

The State of Foster Care in Los Angeles: A Study Of Government and  
Organizations' Efforts to Aid Transitioning Foster Youth in Attaining Steady,  
Useful, Employment

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## **Introduction**

Foster Care for children was meant to be a “short term intervention for abused and or neglected children based on a substantial report of abuse and such children are considered unsafe in their own homes” (Mignon 2014). However today, nearly half a million youth are in foster care in the United States. As of October 30, 2017 there are approximately 437,465 children in foster care, and of these children in foster care 64,317 youth are between the ages of 16 and 20, and only 13,316 are in foster care between the ages of 18 and 20 (AFCARS Report 2017). California alone is home to a large foster youth population containing approximately 15% of the entire country’s foster youth in its system. According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS 2015), there were 62,097 children in out of home care in California in 2014. Of these children, approximately 21,267 were with foster families; 21,752 were with relatives; and 3,786 were living in group homes” (Walker 2017). Approximately 28,000 or 38% percent of the foster youth in California reside in Los Angeles County (Alliance for Children’s Rights 2018). Given these statistics, a viable foster care system is necessary for this country to build a stable future society since so many youth reside in the system with very few coping skills when they enter the world on their own.

As a result of the passage of the California Fostering Connections to Success Act (AB 12) passed in 2010, 20% of youth are staying in foster care after the age of 18 in the hopes of preparing for life on their own, demonstrating the challenges for many of leaving the system. Many of those who don’t stay in extended foster care often miss deadlines to apply because they have turned 18 and are no longer eligible. In order for foster youth to qualify for extended foster care they must demonstrate that they are currently working towards one of these five things: “completing high school or equivalent program (GED, or other), OR enrolling in college,

community college, or vocational program, OR employed at least 80 hours per month, OR participating in a program designed to promote or remove barriers to employment, OR unable to complete one of these requirements due to a medical condition” (CLCLA).

In this project I have analyzed the job programs offered to transitional age foster youth to ascertain if the extra time in foster care given to youth by the government due to AB 12 is promoting better employment outcomes for transitional age foster youth (ages between 18 and 21), whether employment is the solution to better outcomes for foster youth after they age out of care and how the government plays into all of this. I was able to interview 7 professionals who work with transition aged foster youth in helping them attain employment as well as a policy writer who helped design AB 12. I was able to compare this to a data set tracking foster youth employment outcomes since the passage of AB 12 done by Professor Mark Courtney. I found that nonprofit organizations work in cooperation with DCFS and the government to get job training and employment for foster youth, but due to funding issues, many organizations that provide good resources aren't around for very long. My limitations included not being able to get in contact with foster youth directly, but I was able to come to recommendations based on the professionals I chose to interview as well as the data set I analyzed that was a result of speaking directly with foster youth. I found that though AB 12 gives foster youth extra time in care, foster youth are often times still unprepared for life when they transition out, leading to homelessness and lack of employment. In order for extended foster care to have a heavy, positive impact on youth outcomes, there needs to be a comprehensive system to prepare youth with the skills needed to both get and keep a job, find housing, and have continuing support after they age out of care before they turn 18 so that these extra years spent in foster care are used to grow on a base level of life skills as opposed to learning everything at this age.

## **Literature Review**

### *Legislative History*

For the past century, there have been a number of both successful and unsuccessful laws passed to attempt to reform the child welfare system in this country. They have tried to attack the source of the problem by fixing conditions in the home and only taking children away from their families under extreme circumstances, as well as creating better situations for children in foster care currently and when they age out. These laws include the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980, herein after referred to as the AACWA, the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, herein after the ASFA, the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008/2012, hereinafter the AB 12 Act, as well as proposed revisions made to the act since 2012 and relating legislation, which will be evaluated in this section.

Youth were entering the foster care system at alarmingly high rates during the 1970s, many were not getting adopted, and many who were placed back with their families were returning to the system at high rates as well. “The increased amount of children in care, the increased time spent in care, and the reduced chances of adoption or reunification led to the passage of the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act in 1980” (Kawam, 2014). The goal of this legislation was to determine what role the state should play in foster care systems as well as to increase funding so systems could be rebuilt and better address the needs of the most vulnerable foster youth population, predominantly children of color. It was also too easy for youth to be placed in the foster care system, so this legislation served to set standards for what actions could constitute removal from home as well as required plans to be set up for youth to ensure their eventual removal or adoption from foster care. The legislation focused on services before, during, and after foster care for youth that would aim to keep them with their families or

ensure a swift return to their families. Situations began to change in the 70s for families though due to the introduction of crack cocaine in black communities as well as the spread of HIV/AIDS which led to a lot of parental deaths (Kawam). Given the hardships already facing African American families at this time ranging from teenage pregnancy, divorce, persistent poverty, youth unemployment, HIV/AIDS and other illnesses, a six-fold increase in women's incarceration, and job and housing discrimination, this placed a lot of unforeseen pressures on families, causing many to turn to drug use. The introduction of crack cocaine allowed users to conveniently smoke cocaine vapors on a low cost-per-dose basis (Dunlap 2006). With families and extended kin who may have been able to otherwise care for children becoming entrapped in this system of drug use, this epidemic placed many children into foster care without the possibility of returning home, and in turn brought about thousands of children staying in foster care long term. This led to "over 20,000 children ag[ing] out of foster care with nowhere to go" after the passage of the AACWA (Kawam). This piece of legislation was considered "formative in promoting communication between various parties regarding the difficulty associated with parenting, the expense associated with parenting, the need for interdisciplinary dialogue, as well as the sheer importance of child maltreatment prevention," factors that were just not considered prior to the legislative body (Kawam). Unfortunately, the legislative body in the country provided no resources to these youth in the way of laying a path for them to be successful in adulthood, and their futures were virtually in their own hands with no resources or knowledge of the real world.

