

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

CHAIR

Steven A. Marenberg, Esq. *
Arl & Wenzel LLP

VICE CHAIR

Bart H. Williams, Esq.
Munger, Tolles & Olson LLP

SECRETARY

Robert J. Woolway
Trinity Capital LLC

TREASURER

Arny M. Hawkes, Esq.
Zrent & Young LLP

James P. Clark, Esq.
Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP

Dennis P.R. Coffon, Esq. *
Altek Rose, LLP

Nancy de Brier, Esq.
Attorney & Child Advocate

Michael Downer, Esq.
Capital Research &
Management Company

Susan F. Friedman
Producer / Director

Clifford Gilbert-Lurie, Esq.
Ziffen & Testabaro LLP

Leslie Gilbert-Lurie, Esq. *
L.A. County Board of Education

Barbara Grushow
Barbara Grushow Designs

Angie Harmon
Actress & Advocate

Andrea R. Hartman, Esq.
NBC Universal

Craig Hunegs
Werner Bros. Television Group

Jo Kaplan, Esq.
Referee / Juvenile Court

Mitchell T. Kaplan
Kaplan Staffer Agency

Gwyn Lurie
Above Films

Karen Mack, Esq.
Executive Producer

Sue Naegle
Home Box Office

Hemanshu Nigam, Esq.
News Corporation

Sean Perry
William Morris
Endeavor Entertainment

Daniel M. Petrocelli, Esq.
O'Neilly & Myers LLP

Phillip Rudolph, Esq.
Jack in the Box, Inc.

Thomas A. Saenz, Esq.
MALDEF

José F. Sanchez, Esq.
Sidley Austin LLP

Tori M. Schulman *
Child Advocate

Susan Simon
Pediatric Physical Therapist

Robert G. Splawn, MD, MPH, FACEP
PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP

Sandra Williams, Esq.
CBS Television

Noelle Wolf
Child Advocate

PRESIDENT &
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
Janis Spire

LEGAL DIRECTOR
Laura Streimer, Esq.

FOUNDER
Francis W. Wheat, Esq. *
1921-2000

* Post-Chair



The Alliance for Children's Rights

To: Placement and Program Focus Area Team

From: The Alliance for Children's Rights

Date: April 18, 2011

**Re: Youth Surveys –
Findings and Recommendations**

INTRODUCTION

In November 2010 California enacted Assembly Bill 12, the California Fostering Connections to Success Act, to improve outcomes for transitioning youth. This landmark legislation, co-sponsored by The Alliance for Children's Rights, will enable foster youth to elect to remain in care up until to age 21. The goal of AB 12 is to help these young people achieve self-sufficiency by providing them with additional time in which to pursue their education, gain work experience, and live in a supported environment. However, it will take more than three additional years in foster care to realize AB12's goal of improving outcomes and helping these young people achieve self-sufficiency. The challenge before those working to implement AB 12 is to develop a program that shifts the practice of child welfare so that these young adults see foster care as a positive support system in which they want to remain.

The Alliance for Children's Rights is working with the other co-sponsors of AB 12 in order to ensure that critical stakeholder input, particularly the youth input, is embedded into the AB 12 implementation process. The Alliance for Children's Rights is focusing on obtaining youth input in Los Angeles County. During March 2011, staff from the Alliance surveyed two groups of foster youth - those still in care and those recently emancipated - from Los Angeles County on proposed AB 12 programs and policies. A total of 136 youth were surveyed.

For those still in care, The Alliance collected survey responses at Shelter Care in the Edmund D. Edelman Children's Court in Monterey Park, CA. Shelter Care is the waiting area for children who arrive at their court appearances without their caregivers present. Before the survey was handed out, youth were given a brief introduction to AB 12. Youth were then clustered into groups of 3-5, and matched with an Alliance staff member. Staff read the survey aloud to each group and answered any technical questions from the youth along the way. Each youth answered the questions individually.

