The John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program

Educating Youth in Care: The First Year of Education and Training Vouchers

The University of Oklahoma
National Resource Center for Youth Development
A Service of USDHHS Children's Bureau
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My thanks also go to Dorothy I. Ansell, Assistant Director, and Edi Winkle, Program Development Specialist, who, along with the author, Michele Kessler, were dedicated to the completion of this project in a comprehensive and timely fashion.

Peter R. Correia, III, MSW
Director,
National Resource Center for Youth Development
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Introduction

Completing high school, trade school, or college is an important educational accomplishment that yields many benefits, such as better job opportunities and higher earnings. In general, the employment rates are higher for those individuals with a higher level of education. Between 1971 and 1998, the employment rate of males ages 25-34 decreased for those who had not finished high school (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2003), dropping from 88% in 1971 to 75% in 1998. Also, in 2001 73% of those individuals age 18- to 29-years old who dropped out of high school were in the lowest economic half (42% in lowest quartile) (NCES, 2003).

For all youth, education is a significant component in the successful preparation for independence. And, in order to attain educational goals, young people require multiple supports. For many youth in America, this support comes from the family. This may be why many older adolescents and young adults are not leaving home as early as former generations. Current trends in the U.S. suggest that young adults are increasingly leaving home at later ages (Mitchell, 2000).

In addition, moving out of the parental home is often “reversible,” in that young adults can return home to refill the parental nest as “boomerang kids” (Mitchell, 2000). In Canada and the United States, the average age of (first) leaving home is currently about 19.5, an age that has been on the increase since the 1970s (General Social Survey, 1995; Goldscheider, 1997; Mitchell, 2000).

Recent research on the effects of family structure shows that family disruption often leads to youth leaving home early (Aquilino, 1991; Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1993; Mitchell, Wister, & Burch, 1989), which can lead to lower educational attainment (McLanahan & Bumpass, 1988), in part through reducing the access young adults have to parental resources (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1991). Leaving home at an early age has also been associated with lower educational aspirations (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1993).

If the average American young adult is relying more heavily on family support and resources before gaining independence, and if leaving home at an early age negatively impacts education, what are the implications for foster youth who do not have family support to rely on?

Unfortunately, the picture for many former foster youth has been bleak. Researchers indicate high rates of truancy, school changes, and ultimately educational failure in the population. However, some positive advances are being made as a result of the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) and Education and Training Vouchers (ETV).

This monograph gives a brief overview of the policies affecting foster youth and
education, discusses the risks to educational failure, and describes the status of education for foster youth. In addition, a description of how states are implementing the multiple aspects of the ETV program is included. Data was collected through multiple state surveys given to State Independent Living Coordinators by the National Resource Center for Youth Development at The University of Oklahoma, College of Continuing Education.

Policy Review

Summary of Chafee Program

The John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) was created in 1999 with passage of the Foster Care Independence Act (FCIA). The CFCIP replaced the Title IV-E Independent Living Initiative of 1986. This legislation for emancipated and emancipating youth provides states with flexible funding to assist children likely to “age out” of the foster system at age 18 (Carroll, 2002). FCIA doubled the amount of federal dollars available to assist states in providing independent living services, and focuses on education, employment, and life skills training.

Additionally, the FCIA:
• Affirms the permanency plans mandated by the Adoption Safe Families Act and firmly reiterates that independent living is not a permanency plan.
• Allows states to offer independent living services to any child “likely to remain in foster care until age 18” regardless of permanency goal and age.
• Allows the states to offer “room and board” to the older teens who have left foster care and have not yet reached the age of 21.
• Encourages states to provide Medicaid coverage to former foster children through age 21.
• Mandates that states involve community partners in developing programs to ensure the self-sufficiency of older teens transitioning from foster care.
• Establishes a role for young adults in designing their own transition program and requires that they commit to work diligently towards achieving its goals (Carroll, 2002).

Not only does FCIA enhance funding and provide a wider eligibility range, FCIA also greatly enhances possibilities for states to serve youth aged 18 to 21. While the Title IV-E Independent Living Initiative had no special targeting of funds on young people transitioning from care, FCIA requires that “states use a portion of their funds for assistance and services for young people ages 18 to 21 who left foster care because they reached age 18 (National Foster Care Awareness Project, 2000).” One primary area of assistance for these older youth comes by way of room and board payments, which were prohibited by the former independent living initiative. FCIA allows “states to use up to 30% of their program funds for room and board for young people ages 18 to 21 who have

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### Chafee Foster Care

The purpose of Chafee Foster Care Independence Program was spelled out in the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 legislation and had 5 initial points, with a sixth point added with the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendments of 2001:

1. to identify children who are likely to remain in foster care until 18 years of age and to help these children make the transition to self-sufficiency by providing services such as assistance in obtaining a high school diploma, career exploration, vocational training, job placement and retention, training in daily living skills, training in budgeting and financial management skills, substance abuse prevention, and preventive health activities (including smoking avoidance, nutrition education, and pregnancy prevention);

2. to help children who are likely to remain in foster care until 18 years of age receive the education, training, and services necessary to obtain employment;

3. to help children who are likely to remain in foster care until 18 years of age prepare for and enter post secondary training and education institutions;

4. to provide personal and emotional support to children aging out of foster care, through mentors and the promotion of interactions with dedicated adults;

5. to provide financial, housing, counseling, employment, education and other appropriate support and services to former foster care recipients between 18 and 21 years of age to complement their own efforts to achieve self-sufficiency and to assure that program participants recognize and accept their personal responsibility for preparing for and then making the transition from adolescence to adulthood; and

6. to make available vouchers for education and training, including post secondary learning and education, to youths who have aged out of foster care.