The headway made with this act was overturned by Ronald Reagan in the 80s due to his belief that "government intervention into the lives of Americans" was the problem and his desire to shrink the federal government (Mignon, 2016). He got rid of the provisions of the AACWA

completely and it wasn't until the ASFA of 1997 that major changes were again made. The ASFA of 1997 was designed to address the issues that had ensued due to the elimination of the AACWA. The act focused on "achieving permanence for children in the foster care system" (Adler). However, the act did little in the way of its purpose and a decade later new legislation was passed to address the gap in legislation for foster youth.

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act was passed in 2008 in the US at a federal level and was adopted in California as the AB 12 Act (California Fostering Connections to Success Act), being enacted in 2012. According to the AB 12 Act foster children are now allowed to stay in the foster system until the age of 21 if they so choose to do so as long as they satisfy certain pre requirements and follow a stringent plan. The law also has given extensive resources to foster youth during this time period to aid them in succeeding in education and in their careers. They had to be either enrolled and finishing high school, going to college or be on some track towards job security. This act served to address the problem of youth aging out of foster care with no connections or any life skills to prepare them to succeed in life on their own. Startling statistics that lead to this act included "40% of matured foster youth experience homelessness at any given time, 40-63% of youth who age out of foster care do not have a high school diploma one year after aging out of the system, 25-55% of former foster youth are unemployed and those employed have average earnings below the poverty level, and that only 48% of former foster youth ages 23 and 24 were currently employed compared to 75.7% of young adults in the general population" (Walker, 2017 and Ratcliff).

Since then a revision has been drafted called the AB 2337, which addressed the problem that many foster youth were having in that if they decided they wanted to stay in foster care until they were 21, but their case for petition went through on the day or after they turned 18,



they were no longer eligible. This revision would allow for this group of people to petition as long as they aren't 21 (Legislative Counsel). The AB12 act along with other acts passed before then and revisions to it made since then have done a great deal in the way of aiding foster youth in being successful in adulthood, but the resources have been limited, and the educational aspect for both parents and youth to receive these services has been limited as well.

### *The Debate Surrounding the Best Strategies for Child Welfare*

The transition from adolescence to adulthood is hard enough, and for the population of people in foster care it is even harder. Young adults aging out of foster care are more susceptible to the harshness of life. “One in four of the youths who age out is incarcerated within two years of leaving foster care, one in five becomes homeless at some time after age 18, only 46 percent complete high school, a mere 3 percent earn a college degree, and just 51 percent have a job at age 21” (Zetlin). Of these many things no one can say which is the most important, but they all blend and feed off each other. The responsibility to prevent incarceration and homelessness, and improve school outcomes and job attainment lies on the young adults themselves, their guardians, their teachers, their social workers, and the government. The extension of benefits to foster youth to the age of 21 was intended to ease the transition into adult responsibilities.

Experts in the field debate the best way to allocate the available resources to enable the youth who have been able to benefit from the extended benefits provided by AB 12. Personal stories of these youth and their struggles as detailed by Nina Agrawal in her Los Angeles Times article reveal three major areas where the foster youth face obstacles: obtaining an adequate education, a decent place to live and meaningful employment.

### *School Struggles*

Before people live on their own, get a steady job, or go to college, they first go through high school and either graduate or don't. Most often whether or not they graduate determine the next few variables in their life of living situation, higher education and job stability. In a study done through focus groups the researchers found that one of the biggest hindrances for students in schools was the lack of stability due to them being moved from home to home and therefore oftentimes from school to school. This lack of stability leads children to not feel comfortable and as a result not do as well in school or be able to keep up with the curriculum. In addition, the sometimes lack of engagement on behalf of the caregivers and the often dismissive attitude of social workers towards guardians who are trying to get information about a new child's past often leaves foster youth to "fall through the cracks" (Zetlin). This is because some caregivers aren't engaged in trying to address children's learning difficulties or involved in school life, and for those who are, often times the social workers ignore their requests to know about youth's past troubles or happenings in previous schools.

The resources available for foster youth in schools may be materially there sometimes when outside organizations are brought in, but they are very hard to access unless a student is special needs or a high risk foster youth. "The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires secondary schools to begin developing individualized transition plans when students are fourteen. Each special education student must have a plan with long-term goals for education, vocational training, and general life skills, and that plan must specify the services needed to achieve these goals" (Oslong). But when a student isn't in this program they are often left with very few resources unless their caregivers are overly adamant about getting them involved in programs. Given the obstacles preventing foster youth from doing well in primary

and secondary schooling, the rate of former foster youth who attend college is astonishingly low. “By age twenty, less than 10 percent of former foster youth have attended college” (Oslong). Thomas Wolanin and his colleagues have developed a primer for educational policy planners that address “several key areas where changes in policy could alleviate obstacles, such as low educational expectations; frequent disruptions and changes in school placements; underdeveloped independent living skills; and lack of access to mental health care and treatment.”

