

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

Identifying the Success Rate of Former Male Foster Youth Ages 18-25 who Have
Successfully Graduated from Transitional Housing Program

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the Degree of Masters of Social Work

By

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Abstract

Identifying the Success Rate of Former Male Foster Youth Ages 18-25 who Have Successfully Graduated from Transitional Housing Program

By

Iveta Petrosyan

Masters of Social Work

The program evaluation will provide data in reference to individuals over the age of 21 who have successfully completed Ben's House Transitional Housing Program, a transitional housing program for youth who have completed their residence from various Los Angeles County Youth Services. The program introduces individuals between the ages of 18-21 to specific life skills and builds connections with caring adults, including relatives and mentors. The program evaluation of Bens House, will consist of providing details of the success rate of the program by examining how former residents of the program are performing after completion of the program within the areas of employment, academia, marriage and family, incarceration, and those lost to violent death, one and three years' post graduation from the program.

Chapter 1: Introduction & General Research Question

Ben's House is a transitional housing program for youth who have completed their residency within a resident group home located within the San Fernando Valley area. Ben's House is a transitional youth home for young adult males located within the property of Pacific Lodge Youth Services. This program helps individuals between the ages of 18-21 years acquire life skills and connections with support systems, including relatives and mentors. To date there is no formal data to ascertain the effectiveness of Ben's House as it relates to the success rates of the transitional housing program. The evaluation of Ben's House will consist of providing details of the success rate or non-success of the program by examining how former residents of the transitional program are performing within the following areas: employment, academia, marriage and family, military duties to include incarceration and those lost due to violent and nonviolent death. Research evidence will consist of the procurement of information with reference to past residents from the Independent Living Program, located within the Pacific Lodge Youth Service, Los Angeles County Probations liaisons to include current records located within the transitional housing office records.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Presenting research will focus on 18-21 year old male probationary youth who previously resided at Pacific Lodge Youth Services Transitional Housing Program through the implication of AB 12. The goal is to measure the outcomes of positive and negative outcomes acquired in former male residents one, three and five years post-graduation of the transitional program from Pacific Lodge. In doing so researchers will be able to obtain data on how successfully the transitional living program offered through Pacific Lodge Services addressed residents' needs regarding long term success in areas of homelessness, social support, education and employment, incarceration, independent living and overall positive life outcomes upon graduation from the program.

A total of 399,546 foster youth were reported in the U.S. in 2012, of which 15,000 foster youth between the ages of 18-20 years resided in dependency systems (Chavarria and Johnson, 2014). Without transitional programs these youth exit the foster system without the resources needed to succeed in their lives, making them a high risk population for experiencing homelessness, lack of adequate social support systems, less likelihood of possessing the skills necessary to obtain employment as compared to their counterparts, lower wages and higher challenges with less likelihood of obtaining an education as compared to the general population (Stott, 2013). Furthermore, transitioning youth are exiting foster care at a deficit; they are often experiencing loss from their families of origin as well as facing the challenges of having experienced abuse, neglect and loss (Chavarria and Johnson, 2014).

Transitional housing programs are created in an effort to correct the discrepancies and negative outcomes faced by foster youth. Transitional housing is associated with positive outcomes in individuals' successfully establishing employment, positive physical and mental

health and mind-set in regards to one's self-sufficiency (Dworsky et al., 2012). However, "the 2010 Report Exit Outcomes for Former Foster Youth Participating in California's THP-Plus Transitional Supportive Housing Programs showed mixed results for the state's efforts to address this need" (Chavarria and Johnson, 2014). Establishing a successful method of measuring the effectiveness of transitional housing programs presents itself as a very challenging task given the multiple variants applied to the methods of collecting data on the success outcomes of transitioning programs. A common challenge presented in acquiring an accurate measurement of effectiveness in transitional housing programs is that transitioning programs could not continue placement for youth longer than two years which lead to low success rates and low positive outcomes because residents exited the program with little stability and chances for success in adulthood (Kimberlin and Lemley, 2010). This issue is well acknowledged and has received recognition through two implementations of California's Fostering Connection to Success Act, also referred to as, Assembly Bill 12, in response to the issue and in an effort to address this concern. "Assembly Bill 12 was signed into law on September 30, 2010 and took effect on January 1, 2012. A provision of the Federal Fostering Connections to Success law permits states to extend title IV-E assistance to eligible child welfare or probation youth that remain in foster care up to age 21 to improve outcomes for youth in foster care. AB 12 affects many areas in child welfare such as, Foster Care (AFDC-FC), the Transitional Housing Programs, and Adoption Assistance Payments (AAC)" (Department of Social Services, 2007). Studies conducted on various transitional programs found, "overall research shows transiting youth wanting an adult in their lives while transitioning, others remark upon how they enjoyed their relationship with their social worker after they became adult dependents" (Chavarria and Johnson, 2014). Therefore, in addition to providing healthy living conditions to foster youth who