Reference: NRCYD website
left foster care because they reached age 18, but are not yet age 21 (National Foster Care Awareness Project, 2000).”

A recent study assessed the costs expended on extending transitional services to former foster children in New England. The study found that after housing (also called room and board payments), education costs were the largest expenditure. Of the 88 youth in the sample, 53 (60%) received financial support for purchasing educational services (Kerman, Barth, and Wildfire, 2004). College tuition and student living expenses comprised the largest portion of the educational expenses.

**Summary of Education and Training Voucher Program**

One of the initial purposes of the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program was to help young people prepare for post-secondary education and

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**ETV Policy**

The Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendment of 2001 amended section 477 of the Social Security Act to add a new purpose to the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program. It also adds a new subsection to section 477. Subsection (i) states that:

“The following conditions shall apply to a State educational and training voucher program under this section:

1. Vouchers under the program shall be available to youth otherwise eligible for services under the State program under this section.

2. For purposes of the voucher program, youths adopted from foster care after attaining age 16 may be considered to be youth otherwise eligible for services under the State program under this section.

3. The State may allow youths participating in the voucher program on the date they attain 21 years of age to remain eligible until they attain 23 years of age, as long as they are enrolled in a postsecondary education or training program and are making satisfactory progress toward completion of that program.

4. The voucher or vouchers provided for an individual under this section –
   a. Shall be available for the cost of attendance at an institution of higher education as defined in section 102 of the Higher Education Act of 1965; and
   b. Shall not exceed the lesser of $5,000 per year or the total cost of attendance, as defined in section 472 of that Act.

5. The amount of a voucher under this section shall be disregarded for the purposes of determining the recipient’s eligibility for, or the amount of, any other Federal or Federally supported assistance, except that the total amount of educational assistance to a youth under this section and under other Federal and Federally supported programs shall not exceed the total cost of attendance, as defined in section 472 of the Higher Education Act of 1965, and except that the State agency shall take appropriate steps to prevent duplication of benefits under this and other Federal and Federally supported programs.

6. The program is coordinated with other appropriate education and training programs.”

Reference: NRCYD website
training programs. Provisions within the Safe and Stable Families Amendments of 2001 made it possible for states to provide education and training vouchers for youth pursuing post-secondary learning and education. Forty-two million dollars was earmarked for Chafee Independent Living Education and Training Vouchers under appropriations for FY2003. This Bill was signed into law on February 20, 2003. After a .65% (.0065) across the board cut for administrative purposes, $41.7 million remain for student vouchers and training.

The ETV program allows states to provide up to $5,000 per year to a student in an accredited program – college, university, or other training program. Additionally, the ETV program enables states to continue supporting youth 22 and 23 years old who have been successfully completing their educational plan if they were enrolled in the program at 21 years of age. States have been given the flexibility to design their own programs, from application process to review, and the additional supports that are provided to youth pursuing education.

Education is vital in the pursuit of independence. ETV has provided states an opportunity to assist students in accomplishing their educational goals. The key is to find out how students are best supported.

Literature Review

For every child, education is crucial in the successful transition to adulthood. Yet, about 58 percent of all 1992 high school graduates had at least one factor in their family background or school experiences prior to entering high school that placed that at some risk of lower educational attainment (NCES, 2003). The list of risk factors, as defined by the U.S. Department of Education, include:

- changing schools two or more times from 1st to 8th grade (except to the next level),
- being in the lowest socioeconomic quartile,
- having average grades of C’s or lower from 6th to 8th grade,
- being in a single-parent household,
- having one or more siblings who left high school without completing, and
- being held back one or more grades from 1st to 8th grade.

Youth who have been raised in foster care are at multiple risk for educational failure. Many foster youth change schools often as a result of placement changes (Courtney, Terao, & Bost, 2004; Casey Family Programs [CFP], 2003), and regular school attendance is an issue for many foster youth.

In addition, as Steve Christian reported in the 2003 Children’s Policy Initiative on Educating Children in Foster Care, “most of the 500,000 children in foster care bear the scars of physical and emotional trauma, such as prenatal exposure to alcohol,
tobacco and other drugs; parental abuse, neglect and abandonment; exposure to violence in their homes and communities; separation from birth families; and frequent changes in foster placement.”

Despite these risks, some foster youth succeed in attaining educational goals, and some excel beyond their initial goals. For all former foster youth, assistance – both financial and socio-emotional – is vital if they are to overcome the colossal barriers to achievement.

**Status of Foster Youth in Education**

The nations children and youth in foster care have done so poorly in school that placement in out-of-home care is considered a risk factor for education failure (Yu, Day, & Williams, 2002). Pervasive educational failure of foster care youth is a primary reason that the ETV program is timely and important. Success in school can be defined by three primary measures: graduation rates, educational achievement, and future educational aspiration.