Many authors in this field of research point to the difficulties for the youth in our target group to obtain a higher degree. Dworsky and others identify the key barriers for foster kids to achieve success in college: (1) difficulty in completing the application process and obtaining funding for college; (2) frequent changes in residences and schools which makes tracking records difficult; (3) other environmental factors such as lack of available housing and childcare. In order to address these issues and others impacting educational success for foster youth, the California Community Colleges have developed a program called Foster Youth Success Initiative which is designed “to improve outcomes for foster youth by improving the following key areas: access to student and academic support services and resources; term-to-term retention rates; academic performance; completion of certificate and degree programs; transfer rates to baccalaureate” (Foster Youth Success Initiative (FYSI)).

Given that AB 12 gives money to youth or families housing youth who stay in extended foster care, this serves as motivation for youth to continue to pursue their education. However, more emphasis needs to be put on educational support services for foster youth as they are growing up in the system. Still only 58% of foster youth graduate from high school and only 9% from college (Alliance for Children’s Rights). So it seems that by the time these foster youth turn 18

and are still struggling with schooling, it is hard to recover, leading to homelessness and joblessness.

### *Housing*

On a basic level the most important factor impacting success for our target population is adequate living facilities. For the foster youth a place to live is crucial. As noted above, a very large number of foster children end up homeless at some point in their lives. In Los Angeles and the surrounding areas, adequate housing is in very limited supply. Rental increases have driven many people to living in the streets, and we have one of the largest homeless populations in the nation. On the positive side, there are programs that help provide housing for the youth.

Under the Federal Chafee Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, “states may access federal support to assist youth with housing after they have left care until age 21. This room and board provision requires that youth have left foster care and are currently between ages 18 and 21” (Pergamit).

Another program that provides housing resources to the youth was established by AB 12, the Transitional Housing Program-Plus (THP-Plus). “The program provides supervised transitional living housing and supportive services” (California DPSS). The strict eligibility requirements include time limits on services and age, so the assistance is extremely limited. Based on the extreme poverty and extremely limited low income housing of the Los Angeles area, resources for housing are desperately needed. Through this program, these youth are given a stipend of \$800 per month; however, given the ever increasing housing prices in Los Angeles, this is simply not enough (Rose).

In Los Angeles there are an approximately “52,765” people who are deemed homeless, and of these people 39,396 are living on the streets. About 6% of this population are youth be-

tween the ages of 18 and 24 and 9% are under the age of 18 (Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority). Even more shocking is the fact that from 2012 to 2018 the numbers of homeless individuals in Los Angeles has actually increased, pointing to the idea that the passage of AB 12 has not done much to ease the homeless crisis for transitioning age foster youth.

*The drastic nature of the housing crisis in the Los Angeles area is demonstrated by <http://www.laalmanac.com/social/so14.php> the Los Angeles Almanac statistics on homelessness in Los Angeles County (see attached excerpt) provide a graphic depiction of the homelessness prevalent in the general population. Since young people who have been raised in the foster care system are characteristically less qualified for meeting the challenge of maintaining a residence in this area.*

AB 12 does provide funding for foster youth who participate in extended foster care and follow the guidelines provided, however, given the lack of housing in Los Angeles, funding is often not sufficient enough and there often aren't many available housing facilities to refer foster youth in this city.

### *Joblessness*

Joblessness is another persistent problem for the entire population of Los Angeles and especially for foster youth themselves. The California Fostering Connections to Success Act states that in order to participate in extended foster care youth must be "Employed at least 80 hours a month; or, Participating in a program designed to assist in gaining employment" if they are not in school or don't have a disability preventing them from doing so (California DPSS). Yet there is still a strikingly high number of unemployed foster youth in Los Angeles.

Mark Courtney, a professor in the School of Social Service Administration at the University of Chicago, along with his colleague, did a longitudinal study on the effects of California's AB 12 or Fostering Youth Connections to Success Act on foster youth's outcomes during extended care. "CalYOUTH is an evaluation of the impact of the California Fostering Connections to

Success Act on outcomes during the transition to adulthood for foster youth. CalYOUTH includes collection and analysis of information from three sources: 1) transition-age youth, 2) child welfare workers, and 3) government program data. The study, led by Mark Courtney and conducted in collaboration with the California Department of Social Services and California County Welfare Directors Association, is being carried out over an 8-year period from 2012–2020” (Courtney). The study follows 727 youth between the ages of 17 and 21 who live in California, following their outcomes to see what AB 12 was doing to help them succeed or not. When it came to employment he found that these youth’s employment stability, wage, and outcomes did not get any better and stayed pretty steady as they got older and stayed in foster care. Additionally, he compared his study to the Ad Health study of 1995 showing that youth today in foster care are less likely to have a job than youth in 1995 involved in a similar study.

In one study he followed youth from multiple counties all around the state of California and he did one in Los Angeles specifically. In his study he found that the mean income of these youth in California was \$10.21, which is slightly less than the mean wage of youth in Los Angeles at the time being \$10.60, but the living wage in Los Angeles is higher than in other counties in the state. He also found that though 72.3% of youth had reported that they ever had a job, 63.8% reported being unemployed at the time of the study for the California population. Yet for the Los Angeles study a surprising 73.5% of youth between 19 and 20 were unemployed, which is far more than the national average and the state average.