For those out of care, The Alliance collected survey responses at a variety of housing programs, local youth councils and at college campus-based programs serving former foster youth. Before the survey was handed out, youth were given a brief introduction to AB 12. They then completed the surveys on their own, with an Alliance representative available to answer any individual questions.

The Alliance also lead a series of focus groups with aged-out youth. During these focus groups, youth were asked discussion questions and talked amongst themselves about AB 12 and the bill's extended services, and about their own experiences transitioning out of care and living independently. The information that came out of these focus groups support our overall findings and will be referenced throughout this report.

OUTCOMES

While the two surveys were not identical, they asked similar questions about the following topics:

1. Deciding to remain in care
2. Choosing a placement
3. Choosing to re-enter foster care
4. Rules for placement: youth safety & youth responsibilities

The *Youth in Care* survey asked a total of 33 questions, while the *Youth Out of Care* survey asked an addition 11 questions about the youth’s experiences directly following emancipation, especially in the areas of housing, employment and educational opportunities.

Survey Demographics

	Total # surveyed	% Female	% Male	% Hispanic	% African American	% White	% Native American	% Multi-racial/other
Youth In Care	73	72.3%	27.7%	58.7%	15.9%	4.8%	6.3%	14.3%
Youth out of Care	63	66.1%	33.9%	34,5%	41.4%	6.9%	0%	17.2%

The following report contains a summary of youth answers by topics as well as analysis of the data based on both the surveys and the responses during the focus groups. At the end of each section is a series of recommended policies that we believe integrate the youth’s perspective while also remaining grounded in the core values of AB 12, which emphasize the voice of young adults; assistance and partnering; love and belonging; the unique needs of youth; maintaining eligibility; and supporting development.

DECIDING TO REMAIN IN CARE

Youth in Care Survey: Summary of Findings

The *Youth in Care* survey posed a series of questions about whether the respondent would choose to remain in care or leave care after turning 18. In response:

- 50% said they would choose to stay in care beyond the age of 18;
- 15.3% said they would leave care at 18;
- 34.7% said they did not know if they would choose to remain in or leave care.

When asked how long they would remain in care:

- 37% said they would stay in care as short a time as possible;
- 34.2% said they would stay in as long as possible;
- 28.8% said they would stay in as long as they felt like they needed support.

When asked to identify why they would choose to remain in care, the three most popular answers, in order, were 1) to get housing and other kinds of support, 2) because I won't have anywhere else to go, and 3) because I like my current placement and will want to continue living there

When asked why they would choose to leave foster care, the most popular responses, in order, were 1) because I am ready to live on my own, 2) because I will want to return to the household of my biological mother or father, and 3) because I want to get out of the system and away from its rules.

Finally, youth were asked to identify which adult figures they would choose to talk to about this decision. Youth could select multiple people. In response:

- 61% said they would talk to their foster parents or group home staff;
- 60% said they would talk to their social workers;
- 58% said they would talk to their attorneys.

Youth Out of Care Survey: Summary of Findings

Similarly, the *Youth Out of Care* survey asked respondents whether or not they would have chosen to stay in foster care after 18 if they had been given that option when they turned 18:

- 55.6% said they would have chosen to stay in care longer;
- 20.6% said they would not have chosen to stay in care;
- 23.8% said they do not know if they would have chosen to remain in or leave care.

When asked to identify the reasons why they would remain in care, the three most popular answers, in order, were: 1) I would have wanted to continue to get housing and

other supports, 2) I did not have anywhere else to go, 3) I liked my foster care placement.

Youth were also asked to identify the adult figures in their lives who they would have talked to if they had to make the decision about whether to remain in care. Youth could select multiple people. In response:

- 67.7% said they would have talked to their social worker;
- 48.4% chose their caregiver;
- 38.7% chose ILP staff;
- 29.0% chose their attorneys.

