

**FOSTER CARE, HOMELESSNESS, CRIMES OF  
SURVIVAL, AND INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAMS:  
SOME RECOMMENDATIONS**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

Homelessness is often linked to the commission of crimes of survival (i.e. property and violent crimes) and 'quality of life' offenses (seen in city ordinances). One population with particularly high rates of homelessness is youths exiting state-provided foster care systems. Studies show that youths who are emancipated from these systems lack sufficient life skills, which results in approximately one in four experiencing periods of homelessness in the years following emancipation. Independent Living Programs strive to prepare older foster youth for the transition out of care to self-sufficiency. This author reviewed The Inn Home's Independent Living Program in Portland, Oregon. Based on this review and subsequent reviews of literature, recommendations for programming to reduce the rates of homelessness and the related commission of survivalist crimes are presented; these include, increased focus on job readiness skills training as well as transitional housing resources.

**Keywords:** Homeless; foster care; independent living programs; crimes of survival; crime prevention; job readiness training, transitional housing.

## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this paper to the many foster care youth and homeless young clients who I have worked with over the years; and to the many more whom I will meet in the future. You have all been incredible inspirations to me, both academically and in my personal life. To those who have succeeded in reaching your life goals: Congratulations... I know the path was rocky and difficult to navigate; to those who are still travelling down that road: Have patience, accept help, and do not give up... it IS possible!

I am so proud to have known you and to have been a part of your lives.

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## **1: INTRODUCTION**

Oregon has, per capita, the highest rate of homelessness in the United States (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2009). In 2009, the number of people living on Oregon streets shot up 1,439 percent (Ending Homelessness Advisory Council, 2009). This large increase is logical when considering that the unemployment rate in Oregon doubled since the prior year and that, at the time of this writing, the State has the sixth highest unemployment rate in the nation (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009). Homelessness is a desperate situation, and those living on the street often respond to this desperation by engaging in criminal behaviour. Theft, sex trading, drug dealing, violence, and substance abuse are all ways in which this population finds the means to survive; hence the characterization of such behaviours as 'crimes of survival'. In addition to survival crimes, the homeless also experience high rates of victimization at the hands of others, and are often targeted by city ordinances, making the simple act of being without a home a 'crime.'

Many social service organizations strive to address these issues and reduce dangers on the streets. One way that these organizations can start to address the issue of homelessness and help reduce the need to engage in crimes in order to survive, is to focus efforts on a single at-risk group: current and former foster care youth. These youth are disproportionately represented in youth homeless shelters, and studies of those who have 'aged out' of the system show

that approximately 1 in 4 experience episodes of homelessness within their first few years as adults (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2001). An additional study found that 34 percent of aging out youth ‘couch surf’ during their first year out of the system, jumping from one temporary living accommodation to the next (Courtney et al., 2007).

Independent living programs (ILPs) nation-wide work to prepare older foster care youth for life on their own by providing individualized case management and assistance in specific life-skills areas. The Inn’s Independent Living Program, serving residents in Multnomah County, Oregon, works with approximately 200 clients at any one time on housing, educational and employment advancement, and a variety of other life skills<sup>1</sup>. The program’s goal is to ensure that clients will be able to care for themselves once they are emancipated from the state’s foster care system, and avoid joining the ranks of the many young people living on the streets and struggling to survive. The Inn’s ILP provides a number of beneficial services to its clients; however, as with many other social service organizations, there is room for improvement.

The following analysis explores a multi-relational problem. Foster care is a risk factor for future homelessness. Once homeless, a desperation forms that may then lead to the commission of crimes deemed necessary for survival.

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<sup>1</sup> ILP is one of seven programs run by The Inn Home, a social service agency for youth and families based out of Portland, Oregon, serving clients throughout Multnomah and Clackamas Counties. These programs include: Springwater (a transitional housing facility for homeless youth), HomeSafe (a housing program for pregnant and parenting homeless teens), The Inn Home for Boys (a residential treatment facility for teenage boys), Avalon House (a housing program for women recovering from addiction), Madrona House (a transitional housing program for recovering women and their children), and Powerhouse (a mentoring program for youth in foster care).

Recommendations are presented for The Inn's ILP in order to focus on increasing programmatic efforts toward the prevention of homelessness and, in turn, crimes of survival.

## **2: THE PROBLEM OF HOMELESSNESS**

On any given night in the State of Oregon, approximately 17,122 people are without a place to sleep (Ending Homelessness Advisory Council, 2009). As previously mentioned, Oregon has the highest per capita rate of homelessness in the nation at 0.54 percent (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2009), and, as of September 2009, the sixth highest rate of unemployment, at 11.5 percent (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009). More problematic is the dramatic increase in these rates by 37 percent since 2008 (Ending Homelessness Advisory Council, 2009). The unemployment rate has increased as well, almost doubling from the 6.4 percent the State saw in 2008, and now hovering just under 12 percent (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009).

The definition of the term 'homeless' can vary. While living under a bridge or sleeping in a shelter may account for the general public's understanding of the term, couch surfing (moving frequently from one place to another), whole families staying temporarily with other family members, or being held in a hospital or other institution without a place to go upon release may also be considered 'homelessness'. Due to varying definitions, true rates of homelessness may be under-reported by surveying agencies. However, every year both the One Night Street Count and One Night Homeless Counts in a number of large U.S. cities seek to gather the most comprehensive data possible in order to document the number of homeless citizens and the characteristics of this population. Of the

17,122 people in the State of Oregon who identified themselves as ‘homeless’ on a single night in January 2009, single adults made up 49 percent of the population. Childless couples accounted for 6 percent, unaccompanied youth (under the age of 18) made up 2 percent, and the remaining 43 percent were families with children (Ending Homelessness Advisory Council, 2009).

Multnomah County, which includes the Metropolitan Portland area, has the highest population density in the State of Oregon with approximately 1,657 people per square mile (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Thus, it is no surprise that the 2009 One Night Homeless Count found that approximately 28 percent of the State’s homeless citizens (4,808) resided in this county (Oregon Housing Community Services, 2009). The subsequent One Night Street Count (a count of those who were sleeping outside) tallied 1,591 individuals in the county (Smock, 2009).

Youth homelessness is an increasingly difficult problem to address and a true count is hard to come by. “Youth”, in terms of social services supports and many academic studies, extends into the early 20s. Many social supports in the State specific to “youth” serve clients through the age of 24. Therefore, a “youth” may fall into any and all of the above categories reported by the Ending Homelessness Advisory Committee. Additionally, it is estimated that only one in twelve homeless youth accesses social services—those who do not fear that drawing attention to their “status” will lead to them being returned to the abusive or otherwise unsafe households from which they fled (League of Women Voters, 2007). Using this estimate, the Oregon Runaway and Homeless Youth Coalition

determined that, in 2007, approximately 24,000 youth in the State were homeless (League of Women Voters, 2007). This estimate shows that if the rate of youth homelessness in 2009 was similar to that in 2007, then the overall count of homeless citizens (17,122) may be excessively low, with many youth not being accounted for.

In addition to estimating the number of homeless citizens in the State, The One Night Street Count also found that the living situations of these 'households' changed dramatically since the prior year (see Table 1). According to the Ending Homeless Advisory Council (2009), the percentage of homeless citizens living in camping situations increased by 2,180 percent from 2008, while the percentage of those sleeping on the street increased by 1,439 percent. The only decreases were amongst those in hospitals (41 percent) and in the "other" category (53 percent); that is, those who did not fit into the living situation categories of car, hospital, street, squatting, motel/hotel, staying with friends or family, or camping.



**Table 1: Living Situation of Households in the 2009 One Night Street Count**

	<b>Total (n=6,775)</b>	<b>% of all</b>	<b>Change from 2008</b>
Car	409	6%	493%
Hospital	13	0%	-41%
Street	2,047	30%	1,439%
Squatting	90	1%	429%
Motel/Hotel	221	3%	333%
Staying with Friends or Family	2,010	30%	334%
Camping	912	13%	2,180%
Other	1,073	16%	-53%

**Source: Ending Homelessness Advisory Council, 2009.**

Why are so many residents of the State of Oregon, and especially Metro Portland, without a home? The top two reasons given by those surveyed are unemployment and the inability to pay rent (Ending Homelessness Advisory Council, 2009) — both of which appear to be directly linked to the State’s high rates of unemployed individuals.