Courtney plans to do another study following the same youth at the age of 24 to see how far they have progressed at that point, but the numbers of unemployment in Los Angeles are startling. His study attributed much of the unemployment to a lack of job training, childcare, living arrangements and involvement in the criminal justice system. This concludes that there is a dis-

connect between the verbiage of AB 12 and what is actually being done to help transitioning age foster youth acquire employment.

## **Methodology**

This project examines the services and programs offered to foster youth who are “of age”, (defined as between the ages of 18 and 21), and their job procurement and stability while they are in the process of transitioning out of foster care. I examined the resources offered and employment outcomes of foster youth in Los Angeles by looking at data sets recording their employment since the passing of the California Fostering Connections to Success Act (AB 12) and speaking with professionals in order to understand the systems and organizations at work to help these transitioning foster youth get jobs and keep them in Los Angeles, CA.

My basic methodology included 4 steps:

1. Identifying and Contacting key organizations involved in the implementation of AB 12.
2. Obtaining written consents and conducting semi structured interviews.
3. Correlating information gained from various sources.
4. Evaluating results and providing recommendations.

This project compared youth outcomes and professional opinions to the provisions in AB 12 to determine how the policy has been effective. I conducted semi structured interviews with professionals who have contact with foster youth on a daily basis and who have a hand in recruiting and developing programs to see how they view government intervention affecting youth outcomes. By looking at actual youth resources and outcomes and comparing those to the provisions

in AB 12, I have been able to suggest recommendations for how to better offer job support for youth in transition and how to make the provisions of AB 12 more suitable for more youth.

For the data collection, I made contact with a policy writer at the Children's Law Center of Los Angeles (CLCLA) to discuss her views on situations for young adults aging out of foster care before and after the passage of AB 12 and what her thoughts are on the legislation in general. I also spoke with three children's attorneys there who discussed their experiences with youth and the programs offered at the law center to help youth get jobs. I also made contact with the programs director at iFoster, a local organization that specializes in helping foster youth find employment, for their perspectives on youth outcomes in the workforce after foster care. I also reviewed an initiative called the Sustainable Life Project funded by the restaurant Tender Greens that provides job opportunities for foster youth transitioning out of the system, teaching them culinary skills and ending the program with a guaranteed job at a Tender Greens location. I interviewed Kevin Faist, the Program Manager in charge of this project. My last two interviews were with the job coordinator at Hathaway Sycamores, an organization that offers foster youth a multitude of resources in addition to employment services, and a contractor with the county of Los Angeles who works with American Job Centers of California, both of whom gave me a perspective into the work of private organizations and job centers.

In conducting these interviews, I was able to gain a better understanding of how all different types of organization work together and work with the government to help foster youth get employment and other resources like housing and counseling and understand how the California Fostering Connections to Success Act plays into all of this as well.

The following flow chart reflects all of the professionals that were interviewed for this project. These dedicated experts were invaluable to me in gaining an insight into the broad spec-



trum of services currently being offered. While I was unable to speak directly with foster youth, these empathetic and caring individuals have provided a sense of the challenges facing the youth and how they work to mitigate these challenges. The questions asked of the interviewees are appended.

**Workforce Development Centers Administration**

Patrick Koppula  
Works to develop changes to structures and systems to make it easier to connect youth with employment resources

**Flow Chart of Organizations and People Interviewed**

**Private Sector (Hathaway Sy-**

Lauren DeNitto  
Works outside of legislation to provide resources such as housing, employment, counseling, funds, etc to youth

Give information on policy solutions

Social Workers send youth here for resources

**Children's Law Center of Los Angeles**

Susan Abrams  
(Policy Director)  
Researches, Writes, Designs Policy and Policy changes for AB 12 California Fostering Connections to Success Act

Communicate about policy implementation and changes

Charles Inada, Trane Hunter, Samyna Chaquer  
(Children's Attorneys)  
Work with foster youth and find out what is working and what is not in care, support, resources

Reach out to attorneys and social workers about youth

Foster youth get sent to organizations by social workers and attorneys

**Nonprofit (iFoster)**

Summer Rogers (Jobs Program Director)  
Puts Foster youth through training and provides resources to get them career ready

Reaches out to nonprofit to find youth in need of employment

**Businesses (Tender Greens)**

Kevin Faist (Sustainable Life Project Coordinator)  
Gives youth jobs at their business and trains them to have careers there or develop their skills so they can get jobs elsewhere

Reaches out to partner businesses to see if they have open positions for foster youth

Most of the organizations that I interfaced with and included in my study work together in some way. The Children's Law Center encompasses policy writers, children's attorneys and social workers. They all inform each other's work. The policy director, Susan Abrams, trains attorneys and social workers on the implementation of new legislation, and the attorneys and social workers are able to inform policy with hands-on work with youth. The attorneys I spoke with were Charles Inada, Trane Hunter, and Samyna Chequer.

The attorneys and social workers refer foster youth to nonprofit organizations for resources such as housing, employment training, and other benefits. The nonprofit I focused on was iFoster because they are a national organization and have a substantial jobs program for transition aged youth. There I spoke with the jobs program coordinator, Summer Rogers, and she explained the process by which youth go through training and are then referred to partner businesses for employment.