Recommendations

Youth in and out of care have an overwhelming interest in staying in care beyond the age of 18. For these youth, staying in care is synonymous with avoiding homelessness. However, as evidenced by the responses about why a youth would choose to exit care, it is clear that foster care as they know it would not meet their needs as young adults. While these young adults want to avoid homelessness, they also want to be given the opportunity to make their own decisions about their personal relationships with their biological family and they resent the rules they currently live under while in care. Finally, youth surveyed indicated that they will turn to their current caregivers and their social workers to weigh the pros and cons of staying or leaving care. Given this, it is clear these adult figures will need to be well informed about the benefits of AB12 and the youth's right to remain in care so youth are empowered to make the best decisions for themselves.

Given these findings we recommend:

1. Training and outreach materials be developed for youth, caregivers/providers, and social workers. These materials should be targeted to the specific audience and clearly explain the benefits of remaining in care, the rights and responsibilities of youth, and the role of the providers. In addition, these training materials should set forth how foster care will change once a youth turns 18 in order to provide the young adult with more autonomy;
2. Given that nearly a third of youth surveyed indicated that they did not know if they would elect to remain in foster care after age 18, it is critical that discussions about the benefits of extended foster care start far in advance of the youth turning 18.
3. Policies and regulations must reinforce the youth's status as a young adult and ensure that they have the same rights and responsibilities as all other young adults. Specific examples are discussed below under the topic "Rules for Placement."

CHOOSING A PLACEMENT

Youth in Care Survey: Summary of Findings

Next, respondents were asked to select housing placements and the services they would want their placements to provide. In response:

- 37% chose housing that provides one-on-one support in the areas of employment, education and independent living services, plus a small stipend;
- 28.8% chose a housing program with no support but a larger stipend;
- 23.3% chose a relative's home;
- 9.6% said they would want to remain with a foster family.

The most commonly chosen services youth want from their placements, in order, were 1) regular visits from a county social worker, 2) having their own apartment to manage, 3) visits from a case manager that is not a county social worker, and 4) educational support.

When asked what they think would best prepare them for adulthood:

- 51.6% selected living in their own apartment;
- 50% selected regular visits from a case manager;
- 43.9% selected assistance to accessing educational programs.

Youth out of Care Survey: Summary of Findings

Youth out of care were asked to choose between the following two placements: 1) receiving a monthly payment of approximately \$700 to help pay for housing and living costs but no additional services, or 2) housing with one-on-one support but little or no additional funding. 73% of former foster youth completing this survey selected the second option.

When asked what types of services they would want to receive in their placements:

- 51.4% said having their own apartment to manage;
- 37.8% said having affordable rent;
- 34.3% said educational services.

Respondents were asked to identify what can best prepare a youth to successfully transition into adulthood. They selected, in order: 1) access to educational services, 2) an affordable place to live, and 3) a monthly stipend.

Recommendations

The vast majority of youth still in care, 65.8% in total, want to live in a placement that allows them to have and manage their own apartment. Notably, the experience of managing their own apartment within an environment that provides one-on-one support and assistance was more attractive to these young people than living in a more independent environment and managing a greater amount of the monthly benefits. Youth in care indicated they also want services, mostly in the form of regular visits from a social worker or case manager. They believe they are ready to live more independently but not ready to lose consistent contact with an adult figure.

Youth out of care also strongly prioritized independent housing with services versus a placement that provides housing alone, even when this meant receiving a smaller monthly stipend to manage themselves. The services youth out of care want, however, are more concrete. They want help accessing education, they want low rent, and they want some sort of monthly stipend. This is understandable given that these young adults have already emancipated out of foster care and thus know the challenges of finding and securing housing and meeting their basic monthly needs. Accordingly, they were less concerned with regular visits from a social worker and more interested in targeted services and supports.