may otherwise be exposed to homelessness, literature suggest social support available to foster youth through transitional programs provide a platform for youth to build strong support systems which in turn result in youths' self-sufficiency and a positive impact on their self-perceptions as well (Chavarria and Johnson, 2014). "Transitional youth experiencing a separation from their family of origin are often moving around the dependency system, creating a lack of permanent connections," therefore the support systems available to youth through transitional housing programs provide access to positive support systems around them to help youth withstand failures (Chavarria and Johnson, 2014).

Moreover, obtaining a high school diploma or higher education is particularly difficult for transitioning students who may be dealing with the emotional aftermath and disruption of constantly changing schools, which results in losing credits for graduation (Chavarria and Johnson, 2014). California Assembly Bill AB-12 for transitional youth provides additional support and time for youth to complete graduation requirements before exiting the program. Obtaining higher education serves as another challenging obstacle for foster youth to overcome. "The consensus is that transitional programs available to foster youth through AB-12 will increase college attendance because it expands services and benefits to the age twenty-one; however, other researchers argue this is not enough. Other researchers indicate that programs offered through AB-12 will end too soon and services should be extended until the age of twenty-four" (Chavarria and Johnson, 2014). A study on foster youth who have acquired college degrees report they are equally competitive as compared to their non-foster peer counterparts (Salazar, 2013). "After foster youth leave the system of dependency, they face an increasingly competitive job market. Societal expectations for education has increased (Arnett, 2000), and the

current economic climate has added pressure to those preparing for the work force” (Chavarria and Johnson, 2014).

The California Department of Social Services has created administrative groups dedicated to monitoring and collecting data regarding the effectiveness of the extension of transitional housing programs through Assembly Bill AB-12, however, due to the fact that this program has not been effective prior to 2012 there is a great lack of literature on its effectiveness. Government policies and agencies responsible for the implementation of the services offered through the program are continually looking for methods to be successful, however as a result of transitional housing programs through AB-12 still being in their infancy, much of the research done to present day has been focused around each agency's individual population (Chavarria and Johnson, 2014). The transitional housing program available at Pacific Lodge Services is a depiction of this, as it has been providing services to transitioning foster youth since 2011; however, research conducted for this capstone will be the first attempt to collect data on the outcomes of the program. It is the researcher's' goal to contribute to gathering more data on the effectiveness of these programs and to provide assistance to Pacific Lodge Services in establishing a system of data collection and research on the effectiveness of these programs.

While the hardships and future challenges for foster youth are well understood, and programs and policies have been well established in an effort to address the challenges faced by this population, professionals are still searching for the best ways and approaches to interpreting positive and negative outcomes in foster youth. “The lives of these youth are multi-faceted with needs interpersonal, intrapersonal, and concrete in nature such as financial resources. This period of transition is crucial in developing self-sufficiency that will carry them through to adulthood” (Chavarria and Johnson, 2014). Transitional Housing Programs are imperative in providing the

basic need of shelter for foster youth; however, its long term success proves to be difficult to understand due to the complexity of needs that accompany it. Despite these challenges, a common thread in literature remains that transitioning youth who have access to strong support systems tend to have higher rates and likelihood of positive outcomes in their lives as adults. Furthermore, in addition to support systems, transitional housing programs also provide the necessary skills and training which further serves as a platform for success during transition into adulthood for foster youth. In order to fully understand the unique needs of this population, professionals must begin by understanding how to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs available to foster youth. Once this objective has been reached, professionals can then evaluate and begin strategic planning on how to improve the services provided to transitioning foster youth. With the information gathered with reference to the disposition of former transitional youth, researchers will be able to improve the transitional youth program by referencing information gathered through the formative evaluation process.