I next interviewed the Sustainable Life Project Job Coordinator at Tender Greens as an example of a business that hires foster youth from these nonprofit organizations. I discovered a disconnect here because the nonprofit organizations would only send their most well trained and well prepared youth to their partner businesses in order to make a good impression and keep the partnership. However, some businesses like Tender Greens would prefer to receive all types of youth, especially those individuals who are not benefiting from the training from nonprofit organizations like iFoster to give them the opportunity to gain employment and hands on training.

I also looked at the private sector of resources and found Hathaway Sycamores who has its own partnerships with businesses to get youth employment and also works outside of the AB

12 legislation. The problem for youth who get resources through Hathaway Sycamores is that they are no longer eligible to participate in extended foster care and the resources it offers.

Finally, I spoke with Patrick Koppula, a contractor with the City of Los Angeles who also works with Workforce Development Centers, who explained how the centers on the administrative side work to identify the best strategies to get youth connected with jobs and jobs resources and how this can then inform policy.

### **Findings/Analysis**

Foster youth go through many avenues in order to receive help with steady employment., such as the government, nonprofit organizations, job centers, and businesses who offer specific job support for foster youth. In my research, I interviewed a total of 7 professionals in the field of child welfare from several organizations including iFoster, Tender greens, Hathaway Sycamores, Children's Law Center of Los Angeles, and Workforce Development Centers of Los Angeles. I interviewed professionals who aid foster youth in employment opportunities and training, and several major themes emerged from all of the professionals I spoke with. Interestingly, several of these professionals affirmed my previous research questions and some changed the way I thought about my research questions. For example, my initial focus was on employment and how if youth could have and maintain a steady job they would be able to get housing and other things would be easier. However, I came to find out that it actually starts with housing. It was profound in that the most important themes that emerged were that housing determines most other factors and things youth are able to accomplish, youth need mentors, there are an abundance of programs offered to the youth in the way of job support but other areas such as funding and implementation need work, and lastly AB 12 is helpful, but could be improved.

## *Analysis of Organizations*

### *Tender Greens Foster Youth Jobs Program*

Interfacing with Tender Greens was an opportunity to see an example of the outcomes of the nonprofits' outreach to the business world. Tender Greens is headquartered in Los Angeles, and is a restaurant that focuses on responsibly sourced food to ensure people are able to lead healthy lives. The restaurant was founded in 2006 and the Tender Greens Sustainable Life Project started in 2009 at the location in Culver City, when the owner, Jesse Herrera, realized kids were sleeping on the porch of the restaurant. He spoke to these kids and found out that many were homeless foster youth. This led him to giving them jobs and training them at the restaurant which turned into the Sustainable Life Project. I selected this jobs program specifically because the programs manager, Kevin Faist, was very enthusiastic to speak with anyone about the program and all of the good work they do. Additionally, I found it important and relevant that Tender Greens is a business that has a passion to help foster youth get jobs to better their lives when this is typically nonprofit work. Mr. Faist explained to me how he tries to serve as a teacher and friend to these youth who are in need of someone to rely on.

As of 2018, 50-60 youth have gone through the jobs programs at Tender Greens and a reported "50%-60%" have been able to establish careers at the restaurant (Faist). The program is a 6-month long internship in which youth are trained in culinary skills, customer service and office skills, and if they like the positions and meet certain goals, they are offered a full time position at the end of the internship.

Youth are referred to the organization through other nonprofit organizations that help youth get jobs such as Team Project, LA Kitchen and others. Mr. Faist was candid in discussing the inherent problems the program faces:

1. Many interfacing organizations come and go, leading to a lack of permanent resources.
2. The organizations referring youth usually send the organization's "very good kids," defined as not having any juvenile delinquency history, or behavioral problems, or unsatisfactory school grades (Faist). This trend leads to the youth who most need help with their futures being ignored as a potential risk to the success of the program.
3. Another obstacle is the size of the program, given that not every store has people working there who are capable of mentoring 17-21 year old youth, they only have this program at select stores.

### *iFoster Jobs Training Program*

iFoster is a national nonprofit organization that focuses on making sure foster youth are equipped with the tools to be successful after foster care. Through a web of resources with other organizations and resources, iFoster tries to find housing, jobs, mentoring, and other personal items like laptops and glasses for foster youth. I included this organization in my interviews because they are a national nonprofit organization that helps connect youth to jobs and gives them job training. Given that they are a nonprofit, my interviewee, Summer Rogers, the jobs program manager, gave me good insights into the barriers standing between the organization and connecting with foster youth and even when they do connect with foster youth, why some still fall through the cracks and don't end up with employment.

iFoster has offices on the East Coast and in the North, as well as in Los Angeles. Summer Rogers, the Jobs Program manager at the LA office, described the programs at this organization designed to help youth between the ages of 16 and 24 in job training and getting job stability.

The program works with current and former foster youth and runs job training programs through 5 week cohorts or groups, with four 8 hour days of job training. The curriculum is geared toward helping youth with various job skills, including how to interview, how to dress, resume writing and updating, preparing cover letters, how to keep a job, working on customer service skills, and interaction with supervisors and coworkers. The organization also helps with housing, medical care, and life skills such as budgeting. iFoster works with partnership companies to help get youth interviews, but can't guarantee them jobs if they don't prepare. Youth are connected to paid internships in social service industries that have funding to provide supervised job experience, while others who are ready are connected with businesses and professionals to interview for regular jobs.