Given these findings we recommend:

1. Ensuring that *all* placement options provide youth with a level of independence and autonomy consistent with their status as young adults so that those youth who are continuing in more traditional foster care placements (i.e. a foster family home or relative caregiver placement) have the ability to manage their own affairs.
2. For those youth who continue to reside in more traditional foster care placements (i.e. a foster family home or relative caregiver placement), we recommend that a Shared Living Agreement be entered into between the youth and the provider. The Shared Living Agreement will allow youth to have a voice in defining the terms of the placement, to communicate in advance about his/her own needs and expectations as well as to understand the needs and expectations of the provider, and allows both parties to assess whether a particular placement is appropriate. Youth should be permitted to decline to live in a household where the expectations of that provider are not compatible with the young adult's own expectations in that placement.
3. The survey responses indicate that most youth would prefer a setting like THP-Plus Foster Care, which provides youth the opportunity to live in and manage their own apartment but within a supported program that provides case management and oversight. Even the youth out of care indicated that they

would prefer to live in a supported housing environment. These responses indicate the need to develop standards for Supervised Independent Living Placements that ensure that youth who reside in a SILP continue to have access to active case management and assistance. In addition, we recommend developing a checklist for the SILP that ensures that prior to moving into a SILP, the youth demonstrate that he/she is prepared for the level of independent living required. This includes, at a minimum, ensuring that the youth has sufficient income or resources (through a combination of their monthly foster care benefit in addition to other sources of income such as scholarship, financial aid, employment earnings) to meet their monthly living expenses.

CHOOSING TO RE-ENTER FOSTER CARE

Youth Out of Care: Summary of Findings

AB 12 allows youth under 21 to reenter care even after they have left the system. We surveyed youth out of care about the process of reentry and learned the following:

- 39.3% said they would have considered going back into the system;
- 31.1% said they did not know if they would have considered going back into the system;
- 29.5% they would not have considered going back into the system.

When asked if they kept in touch with their social worker after they left the system:

- 14.5% said they did keep in touch
- 85.5% said they did not keep in touch
- 51.7% said they knew how to reach their social worker after they left care.

When asked if they kept in touch with their attorney after they left the system:

- 9.7% said they did keep in touch;
- 90.3% said they did not keep in touch;
- 36.1% said they knew how to reach their attorney after they left care.

When asked if they had received ILP services after they left care:

- 51.6% said they did received ILP services;
- 48.4% said they did not receive ILP services;
- 59.7% said they know how to reach their ILP coordinator.

Focus Groups: Summary of Findings

In our various focus groups, participants repeatedly expressed concerns that youth would not know who to contact in order to reenter the system. Participants referenced homelessness, lack of a phone, and transient living as reasons why youth will struggle to contact the county. Focus group participants recommended that the state set up a designated hotline or provide youth with an information card upon leaving the system that clearly outlines the steps they would need to take to reenter and the people they would need to contact. Finally, the reentry process, they pointed out, should be a part of every youth's exit interview with their social worker.

Recommendations

After leaving the system, youth do not maintain relationships with their social workers or their attorneys for a variety of reasons. Only 14.5% of our respondents keep in touch with their social workers after leaving care, but over half of them indicated that they know how to reach their social workers. This is important given that social workers were previously identified as one of the primary adults youth would turn to when

deciding to remain in or leave care. This indicates that it is also likely that youth will choose to reach out to their social workers if they decide to reenter the system.

ILP Coordinators were another identified resource that youth could rely on to assist in reentry to foster care. Over half of survey respondents are currently receiving ILP services and almost 60% know how to reach their ILP Coordinators.

Given these findings we recommend:

1. Develop and provide clear instructions and information to youth who choose to exit foster care before age 21 about the process for reentry and resources within the community to provide assistance if the youth later chooses to reenter care.
2. Provide each youth who chooses to exit foster care before age 21 with the contact information of their social worker, attorney, and their ILP coordinator. Providing youth with multiple contact information will ensure that the youth is able to get in touch with at least one person if the youth later chooses to reenter foster care.
3. Develop on-line resources, such as information on a Facebook page or another type of website, that provides information and instructions on reentering foster care as well as contact information for organizations or entities that can assist a youth in reentering foster care.
4. Designate a person within each ILP program who can assist youth in reentry including helping to complete the petition that must be filed with the court to reenter foster care, assisting the youth in getting in touch with his/her social worker, and helping the youth come into compliance with one of the 5 eligibility requirements.