### **3: CRIMES OF SURVIVAL**

Homelessness can be a life-threatening situation. Survival is top priority for those living on the street; legal codes may be pushed aside if following them appears inconsistent with a positive answer to the question, “does this action help me not to die?” (Fest, 1998). For example, a homeless citizen may overlook laws against carrying knives in public parks if they feels a need for physical protection. In the case of homelessness, the lack of basic needs such as food, shelter, and protection can result in the commission of crimes in order to meet their survival needs (Baron, 2003; Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 2004; Fest, 1998; Roebuck, 2008; Siegel & Williams, 2003). Additionally, the longer a person is homeless, the more desperate he or she may become for these life necessities; thus, the higher the chances that the individual will commit a crime in order to survive (Baron, 2003; Baron & Hartnagel, 1997; McCarthy & Hagan, 1991, Roebuck, 2008). Furthermore, as many youth are on the streets due to emancipation from the foster care system, or in order to escape abusive and unsafe living environments, they may not have the knowledge and skills, or even the chronological age, that are required to obtain employment, making the ability to fend for themselves by legal means very difficult.

#### **Property Crime**

In their 1992 study of street youth in Toronto, McCarthy and Hagan discovered that incidents of minor theft increased with levels of hunger, and

serious theft increased with youths' difficulties in finding steady shelter. In their study, 45 percent of respondents admitted to having stolen food at some point, and 75 percent reported that they had committed some form of serious theft. Other research has found that the relationship between crime and homelessness continues into adulthood. Snow, Baker, and Anderson (1989) found that homeless men are more likely to be arrested for crimes of theft and burglary than are men in the general population. Research suggests that long periods without a stable home and long periods of unemployment are directly related to an increase in the commission of property crimes (Baron, 2003; Baron & Hartnagel, 1997; McCarthy & Hagan, 1991; Roebuck, 2008).

## **Sex Work**

The ability to provide sexual gratification is a valuable commodity that is well known to those without a stable home. Sexual favours are often traded for perceived survival needs such as food, shelter, money, and drugs (Tyler & Johnson, 2006). Acts of prostitution are strongly linked to unemployment and increase with problems in finding shelter (McCarthy & Hagan, 1992). On a single night in Portland, Oregon, a street prostitute can make around \$500 (Fest, 1998).

Approximately 1 in 3 youth living on the streets has some experience selling sex (McCarthy & Hagan, 1992; Tyler & Johnson, 2006). Even more disturbing are the demographics of those who choose to use sexual gratification as a commodity. Reid (2001, as cited by Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 2004) found that 90 percent of the prostitutes in his Atlanta, Georgia study were abused as children, and that 85 percent were the victims of incest. Considering the number

of former foster youth who find themselves living on the streets (as mentioned in the introduction of this analysis and revisited in the sections to come), and the fact that as many as 82 percent of children are placed in foster care as a result of abuse in their homes (Hobbs, Hobbs, & Wynne, 1999), the risk of these youth turning to prostitution as a means of survival appears alarmingly high.

## **Drug Use**

McCarty, Angeriou, Huebner and Lubran (1991) found a bidirectional relationship between homelessness and drug use. In other words, drug use can lead to homelessness, but homelessness can also lead to drug use. Research has found that 30 to 40 percent of homeless citizens abuse alcohol and 10 to 30 percent abuse other substances (McCarthy et. al, 1991; National Resource and Training Center on Homelessness and Mental Illness, 2009). Even with this bidirectional relationship, McCarthy and Hagan (1991) discovered that once on the street, substance abuse increases – perhaps due to the fact that using drugs is part of the street ‘lifestyle’ (Baron & Hartnagel, 1997). Regardless of the reasons, drug use among the homeless is widespread. A study of homeless youth in Ottawa in 2002 and 2003 found that 56 percent of females and 68 percent of males reported problems with substance abuse (Aubry, Klodawsky, Hay, & Birnie, 2003). In the mid-1990s, a study of homeless youth in Hollywood, California found that 71 percent had a diagnosable substance abuse disorder (Kipke, Montgomery, Simon, & Iverson, 1997).

Those who use drugs are also more likely to sell them (McCarthy & Hagan, 1991). Involvement in drug trafficking and distribution increase with time

spent without another legitimate means of income (Baron & Hartnagel, 1997).

While street-level drug dealing is not a highly lucrative crime, (it is comparable to a typical minimum wage job) it may be seen as an attractive alternative for those without another option (Levitt & Venkatesh, 2000; MacCoun & Reuter, 1992).

## **Violent Crime**

Those who live below the poverty line (which, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2009a) is set at \$10,800 per year for a single person), commit more violent crimes than those who live above that line, specifically in terms of aggravated assault (Bourguignon, 1999; Flango & Sherbenou, 1976; Hsieh & Pugh, 1993; Kelly, 2000; Patterson, 1991). Resource deprivation has been linked to varying degrees with homicide, assault, rape, and robbery (Bourguignon, 1999; Hsieh & Pugh, 1993). Baron and Hartnagel (1997) concluded that unemployment and poverty can lead to “resentment, hostility and withdrawal of legitimacy” from societal norms, causing people to lash out in aggressive and violent ways (p. 424).

Research has found that the period of time one spends living on the streets is related to the commission of violent crimes (Baron & Hartnagel, 1997, McCarthy & Hagan, 1991, Roebuck, 2008). Even though statistics show that homeless citizens commit more violent crimes than do the general population (Roebuck, 2008), one has to wonder whether the violence is a result of self-defence or the need to survive. Living without a stable shelter can be a dangerous situation. There are no locks where there are no doors, and as a result, homeless citizens are frequently the victims of violent crimes (Fitzpatrick,

La Gory, & Ritchey, 1993). In order to survive in a violent culture (in this case, homelessness) one must be prepared to use a level of violence that is greater than the threat (Fest, 1998).

## **Victimization**

The homeless are significantly more likely to become crime victims than are their housed peers, and are more likely to become victims of *violent* crimes than any other crime (Fitzpatrick, La Gory, & Ritchey, 1993). In a 2006 study in Toronto, 35 percent of the sample of homeless respondents reported having been physically assaulted during the previous year, 14 percent had been sexually harassed, and 21 percent of the female respondents reported having been sexually assaulted during that period (Khandor & Mason, 2007). These statistics mirror the results of a U.S. study conducted by Simons, Whitbeck and Bales (1989) of the homeless in Iowa in the late 1980s. The researchers found that 50 percent of the 79 homeless citizens who they interviewed had been victimized in some way; 35 percent had been threatened with a weapon, 25 percent had been assaulted with a weapon, 35 percent were robbed, and 7 percent were raped. Additionally, Hwang (2000) found that homeless men in Canada were nine times more likely to be murdered than those with stable homes.

## **City Ordinances as Anti-Homeless Measures**

Over the last 25 years, cities across the United States have been responding to the problem of homelessness by targeting this population and

creating measures that make it illegal to perform certain life-sustaining activities in public places (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009). A survey of homeless youth in California found that 60 percent had been ticketed for “quality of life” offenses such as sleeping outside, trespassing, and loitering (Bernstein & Foster, 2008).

Of the 235 cities surveyed by the 2009 National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH):

- 33 percent prohibit camping in certain city areas and 17 percent have a city-wide prohibition;
- 30 percent have made it illegal to sit or lay down in certain areas;
- 47 percent prohibit loitering in certain areas and 19 percent restrict it city-wide;
- 47 percent restrict begging in certain public areas, 49 percent ban aggressive panhandling, and 23 percent have a citywide prohibition on any type of begging.

Surveying 224 cities in both 2006 and 2009, the NCH (2009) found that the creation of these types of measures is on the rise. In this three-year time period, cities saw a 7 percent increase in laws prohibiting camping in certain areas, an 11 percent increase in laws concerning loitering, and a 6 percent and 5 percent increase, respectively, in laws prohibiting begging and aggressive panhandling.

While Portland, Oregon (the metropolitan city in Multnomah County) did not make the NCH’s list of the top ten “Meanest Cities” in the U.S., there are still many city ordinances that prohibit life-sustaining activities among the homeless.

For example, according to the Auditor's Office (2010), citizens are prohibited from:

- Drinking alcohol along any street, sidewalk or other public right of way (City Code 14A.50.010) or possessing alcohol in any city park (20.10.040);
- Camping on public property or along a public right of way (14A.50.020);
- Erecting permanent or temporary shelters on public properties or along public right of ways (14A.50.050);
- Lying down on the floor of a public restroom (14A.50.110);
- Being out in a public area between 12 AM (or earlier, depending on age and day) and 6 AM if the citizen is a minor (14A.80.010);
- Leaving a vehicle parked on public property or in a public right of way for more than 24 hours (16.20.170);
- Urinating or defecating in a public park (20.10.030);
- Possessing a weapon in a public park (20.12.050);
- Bathing in a city park (20.12.150); and
- Being in a city park between 12 AM and 5 AM (20.12.210).