**Graduation Rates**

A high school diploma or its equivalent represents mastery of the basic reading, writing, and math skills a person needs to function in society. The National Center for Education Statistics (2003) reports that the educational attainment of 25- to 29-year old olds has increased between 1971 and 1998; however high school dropout rates remain at approximately 13%.

Blome (1997) found that foster youth dropped out of high school at higher rates than did non-foster youth. Yet, there is a discrepancy in the research as to exactly how many older youth in care complete a high school diploma, or GED. A report by Burley and Halpern (2001) in Washington State found that only 59% of the foster youth enrolled in 11th grade complete high school by the end of grade 12. Scannepieco et. al. (1995) reports a 31% high school completion rate among adolescents in care, and Westat (1990) found 31% left care as high school graduates (includes GED).

McMillen and Tucker (1999) argue that these studies examined foster youth who left care before “their age-mates graduated from high school.” An additional study by Mallon (1998) found that 74% of the youth who left care at age 21 had completed high school or received a GED.

In the end, there is consensus that attaining a high school diploma prior to leaving care is critically important. Youth who completed high school before leaving care are more likely to have a steady job (McMillen & Tucker, 1999). In addition, a high school diploma or GED is a pre-requisite to higher education.

**Educational Achievement**

Youth in foster care, on average, have a lower level of school achievement than other students (Prosser, 1997). Many factors affect school achievement. Reading (or other performance) at grade level, placement in special education classes,
and school discipline are among the most commonly researched education indicators about foster youth.

The recent Midwest Evaluation conducted by Courtney, Terao, and Bost (2004), looked at a sample of 732 foster youth from Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin, and had a comparison group of non-foster youth from the same states. The evaluation found that 37% of the foster youth had to repeat a grade, compared to 22% for the comparison group. Also, they found that adolescents surveyed nationally report approximately 2 times more instances of “A’s” in their academic classes than foster youth. A similarly designed study in Illinois found that 61% of foster youth failed a subject in the last two years, and 20% were on the honor roll (Shin & Poertner, 2002). Other studies have reported the following percentages on grade or class failure:

- 36% repeated a grade in school (CFP, 2003)
- 18% failed a grade in school (Shin and Poertner, 2002)
- At both the elementary and secondary levels, twice as many foster youth had repeated a grade (Burley and Halpern, 2001)
- 58% had failed a class in the last year (McMillen, et. al., 2003)

Mathematics and reading achievement test scores are important measures of students’ skills in these subject areas, as well as good indicators of achievement overall in school. Two separate studies by Shin report on the reading abilities of a sample of youth in Illinois. The 2002 study that had a sample of 74 youth age 16.5 to 17.5 found that 36% were categorized between grades 2 and 5 on reading level, 24% demonstrated a reading level between grades 6 and 8. Shin’s 2003 study that had a sample of 152 youth age 16.5 to 17.5 found that one third demonstrated a reading level below 6th grade, 31% read between 6th and 8th grade level, 18% read between 9th and 12th grade level, and another 18% demonstrated 12th grade or higher reading ability. Courtney and colleagues (2001) found that out of a sample of 141 young adults who left care in Wisconsin during 1995 and 1996 that 32% were reading at or below 8th grade level.

Placement in special education is common for foster youth. Foster youth are more often in special education with emotional and behavior problems, as opposed to physical disabilities. In Courtney et. al.’s (2004) Midwest Evaluation, 47% of the sample report being placed in a special education classroom. Other studies report slightly lower rates:

- 38% in special education classes (CFP, 2003)
- 34% in special education classes (Shin, 2003)
- 34% reported being in one or more special education classes (Shin & Poertner, 2002)
- 37% had been in special education classes (Courtney, et. al., 2001)

Researchers also have studied how much trouble students get into at school. Indicators include expulsion, suspension,
and/or physical fighting in school. Some of the findings are as follows:

- 67% received out-of-school suspension (28% for non-foster care comparison group) (Courtney, Terao, & Bost, 2004)
- 17% expelled from school (5% for non-foster care comparison group) (Courtney, Terao, & Bost, 2004)
- 73% had been suspended at least once since 7th grade, and 16% expelled (McMillen, et. al., 2003)
- 29% reported physical fights with other students (McMillen, et. al., 2003)

Educational Aspirations

The level of education that adolescents hope to achieve has been regarded as among the most significant determinants of educational attainment (Courtney, et. al., 2004). Other factors that have shown to influence level of attainment are:

- socioeconomic status,
- parents’ level of education,
- availability of age-appropriate books in the home, and
- early school performance.

A study that interviewed 262 youth referred for independent living preparation in one Midwestern county found that 70% of those youth wanted to attend college (McMillen, et. al., 2003). However, that same study found that 73% of the youth had been suspended at least once since 7th grade, and 16% of the youth had been expelled from school. In addition, 58% of the sample had failed a class within the last year, and 29% reported having physical fights with other students.

Courtney, Terao, and Bost (2004) had similar findings in their Midwest Evaluation, a study that interviewed 732 foster youth age 17.5 from Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin. Their findings indicate that over 70% of the large sample hope to graduate from college (or higher degree). Yet, the list of barriers this sample face is compelling. Some of the additional findings from the study are that:

- 47% report being placed in special education classrooms.
- 37% had to repeat a grade.
- 67% received an out-of-school suspension.
- 17% were expelled from school.
- Many of the youth showed reading deficits, 44% read at a high school level or higher.