Research Question

What is the success rate of the program and the disposition of individuals with reference to former residents of Ben's House utilizing times periods of one year, three years and five years post residency. The research question has a targeted goal of the following areas: Employment, academia, marriage and family, military duties to include incarceration and those lost due to violent and nonviolent death.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Parameters of this study will consist of no contact with past residents. The evaluation will consist of determining the disposition of past residents of Ben's House based on the 13 variables listed in table 1.1. Our population will consist of males over the age of 21 who were once probationary youth. This study will target former residents in particular areas of their life. Former residents established housing and the disposition of their current situation within the following time periods. One year after graduation of the program, three years after graduation and five years after graduation of the 18-21 year old life skills program. Program evaluations will be utilized in order to ascertain information with reference to the status of former transitional youth in order to determine their effectiveness of the program with reference to life skills.

Evidence utilized for this evaluation will be gathered from existing data from current supervisors, the Director of Ben's House to include the Director of the Independent living program. All information will be gathered by existing data obtained from Pacific Lodge Youth Services to include the California Youth Probations Department. Research will be conducted through existing data. Existing data will be gathered on all residents within the realm of employment, education, military service, incarceration, homelessness to include marital status of all residents who have graduated within the last five years. Information will be evaluated from the Independent Living Program Supervisors to be included are the Los Angeles County Probation liaisons. Results of the study will be utilized to strengthen and improve the program within areas of employment, life skills, education and lowering the rate of recidivism.

Design of Study

Our research design will consist of a program evaluation, which will measure the 13 variables listed in table 1.1. This evaluation will be utilized for the purpose of gathering data to assess, mitigate and improve programs which are either not effective and /or effective to include

implementing actions which improve the transitional housing program by utilizing formative evaluation techniques.

Sampling and Data Collection Strategy

Information will be gathered through secondary sources from the California Youth Probations Department to include Pacific Lodge Youth Services. Current probation officers and current supervisors along with the Director of Independent Living will be utilized as sources of information in order to gather pertinent information with reference to the current status of former residents.

Chapter 4: Results

Researchers utilized program evaluation existing data to evaluate success amongst former residents of Ben's House Transitional Housing located within the San Fernando Valley area. Ben's House Transitional Housing is part of Pacific Lodge Boys Home which provides transitional living programs, parenting classes, basic automotive maintenance skills, basic culinary skills, anger management classes, drivers' education, employment workshops, financial management workshops, individual case management, vocational training programs, college preparation workshops and computer literacy workshops. Our study population consisted of males age 21 and older who were probationary youth during the time of their residency at the Ben's House facility. Our results focused on participants' current lifestyles in terms of achieving success at two points in time, one year after graduation of the program and three years after successful graduation of the 18-21 year old life skills program. Data was collected by age, employment history, recidivism rate, homelessness, marriage, and illegal substance and prescription drug abuse. Information gathered was derived from existing data from current supervisors, director of independent living program, probations officers and existing records obtained from probation officers.

Results derived from existing data of twenty former residents from Ben's House Transitional Program from 2013-2016, targeting individuals who completed transitional housing as well as those who successfully aged out of the program upon reaching the age of twenty one. The results of the study are identified below in Table-1.

Environment

The environment of transitional housing consists of a six bedroom home for transitional youth. Residents of Ben's house consist of young men whom in the past have had trouble with

the juvenile justice system. These young men come from diverse backgrounds, which include but are not limited to substance abuse, gang affiliation and parental neglect. Youth were accepted and remain in Ben's House under Assembly Bill CA-AB -12. In order for the youth to reside in the home the residents were mandated to attend a postsecondary education or a vocational training program for at least part time and work 80 hours a month. Residents' of Ben's house may also attend post-secondary education or vocational training programs full time and work 30 hours a month. Furthermore, residents may also choose to work 32 hours a week in order to remain a resident of Ben's House.