This collection of city ordinances may seem reasonable to the average citizen; however, what happens when a person does not have a private residence in which to consume their alcohol or lay their head down for a night? The homeless are not allowed to pitch a tent for shelter on a rainy night or find refuge in a public bathroom facility. If they are under the age of 18 (as mentioned earlier, approximately 2 percent of the homeless in Oregon are unaccompanied minors), they are not even allowed to be outside after midnight. So where do these people go? Moreover, how do they protect themselves if they are not allowed to carry a weapon? In Oregon, less than half (48 percent) of the



homeless population can be accommodated in homeless shelters (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2009). The rest have to find their own place to sleep for the night, fend off the cold, and find their next meal.

Criminalizing life-sustaining activities creates an unfortunate cycle. Chances are that a homeless citizen ticketed for sleeping on the street does not have the funds necessary in order to pay the fine, or the alarm clock needed to make it to court on time. These tickets and arrests then become warrants and possibly a criminal record, impeding the individual's ability to find a job, get a driver's license, be accepted into emergency housing, and get out of their situation legitimately. This, in turn, creates more desperation and increases the likelihood that the citizen will commit prohibited and illegal acts.

How do we eliminate these crimes of survival? Clearly, the best response is to eliminate the need to struggle for survival; but the problem is a big one. In Oregon 1 in 200 people is homeless (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2009). Perhaps identifying and addressing the needs of one at-risk group, youth exiting the State's foster care system, is a good place to start.

## **4: FOSTER CARE AS A RISK FACTOR FOR HOMELESSNESS**

Children are placed in foster care so that they may be protected from further maltreatment in their homes (Franz, Woodward, & Gale, 2006; Hobbs et al., 1999). Definitions of maltreatment vary and there are numerous reasons why children end up in protective care; however, studies have shown that the primary reason children are removed from their families is due to degrees of abuse and victimization (Hobbs et al., 1999; Takayama, Wolfe, & Coulter, 1998), which is, unfortunately, widespread. In 1999, child protective services in the United States received 2.97 million reports of child maltreatment nationwide (Rapp-Paglicci, Roberts, & Wodarksi, 2002). Childhood abuse is a risk factor for a number of different social, behavioural, and emotional problems later in life including: mental health issues, substance abuse, sexualized behaviours, aggression, school difficulties, poor health, risk-taking behaviours, early parenthood, criminal activities, homelessness, re-victimization, and the ability to create and maintain positive, healthy relationships (Hobbs et al., 1999; Kendall-Tackett, 2002; Loeber & Farrington, 1998).

Statistics gathered in 2006 show that 26,517 youth were emancipated from foster care systems throughout the United States in that year (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008). That statistic is in line with the

yearly average for the United States of approximately 25,000 'aging out' youth per year (Frey, Greenblatt, & Brown, 2005). 'Aging out', the commonly used phrase for emancipation from state care, generally occurs when a youth reaches the age of 18 or graduates from high school (Ray, 2009). These youth are then expected to care for themselves and live independently.

Unfortunately, studies of emancipated youth show that this transition is difficult—evident by the high numbers of youths who end up without a place to call 'home'. Various studies have found that between 12 and 25 percent of emancipated youth are homeless for at least one night within four years of leaving care (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2001; Courtney et al., 2007; Pecora et al., 2006). In urban settings it is estimated that 30 to 40 percent of all homeless youth have come out of the foster care system (Commission on Children and Families, 2007). One specific study of homeless youth in New Jersey in 2000 found that approximately 46 percent of youths (ages 18-21) staying in a specific homeless shelter had been in foster care within the previous year (Eisenbud, Moore, Ryan & Tayler, 2001).

Even if these youths do not end up sleeping in homeless shelters or on the streets, many of them 'couch surf', moving from one temporary shelter to another. For example, a study conducted in Wisconsin in 1998 found that, within 18 months of leaving care, 12 percent of the 113 youths in the sample spent some time homeless; however, 22 percent couch-surfed, living in at least four different places during this period (Courtney, Piliavin, Grogan-Kaylor & Nesmith, 2001). Many other studies have found similar results. Barth (1990) and Courtney

et al. (2007) both found that approximately 30 percent of their study populations (in San Francisco in the late 1980s and in the mid-western states of the U.S. from 2002-2007, respectively) had lived in at least three different locations within three years of leaving care. In Courtney's study, 18 percent of the emancipated youths had been homeless, and half of those individuals had been homeless at least twice. In Barth's sample, 29 percent of the youths had no place to call 'home' or were moving at least once per week.

### **Why Placement in Care Could Lead to Homelessness**

These tens of thousands of young adults released from the foster care system every year are expected to fend for themselves. They are expected to be 'independent' and know how to 'do' all the things and 'have' all the skills that they need in order to survive. This expectation, however, runs contrary to information gathered from the general population. The average 18-year-old is not independent of his or her family in today's American society. In fact, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2008), approximately 50 percent of childless adults aged 18-24 are still living in their family home. Youths aging out of the foster care system do not have the same safety net that their non-fostered peers are able to enjoy.

It is not uncommon for a child in foster care to change placements at least once per year, if not more (Reed, 2007). These frequent placement changes can make it even more difficult for youths to form positive, trusting relationships with foster parents and learn the various life skills that they need in order to excel – not to mention the negative effect that continuous school changes may have on

their academic abilities (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2001; Iglehart, 1995; Reed, 2007; Tweddle, 2007). Very few emancipated foster youth obtain their high school diploma, and the rates have not changed much in over 15 years. In 1991, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services conducted a nationwide study of former foster youth four years after leaving care; only one-half of these youths had completed high school (as cited in Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2001). Barth (1990) completed a similar study in the same period in the San Francisco area with very similar results. He found that 55 percent of aged-out youth left care without a high school diploma, and only 43 percent of those who had not finished high school completed any additional coursework on their own. Courtney et al. published study results nearly two decades later, in 2007, with similar findings. Of the mid-western youth in their study, approximately 25 percent had not completed high school or obtained a GED by the age of 21; this was more than twice the rate of the general population at 11 percent. Additionally, only 30 percent had completed any college-level course work, compared with 53 percent of the general population.

Perhaps due to this lack of education, former foster youth experience high rates of unemployment and difficulty in finding and maintaining employment. Westat, Inc. found that, nationwide, fewer than half of aged-out foster youth in 1991 had employment four years after leaving care, and only 38 percent of those had maintained that employment for at least a year (Cook, 1994). Courtney et al. (2007) found that, by the age of 21, half of their sample was unemployed. Of

those few study participants who had employment, they earned, on average, \$1 less per hour than did their non-fostered peers.

The low employment rates of former foster youth may also be a product of a lack of life skills training in other areas. Because of frequently moving around, these youths may not have had the opportunity to find a job or work in one place for more than a few months. This instability leads to a lack of work history, a lack of experience in any given field, and few employer references to use for future purposes. Additionally, without an adult to help them, these youths may be unaware of how to *find* a job; for example, how to create a resume or where to look for job openings. Finally, a barrier to employment may also be transportation. Recent studies show that only a little over 30 percent of driving-aged youth in foster care have a driver's license (Courtney et al., 2008). Moreover, even if they are legally able to drive, the cost of things like a car or auto insurance and registration fees are the responsibility of the youth who, without income, will not be able to afford this added expense.

The lack of employment stability, the presence of many employment barriers, and lower average wages all have an effect on the rate at which former foster youth find themselves living in poverty. As mentioned previously, the U.S. federal poverty line for a single person is set at an annual income of \$10,800. The average annual income for a former foster youth at age 21 is only \$5,450 — almost 50 percent lower than the poverty line (Courtney et al., 2007). Not surprisingly, former foster youth have a hard time paying bills and making ends meet. A study conducted in the Pacific Northwest between 2000 and 2002 found

that 16.8 percent of former foster youth were receiving financial assistance from some kind of state agency –five times higher than the rate of assistance received by the general population (Pecora et al., 2006). Barth (1990) reported that 53 percent of his study sample had “serious money trouble” and 25 percent said that they had a hard time simply understanding their bills. These money troubles contribute to the approximately 27 percent of foster youth who, at the age of 21, fear that they do not have enough money to pay their rent and the 27 percent who cannot pay their utilities (Courtney et al., 2007). This lack of financial stability and knowledge results in 8 percent of foster youths being evicted from their homes, another 8 percent losing electrical power, and 33 percent losing telephone service (Courtney et al., 2007).

## **5: THE FEDERAL INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM**

In order to address the life skills deficiencies of youth exiting the foster care system, the United States government has opted to support the implementation of independent living programs for foster youth nationwide. As an amendment to Title IV-E of the *Social Security Act*, the first legislation to address this need for independent living skills preparation, called the “Independent Living Initiative”, passed in 1985 (Collins, 2004; Social Security Online, 2009). As this initiative developed, financial support was capped at \$70 million per fiscal year for the country’s independent living services, thus limiting the development and impact of new and current programs (Collins, 2004; Fernandes, 2006).