Given the challenges that foster youth face in the education system, is aspiration enough to help these youth attain their educational goals? While aspiration, internal motivation, and a strong work ethic are vital to advancement, foster youth need additional supports to assist them in achieving the goals in their educational plan. In order to learn how students can best be supported, NRCYD conducted an evaluation of the states’ implementation of the Federal ETV Program. The methods and results of this study are described in the following sections.
| Cite                      | Sample                                                                 | Method                              | Outcomes                                                                                                                                 |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|                                    | --------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------- |
| Courtney, Terao, and Bost, 2004 | 732 foster youth/(former) age 17.5 (at beginning of longitudinal study) from Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin | In-person or telephone interviews   | • Over 70% of sample hope to graduate from college (or higher degree). <br>• 47% report being placed in special education classroom <br>• One-third report experiencing five or more school changes <br>• 37% had to repeat a grade (22% for comparison group) <br>• 67% received out-of-school suspension (28% for comparison group) <br>• 17% expelled from school (5% for comparison group) <br>• Adolescents surveyed nationally report approximately 2 times more instances of "As" in their academic classes than foster youth. <br>• Many youth showed reading level deficits, 44% read at high school level or higher. |
| Kerman, Barth, and Wildfire, 2004 | 115 alumni of Casey Family Services foster care who were 18 or older and who had resided with a CFS foster family for one year or more | Administrative record review          | • Not all young adults accepted supports extended to them. <br>• 41% of the youth incurred expenditures for services after age 19. <br>• Of those using supports, about two-thirds incurred expenses for higher education. |
| Casey Family Programs., 2003 | 1,087 alumni of Casey Family Programs were interviewed; 1,609 total sample size. | Case record reviews and interviews | • 38% were in special education classes. <br>• 36% repeated a grade in school. <br>• 68% attended three or more different elementary schools. <br>• 33% attended five or more elementary schools. <br>• 72% of the Casey alumni had received a diploma or GED by the time their case had closed. (86% completion rate overall). |
| Shin and Poertner, 2002 | Representative sample of youth between the ages of 16.5 and 17.5 in out-of-home care in Illinois. N = 74 | Questionnaire (developed by Courtney and associates) | • 61% failed a subject. <br>• 18% failed a grade. <br>• 34% reported being in one or more special education classes. <br>• 36% were categorized between grades 2 and 5 on reading level. <br>• 24% demonstrated reading level between grades 6 and 8. |
| Burley and Halpern, 2001 | A sample from the 12,000 school-age children in Washington State | Secondary data analysis | • Foster youth score, on average, 15 to 20 percentile points below non-foster youth in statewide achievement tests. <br>• Only 59% of foster youth enrolled in 11th grade complete high school by the end of grade 12. The completion rate for non-foster youth is 86%. <br>• At both the elementary and secondary levels, twice as many foster youth had repeated a grade, changes schools during the year, or enrolled in special education programs compared with non-foster youth. <br>• Foster youth in short-term care have, on average, the same educational deficits as children in long-term foster care. |
| Courtney, et. al., 2001 | 141 young adults who left foster care in Wisconsin in 1995 and 1996 | Interviews | • 90% were still attending high school. <br>• 30% had at some time failed a grade. <br>• 37% had been in special education classes. <br>• 50% reported having to change schools at least four times since beginning their formal education. <br>• 32% were reading at or below 8th grade level. |
## EDUCATION FINDINGS ON FOSTER CARE YOUTH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cite</th>
<th>Study Design</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Study Design</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sample</strong></td>
<td><strong>Method</strong></td>
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</table>
| McMillen and Tucker, 1999 | 252 youth previously in Missouri state care (closed cases) | Administrative and case record review | • 39% foster youth were high school graduates.  
• Adolescents who had fewer placements were more likely to be employed at discharge.  
• Youth who completed high school before leaving care are more likely to have a steady job.  
• Running away while in care, placement in inpatient psychiatric facilities, and being mentally disabled were negatively related to completing school. |
| Mech and Fung, 1999 | 214 youth between age 17 and 19 preparing for emancipation and independent living in Illinois in Phase One, 171 of those same youth follow-up in Phase 2 | Interviews and state records review | • Percentage of youth who failed to complete high school increased as placement restrictiveness increased.  
• Two-thirds of youth in low restrictiveness settings attended some postsecondary education, compared to only one-third of youth in the high restrictiveness group. |
• 15% foster youth enrolled in college prep. vs. 32% comparison.  
• Enrollment in post-secondary school was lower than comparison group, but 45% of foster youth had taken higher education courses.  
• More foster youth took vocational classes than comparison group. |
| Scannepieco, et. al., 1995 | The sample consisted of 44 teens in Baltimore who participated in IL Programming, and 46 that did not participate. Total of 90 youth in foster care. | Case record review | • 31% high school completion rate among adolescents in care. |
| Wedeven, et. al. 1994 | 68 former foster youth from Boise, Idaho Casey Family Program | Survey | • 94% had completed high school or GED.  
• 57% had post-secondary education. |
| Jones and Moses, 1984 | 607 former foster care youth in West Virginia targeted; 328 youth in final sample. | Pre-coded interview schedule. 89% conducted in person, 11% by phone or mail. | • 51% had completed high school degree.  
• 7% had at least one year of college.  
• Lagged behind their peers in education by at least one year. |
| Festinger, 1983 | 364 former foster care youth in New York City targeted, 277 were interviewed | Structured Interview | • 65% had completed high school or GED at the time of discharge.  
• 34% completed some college, 5% graduated from college. |
Methods