### *Children's Law Center of Los Angeles*

The Children's Law Center of Los Angeles (CLCLA), located in Monterey Park in Los Angeles, has many resources for youth in the areas of peer-to-peer advocacy and job support through DCFS. I spoke with three attorneys as well as their policy director who worked first hand with AB 12 through its drafting and implementation in California. Through my interviews with Trane Hunter, Charles Inada and Samyna Chequer I was able to understand their perspectives on youth struggles, given that they represent them and know the resources that their office gives these youth. Through speaking with the policy director, Susan Abrams, I was able to get more background on AB 12, its implementation, training and why it is currently doing well in some areas but not doing well in other areas.

### *Hathaway Sycamores*

Hathaway-Sycamores Child and Family Services is a private mental health and welfare agency with 10 locations throughout Southern California. They receive funding from multiple government sources to aid foster youth, including the Department of Mental Health and the Department of Children and Family Services. I spoke with Lauren DeNitto who has worked behind the scenes on laying out policy to help youth in the organization as well as helping them directly. This group offers several job training programs as well as aid for youth who are unemployed and having trouble paying for food or other necessities. In interviewing people here, I was able to understand how important housing is for youth and how this comes even before employment. Additionally, I included this organization in my sample because unlike other nonprofit organizations, the group has been around for a very long time with roots in the early nineteenth century. They recruit youth outside of government interventions and provide youth with resources through their own organization. In fact, they encourage youth to not participate in extended foster care in order to take advantage of their services instead.

### *American Job Centers of California*

Patrick Koppula, a contractor with the County of Los Angeles, also works in problem solving with the American Job Centers of California. He works with people who are directly working with foster youth and provided insight into how workforce development centers target foster youth. He also explained how the city is planning to have workforce development centers be the point of entry for all youth, especially foster youth, so that nonprofit organizations can receive funding from them and solely focus on aiding youth (Koppula). I included him in my sam-



ple because I was unable to get in contact with any administrators working at the workforce development centers.

### *Trends Across All Data Collected*

In conducting all of my interviews, I asked standard questions about interviewees views of the current state of the foster care system and what areas are most important to them that need to be improved. I also asked them about their perceptions of AB 12 and whether it was working or not or needed to be improved. After understanding more about what their organization in particular did to help alleviate joblessness among transitioning age foster youth, I then tried to find out what the gap was between connecting youth to such resources.

### *Housing a Crucial Factor in Success*

**A major issue for foster youth is housing which is in especially short supply in the Los Angeles area. Considering the severe housing shortage and the vast numbers of homeless in the area, the biggest challenge facing the youth is access to decent and affordable housing.**

Throughout my discussions with various professionals, I would ask them about jobs as well as the biggest obstacles they have seen facing youth in their transition out of care. One of the biggest obstacles was housing. There is a system in place in Los Angeles in which youth are “Next Stepped,” which means they are connected through the DCFS system to find available housing projects that are suitable for them based on their needs (DeNitto). This system is available for youth up to age 24, and then there is an adult system for homeless people after the age of 25. A major problem with this system is that while it connects youth to available housing and

housing programs specifically designed for foster youth with certain needs, the space is very limited. Oftentimes housing programs for foster youth have very strict guidelines including “no criminal records. Some are strictly rehabilitation facilities, some must do a month there with no phone, no leaving, even though they don’t use drugs or alcohol, and they therefore are unable to work. They can’t sustain living if they can’t go to work. And often programs don’t take 18 year olds with children, and it’s hard to put kids in downtown missions homeless shelters” (Faist).

In addition to these strict guidelines that don’t suit many youth and their lifestyles, these housing programs are very temporary in that many often get taken off the market and there is no available housing at all for foster youth, resulting in homelessness. Los Angeles serves as an extreme case when it comes to the numbers of homeless in the county, currently estimated at over 50,000 (Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority). When it comes to foster youth, there is not a good system in place to prevent them from being homeless at least once in their transition out of care. Policy director at the Children’s Law Center of Los Angeles, Susan Abrams, explained how there is a lack of transition programs in Los Angeles because large numbers of foster youth leave foster care just to end up homeless before they are able to find a program. She stated that “stable housing determines everything else like schools and jobs. If your basic needs aren’t meant how are you going to get to the other stuff?” (Abrams). All in all, if an abundance of foster youth are homeless and are worried about where they are going to sleep every night, it is very hard for them to focus on finding a job, let alone keeping one.

#### *Youth Need Peer and Adult Mentors To Find Work*

**Having a mentor they can relate to is essential for foster youth to have a successful transition out of foster care, given that many of their familial ties are severed. A peer who**

**can share their experiences and an adult mentor who can fill in the social and educational gaps in the child's upbringing are crucial elements in transitioning to adult life.**

When asked what needs to be done to make sure the transition out of foster care is smooth and that these youth are able to find jobs and be successful, an overwhelming number of my interviewees said that they need support in the form of a mentor, given that many youth have not learned the skills they need to be successful once they are on their own in adulthood. Additionally, many job program managers have trouble connecting with youth and being able to advise them because many of these foster youth have a lack of trust with adults. Thus, peer mentors would be a good way to make these youth more comfortable in connecting with adults and taking advantage of job services. "21 is very young to be expected to live independently when they don't have skills that are normally built throughout childhood" (DeNitto). Youth who are transitioning out of foster care for the most part don't have strong family ties or someone to fall back on in a crisis, so this transition out of foster care into adulthood is huge and difficult. The peer advocate program at the CLCLA helps a great deal with this because it connects former foster youth with current foster youth in order to mentor them and give them someone to guide them through the life skills they may not have learned before. One important program people at the CLCLA want to develop is one in which these youth's extended family members would be found like distant cousins or aunts so that they can be connected with someone in their transition out of care (Hunter, Inada, and Chaquer).

