	32.9%	14.2%	31.3%
GED/Basic Education	16.1%	46.7%	17.6%	15.5%	11.0%	20.2%
Life skills	80.7%	50.7%	11.5%	42.0%	43.3%	41.1%
Parenting	15.6%	3.3%	0.3%	12.1%	5.5%	6.8%
Health	52.3%	17.1%	61.5%	4.8%	No data	34.8%
Income support	50.9%	17.1%	54.5%	8.7%	No data	33.0%
Substance abuse	13.8%	2.0%	2.0%	1.9%	No data	4.1%
Other	64.7%	86.2%	31.8%	45.9%	4.7%	45.9%
Number of youth	214	152	358	207	127	1,058

Note: Variable definitions can be found in Table 2 of the main report.

Table D shows the percentage of youth who achieved specific outcomes, and the last row shows the percentage of youth who achieved any of the tracked outcomes. Wide variations in outcomes across the sites can be noted. These variations occur for all types of outcomes. Some can be explained by the specific program model used at a site. For example, Chicago has the highest GED or diploma rate, and Chicago is also the site where the most youth are in high school at the time of enrollment. Detroit has the lowest GED/diploma rate, which is consistent with what we learned from the site regarding their programming challenges around education. Because New York was in operation for fewer quarters, achievement of outcomes was likely reduced for both Passport to Success and overall for all sites.

Table D. Outcomes Achieved—by Site and Overall

Attained the Following Outcomes	Chicago	Detroit	Houston	Los Angeles	New York City	Total for All Sites
GED or diploma	43.6%	4.6%	27.9%	15.0%	8.7%	23.0%
Postsecondary	33.5%	10.5%	19.3%	9.2%	0.8%	16.8%
Employment	56.4%	38.8%	31.8%	24.2%	20.5%	35.0%
Any positive outcome	66.1%	45.4%	46.4%	32.4%	23.6%	44.8%
Number of youth	214	152	358	207	127	1,058

Note: Variable definitions can be found in Table 2 of the main report.

We examined a number of variables relating the participant characteristics and services received to outcomes attained. Some significant patterns emerged. Across all the characteristics and services, the most significant findings related to age, schooling status at entry, housing status at entry, and foster care status. Table E shows how outcomes varied for youth with particular characteristics.

Table E. Percentage of Youth with Specific Characteristics Who Attain Different Outcomes

Characteristics at Entry	Category	Attained the Following Outcomes			
		Employment	GED or Diploma ^a	Postsecondary ^b	Any Positive Outcome
Age	Under 17	18.6%	16.5%	6.9%	27.3%
	17 & older	40.1%	25.8%	17.3%	50.4%
Race/Ethnicity	White	37.0%	--	--	45.0%
	Black	36.1%	24.5%	16.6%	46.2%
	Hispanic	31.6%	20.6%	10.7%	40.8%
	Other	29.4%	--	--	39.2%
Gender	Male	33.7%	21.1%	14.0%	43.7%
	Female	36.1%	24.3%	15.3%	45.9%
School status at entry	In high school	34.5%	--	17.3%	47.1%
	In postsecondary	54.9%	N/A	N/A	67.0%
	Dropout	28.6%	10.4%	5.0%	35.7%
	High school graduate but not enrolled in postsecondary education	35.1%	29.8%	19.2%	42.4%
Housing at entry	Stable housing	31.1%	22.4%	12.6%	41.2%
	Independent living	43.4%	27.5%	19.7%	53.9%
	Temporary housing/homeless	34.3%	21.3%	14.5%	42.8%
Foster care at entry	Yes	36.1%	25.3%	17.0%	45.8%
	No	34.0%	18.5%	11.6%	44.0%
Incarcerated/Adjudicated	Yes	32.7%	21.5%	14.9%	40.5%
	No	34.4%	26.2%	15.7%	45.6%
Parental status	Not a parent	32.1%	21.6%	12.5%	41.7%
	Noncustodial	36.5%	22.6%	26.2%	49.2%
	Custodial	51.7%	31.2%	22.6%	61.5%
Number of youth		1,058	687	971	1,058

Note: Variable definitions can be found in Table 2 of the main report.

^a Only youth who were in high school or were high school dropouts at enrollment were considered for this outcome.

^b Only youth who were not in postsecondary school at enrollment were considered for this outcome.

Additional Findings

One of the most significant findings to emerge from the data is that youth who receive services for more quarters are much more likely to attain a positive outcome than youth who receive the same service for fewer quarters. (See Table 8 in the main report). For example, only 8.3 percent of participants who did not receive job training achieved an employment outcome. Of those youth who received 1–3 quarters of job preparation service, 32 percent obtained an employment outcome. The number who achieved this outcome rose to 69 percent for youth receiving the service for 4–6 quarters and to 100 percent for youth receiving the service for 7–9 quarters.