RULES FOR PLACEMENT - YOUTH SAFETY

Youth in Care: Summary of Findings

The *Youth in Care* survey posed a series of questions about rules for placement. In response:

- 44.4% believe that having a curfew is a good idea, while 55.6% disagree;
- 80.8% believe that allowing youth to have overnight guests in their placement is a good idea, while 19.2% disagree;
- 56.3% believe these guests should be required to get background checks, while 42.7% disagree;
- 69.9% think youth should be able to live with another youth not from the foster care system, while 30.1% disagree;
- 69.9% think youth should be allowed to live with a boyfriend or girlfriend, while 30.1% disagree;
- 72.6% believe that any roommate who is not from foster care should get a background check prior to moving in, while 27.4% disagree;
- 82.2% believe youth should inform their placement supervisor when a new roommate moves in, while 17.8% disagree.

Youth Out of Care: Summary of Findings

The *Youth Out of Care* survey also asked a series of questions about rules for placement. In response:

- 50% believe that having a curfew is a good idea, while 50% disagree;
- 59.7% believe that allowing youth to have overnight guests in their placement is a good idea, while 40.3% disagree;
- 64.5% believe these guests should be required to get background checks, while 35.5% disagree;
- 67.7% think youth should be allowed to live with another youth not from the foster care system, while 32.3% disagree;
- 20% think youth should be allowed to live with a boyfriend or girlfriend, while 80% disagree;
- 77% believe that any roommate who is not from foster care should get a background check prior to moving in is a good idea, while 23% disagree.
- 93.5% believe youth should inform their placement supervisor when a new roommate moves in, while 6.5% disagree.

Focus Groups: Summary of Findings

The discussion about roommates sparked lively conversations in our focus groups. Participants strongly believe that allowing youth to live with their peers who are not from foster care is a good idea. Youth expressed interest in living in the “real world”

with everyone else and believe this exposure to the world outside of the system could help them make a more successful transition into adulthood.

Recommendations

Youth in and out of care want to decide who they live with, but they also want to feel safe in their homes, as is evidenced by the number of youth agreeing to subject their guests and/or potential roommates to background checks. Youth out of care have more conservative opinions regarding overnight guests but also strongly believe that youth should be allowed to live with peers from outside of foster care. The most notable difference between these two populations of youth, however, is their opinion regarding youth living with a boyfriend or girlfriend. Youth out of care strongly disagree with the idea of youth in care between the ages of 18-20 living with a significant other, compared to just 30.1% of youth in care. Youth out of care have the advantage of their own experience and potentially know firsthand how unstable romantic relationships can be between young adults.

Given these findings we recommend:

1. Development and use of a Shared Living Agreement that will be used to define the expectations and responsibilities of the youth and the provider. The Shared Living Agreement will allow youth to have a voice in defining the terms of the placement, to communicate in advance about his/her own needs and expectations as well as to understand the needs and expectations of the provider. This allows both parties to assess whether a particular placement is appropriate. The Agreement will provide a means for the provider and the youth to communicate about things like curfew, overnight guests and other household rights and responsibilities.
2. Youth participating in extended foster care under AB 12 should be permitted to live with roommates, including their peers from outside foster care. While the youth we surveyed were somewhat willing to subject their roommates to a background check, our focus groups and discussions revealed this stemmed from a desire to ensure a safe living environment. We believe that less onerous requirements should be adopted in order to ensure the youth's safety because requiring a roommate to have a background check could impede on the youth's privacy. Social workers should be trained to discuss potential living situations with the young adult to help the youth make an informed choice about where to live and who to live with.

RULES FOR PLACEMENT - YOUTH RESPONSIBILITY

Youth in Care: Summary of Findings

In the *Youth in Care* survey, respondents were asked to choose which of the AB 12 participation requirements they think they would fulfill. They had the option to choose any or all requirements. In response:

- 83.3% said they would attend college, community college or a vocation program;
- 59.7% said they would attend high school or participate in a GED program;
- 55.6% said they would work at least 80 hours per month;
- 41.7% said they would participate in a program that removes barriers to employment;
- 13.9 % said they would do none of the above because they did not intend to stay in foster care after 18;
- 9.7% said they would do none of the above because of a medical condition.