Something many of the professionals that I spoke with noticed was that many of the foster youth between ages 18 and 21 didn't have the life or job skills that would be expected of them at the time. They didn't know how to communicate with bosses, how to make phone calls and who to make phone calls to when they needed assistance. Summer Rogers from iFoster stated

that there should be “ a mandatory jobs training and independent living skills training program before they age out, making guidance as available and necessary as possible” (Rogers).

Despite the need for job skills and communication skills, “nobody gets anywhere without someone, meaning that if someone is alone and is never taught and guided to do what they need to be successful and on top of this they are handed a bad hand in life, they cannot be expected to succeed. Without foster parents who care a lot and no mentor it is hard for these youth to find their way especially when most social workers get burnt out” (Faist). The bottom line is that all youth need support, but especially the vulnerable population of foster youth who are transitioning to adulthood and now living on their own, so a proper support network could not only help these youth get and maintain jobs, but help them with all other aspects any youth experiences in the transition to adulthood.

#### *Lack of Access To Job Programs*

**Factors affecting ability of foster youth to benefit from job programs include:**

- 1. Impermanence of many programs;**
- 2. Lack of interface among various resources;**
- 3. Inability to maintain consistent contact between youth and institution due to social worker case overload which acts as a barrier to communication.**

In my research I found an abundance of nonprofit organizations, government organizations, and companies focused in Los Angeles that help youth acquire jobs and jobs training. The ones I was able to learn more about through interviews were The Sustainable Life Project at Tender Greens, Workforce Development Centers, iFoster jobs training program, and the DCFS jobs program for youth, and jobs training offered at Hathaway Sycamores.

The common thread running through all of these programs was that it really depended on the process by which youth were referred to them. For many nonprofit organizations, youth are being referred by other organizations and it is a large web of connections, leaving some youth to fall through the cracks. Sometimes organizations don't refer youth to job training because they don't feel that they are ready or given that there is a lack of a consistent way to contact youth because their phone numbers change so often, and it is then left up to youth to reach out to organizations or their social workers. Other organizations like Hathaway Sycamores offer youth many benefits in the way of job help and even financial help when they don't have jobs, but they are then unable to take advantage of some benefits offered by the government through AB 12. For example, at Hathaway Sycamores, they will give youth a stipend of money for food if they lose their job, but if they are enrolled in extended foster care, they cannot receive such a stipend. A contractor at the workforce development centers in Los Angeles stated that "with workforce development centers, foster youth are a priority population and right now is a ramp up period of a city-county combined initiative that is trying to become a single point of entry for all youth, especially foster youth" (Koppula). This system would solve problems that organizations have with funding jobs programs for youth in that the workforce development centers would handle funding and other organizations can focus on youth development and job training.

Many organization have job training programs for youth and try to get in contact with them through many means, but the number one point of contact for any foster youth is through their social worker, and all of the professionals I worked with stated that many social workers have been working for so long and their case load is so large that they don't have the time or patience to dedicate themselves to every single youth who needs guidance.

Even when youth are working with organizations for job training and getting jobs, oftentimes youth aren't prepared for the job world and being on their own and frequently don't hold jobs for very long after they get them. Other factors standing in their way that are not often addressed by organizations are mental health and transportation. Plenty of youth don't have reliable transportation to get to jobs and therefore lose them and many also have mental health issues that they aren't able to get help with, and this prevents them from keeping jobs as well.

Lastly, though there are many organizations offering job training and resources to transitional age foster youth, there is often times a lack of funding for these programs. For example interviewee Kevin Faist stated that he gets youth referred to him from other organizations that give youth job training, but often times when he reaches out to an organization a year later, their job training program has been dissolved due to a lack of funding or the organization itself has ceased to exist. LA Kitchen is an example of this in that they had a jobs program for foster youth that trained them to become chefs and other professions, but the organization itself closed down, leaving many potential positions for foster youth closed.

### *AB 12 Is Good, But More Must Be Done*

**AB 12 gives 3 extra years in foster care, but more services and instruction need to be given to the youth as they age out of the system.**

Given that AB 12 was implemented all over the country, it is hard to measure its success since each state adopted and implemented it differently. In Los Angeles it has definitely helped to give youth more time in the system with more resources and more support, but hasn't done anything more to ease the transition out of foster care when it inevitably comes. Ms. Abrams explained how "so many people have taken advantage of it and the problem is now the lack of re-

sources and not having enough housing or resources for youth. The way it is structured left it open for a lot of youth to take advantage of the program” because in California youth are allowed to reenter the system anytime between 18 and 20, while in others, once they leave after 18 they can’t reenter (Abrams).

AB 12 seems to buy people time to make more connections and get support with housing and job searches while they are still dependent on the DCFS. However, it’s not “solving issues of homelessness or job security, given that these are still huge issues and youth really need to get these in place before they turn 18” (Rogers). All of the job training that is crammed into a few months in some of these organizations isn’t enough to make up for the previous 18 years of life that youth spent unguided and unprepared for adult life. So even though AB 12 buys them more time in care, there needs to be a system in place that prepares youth with mentors and trains them in the way of life skills before they turn 18.