The National Resource Center for Youth Development (NRCYD) at The University of Oklahoma, College of Continuing Education designed and conducted multiple web-based surveys with the 50 State Independent Living Coordinators (ILCs). ILCs were asked a series of questions related to their states’ implementation of the ETV program. ILCs were given three weeks to complete the surveys on-line. The purpose of the surveys was to gather information on how states are implementing the ETV program so that states can learn from each other how best to support students’ pursuit of education.

Then, NRCYD staff called ILCs that had not completed the surveys. Several more states added their responses by giving answers over the phone. NRCYD staff input the information into the database with the other responses. The study had an overall response rate of 76% (38 states).

Preliminary findings of the results were reported at the NRCYD annual Pathways to Independence conference that was held in Washington D.C. during April, 2004. Additional information on how states are implementing ETV programs was collected at the Pathways conference. NRCYD staff facilitated large- and small-group discussions focusing on policy, outreach, supports, and challenges of the ETV program.

Results

Outreach

A recent evaluation of Casey Family Services (CFS), Kerman, Barth and Wildfire (2004) found that not all young adults accepted supports extended to them. In a sample of 115 alumni of CFS foster care, only 41% incurred expenses for services after age 19. Some youth are simply ready to end their relationship with the child welfare system when they are legally able, others; however, may not incur expenses for services because they are not aware of the benefits that are available.

The surveys found that states employ several different strategies to inform eligible youth about the benefits available to them as a result of the ETV program. Many states have used various forms of media, and relationships, to educate youth about the ETV program. The types of outreach strategies used are listed in both Table 1: Media Outreach and Table 2: Personal Outreach.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Media Outreach</th>
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<td>States report that the following media methods are used to inform youth about the available benefits to them under the ETV program:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Web-site</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brochure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mass mailing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other forms of media</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Media outreach refers to using various forms of public media to inform potential students about ETV (see Table 1). The survey indicated that 40% of states have developed (or are in process of developing) a website for providing information to youth on ETV. Many youth today rely on the internet and world wide web for doing research on schools, gathering information, and getting current news. Providing facts about benefits on-line is a critical next step for states.

In addition, 47% of the states that responded to the surveys have created a brochure to get information spread about ETV. The brochures are helpful because they have been disseminated at youth conferences, and during meetings with foster parents and youth. Another benefit of the brochure is that it can be available at the field office, and be used to inform social workers about the ETV program.

Also, many brochures and letters have been mailed to eligible youth. Fifty-eight percent of states report engaging in a mass mailing campaign. Mail was sent to the last known address of youth. It is uncertain how many of these mailings actually reached the intended youth.

Many states described collaborative relationships that they entered into for the purpose of more effectively spreading the word on ETV. Foster Club, the Orphan Foundation, various state departments, and higher education entities have all been partners for some states in this process. Foster Club has a website (http://www.fosterclub.com) that is used by many states, as well as a poster with room for the addition of state-specific information.

In Idaho, collaboration has helped get the word out to youth on ETV. The Idaho Department of Health and Welfare has a yearly publication called Facts, Figures and Trends: Public Information Booklet, and this years’ publication contains information on the Independent Living Program and the Education and Training Voucher Program. Idaho has been able to reach many youth through the collaboration with their youth advisory group and Casey Family Programs. Training on ETV was done around the state for Department staff. This enabled staff to educate foster parents and youth on their caseload about ETV.

Direct-care staff provide the most effective means for sharing information with foster parents and youth about ETV. Ninety-five percent of the responding states report that the IL worker is used in providing information to youth about ETV. Other people or positions that inform youth about the benefits of ETV are listed in Table 2: Personal Outreach.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: Personal Outreach</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>States report that the following people/positions are used to inform youth about the available benefits to them under the ETV program:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IL Worker</td>
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<td>Foster Parent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foster Parent Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth Advisory Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>Court Personnel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Application**

All students must go through some type of process to access state ETV funds. Many states require a written educational plan; some states require references or an interview. These requirements are noted in Table 3: Application Requirements. Some states are beginning to provide application materials on the web, as listed in Table 4: Application Availability.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: Application Requirements</th>
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<tr>
<td>States report that the following are requirements youth must complete to apply for ETV funding:</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Submit written educational plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide letter(s) of reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have in-person or telephone interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet additional requirements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Older youth who are in state care generally work with their caseworkers on an independent living plan. This plan addresses goals they are striving to meet, and can be related to work, education, or relationships. Sixty-two percent of the states that responded to the survey state that a formal written educational plan from youth is necessary for application for ETV funds. Thirty percent of states are requiring students to provide letters of reference. And, 40% of states require either an in-person or telephone interview with the student.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4: Application Availability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>States report on application eligibility:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application forms are available on-line, either by intranet or internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students can submit applications via e-mail</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Seventy-six percent of the responding states indicated that there are additional requirements beyond the educational plan, letters of reference, and interview. Examples of what states are requiring in the application process include:

- complete FAFSA (Federal financial aid form),
- look for additional financial aid,
- provide proof of enrollment,
- provide high school transcripts,
- submit grade status at the end of each semester,
- submit list of expenses and resources,
- attend youth/mentoring support meetings on campus,
- complete student budget form,
- be enrolled full-time and maintain a C average, and
- completion of forms required every semester.