In another example, as the number of quarters participants received college preparation services increased, so did the number achieving a postsecondary outcome. For participants with no college preparation services, 8 percent achieved a postsecondary outcome; for participants with 1–3 quarters of college preparation services, 21 percent obtained a postsecondary outcome; for participants with 4–6 quarters of college preparation services, 49 percent obtained a postsecondary outcome; for participants with 7–9 quarters of college preparation services, 63 percent obtained a postsecondary outcome.

Conclusions

This evaluation was intended to be instructive to state and local policymakers and practitioners across the many systems that touch the lives of these youth. The following conclusions can serve as useful advice to those who work to ensure a successful transition of youth from foster care to productive adulthood.

- ***A multisystem approach is needed, as no single agency can meet all needs.*** Partnerships are critical design elements for these types of programs and, as such, need to be part of the original program plans. However, many of these relationships were formed after the programs were launched. Some never bore fruit and need further examination as to why.
- ***Staffing, including specialists who work directly with the youth, is resource-intensive but highly valued by the youth.*** As noted earlier, focus groups of youth placed a high value on the project staff, particularly their youth worker. These were not case managers in the traditional sense. These sites have gone a long way in creating a

practice model that combines the roles of social worker, counselor, mentor, navigator, teacher, and listener.

- ***The sites lacked complete data and comprehensive outcome measures.*** This is an important lesson for future demonstration and new program implementation efforts. Good data inform work, are a vehicle for tracking and following up on individual progress, and are needed to promote the program in the community and to prospective funders.
- ***Some program models are better defined than others, and these tended to be more successful in leveraging other services.*** Programs that start out as demonstration projects, such as these, use what they learn to refine and improve their service models. After more than two years of programming, the program model needs to be very clearly defined for the program to succeed.
- ***What constitutes formal program completion should be defined for all programs.*** Sites continue to explore the criteria for closing a case. As a result, sites report few youth exiting their programs. Program completion should be both a goal and a milestone for youth. That is, it should be defined and recognized through some sort of graduation or by a certificate of completion. Program completion or exit should not mean, however, that the young people who exit the program can no longer be served. Alumni follow up support groups offer promise as a way to transition youth away from the program supports that they have grown used to and can address some of the unmet permanency and relational needs these youth frequently experience.
- ***Sites value and need well-defined, intensive technical assistance.*** Sites unanimously found little value, aside from encouragement, from the technical assistance provided through DOL. More targeted and sustained technical assistance for this type of project is critical and should be a required part of the partnership agreement between the funder and the sites. An effective technical assistance strategy is especially important to replicating the promising approaches and to sustaining the projects. Future technical assistance elements should be customized for each site and combined with the opportunity for cross-site learning.

- ***Sustainability is an elusive goal.*** None of the sites has yet created a credible plan for sustainability. Casey Family Programs, which is now sponsoring the sites, is requiring that each site develop a sustainability plan moving forward.
- ***States clearly have a role in this type of program, but the role was inconsistent across the sites.*** With the exception of Texas, it is hard to see how these projects have brought the child welfare and workforce systems together in a truly collaborative way. This has been one of the more disappointing aspects of these projects. Strong partnerships and leadership at the state level—especially between the workforce development and child welfare agencies—can translate into aligning systems and services at the local level, no matter how the partnerships are organized. Moreover, it is clear that these local programs often need the help of the state to sustain their efforts.
- ***Policy changes in other arenas are needed to ensure success for youth transitioning from foster care.*** Many times, policies related to high school graduation requirements, financial aid for postsecondary education, liability for obtaining driver’s licenses, and eligibility for subsidized housing have a direct impact on youth transitioning from foster care and their opportunities for success.
- ***Strong long-lasting adult relationships are not a given for this population, so it is vital to assist youth in building these relationships at all stages of their lives.*** At all sites, several of the individuals interviewed recognized the important role that lasting adult connections can play in the lives of these youth. The lessons from this project should be built into strategic planning and reforms in how to deliver services to younger children in foster care to prevent them from reaching this stage of life without the connections they need for stability and success in adulthood.
- ***The sites show promise in serving youth in foster care and alumni of care, but it is too soon to draw conclusions about their success.*** We have found a number of promising practices across the sites, yet the data present a mixed picture. Only one of the sites reports a positive outcome for more than half the participants. Two of the sites report positive outcomes for less than one-third of the youth. On a more positive note, the data show that the longer youth receive services, the better their outcomes. We draw from these data that most youth need intensive services over a longer period of time if

they are to achieve successful outcomes. This is not surprising given what we know about the childhood adversities endured by this population. Accordingly, if these programs are to achieve lasting success, they must move beyond demonstration projects to stable programs with sustained funding support.

Highlighted practices from across the sites:

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