Analysis

Analysis of this study utilizing information gathered from the Independent Living Program Director, which included the California Juvenile Probations Department. Analysis of this study offers insight into the dispositions of former residents. This study found that former transitional youth lived productive lives and maintained a positive place in society in year one and year three post-graduation from Ben's House. The analysis of the study identifies that by the third year after the program completion a lower number of residents are unemployed (7 individuals in the first year and 5 individuals in the third year, the remaining 8 individuals were employed), with a higher graduation rate from junior college and vocational school (4 individuals completed junior college and 14 individuals completed vocational school, the remaining 2 individuals did not complete either junior college or vocational school). Looking at the category of substance abuse and incarceration lowered significantly by the third year. Causes for the improvements within the area of recidivism, vocational training and substance abuse by former residents were all correlated to the utilization of the resources provided to them by the transitional housing program. Resources included life skills training with reference to tutoring,

resume writing, effective communication, parenting classes, individual therapy and vocational training.

Our analysis concludes that former residents (N= 40%) previously involved within the life skills training are employed within the state of California. This study provides information detailing the dispositions with reference to individuals who exited the program without successful completion, individuals who failed to utilize the resources provided to them through Ben's House after the third year, have a higher likelihood of unemployment (N= 60%), divorce (N= 20%), and substance abuse issues (N= 100%).

Analysis of the study concludes less than half (N= 40%) of the subjects evaluated maintained some level of employment at the minimum wage level, and more than half (N= 60%) remained unemployed for a significant amount of time. Although the numbers decreased for employment, research indicated all whom participated in the life skill resources training are currently employed. One year after leaving transition housing, the results dictate three subjects were in county jails due to drug offenses (N= 10%) or domestic violence (N= 5%).

Existing data concludes zero deaths and zero voluntary enlistments for military service, which could be explained by their having a probationary record. Furthermore, fourteen former residents (N= 70%) have completed vocational training and four former residents (N= 20%) have completed college at the junior level. Two former residents (N= 10%) remain married and two former residents (N= 10%) are divorced at this time. Two former residents (N= 10%) were homeless one year after the program and one former resident (N= 5%) is homeless at this time due to continued misconduct and breach of policy which lead to his dismissal from the program. Substance abuse for the purpose of this study is specified as any amount of drug use (e.g. marijuana) to include illegal use of medications and alcohol use/abuse. Within these criteria, one

year post completion from the program 12 former residents (N= 60%) were identified as substance users. Three years after completion of the program eight former residents (N= 40%) were identified as substance users. Therefore, within the first three years of completing the programs all 20 former residents reported having substance abuse problem. Zero individuals' were in treatment one or three years post completion of the program.

Recommendation

Researcher's recommendations include a review of the interview intake process to insure a zero tolerance of substance abuse. Researchers have discovered the number one factor for eviction from transitional housing is due to substance abuse. Our second recommendation is to implement a policy which dictates all life skills training will be mandatory while maintaining residency within transitional housing. Results of this study correlate life skills training and employment which was a major factor within the success of the transitional housing program at Ben's House.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Research has shown with reference to the program evaluation of Ben's House, residents which took advantage of the life skills resources offered were more often successful within the realm of employment than the residents which chose not to participate. Findings showed residents which were homeless and unemployed at particular times during the evaluation period were the residents which did not participate in the life skills programs such as: resume workshops and interviewing skills. Issues of substance abuse were a relevant factor in the rate of success between residents who gained and maintained employment. Researchers found this to be a major proponent in the success of those which completed the program. Researchers discovered the residents who had known issues with substance abuse completed the transitional age youth program at a higher success rate than those residents which had substance abuse issues.

Outcome

Outcomes Pacific Lodge Youth Service correlates with two major implications, first identifiable marker directs the attention towards the need to keep records of all residents of transitional housing residents from 1- 5 years in order to continuously identify and improve the intervention skills utilized with reference to transitional age youth. The second outcome points towards the resident interviewing process for transitional youth assistance. Research has shown residents with substance abuse issues have a higher likelihood to not be employed or maintain residence within the home in comparison to residents' which avoid substance use. In order to mitigate the use of illegal substances, the agency may deem random on site drug testing as a necessity. Doing so will maintain effective education and employment based residency and discipline within Ben's House.