Fortunately, fourteen years later in 1999, the *Foster Care Independent Living Act* was passed, which, among other things, expanded the funding available for independent living services for former foster youth (American Psychological Association & Public Policy Office, 2009). The “Independent Living Initiative” was reworked and re-titled the “John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program” (CFCIP) (Fernandes, 2006).

Not only did the CFCIP double the funds available to states’ independent living programs, but it also expanded the age of eligibility of services up until a former foster youth’s 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, and allowed for services to be provided to youths still in foster care who were expected to remain in care until legal emancipation (Collins, 2004; Cornell University Law School, 2008; Fernandes,



2006). Additionally, the new program allowed for 30 percent of the funds allotted to the states to be spent on housing; this use was prohibited in the prior initiative (Collins, 2004; Fernandes, 2006).

CFCIP funding is granted to states which can provide a plan of services that will assist older and former foster youth in obtaining independent living skills (Cornell University Law School, 2008; Fernandes, 2006). Programs must include the following components:

- 1) “identify children who are likely to remain in foster care until 18 years of age and... help these children make the transition to self-sufficiency by providing services such as assistance in obtaining a high school diploma, career exploration, training in budgeting and financial management skills, substance abuse prevention, and preventative health activities (including smoking avoidance, nutrition education, and pregnancy prevention);
- 2) help children...receive the education, training, and services necessary to obtain employment;
- 3) help children...prepare for and enter post-secondary training and education institutions;
- 4) provide personal and emotional support...through mentors and the promotion of interactions with dedicated adults;
- 5) provide financial, housing, counselling, employment, education, and other appropriate support and services...to complement their own efforts to achieve self-sufficiency and to assure that program participants recognize and accept their personal responsibility for preparing for, and then making, the transition from adolescence to adulthood; and
- 6) make available vouchers for education and training, including post secondary training and education, to youths who have aged out of foster care” (Cornell University Law School, 2008, section a 1-6).

To more effectively address the need for the final component, the Education and Training Voucher Program for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care (ETV) was added to the CFCIP in 2002, bringing with it additional funding for educational uses (Collins, 2004; Reed, 2007; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009b). Former foster youth who participate in this program are provided with vouchers for up to \$5,000 per academic year, through the age of 23, to support them in attending an institution of higher education (Cornell University Law School, 2008).

With this government support, social service departments across the country are creating and expanding programs to assist former foster youth with independent living skills such as employment, education, housing, financial management, personal and community engagement, personal and cultural identify, physical and mental health, and legal information and documentation (Courtney, et al., 2007; Frey et al., 2005). So far, these programs appear to be having a positive impact. In terms of educational achievement, employment, and housing, many studies have found significant results in favour of ILP participation (i.e. Georgiades, 2005; Lindsey & Ahmed, 1999; Scannapieco, Schagrin, & Scannapieco, 1995; Shippensburg University Center for Juvenile Justice Training and Research, 1993). For example, Lindsey and Ahmed (1999) found that more than twice as many ILP participants earned their GED or high school diploma than their peers who did not participate in the programs. Georgiades (2005) discovered that, within eight years of leaving care, 92 percent of former foster youth with no ILP history were unemployed — compared with only 27 percent of

those who had participated in a program (see Appendix A for an overview of findings from six ILP studies).

## **6: THE INN'S INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM**

Located in Portland, Oregon, The Inn's Independent Living Program is one of three such programs in Multnomah County; the others are Impact Northwest, and the Native American Youth and Family Center. The Inn's ILP targets youths, aged 14-21 years, who are in the foster care system or who have spent at least 180 days in the system after their 14<sup>th</sup> birthday (The Inn Home, 2008). The program's Executive Director, Tom Mitchell (2007; 2008), recognizes the risk of homelessness among this demographic and hopes that by teaching necessary life skills and providing additional support and education, the Inn's ILP will reduce the number of former foster youth who find themselves living on the streets of Portland.

### **Philosophies and Goals**

The Inn's ILP is designed as a strength-based program utilizing the philosophies of Positive Youth Development (Mitchell, 2008). Strength-based programming focuses on identifying the strengths that an individual already possesses and building on their knowledge and skills from that point, rather than focusing services on current problems and weaknesses such as teen pregnancy or drug addiction (Brun & Rapp, 2001; Smith, 2006)<sup>2</sup>. By focusing on individuals' strengths, these programs assist in enhancing clients' intrinsic sense of power

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<sup>2</sup> Personal communication, Ally Jamieson, MSW, October 7, 2009.

and motivation, which, in turn, may help clients take a greater interest in their own futures (Brun & Rapp, 2001; Smith, 2006).

In order to address these goals, practitioners believe that strength-based programs should consider the following characteristics during program implementation (Green, McAllistar, & Tarte, 2004):

- Empowering Orientation: empower clients to do things for themselves;
- Cultural Competence: value culture as a source of strength;
- Relationship-Based: develop supportive relationships between program staff members and clients, in addition to
  - Improving relationships within families;
  - Creating partnerships between families and program staff;
  - Understanding community history and issues; and
  - Building knowledge of community resources;
- Family-Centered: focus on the entire family rather than just the individual;
- Goal Orientation: identify clients' long term goals; and
- Individualize Services: focus on specific client needs.

As with strength-based approaches, practitioners who utilize Positive Youth Development (PYD) as a programming model seek to identify the unique and positive talents, energies, and strengths of individual youths. They seek to assist these youths in reaching their full potential in order to decrease their likelihood of participating in high-risk activities (Damon, 2004; National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth, 2008; United States Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). PYD strategies work to cultivate the potential of youths as positive future community resources and partners, by promoting

increased social responsibilities (Damon, 2004; Oregon Commission on Children and Families, 2009).

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (n.d.) and the National Clearinghouse on Families and Youth (2008) compiled lists of PYD activities that could be used to address these goals. Some of these activities include:

- Business owners hiring young people and teaching them specific skills, or being available for job shadows and career fairs;
- Working together to develop youth drop-in centers and recreational groups;
- Recruiting youths to volunteer;
- Teaching young people how to create their own newspapers and websites;
- Allowing youths to co-teach in an educational setting;
- Inviting youth to participate on the boards of social service organizations; and
- Creating a group of youths to act as a board for state and local government agencies and advise on issues that pertain to them.

Through case management, support, and advocacy, The Inn's ILP addresses the philosophies of PYD and strength-based practices. In addition to these philosophies, the agency has identified four goal areas for program implementation and five attributes that will be apparent in youths who have been successful in the program. Goal areas include obtaining and retaining employment, furthering education, achieving stability in housing, and living independently without social service financial supports (Mitchell, 2008). Clients

who are successful in these goal areas will have strengthened their competencies and knowledge, their confidence in themselves and their abilities, their personal character and respect for community standards, their connections to personal and community supports, and their compassion for those around them (Mitchell, 2008).

## **Current Program Implementation**

Eligible clients (ages 14 to 21 who are currently in care or have been in care for at least 180 days after their 14<sup>th</sup> birthday) are referred to The Inn's ILP by their Department of Human Services (DHS) case manager (Mitchell, 2008). As the program is voluntary, after the initial referral it is the youth's choice to take steps toward program participation (Mitchell, 2008), the first of which is a program orientation. At the orientation, clients complete an Ansell-Casey life skills assessment<sup>3</sup> in order for program staff to obtain a baseline level of the client's skills prior to determining how to target and individualize program services.

After youth enrol in the program and are assigned to a case manager, two additional assessments and service plans are completed in order to identify clients' individual needs and assist in creating service plans for their time with the program. Service planning is led by the client, so that the youths take a personal interest in, and responsibility for, the plan's implementation (Mitchell, 2008). DHS case workers, foster parents and other supportive adults may choose to be