When asked what should be included in the “mutual agreement” – the contract that youth and the county will sign outlining rights and responsibilities – the majority of those surveyed agreed with all seven conditions we proposed. These included: 1) In exchange for housing, I will follow the rules of my housing placement, 2) I will meet with my social worker regularly to monitor my progress, 3) I will not abuse alcohol, 4) I will uphold the law, 5) if attending a GED program, I will attend class regularly, 6) if attending a college or vocational program, I will enroll in at least two classes per term, 7) if I am working, I will work a minimum of 80 hours per month.

Youth were asked to identify appropriate reasons for being asked to leave their placement. The four most popularly selected reasons, in order, were: 1) being found in possession of illegal drugs, 2) if a youth leaves an apartment vacant for 30 days and stops paying rent, 3) being found intoxicated, and 4) not participating in services.

Youth were next asked to identify appropriate consequences for the offenses above. They favored the following: 1) receiving a written warning that could lead to suspension or termination of foster care funding, 2) participation in a drug or alcohol awareness class, and 3) being “grounded” for a period of time.

When asked about their monthly foster care payment, 100% of youth believed that a certain amount of the benefits should be given to the youth each month to spend on basic necessities and 78.1% said they should be allowed to manage this funding themselves.

When asked about case manager or social worker visits, 70.8% of respondents agreed that youth should visit with them on a regular basis. In regards to the frequency of these visits, they responded:

- 40% said once a month;

- 26.2% said one a week;
- 15.4% said once every two weeks;
- 18.5% said once every two months.

Next, a series of questions were asked about housing contracts, rules of living, and dispute resolutions. 84.4% agreed that a written agreement between the placement provider or caregiver and the youth is a good idea. We asked respondents to select three areas that they believe placement providers/caregivers should have the authority to set rules. In response:

- 70.3% chose no drugs or alcohol;
- 59.4 % chose household chores;
- 32.8% chose curfew;
- 32.8% chose overnight guests.

In the event that a dispute between the placement provider/caregiver and youth arises, the majority of youth believe that a team meeting with the youth's case manager/social worker, the housing provider and the youth should be held to discuss the situation.

Youth Out of Care: Summary of Findings

In the *Youth Out of Care* survey, respondents were asked to choose any of the AB 12 participation requirements they would have fulfilled if they had stayed in care after 18. In response:

- 88.5% said they would attend college, community college or a vocation program;
- 68.9% said they would attend high school or participate in a GED program;
- 54.1% said they would work at least 80 hours per month;
- 52.5% said they would participate in a program that removes barriers to employment;
- 8.2 % said they would do none of the above because they would not have stayed in foster care after 18;
- 6.6% said they would do none of the above because of a medical condition.

Youth were asked to identify appropriate reasons for being asked to leave their placement. The three most popularly selected reasons, in order, were: 1) not participating in services, 2) being found in possession of illegal drugs, and 3) if a youth leaves an apartment vacant for 30 days and stops paying rent.

Youth were next asked to identify appropriate consequences for the offenses above. They favored the following: 1) receiving a written warning that could leave to suspension or termination of foster care funding, 2) participation in a drug or alcohol awareness class, 3) being "grounded" for a period of time, and 4) suspension of foster care funding for one month.

When asked about their monthly foster care payment, 95.1% of youth believed that a certain amount of benefits should be given to the youth each month to spend on basic necessities and 80.3 % said they should be allowed to manage this funding themselves.

When asked about case manager or social worker visits, 95.1% of respondents agreed that youth should visit with them on a regularly basis. In regards to the frequency of these visits, they responded:

- 39.5 % said once a month;
- 34.4% said once every two weeks;
- 26.2% said one a week;
- 4.9% said once every two months.