To be able to apply for ETV funds, many states have developed forms youth must complete. See Table 4: Application Availability. Of the 38 states that responded to the surveys, 46% report that application forms are available to youth on-line, either by intranet or inter-
net; and 38% of the sample report that students can submit applications on-line.

New York State, a county-run system, is an example of a state that was successful this first year of implementation in quickly organizing the ETV program and disseminating funds to youth. Local districts were required to submit names of eligible youth to their Regional Office by a specified date. For the first year, in order to be able to expend the funds, districts had to submit names within a 3-week period of time. Criteria for selection was as follows:

- Priority was given to youth who were enrolled in an educational program and would be aging out of foster care by September 30, 2004.
- Second priority was given to students who are 18 and 19 years of age and were already enrolled and attending an educational program.
- Next priority given to nominees were 18, 19 and 20 year olds who have been accepted and enrolled in an educational program but were not yet attending at the time the ETV awards were made.
- The final priority are any youth under age 18 who are accepted and enrolled in an educational program but were not yet attending.

In New York this year, all ETV funds were awarded through this process. In fact, all money was expended to youths in categories Priority 1 and 2. Any unspent funds will be awarded to eligible youth in Priority 3 and 4.

The Orphan Foundation has been involved with states’ ETV programs by providing assistance with the application process. Some states have a contractual agreement with the Orphan Foundation to handle all aspects of the ETV application. But, for even those states that are not involved this way, the Orphan Foundation of America will provide state-specific information on ETV for all states via their website (http://www.orphan.org/).

**Implementation**

States have the formidable task of developing guidelines and program processes for ETV. States had to decide who checks should be payable to, what type of fiscal benefits to make available for youth, and codify various definitions, such as “successful progress” for completion of a degree.

Table 5 shows the percentage of responding states that make checks out to various persons or agencies. Institutions and vendors are most likely to receive direct payment. Eighty-seven percent of the responding states report that they make checks payable to institutions, and 71% will make checks payable to vendors. Fifty-five percent of the states report that they will distribute ETV funds directly to the youth, and 13% report that checks are made to other entities. Examples of other agencies or people directly receiving ETV funds are:

- non-profits or counties that are acting as mentors to the youth,
- foster parents, and
**Table 5: Checks**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutions</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vendors</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Maine, the ILC reports “ETV funds are paid for any bill balances due for youth in post-secondary education programs after any federal student aid, or the foster care tuition waiver is applied to their account. On occasion, ETV funds have been used to purchase a computer for youth who are in specialized computer technology programs or for room and board for youth who are attending college, but living in their own apartments. The youth for whom apartment payments are being made are youth finishing up a four-year degree who are over 21 years of age.”

These types of payments are common in other states as well. Table 6 lists the percentages of states that provide various types of financial benefits to youth. Over 90% of the responding states provide financial support to youth for room and board, school supplies, equipment and uniforms, school-related fees, and transportation costs. Eighty-four percent of states make payments for child care for dependents of youth. And, 60% of states report making payments for college or university health plans on behalf of the youth.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Payments for room and board</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payments for equipment, supplies, and uniforms</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payments for school-related fees</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payments for child care for dependents of youth</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payments for transportation costs</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payments for college/university health plans</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fifty-four percent of the states that responded to the surveys indicated that they pay for other tangible benefits for youth. Some examples of these benefits are as follows:

- tutoring,
- internet access,
- memberships to school related-organizations,
- computers,
- books,
- medications, if required to allow youth to be successful with their studies,
- payment for travel back to foster parent’s home for holidays or vacations, or payment for housing over holidays and vacations when dorms are closed,
- preparatory tests and study materials.
The language in the ETV legislation provides latitude within states to define “successful progress” toward completion of an educational or training program. Sixty-eight percent of the states that responded to the NRCYD surveys indicate that part of the requirements in their state for defining “successful progress” was setting a minimum GPA that students must achieve each semester. Many states indicate that a C average (2.0 on 4.0 scale) is the requirement, and none have indicated a GPA below that level being “successful”. Several states indicate that each individual program determines criteria for success in that program, and the state follows those guidelines. In other words, the student must meet the academic or training requirements of the specified program, or must be in good academic standing.

Table 7: Defining “Successful Progress”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By setting a GPA requirement</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By setting a “full-time status” requirement</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only a handful of states, 19% of the 38 responding states, set the requirement that youth must be enrolled full-time to be eligible for ETV funds. This may be more an indicator of the high demand for funds, rather than related to “success”, and be a way that some states are prioritizing what groups of youth are most eligible to receive ETV money.

Finally, another aspect of the ETV program is the possibility that in many states students can fail to meet standards in one program, but then be awarded ETV funding for a different education or training program later. Eighty-nine percent of the states responding to the surveys indicated they would allow students a second chance to pursue different programming. This is important since some students may not succeed in college, for example, but find great success in trade school.