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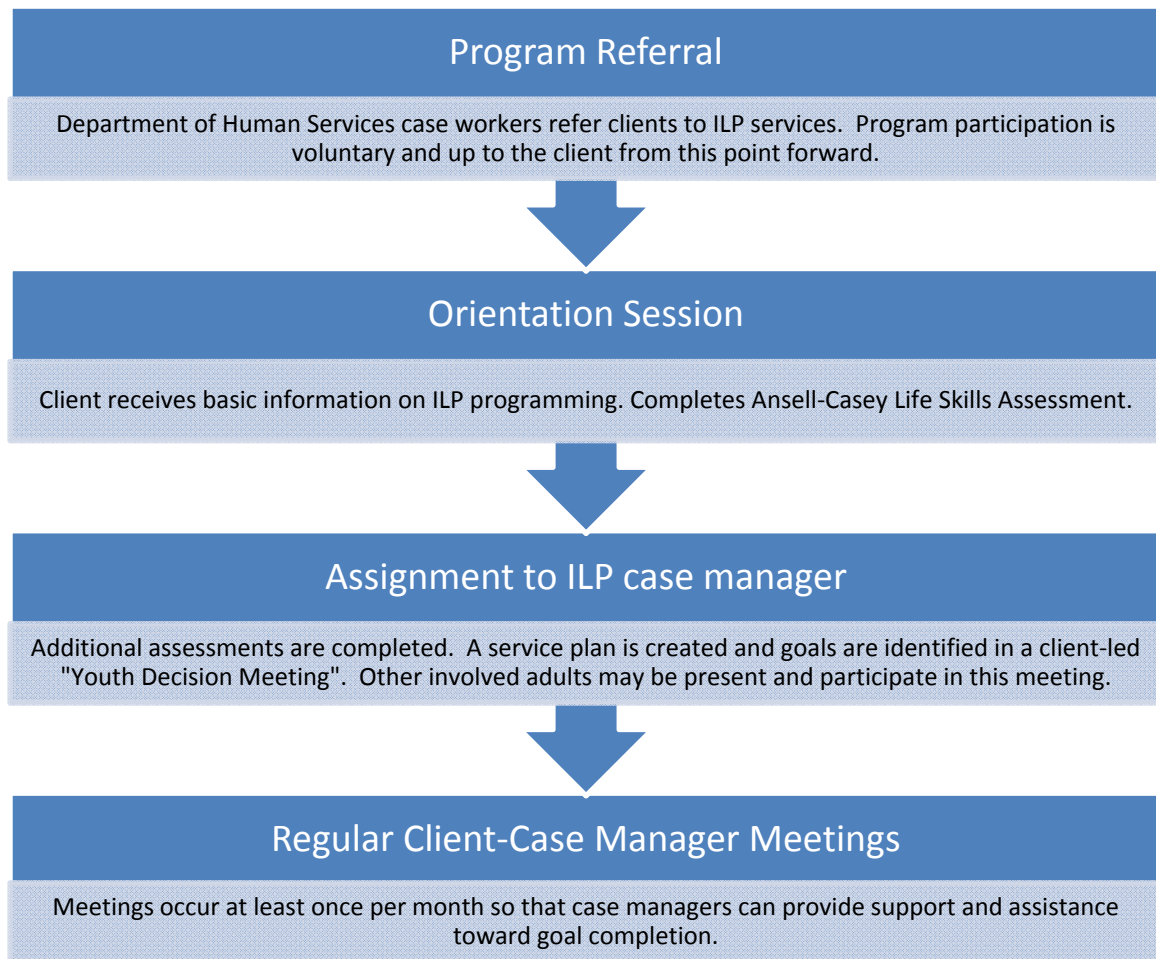
<sup>3</sup> The Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment is a written test intended to measure awareness and skills in a number of areas, including: career planning, daily living, housing and money management, self care, social relationships, work life and miscellaneous extras.

involved in the process, however, the client must agree on the final plan at “Youth Decision Meetings” (Mitchell, 2008).

After the final service plan is set, case managers meet with the client at least once per month and provide any assistance and support that the youth may need in order to progress in the “steps” outlined in their service plan. These steps can be adjusted and altered at any time throughout the client/program relationship (Mitchell, 2008). Assistance and support by case managers takes many forms; for example, role modelling, providing connections to additional community resources, assisting with searches for employment, housing, and school, and providing general life-skill building opportunities, either one-on-one or through one of the many available monthly classes (Mitchell, 2008). See Figure 1 for a visual outline of The Inn’s ILP program services.



**Figure 1: The Inn's ILP Program Services**



The Inn runs its ILP on an annual budget of \$600,000<sup>4</sup>. These funds come from federal CFCIP grants as well as general state funds, donations, and other private grants (Mitchell, 2008). As a contracted 'employee' of the County's Department of Human Services, The Inn's ILP is required to raise a pre-determined amount in donations each fiscal year. Each donation to the program is assigned a cash value and reported to DHS, which then matches 75 cents for

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<sup>4</sup> Personal communication, Marni Doerfler, ILP Program Manager, September 28, 2009.

each dollar to supplement program needs<sup>5</sup>. As an example of this, a student intern who volunteers with the program for 20 hours a week for 10 weeks at an estimated value of \$15 per hour will be reported to DHS as a donation of \$3,000. Not only will the program have had the benefit of 200 hours of free support by this student intern, but the program will also earn 75 percent (\$2,250) of that value from DHS to use towards other programming needs.

A financial benefit that clients can obtain through ILP participation is a housing subsidy. As mentioned previously, the CFCIP legislation allowed for 30 percent of funding to be utilized for housing needs. In addition to this, state housing subsidies are also available for those former foster youth who may not meet the specific qualifications for the federal subsidy program. Both subsidy programs require that youth participate in a 40 hour 'productive week' (i.e., working toward employment or educational enhancements), work toward a GED or high school diploma if they have not yet obtained one, participate in ILP services, and not live with their legal or biological parents (Oregon Independent Living Program, 2009). Through these programs, youths may be provided with up to \$512 per month in housing assistance for a predetermined amount of time, dependent upon which subsidy program provides their funds (Oregon Independent Living Program, 2009).

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<sup>5</sup> Personal communication, Marni Doerfler, September 28, 2009.

## **7: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING**

The CFCIP will grant funds to agencies who submit a plan that encompasses the six identified components of programming; however, the *specifics* of individual program implementation are not regulated. For example, one program may choose to deliver most of their services through large group sessions, while another may subscribe to more individualized services. Funding from the CFCIP can be used for a variety of different programming elements, such as education, vocational training, college preparation, life skills training, substance abuse prevention, pregnancy prevention, preventive health activities, and other services that may make the transition to adulthood easier (American Psychological Association & Public Policy Office, 2009; Tweddle, 2007; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009b). Unfortunately, to date there has not been enough methodologically sound research to determine which type of programming is the most effective for achieving desired program outcomes.

Because of this lack of research, programs often vary dramatically from state to state, city to city, or even within the same county. The following recommendations (outlined in Table 2) for The Inn's ILP were developed based on a review made by the author during a three-month practicum placement with the program, observations and information gathered on different programming styles, fundamentals of positive youth development and strength-based

programming, as well as the desired goal of keeping this at-risk group off the streets, so as to reduce rates of survival desperation and related criminal activity.

## **Staff Structuring**

The Inn's ILP currently employs one part-time and seven full-time case managers. These case managers develop and implement service plans for approximately 200 clients per contract year. Throughout their work week, case managers are also expected to attend program meetings, support clients at court appearances, plan and implement group activities, and attend to their record-keeping and additional program paperwork. Driving time must also be taken into account, as traveling to meet clients in their own communities is seen as a program priority (Mitchell, 2008). If it is assumed that a single week consists of 300 hours of possible case management time (seven case managers at 40 hours per week and one at 20 hours) and 200 clients; this works out to approximately 1.5 hours per week to dedicate to each client. However, as the time needed for other outlined programming areas is accounted for, this ratio quickly dwindles.

In reality, it appears that in a given week a case manager would be fortunate to get 30 to 60 minutes on average to devote to each client on their caseload. This time frame is not sufficient to accomplish important tasks. Assisting a client to create a resume and cover letter, search job postings to apply for online and complete and submit applications can take hours. This author was given the opportunity to sit in on one of these employment search

sessions, for a period of three hours. While the client being served during those hours received quality assistance, the sheer volume of time spent by the caseworker with this single client meant that other clients on this case manager's case load would not get the same level of service that week.

There are a number of ways that this lack of available case management time could be addressed; however, all solutions revolve around the need for a smaller client-to-staff ratio. The program would probably be more effective if the ratio (currently approximately 30 clients to 1 full time case manager) were reduced either by bringing in more staff or accepting fewer clients.

Unfortunately, many social service programs face the same dilemma. Reducing the number of clients may in turn reduce the amount of funding given to the program; however, the current funding available to the program is not enough to pay for additional staff members. This is one reason why factors such as volunteer recruitment, the effective use of current staff, and ongoing communication and partnerships with other local agencies are so important.

### *Volunteer Recruitment*

Portland, Oregon has many public and private colleges and universities in its metropolitan area. The Inn's ILP Program Manager has been trained as a field instructor for Portland State University (PSU) and has an ongoing relationship with the social work department at PSU. In turn, the University places interested practicum students with the program<sup>6</sup> for one academic year, (approximately 9

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<sup>6</sup> Personal communication, Madeline Woods, PSU intern, January 18, 2010.

months). These interns, from the Masters in Social Work program, work as temporary case managers. During the period that this author reviewed the program, only one PSU student intern was working with the program.

In order to host an intern at The Inn, there is some additional work that program supervisors need to be willing to do. This includes training the students on program policies, organizing work for them while they are with the agency, and completing evaluations of their work to return to their respective colleges, depending upon the educational programs' requirements. However, these interns are 'free labor'. By creating a streamlined volunteer program, recruiting through various educational departments, and allowing more interns to work in the program during the academic year, the program and its clients could benefit greatly from an increase in resources and knowledge, a gain in case worker time to focus on clients, and an increase in matched dollars provided by CFCIP.