Next, a series of questions were asked about housing contracts, rules of living and dispute resolutions. 95.1% agreed that a written agreement between the placement provider or caregiver and the youth is a good idea. We asked respondents to select three areas that they believe placement providers/caregivers should have the authority to set rules. In response:

- 72.1% chose household chores;
- 60.7% chose no drugs or alcohol;
- 52.5% chose minimum grades or hours of work.

In the event that a dispute between the placement provider/caregiver and youth arises, the majority of youth out of care believe that a team meeting with the youth's case manager/social worker, the housing provider, and the youth should be held to discuss the situation.

Focus Groups: Summary of Findings

The focus group conversations further demonstrated that former foster youth see themselves as adults, able to make their own decisions, but also acknowledge their need for additional supports. Youth complained that while in care they had so little control over their own lives that they were not able to learn from first hand experience. For example, participants liked the idea of youth managing their own money because the consequences of poor management would directly impact them, and they would quickly learn from mistakes.

The youth that participated in our focus groups want to take advantage of services, especially in the areas of education but they also want to be held accountable to their commitments and responsibilities. They believe that if youth are not actively participating in program services, they should face consequences, but they also believe that a program model that allows for failure and second chances would be most beneficial to youth in the long term.

Recommendations

Youth in and out of care want to participate in activities that improve their chances of success as adults. The majority of the youth we surveyed prioritized furthering their education over employment. The majority also agreed that regular visits with a case manager or social worker would be beneficial. Finally, most youth surveyed believe that they should receive some or all of their foster care payment and should be responsible for managing these funds themselves. As we have seen elsewhere in this report, youth want support beyond 18 years old but they also want opportunities to exert their independence and learn from their firsthand experience, be it their successes or failures.

In regards to their placements, most respondents agreed that signing a contract with their caregiver/placement providers is a good idea. While the idea of curfews was low on their priority list, agreeing not to abuse drugs or alcohol and participating in household chores was high. Youth also believe in being held accountable for their actions but prioritized intermediate steps, such as a meeting with their social worker or participation in classes or programs, rather than termination or suspension from the program as a means of resolving any problems. Again, youth want opportunities to grow, but want chances to make mistakes in the process.

In response, we recommend:

1. Development and use of a Shared Living Agreement that will be used to define the expectations and responsibilities of the youth and the provider. The Shared Living Agreement will allow youth to have a voice in defining the terms of the placement, to communicate in advance about his/her own needs and expectations as well as to understand the needs and expectations of the provider, and which allows both parties to assess whether a particular placement is appropriate. Youth should be permitted to decline to live in a household where the expectations of that provider are not compatible with the young adult's own expectations in that placement. The youth should be given appropriate supportive services to find a new placement in which the expectations, rights, and responsibilities of both the youth and the provider/caregiver are compatible.
2. Given the large number of youth interested in pursuing their education while participating in extended foster care, we believe that systems should be developed to coordinate services and supports between the child welfare agency, Independent Living Programs, and the higher education community should ensure that youth gain assistance in activities like applying for financial aid, registering for courses, and accessing campus services like tutoring.
3. The youth's Transitional Independent Living Plan should be used as a roadmap for the youth in order to help the youth define their goals, what services and supports are available to help the youth achieve their goals, and how to access

resources in order to maintain eligibility. The youth and social worker should meet regularly, at least once a month, to check in on whether the goals of the TILP are being met, and to address any concerns.

4. Policies and procedures should be enacted to provide youth who are struggling with the participation requirements the opportunity to work with their social worker and other support systems in order to come into compliance with those requirements prior to initiating any action to terminate or suspend foster care benefits.
5. Youth should be provided a monthly stipend by their caregiver/provider so that they gain the experience of managing their own money, making financial decisions, and being accountable for those decisions. If a youth is living in a foster home or with a relative caregiver, how much of a stipend is provided to the youth and the expenses that the youth is responsible for paying can be delineated in the Shared Living Agreement. The Independent Living Programs should develop programs and classes specifically geared towards helping youth to develop and maintain a budget, to meet their monthly expenses, and to develop savings plans.