**Collaboration**

States often find that they need to enter into relationships with other entities for the purpose of supporting students in the pursuit of their educational goals. These relationships can be with other governmental agencies, community groups, educational institutions, or various non-profit or advocacy groups. Table 8 identifies several types of collaborative relationships that states have engaged in to support the educational achievements of youth.
Post-secondary education programs are where many states are making the initial partnerships. Sixty-five percent of the responding states indicated that they are in some way collaborating with post-secondary institutions. Much of the collaboration is done through the financial aid offices. Sixty-two percent of the states report that the collaboration takes place through the financial aid departments. The institutions of higher education are effective in spreading the information regarding financial benefits for foster youth.

Only 16% of the responding states indicated a connection with drop-out prevention programs. In Maine, the Education Department offers good drop-out prevention programs for youth who may be non-traditional students. They are serving a number of youth living in shelters, or in other alternative education settings. Working with youth to assist them in finishing high school, and potentially attending college or a training program is vital for helping that youth achieve independence.

Thirty-eight percent of the responding states indicated that they had developed a relationship with private-sector initiatives to aid the implementation of ETV. Due to the infancy of ETV many of these partnerships are just beginning, but many states recognize that to effectively support youth collaboration is needed. The Orphan Foundation of America and Casey Family Programs have worked with many states to build partnerships and alliances.

Over 90% of the ETV students are provided with a contact person who can assist youth with financial issues, health issues, housing issues, or other personal problems. A good majority of the contacts are mentors. In some states the mentor relationship is very formalized, in others it is less formal. Many states are now contracting with private agencies to establish mentoring programs for their ETV students.

In Delaware and Minnesota, youth are matched with a mentor, and youth usually identify their own mentor. In Alabama, E-mentoring is available to youth. This program is contracted out to a private entity. In Kentucky, each campus has monthly, on-campus mentoring groups for ETV students to attend. And, in Indiana, Ball State has been awarded a contract to provide services for follow up and aftercare to ETV students.

Collaboration for many states is still in development, and as the programs become more organized these partnerships will become formal and concrete. Yet, in the first year of implementation, many states have forged relationships with other entities in the areas of outreach, financial aid, and providing support to youth in care.
These partnerships are crucial for youth to be supported in their educational pursuits.

**Discussion**

Research over the past 20 years has consistently shown that youth in care often fall behind in school, seldom achieve academically, and are much less likely than their peers to go on to further or higher education. Education and Training Vouchers provide states additional resources to support students’ educational goals. In order to be effective, ETV guidelines must adhere to the Four Core Principles (NRCYD, 2004). The Four Core Principles are youth development, collaboration, cultural competence, and permanent connections.

In March, 1998, the executives of the National Collaboration for Youth Members approved the following definition: “Youth Development, noun. A process which prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences which help them to become socially, morally, emotionally, physically, and cognitively competent.” Positive youth development addresses the broader developmental needs of youth, in contrast to deficit-based models which focus solely on youth problems (National Youth Development Information Center, [NYDIC], 2003).

Successful transition to adulthood to a large degree depends on the youth’s ability to make appropriate decisions regarding his or her case plan, which includes education goals. Youth who have a sense of self-esteem and who feel empowered are often better equipped to deal with the barriers as well as the opportunities that arise during and after care. By encouraging youth and adults to become partners in making decisions, youth learn to take responsibility for themselves and thus feel empowered. This philosophy lies at the core of the youth development approach. Therefore, in order to provide effective services and achieve positive, desired outcomes for older foster youth, it is imperative that guideline and/or policy development related to ETV embrace youth development philosophy and include youth not only in the development of their own educational goals and planning, but also in the overall ETV policy and program development, implementation, and evaluation.
One way advocates can learn how youth in care view educational issues is by asking them about their experiences. A study out of Australia has taken the strengths-based approach to learning more about achievement by identifying a group of high achievers and asking them how they became successful in school. Martin and Jackson (2002) interviewed 38 high-achieving young people who spent at least a year in residential or foster care on what they think are the best ways to enhance the educational experiences of youth in care. Many of the recommendations these youth mention are echoed in other studies and publications on foster youth and education. Below are the recommendations from the Martin and Jackson study:

- youth in care need to be like other people and be involved in everyday activities,
- encouragement from others is crucial,
- the importance that birth and foster parents place on education is important,
- social workers need to show a genuine concern for the youth,
- school attendance is of primary importance,
- stereotyping is harmful – such as low expectations from teachers and stigma by peers, and
- youth who have a special relationship with at least one person are more successful.

These recommendations are important to keep in mind when planning the implementation of the ETV program in each state. While ETV provides financial means for youth to be able to attend college or other training programs, youth in care must first be more adequately prepared for the rigors of further academic work. The reality is that many youth in care are simply not ready to attend college. Where possible, Chafee Program services should look for ways they can enhance the educational experiences of youth in care.

### Listening to the Youth Voice

**“I decided to go to college when...”**

I was in my first year of high school. I wanted to have a good job so that I could take care of my family some day.” — Sean D.

I decided that I wanted to do something with my life and have a good job.” — Sheilah M.

I was in Jr. High. I don’t want to work at a fast food restaurant my whole life.” — Sarah H.