This author's task, while with The Inn's ILP, was to create an employment curriculum that case managers and clients could utilize together without the need for an additional staff member to run a specialized program. The assignment was completed by creating a client manual and a case manager resource guide. In addition, this author was able to create partnerships with a number of businesses in the community to provide employment support to the program's clients. Examples of this support included internships, mock interview assistance, company tours, guest speakers, and employment possibilities. However, without a key person to continue to cultivate these partnerships, they will likely be lost. This is a job that could easily be continued by a volunteer or academic intern.

Additionally, interns and volunteers could lead skill-building groups for clients, or be available to help clients one-on-one with simple tasks, such as resume building, when case managers are not available.

### *Specialized Staffing*

Case managers at The Inn's ILP have been with the program for varying amounts of time; some for only months, and others for many years. Naturally, as a case manager works with the program for an extended period of time, they are able to accumulate knowledge that helps with different aspects of the job and provides them with resources to pass on to their clients. These veteran staff members are available to answer questions and provide information to new case managers, however, there is still a gap in knowledge and proficiency and thus a difference in services that one client may receive over another.

The six components that the CFCIP requires of programs focus on preparing clients for education, employment, and health self-sufficiency:

...providing services such as assistance in obtaining a high school diploma, career exploration, training in budgeting and financial management skills, substance abuse prevention, and preventative health activities (including smoking avoidance, nutrition education, and pregnancy prevention) (Cornell University Law School, 2008, section a).

Allowing case managers to specialize in one of these areas and take advantage of training and other opportunities to expand on each area's specific knowledge base would provide more quality assistance to clients. In addition, this would serve to address one of the components of a strength-based program: knowledge of community resources (Green et al., 2004). Other case managers

would then have the opportunity to refer their clients, with needs in particular areas, to specific individuals for more specialized support. While it is important that all case managers have an understanding of these systems, having a specific 'go to' person who focuses on learning the ins and outs, and tips and tricks, of the requirements for successful independence would save time for all case managers and be more beneficial to the program's clientele.

### *Partnerships with Other Agencies*

Portland has many different options in terms of social and support services. Due to the lack of available resources (both financially as well as in terms of a high client-to-staff ratio) it is important that case managers are up to date and aware of the different opportunities available to their clients through other resources. While this author is not advocating that the program 'give up' some of their clients to other organizations, it would be in the best interest of clients to connect them to beneficial services *in addition* to services provided by the ILP.

For example, PAVE (Promoting Avenues to Employment) — a program through New Avenues for Youth, also in Portland — assists young clients ages 16-24 with their employment and education needs. In order to become involved in the program, interested clients must complete a 3 week job readiness training class that includes lessons in a variety of employment areas such as how to write a resume, what to say in a job interview, and how to act 'on the job'. At the end of these courses, clients leave with a better understanding of expectations in the



work force as well as a completed, edited resume and advanced interviewing skills developed through the process of mock interviews.

Utilizing a program like PAVE would benefit both ILP clients and case managers. Clients would gain important knowledge with respect to job searching and gaining employment, and case managers could spend more time with clients on specific need areas, rather than focusing so much effort on resume writing and interview skills. Having a steady income is the first step in securing stable housing and staying off the streets, so it would seem that applying extra focus and attention on job readiness training and employment placement would be of particular interest to programs such as The Inn's ILP. PAVE is not the only employment program in the area that could be utilized; other programs include: Goodwill's Job Connection, Outside In's Employment and Education Resource Center, Department of Human Service's Vocational Rehabilitation programs, and Open Meadows Career Connections.

Even within The Inn Home's own agency, partnerships can be cultivated and strengthened. One floor above The Inn's ILP is the Powerhouse Mentoring Program. Powerhouse works to connect foster youth, ages 13 to 21, with mentors in the community (Powerhouse, 2009). Youths and their mentors are then able to spend a minimum of 10 hours per week either communicating with each other or participating in activities together for at least one year (Powerhouse, 2009). While the goals of Powerhouse focus more specifically on educational supports and building positive relationships, the program may be a great resource for ILP clients and case managers in terms of time management

and service planning. Mentors could be worked into individual service plans as additional supports for ILP youths who need more time-consuming assistance with services such as job hunting or college applications<sup>7</sup>.

## **Focused Programming**

As previously mentioned, The Inn's Executive Director has noted that one of the goals of the ILP is to work toward the prevention of future homelessness. However questions arise concerning how a program can accomplish this goal, what are the important factors to consider, and, in general, where to start. The answers may lie in the Ending Homelessness Advisory Council (2009) survey results: the inability to pay rent and problems with unemployment. It seems, then, that programming efforts should focus more intensely on housing and employment acquisition in order to prevent homelessness.

### *Employment*

As mentioned previously, partnering with other employment programs may be tremendously beneficial to both the program and its clients. Clients would have the opportunity to receive additional support, assistance, resources, and one-on-one attention, and case managers would be able to focus their efforts on the specific, advanced needs of their clients, rather than spending multiple hours creating a resume with an individual client and instructing him or her on internet-based job applications. Internally there appear to be three different ways that the program could have a greater impact on its clients' employment acquisition: (1)

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<sup>7</sup> To date, only 13 of The Inn's ILP clients are also mentored through Powerhouse (personal communication, Doerfler, February 25, 2010)

creating partnerships with possible employers in the community; (2) providing group-based job readiness training and workshops; and (3) utilizing a daily employment notification system.

### **Community Partnerships**

There are many small, local businesses in the Metro Portland area. Connecting and creating relationships with these businesses could produce employment opportunities for clients. Additionally, many of the Positive Youth Development activities listed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (n.d.) and the National Clearinghouse on Families and Youth (2008) focus upon cultivating partnerships with community businesses and organizations.

Part of this author's assigned project while with The Inn's ILP was to begin to create these partnerships with local businesses. To begin with, an employment partnership proposition letter was drafted. This letter provided an overview of the program, briefly stated the need for employment partnerships, and gave examples of what these relationships might look like (e.g., help with mock interviews, teach job readiness workshops, provide unpaid internship or volunteer opportunities, or provide paid employment positions). While the ultimate goal of the partnership initiative was to find business owners who would be willing to hire and pay clients, it was understood that the first steps in this process would involve making a good impression and building trust between the businesses and the program. Small steps, such as coordinating internships or bringing in business owners to meet clients for mock interviews would allow the

employers to see the program in action and get a better sense of the clients with whom the program works.

A list was compiled of all businesses within one mile of The Inn's ILP, as well as those within the same distance from a local Department of Human Services office. Letters were sent out to these businesses, as well as other potential businesses identified based on company size and availability of entry-level employment. Additionally, the same letter was sent electronically on a daily basis to employers advertising open positions on the website *Craigslist.com*. In total, approximately 600 partnership inquiry letters went out into the community. Of these, approximately a dozen partnerships were created and at least one youth was employed. While one employed youth in 600 inquiries does not, at first glance, appear to signal success, the fact that it occurred within a three-month period and that another handful of employers were also willing to involve themselves with the program through participating in mock interviews and providing internship opportunities may show a higher "success" rate.

Cultivating these relationships and continuing to find and build new ones will lead to higher employment acquisition rates and additional employment education opportunities for clients, in addition to more support from the community. Unfortunately, for this to occur successfully, these additional responsibilities must fall on staff members. This is another area in which having specialized staff would be helpful for program implementation.

## **Job Readiness Training and Workshops**

Another part of this author's assignment was to create a stand-alone employment curriculum that could be utilized by clients without the need for additional staff time. The curriculum was designed in five chapters: 1) Before you even start looking; 2) The job hunt; 3) The interview; 4) How to keep your job; and 5) How to leave your job. Information was gathered from a variety of employment sources to create a client workbook full of explanations, samples, and helpful worksheets. In addition, a case manager supplemental manual was also created to provide additional resources and tips to case managers. While this workbook is seen as a good start to more effective program implementation, additional direct services to clients should be provided.

A number of employment programs for at-risk youth require that interested participants take part in job readiness training at the beginning of their relationships with the program. The goals of these classes are to provide foundational job readiness that gives clients an insight into the hiring process and job retention. These classes also provide clients with increased self-awareness and presentation skills so that they will be seen as capable, confident applicants with a competitive advantage in the search for available jobs<sup>8</sup>. While The Inn's clients could reap the benefits of these services through the program's partnerships with other agencies, this job readiness training may also be a service that The Inn itself could implement.

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<sup>8</sup> Personal communication, Julie Guzman, PAVE Skills Trainer, January 26, 2010.