Implications

Implications and challenges associated with this study present future case managers and social workers need to maintain constant evolving goals as a means to confront residents' disruptive behaviors as well as facilitate self-control exercises and behaviors. Other challenges include random urinalysis. The challenge will be placed upon different agencies such as Juvenile Probations to include Pacific Lodge Youth Service. Which agency will conduct the random drug testing to include enforcement of this policy? The major implication references the issue regarding the effectiveness of transitional housing as it relates to positive outcomes for transitional youth ages 18-21. Substance use is the leading cause of termination at Ben's House Pacific Lodge. This implies a need to further evaluate how the program addresses the challenge of substance use amongst its residents. If policy states that substance use is grounds for termination from the program, how have we then helped individuals who are dismissed as a result of their substance addiction/use?

Limitations

Limitation of the program evaluation consisted of the following:

- (1). No interviews conducted with current or former residents.
- (2). No information on hand past (4) years with reference to current or former residents.
- (3). Results could not prove if CA-AB12 is consistently improving the lives of transitional age youth due to no on-hand data past a 3 years period.
- (4). Researchers could not verify by interview if transitional age youth feel the CA-AB 12 program is successfully meeting the needs of the residents of Ben's House.
- (5). The study could not pinpoint the success or failure of the program due to the short existence of Ben's House which has been providing services for less than four years.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In conclusion, program evaluation of Ben's House suggests successful completion of the program does not confirm successful life outcomes for residents post-graduation from the Ben's House Transitional Housing Program. Furthermore, enrollment into the program for individuals who failed to utilize the resources provided to them was based on monetary gain (in the form of monthly checks provided to them by the State) rather than personal advancement and development. In addition, residents with substance abuse dependencies were dismissed from the program without alternative programs to help them succeed. Lack of records dating back further than five year as well as the program being in its infancy presented as a challenge, however, continued staff training and research in the realms of program evaluation continue to build on the foundation of the program goals to promote success in the future of its residents. Pacific Lodge Youth Service and the Los Angeles Juvenile Probations Departments have made great strides toward bettering the lives of probationary youth since the start of the program and although there are still areas, such as the above mentioned, which need further evaluation, together they have contributed to many notable positive changes as researchers have depicted earlier.

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Appendix: Joint Project Addendum

Identifying the Success Rate of Former Male Foster Youth Ages 18-25 who Have Successfully Graduated from Transitional Housing Program

Identifying the Success Rate of Former Male Foster Youth Ages 18-25 who Have Successfully Graduated from Transitional Housing Program is a joint graduate project between Jimmie Jakes and Iveta Petrosyan. This document will explain the division of responsibilities between the two parties. Any additional information can be included in a separate document attached to this Addendum page.

Jimmie Jakes is responsible for all the following tasks/document sections:

- Identified the study population, inclusion and exclusion criteria.
- Gathered existing data from the Manager of Ben's House, Director of Independent Living Program and Los Angeles Juvenile Probation Program.
- Analyzed and evaluated the existing data for the purpose of identifying critical skills which have aided and assisted former youth in success outcomes and also to develop future courses of action and contingencies which bolstered and assisted in the development of the transitional housing program.
- Identified, through data analyses, what was not working in the best interest of former residents in order to identify solutions which will improve the success rate of current foster youth with residency at Ben's House Transitional Housing Program.
- Collaborated on gathering information and drafting all sections of graduate project with Iveta.

Iveta Petrosyan is responsible for all the following tasks/document sections:

- Identified the study population, inclusion and exclusion criteria.
- Gathered existing data from the Manager of Ben's House, Director of Independent Living Program and Los Angeles Juvenile Probation Program.
- Analyzed and evaluated the existing data for the purpose of identifying critical skills which have aided and assisted former youth in success outcomes and also to develop future courses of action and contingencies which bolstered and assisted in the development of the transitional housing program.
- Identified, through data analyses, what was not working in the best interest of former residents in order to identify solutions which will improve the success rate of current foster youth with residency at Ben's House Transitional Housing Program.
- Collaborated on gathering information and drafting all sections of graduate project with Iveta.

Both parties shared responsibilities for the following tasks/document sections:

- All of the above, including all university requirements for the successful completion of our graduate project.

_____	_____	_____	_____
Jimmie Jakes	Date	Iveta Petrosyan	Date
_____	_____	_____	_____
Dr. James T. Decker	Date	Dr. Amy C. Levin	Date
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Dr. Amy C. Levin	Date	Dr. Amy C. Levin	Date
_____	_____		
Dr. Jodi L. Brown	Date		