Many professionals even thought that 21 is still not old enough to be left alone given that oftentimes "their discharge date is their 21st birthday so maybe even giving them 6 months longer to adjust” would help youth a little more (DeNitto and others).

## **Discussion and Recommendations**

AB 12 has been developed to alleviate the often dire circumstances that foster children face when they age out of the foster care system at the age of 18. Many of these youth are not even equipped with a high school education, so given the lack of housing and entry level jobs too many end up homeless or in jail. AB 12 extends the foster care benefits to the age of 21. This three-year period of extended benefits could be a means to improve the success rate for foster youth, but existing information suggests that the grace period is not functioning as hoped. The

AB 12 program has been in existence for almost a decade, but no dramatic results have been reported.

## **Recommendations**

***First: Mentorship – Each transitioning youth between 17 and 20 will be matched with a prior foster youth age 21+ to serve as a mentor.***

One of the major problems in the current program concerns communication and connectivity. This first recommendation of the appointment of an official mentor would be a tremendous aid to the younger person who could learn from a caring person how to successfully navigate the system. In addition, the relationship that builds over time between the foster youth and the mentor will be an invaluable tool to the transitioning youth in managing adult life.

***Second: Data Base – a complete and integrated computer data base, containing youth contacts and an assigned permanent telephone number for each youth.***

AB 12 is a relatively new program and the maintenance of a central data base is crucial to the success of every facet of the project. The data base should be maintained in a facility that welcomes the youth to come in and visit the facility. The program provided should include higher educational opportunities as well as employment services, but there is no central clearing house for the various and often overlapping services available to the youth. A central data base needs to be developed so the various elements of the program can be integrated.

***Third: Special Housing for Youth in Facilities where services are made available.***

The crucial factors that have been identified in this research as impacting future success for foster youth are housing, education and employment. A problem with the housing component is that foster youth who go into the extended 18-21 program often stay in the same home environment where they lived before the age of 18. The lack of a change of environment could have a



negative impact on success. In the areas of education and employment also the youth is limited by his past environment. To make this program more effective a pilot project is suggested in which the youth in the program are removed from their current living quarters and placed in a dormitory situation with other 18-21 year olds in the program.

An ideal environment for the participants would be designed to function like a college dormitory with added facilities for those who have children themselves. The ground floor of the facility would include classrooms, offices and other communal spaces. The various residents of the facility could access the programs and services they need. These services would include the extensive use of mentoring by the professionals who service the residents. The employees of the facility could be complemented by volunteers in various fields. Resources can be consolidated because of the efficiency promoted by bringing the youth together in the same facility to interact, teach and learn from each other. Many of the required activities of the program could be handled on site.

From a policy perspective such facilities would provide a more controlled environment where positive changes can be effective and the results monitored and documented. In terms of future projections for the development of other living centers the potential costs involved would pose problems due to the lack of funding allocated by the state for this program. Thousands of young people in our area are in need of services, so it would be advantageous to solicit additional funding from Corporate America. Most large corporations also operate nonprofit foundations to support their pet causes with at least a small part of their corporate earnings. Turning foster youth into the American work force of the future would seem to be a viable charitable endeavor for many different industries. In addition to the charitable aspect of their funding the possibility of providing job opportunities for graduates of the program also needs to be explored.

## **Conclusions**

In conclusion, AB 12 is a tremendous opportunity to provide much needed assistance to the young people who have been forced to grow up in foster care. The tremendous social problems caused by the wholesale removal of children from their homes and placed into temporary foster care that turns out ultimately to be permanent do not vanish when the child reaches the age of 18. The additional three years granted by the program are a base from which to begin preparing the foster child for life as a functioning adult member of society. The base needs to include remedial education, teaching of life skills, job readiness and counseling. This senior group of foster kids needs to be differentiated in such a way that the three-year program becomes an important milestone in their lives where they are now getting advanced life lessons and the development of the tools needed for success in life.

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## **Appendix A: Interview Questions**

1. What is your position in the organization?
2. What got you into this field of work?
3. What is the biggest obstacle you have dealt with in helping foster youth?
4. How have you dealt with this obstacle?
5. What trends do you see in the way of transitioning foster youth acquiring jobs?
6. How easy is this process for youth to get steady jobs from 18-21 and after?
7. Do you maintain relationships with youth after they age out and in what way?
8. What is your opinion on government legislation pertaining to foster care, specifically but not limited to AB 12?
9. What do you think benefits youth more, government input or organizations actions?
10. What do you personally think is the biggest obstacle preventing foster youth from succeeding in life after foster care?

**Appendix B: Homeless Count Charts LA**

City of Los Angeles			All Los Angeles County		
Total	Unsheltered	Sheltered	Total	Unsheltered	Sheltered
31,285	22,887	8,398	52,765	39,396	
34,189	25,237	8,952	57,794	42,828	
25,686	17,687	7,999	44,359	31,018	
22,993	14,968	8,025	39,463	25,136	
-	-	-	39,135	20,517	
-	-	-	38,602	21,073	
-	-	-	52,956	39,168	
-	-	-	65,287	53,429	

Homeless Population Counts in Los Angeles County  
 All Los Angeles County & City of Los Angeles

Appendix C: Recommendations, Sample Housing Facility