An example of a job readiness training program can be seen at PAVE. The program's three-week training occurs at the beginning of program participation, is a requirement for enrollment, and includes a number of assessments and training opportunities in matters of education and employment<sup>9</sup>. During the first week, clients learn about their rights in the workplace and talk about the different skills and aptitudes that they possess and that employers look for; additionally, they complete assessments in job readiness skills, computer competency, reading, and math. The second week of PAVE offers clients the opportunity to participate in career explorations and job search strategies. While doing so they practice completing job applications, creating resumes, and interviewing. In the third and final week, PAVE clients learn about the importance of volunteering and education. They are exposed to college preparation requirements such as college placement testing and applying for financial aid. It is also during this week that clients are assessed by program staff to determine whether advanced program involvement and additional services are appropriate.

While it may not be possible for The Inn's ILP to make this type of course mandatory for program enrollment, it would be possible for them to implement a similar set of classes in which their clients could participate. By utilizing outlines and curricula used by other programs, as well as the curricula and materials that this author created during the practicum term, the program could add a job readiness class to their monthly calendar, alongside courses that are already in

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<sup>9</sup> Personal communication, Julie Guzman, January 26, 2010.

place dealing with topics such as readiness to rent and other types of skill building.

### **Daily Employment Notification System**

Every day local employment websites add new job listings. For example, on a randomly selected day in January 2010 there were 258 job openings in the Metro Portland area posted on the popular website *Craigslist.com*. An additional 887 jobs were listed in the local newspaper's online classified ads. This is large number of jobs to sift through for a single client who may be looking for work. However, if case managers were up to date on the current offerings in the city they could provide this information to their employment-seeking clients (and perhaps help fill one of the approximately 1,145 vacant positions in the Metro Portland area).

Again, the availability of specialized staff would be beneficial. A staff member focused on employment could sift daily through new openings and compile a list of entry level and low skilled jobs that clients may be interested in and qualified for and then distribute the completed, shorter list in a group e-mail to other case managers. By doing this the information would be made available to the entire staff in a form that is less extensive and easier for individual case managers to absorb, match with clients, and be able to recall when a client mentions they are seeking a particular kind of job.

Additionally, with a single person filtering the available jobs, specific requests could be taken into consideration. For example, if one case manager has a client who spent a year working in a retail establishment, non-entry level

jobs that require previous experience in customer service could be filtered out for this specific client. This strategy could be done for clients with a variety of employment needs and desires.

### *Housing*

The Ending Homelessness Advisory Committee created six goal areas for homelessness prevention and intervention:

- 1) Prevent and divert people from becoming homeless by working with them to obtain and keep their housing;
- 2) Expand, develop and coordinate the supply of affordable housing and supportive services to prevent and end homelessness, and shorten stays in shelter;
- 3) Build the capacity of homeless persons for self-support through strategies that identify their risk of homelessness, their needs, and access appropriate housing with appropriate supportive services;
- 4) Identify and implement system improvements for coordination at the program funding and delivery levels leading to measurable results;
- 5) Implement education and public campaign initiatives to remove societal stigma around homelessness and to build community support and coordinated responses; and
- 6) Improve data collection technology and methodology to better account for unsheltered and sheltered homeless persons (Ending Homelessness Advisory Council, 2009, pp. 8-9).

In terms of housing, The Inn's ILP services and philosophies fit best with the third goal of increasing self sufficiency and providing appropriate resources and supportive services. For example, one resource available to ILP clients is the



housing subsidy funds, mentioned earlier. Clients can apply for this government assistance in order to support them with rent and other housing needs. Funds are need-based and an applicant must provide a proposed budget that states their need<sup>10</sup>. Upon acceptance, clients are eligible for financial assistance for one year, as long as they are completing their 40-hour 'productive weeks'<sup>11</sup>.

While this resource is very helpful to clients, the program does not provide any direct housing opportunities for ILP clients within The Inn's umbrella of programs or through partnerships with affordable housing agencies or specific property managers. Including this type of service delivery would be a large undertaking and a change that would not easily occur. However, these are areas in which additional funds and programming may be beneficial in assisting clients with the transition from foster care living to independent housing, as well as to address the Ending Homelessness Advisory Committee's second goal area: to expand, develop and coordinate affordable housing for clients.

### **Transitional Housing**

One homelessness prevention philosophy often seen in Oregon's social service programming is that of "housing first". In this model, providing housing to clients right away is seen as the first step to getting them stabilized. Once clients no longer need to worry about shelter, other services can be more successfully offered and accepted (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2010a).

Transitional housing programs, which provide free or inexpensive long-term

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<sup>10</sup> Personal communication, Tina Needham, ILP Case Manager, January 25, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Personal communication, Tina Needham, January 25, 2010.

housing for clients, are often used in programs that work specifically with the homeless. However, the argument can be made that this programming model may also be beneficial to those leaving the foster care system that are at risk of becoming homeless.

The Orangewood Children's Foundation in California already utilizes transitional housing resources for their clients who have been emancipated from the foster care system. The program, called Rising Tide Communities, is an 18-month program that provides reduced rent and shared apartments for clients to live in while working or attending school (Orangewood Children's Foundation, 2009). Clients are expected to meet regularly with program staff members to plan and discuss progress toward financial independence.

Grants and government funding are available for these types of programs, specifically when proposals target crime prevention outcomes. For example, the Justice Assistance Grant Programs fund agencies that focus efforts on crime prevention (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2010). Some available grants also specify that funding may be used for programming with outcomes related to reducing property crimes, as well as for providing resources to victims of crime (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2010). As discussed previously, reducing street populations and preventing homelessness may have a direct effect on the commission of crime, specifically property crimes. Additionally, as foster youth are primarily in the system due to previous victimization within their families of origin, grants that supply resources to crime victims may also be appropriate for transitional housing programs for these clients.

Additional funding for homelessness prevention will also be available in the coming year with the signing into law of the HEARTH Act by President Obama. Part of the implementation of this Act will focus 40 percent of the available funding on homelessness prevention programs that strive to reduce the number of people who become newly homeless, as well as to rapid re-housing programs, which reduce the length of time that citizens spend without a stable living situation (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2010b). Specifically mentioned in this Act are transitional housing facilities and rental subsidy programs.

### **Scattered Site Housing**

As with employment resources, forming partnerships within the community to meet the housing needs of homeless youth may also be important for a client's success. Scattered-site housing models<sup>12</sup> focus on creating these partnerships with landlords and property management companies in order to cultivate supportive housing resources for clients. These partnerships benefit the client by making available affordable apartments with landlords who will overlook the lack of rental history or poor credit. Landlords are also benefitted by having access to potential tenants who are supported, both socially and financially, by a social service agency. Some agencies are able to provide rent assistance to their clients, therefore guaranteeing that landlords receive their monthly payments.

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<sup>12</sup> As opposed to many transitional housing programs which are located in a single facility, scattered site models utilize housing which is "scattered" throughout the service area, often in partnership with private property management complexes.

Like the Orangewood Children's Foundation, the Lighthouse Independent Living Program in Cincinnati, Ohio offers housing resources for their transitioning clients; however, they utilize a scattered-site housing model. Clients are accepted into the program just prior to their emancipation from state care (between the ages of 16 and 19 years), and are placed into their own apartments throughout the community (Lighthouse Youth Services, 2009). In addition to weekly meetings with their case managers to get assistance toward successfully completing their case plans, clients receive financial support for security deposits, rent, utilities, and furnishings, as well as a weekly stipend to off-set the cost of food, transportation and personal items (Lighthouse Youth Services, 2009). A portion of this weekly stipend is deposited into a savings account for the client for future needs.

Ideally, clients participate in the Lighthouse Independent Living Program for 12 to 18 months; the goal is that at the end the client will have progressed and taken advantage of the available resources to the point where they are able to care for themselves independently (Lighthouse Youth Services, 2009). If the client has been successful they are able to keep the apartment, security deposit, furniture and supplies.

Creating a transitional housing program and forming scattered-site housing relationships would be a large undertaking for The Inn's ILP and would require additional research and funding. However the benefits clients would receive, and the program's ability to reduce the number of former foster youth on

the streets, rationalizes the time and staffing spent on researching and proposing the execution of these programs.

**Table 2: Outline of Recommendations**

<b>Staff Structuring</b>	Volunteer Recruitment	Provide additional staffing supports by increasing program volunteers from the community and local educational institutions.
	Specialized Staff	Allow staff members to “specialize” in specific program areas by focusing their time and participating in applicable trainings. This will allow for knowledge that is more detailed and a “go to” person in this area for questions from others.
	Partner with other agencies	Explore services available from other related agencies and work together on client referrals.
<b>Focused Programming</b>		
<i>Employment</i>	Community Partnerships	Collaborate with community businesses to open the door for client job training and employment placement.
	Job Readiness Training	Provide intensive classes and workshops on job readiness skills to prepare clients for successful job searches.
	Job Notification System	Implement a daily job notification system so that staff can be up-to-date on available positions and can pass relevant information to job-seeking clients.
<i>Housing</i>	Transitional Housing	Create transitional housing program for clients exiting foster care.
	Scattered Site Housing	Form relationships with local property managers to soften the “risk” of leasing for agents and create the opportunity for client placement in off-site housing.