I was in 8th grade because if you get a career you make better money.” — Jennifer B.

I was 16 years old. When I made my decision it was because I wanted to make something of myself.” — Edward H.

Preparing a young person to take his/her place in the community as a young adult is, in part, the community’s responsibility. Independent living/transitional living programs should be proactive in seeking community involvement/collaboration. Collaboration is defined as “the process
by which several agencies or organizations make a formal, sustained commitment to work together to accomplish a common mission (NRCYD, 2003).”

When young people move into dorm rooms, campus apartments or on their own for the first time, they need to be well connected with community resources and individuals. Some of the problems that students get into are credit card debt, difficulty accessing health and wellness resources, or other various problems that would require professional assistance.

ETV programs that promote community interactions and interagency collaboration are modeling for youth the importance of networking and community support systems. Administrators and staff in these agencies should embrace the value of interagency and community collaboration and seek to make the necessary linkages that will help youth as they prepare to leave and after they leave care.

ETV guidelines and policies must also strive to be culturally competent. African Americans are overrepresented in the child welfare system (Derezotes and Poertner, In Press). Although African Americans constituted 15 percent of the child/youth population of the United States in 1999, they accounted for 45 percent of the children and youth in substitute care (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000; U.S. DHHS, 1999). In contrast, while constituting 60 percent of the United States child/youth population, only 36 percent of the children and youth in out of home care were Caucasian (Morton, 1999).

And, gaps for minority youth in education, although closing, still exist. While the overall dropout (from high school) rate is around 13%, when broken down by race/ethnicity some significant differences occur. While the high school dropout rate for Caucasians is approximately 7% and for African Americans it is 10%, Hispanic youth have a high school dropout rate of 27% (NCES, 2003).

Culture is a constantly changing, learned pattern of customs, beliefs, values, and behaviors, which are socially acquired and transmitted through symbols, rituals, and events, and convey widely shared meanings among its members. Through culture, people of a given group adapt to one another and to their physical, social, and historical circumstances (Correia, et. al., 1999).

Cultural competence is a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enable that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. A culturally competent system of care acknowledges and incorporates – at all levels – the importance of culture, the assessment of cross-cultural relations, vigilance towards the dynamics that result from cultural differences, the expansion of cultural knowledge, and the adaptation of services to meet culturally-unique needs (Cross, 1989).

Gaining cultural competence is a long-term process of expanding horizons, thinking critically about the issues of
power and oppression, and acting appropriately. Culturally competent individuals have a mixture of beliefs and attitudes, knowledge, and skills that help them establish trust and communicate with others (Advocates for Youth, 1994).

The ETV program can also be significant for assisting youth in developing lifelong permanent connections. Successfully developing and sustaining long-term emotional relationships with adults and peers is essential to the successful transition to adulthood. Higher education and further training can facilitate youth in gaining permanent connections with instructors, professors, or colleagues. In addition, maintaining relationships with family and others met while youth were in care is important for youth.

Former youth in care have reported that they seek out relatives as well as other adults they met while in care for emotional connections after they have left the system (Barth, 1990; Courtney, Piliavin, Grogan-Kaylor, & Nesmith, 2001; Courtney & Barth, 1996; Jones & Moses, 1984; Westat, 1991). These relationships have an enormous impact on the young person’s ability to succeed in education and in making the difficult transition from youth to adulthood. In fact, Courtney and Barth’s (1996) study reports that “it may be that long-term residents of foster care who maintain ties to their families fare better as adults than those who no longer retain a connection to biological kin.”

Programs that focus on youth-defined connections by working with the youth and those people with whom the youth has relationships are more likely to successfully establish relationship permanency. Youth may be the best resource in identifying people in their life or from their past that can serve as their permanent connection. A good example of this is the many ETV programs that are offering mentoring programs where the youth identifies a mentor. Permanent connections are made with relatives, foster parents, group home staff, school personnel, and other professionals youth come into contact with while in care. When youth advance to college or other training programs, these connections are not broken. The support and encouragement given by these permanent connections are vital for students to achieve their educational goals.

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**Permanent Connections**

**“Who or what has influenced your academic dreams?”**

“My mother has been my biggest influence because she always helped me to do my best in school, and now she has taught me to do my best in life.” — Christa S.

“My mom, because she never went to college and I see how her life is because she didn’t get a good education.” — Sarah H.

“Getting through high school and having teachers teach me what I need to know and about having self-discipline.” — Jennifer B.
The establishment and enhancement of permanent connections is the best way that ETV can move beyond financial assistance into the realm of best practice. ETV provides one avenue for financial support for education, best practice mandates that social and emotional supports be given to youth as well. And, since ETV is one aspect of the broader CFCIP, some of these supports are available through the implementation of the Chafee Program.

Many states are aware of the need to support youth beyond finances, and are establishing social supports as part of their educational programs. An example of this is the many mentoring programs that are being established for ETV students. Students also need assistance in learning about health care, budgeting, managing personal relationships, and other aspects of daily life that impact educational pursuits.

States that mold ETV guidelines, policies, and practices around the philosophies of the Four Core Principles of youth development, collaboration, cultural competence, and permanent connections will succeed in enhancing the educational experiences of youth in care.
Works Cited


John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program