## **8: CONCLUSION**

With approximately 24,000 youth on the streets of Oregon and 30 to 40 percent of them having a history of involvement with the State’s foster care system, it seems obvious that work is needed to lower these numbers. Once on the streets, these youth, who have not had the benefit of effective life skills training, turn to property crimes, drug dealing, sex work and violence in order to survive. Without the knowledge of “how to” find a job or apply for social service supports, and sometimes without the chronological age required for legal employment, options for these youth are limited. In addition to criminal offenses, youth on the streets have frequent interactions with police for “quality of life” infractions such as sleeping in public parks or begging for money.

Independent living programs nationwide work to decrease the number of former foster youth who experience homelessness after exiting care—and, in doing so, may decrease the number of these youth who come into contact with the criminal justice system. One way in which agencies implement their programming is through Positive Youth Development and strength-based practices. These philosophies contend that by focusing on the positive aspects of an individual, and building upon skills that client have already obtained, these clients can grow and accomplish independence. In terms of independent living programs, the goal is to provide older and former foster youth with experiences

and resources which they can use to become productive, successful members of a community.

The Inn's ILP has been successful in implementing a youth-development modelled. Philosophically, the Inn reaches the goals of strength-based practices by promoting self-empowerment and advocacy, cultural awareness and expression, and goal achievement through individualized case planning with clients and available classes and activities. Additionally, the program has taken steps towards providing better services in terms of PYD by creating partnerships in the community through the use of a practicum student intern and, as of February 2010, implementing these partnerships into employment workshops and community activities for their clients<sup>13</sup>. The Inn's ILP provides many supports and resources to their clients; however, successful programs always strive to do better.

With the poor economic situation in Oregon it is important that more efforts are focused on the housing and employment needs of this already at-risk group of clients. In order to decrease the rate of homelessness upon foster care emancipation and, thus, the perceived need to turn to crime as a means of survival, social service agencies need to focus services on the identified needs of their clients. For The Inn's ILP, these needs are employment and housing, which can be addressed in two ways: through staff restructuring and programming specifically focused on these need areas. The Inn's ILP could benefit from allowing current staff to focus and specialize on areas such as employment,

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<sup>13</sup> Personal communication, Madeline Woods, February 3, 2010.

housing and educational needs, as well as increasing the number of volunteers working within the program and partnerships without outside agencies in order to reduce the “client to staff” ratio and increase the time spent on job readiness skills. Employment readiness training, transitional housing opportunities, and the restructuring of current staff responsibilities are all steps that have already been taken by similar programs. The Inn’s ILP and its clients would benefit from a careful consideration of these potentially valuable programming changes.



# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Independent Living Program Evaluation Findings

	Time Elapsed Since Emancipation	Education	Employment	Housing	Crime/Delinquency	Other
<b>Courtney et al. (2008)</b>	2 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ High school diploma/GED: ILP= 59.7%, Control= 58.6%;</li> <li>▪ Attended college: ILP= 34.7%, Control= 40.9%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Currently employed: ILP= 45.4%, Control= 49.8%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Periods of homelessness: ILP= 12.8%, Control= 16.7%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ One or more delinquent behaviours: ILP= 34.7%, Control= 30.7%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Became pregnant: ILP=24.4%, Control= 23.1%;</li> <li>▪ Have driver's licence: ILP=31.6%, Control= 35.8%</li> </ul>
<b>Georgiades (2005)</b>	Up to approximately 8 years (up to age 26)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No High school diploma or GED: ILP= 16%, Control= 8%;</li> <li>▪ High school diploma or GED: ILP= 53%, Control= 15%;</li> <li>▪ College education: ILP= 31%, Control= 0%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Employed full time: ILP= 22%, Control= 8%;</li> <li>▪ Employed Part Time: ILP= 51%, Control= 0%;</li> <li>▪ Unemployed: ILP= 27%, Control= 92%;</li> <li>▪ Average job income per month: ILP= \$437, Control= \$54</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Currently reside with relatives/foster parents/friends: ILP= 16%, Control= 27%;</li> <li>▪ Own/rent independent housing: ILP= 82%, Control= 55%;</li> <li>▪ Never been homeless: ILP= 85%, Control= 83%;</li> <li>▪ Homeless for 1-3 nights: ILP= 6%, Control= 0%;</li> <li>▪ Homeless more than 3 nights: ILP= 9%, Control= 17%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Currently in jail: ILP= 2%, Control= 18%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Public aid use (TANF, food stamps, SSI, unemployment, WIC, jail/prison, or aftercare stipend): ILP= 22%, Control= 93%;</li> <li>▪ Have driver's licence: ILP= 61%, Control= 17%;</li> <li>▪ Depend on friends/family for transportation: ILP= 12%, Control= 22%;</li> <li>▪ Have many transportation problems: ILP= 16%, Control= 64%</li> </ul>

	<b>Time Elapsed Since Emancipation</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Employment</b>	<b>Housing</b>	<b>Crime/Delinquency</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>Lemon, Hines, &amp; Merdinger (2005)</b>	Up to approximately 16 years (all former foster youth under age 34)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ N/A</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Had a job immediately after discharge from foster care: ILP= 58.4%, Control= 73.8%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ever been without a place to sleep: ILP= 16%, Control 23%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Since discharge from foster care, ever had a problem with the law: ILP= 12.3%, Control 15.9%</li> </ul>	
<b>Lindsey &amp; Ahmed (1999)</b>	1-3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ High school diploma/GED: ILP= 37%, Control= 18%;</li> <li>▪ Completed Technical/vocational program/Some college: ILP= 21%, Control= 0%;</li> <li>▪ Currently enrolled in education program: ILP= 46%, Control= 34%;</li> <li>▪ Currently in college: ILP= 16%, Control= 0%;</li> <li>▪ Desire for college degree: ILP= 36%, Control= 29%;</li> <li>▪ Desire for post-graduate or professional education: ILP=21%, Control= 10%;</li> <li>▪ Satisfied with high school degree or GED: ILP= 19%, Control= 48%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Employed full time: ILP= 41%, Control 22%;</li> <li>▪ Employed part time: ILP= 18%, Control 22%;</li> <li>▪ Hours worked per week: ILP= 39, Control= 29;</li> <li>▪ Unemployed for more than 1 month since leaving care: ILP= 63%, Control= 81%;</li> <li>▪ Average number of episodes of unemployment: ILP= 1.9, Control= 2.4;</li> <li>▪ Average length of longest period of unemployment: ILP= 8.5 months, Control= 11 months</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Living independently: ILP= 38%, Control= 41%;</li> <li>▪ Paying all housing expenses: ILP= 30%, Control = 19%;</li> <li>▪ Paying part of housing expenses: ILP= 25%, Control= 19%;</li> <li>▪ Paying all housing expenses while living independently: ILP= 60%, Control= 60%;</li> <li>▪ Paying all housing expenses while living with others: ILP= 25%, Control= 0%;</li> <li>▪ Number of residences since leaving care: ILP= 2.6, Control= 2.0;</li> <li>▪ Average length of stay per residence: ILP= 2.3 years, Control= 2.3 years;</li> <li>▪ One or more episodes of homelessness since leaving care: ILP= 52%, Control= 53%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ N/A</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ N/A</li> </ul>

	<b>Time Elapsed Since Emancipation</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Employment</b>	<b>Housing</b>	<b>Crime/Delinquency</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>Scannapieco et al. (1995)</b>	Unclear; participants were aged 16 years or older and in care between 1988-1993	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ High school graduate: ILP= 50%, Control= 13%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Has history of employment: ILP= 100%, Control= 71.7%;</li> <li>▪ Employed at case closing: ILP= 52.3%, Control= 26.1%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Living on own at case closing: ILP= 36.4%, Control= 4.3%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ N/A</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Self-supporting at case closing: ILP= 47.7%, Control 17.4%</li> </ul>
<b>Shippensburg University Center for Juvenile Justice Training and Research (1993)</b>	1 year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Less than High school: ILP= 41%, Control= 21%;</li> <li>▪ High school/GED/Vo-tech: ILP= 59%, Control= 79%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Unemployed: ILP= 50%, Control= 63%;</li> <li>▪ Part-time/Summer-full-time: ILP= 50%, Control= 37%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Living with parent/relative/ foster parent/other: ILP= 50%, Control= 83%;</li> <li>▪ Living by self/with a friend: ILP= 50%, Control= 17%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ N/A</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Using public assistance: ILP= 38%, Control= 29%</li> </ul>

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