

**Extending Foster Care to Age 21: Implications and Estimates
from Youth Aging Out of Foster Care in Los Angeles**

Final Report to The Stuart Foundation

**Michael R. Pergamit and Heidi Johnson
The Urban Institute**

December 2009

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Executive Summary

Background

In 2008, over 4,600 youth living in out-of-home foster care in California emancipated from the child welfare system, usually due to reaching the age of majority or upon graduation from high school. These youth face significant challenges as they transition to living on their own. Specifically, they have limited education and employment experience, relatively poor mental and physical health, and a relatively high likelihood of experiencing unwanted outcomes such as homelessness, incarceration, and nonmarital pregnancy (Courtney et al. 2005; Goerge et al. 2002; Pecora et al. 2005).

In October 2008, Congress passed the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-351). This law gives States the option to use Title IV-E funds to provide foster care to individuals who meet certain conditions up to age 21. To date, very little is known about how staying in care past age 18 impacts the lives of transitioning foster youth. While several States have allowed youth to stay in care past age 18, no evaluation has been done to assess the success of this option. Recent studies of three Midwest States - Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin - have found that youth who stay in care past age 18 fare better than those who leave the child welfare system (Courtney et al. 2007). Of these three States, Illinois is the only one that allows youth the option to stay in care past age 18.

The California State Legislature is currently considering whether to extend foster care beyond age 18. A recent study, the Multi-Site Evaluation of Foster Youth Programs, provides important data to help inform the discussion about adopting the federal legislation and about the support that might accompany extending foster care.

Methods

The Multi-Site Evaluation of Foster Youth Programs, mandated by the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, looks at four different independent living programs in the United States, including a classroom-based life skills training program serving youth in Los Angeles County. The youth in

the Life Skills Training program (LST) sample were interviewed at ages 17, 18, and 19, providing a valuable resource of longitudinal information that follows youth from their late foster care placements through their exit from care, and finally to their early experiences after leaving care. The youth survey was designed to collect information needed to understand the impacts of the program; however it also provides useful information about youth characteristics and experiences. Although the characteristics of foster youth in Los Angeles are not representative of all foster youth in California, the child welfare caseload in Los Angeles County comprises nearly one-third of the state's child welfare cases.

This report uses data from this study, along with data from the California Child Welfare System Case Management System (CWS/CMS) to examine characteristics and outcomes of a sample of youth who aged out of foster care in Los Angeles in the 2004-2006 period and were 19 years old when interviewed in 2005/2006. Outcomes for these youth are then compared with foster youth studied in three Midwestern States (Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin) and with national samples of 19-year olds.

Using the LST sample, in combination with data from other sources, estimates are generated of the number of youth in California who would have stayed in care after 2008 if the State had extended care to age 21 using the federal legislation requirements.

Key Findings

- At age 19, three in seven youth who had left care were living with a relative. The percentage of youth out of care in L.A. living with a relative was much lower than national estimates indicating 79 percent of 19 year olds living with relatives. Nearly all youth in the national sample living with relatives at age 19 were living with their parents (73%). This is in stark contrast to L.A. foster youth, 18 percent of whom were living with their parents after leaving care.
- At age 19, roughly one in five former foster youth had a period of homelessness during the previous twelve months.
- Approximately 54 percent of study youth had obtained a high school diploma by age 19, with an additional 6 percent having a GED.
- Between their 18th and 19th birthday, nearly one quarter (23%) of study youth attended some form of vocational or job training.
- Seventy percent of the study youth worked in the year between their 18th and 19th birthday; however, only a small percentage of youth worked continuously. Youth who worked at all during the year, worked on average 6.7 of the twelve months.
- In the year since leaving care, about one in eight at some point could not pay their rent on time. About 5 percent report having their gas or electricity shut off and a similar percentage report having been evicted. One in five youth reports having their phone

service disconnected. Thirteen percent report having been hungry but not eating because they couldn't afford enough food some time in the past year.

- Roughly three-quarters of youth out of care at age 19 have some form of health insurance, with the bulk of it being Medicaid (Medi-Cal).
- About one-fifth of study youth had visited a hospital in the past year due to an accident or injury. However, about one-quarter of study youth did not seek medical care when they thought they should have. The reason given most often was that they couldn't pay.
- One fifth of youth were parents at age 19. Over one-quarter of females were mothers while nearly one in ten males reported being fathers. Two-fifths of parenting youth were married or cohabiting.
- By age 19, 22 percent of the study sample had been arrested and 14 percent had been incarcerated. Males are three times more likely than females to have been arrested and almost four times as likely to have been incarcerated.

Detailed Findings

Characteristics of former foster youth at age 19 in L.A. County

- Although children in foster care divide equally between the sexes, those who age out of care are roughly three-fifths female.
- Over two-fifths of the youth identify themselves as Hispanic. Another two-fifths identify as black non-Hispanic, fewer than one in ten identify as white non-Hispanic, and 7 percent identify themselves as another race and not Hispanic.
- On average, youth were nine years old when they were first removed from their household and placed in foster care. On average, boys came into care earlier than girls (8.5 and 10 years old, respectively). Blacks came into care while seven years old, on average, while whites came into care at age ten and Hispanics at age eleven.
- Most youth experienced only one removal episode, though nearly one-quarter experienced more than one removal. Blacks were more likely than whites or Hispanics to have experienced more than one removal.
- Youth experienced 5.8 placements on average, with the median number of placements being 4. Nearly one in six experienced ten or more placements.
- Over a third of youth report having run away at some time from a placement.

- Over their entire placement history, seven in ten youth have been placed at some time with a relative, four in ten have been placed at some time in a group home, and one in five having been placed at some time in a shelter.
- At age 19, three in seven youth who had left care were living with a relative. Roughly one in ten youth was living in the same household as their mother, one in twenty with their father. About one-third of youth were living in the same household with a sibling and nearly 12 percent was living with a grandparent. About one quarter were living with another relative such as an aunt, uncle, or cousin. These categories are not mutually exclusive and many youth live with more than one relative.
- Another 42 percent have contact with a relative at least once a week. However, seven percent report having either no contact with any relative or having contact not even once per month
- About one-third of youth were living independently, either on their own or with friends, spouses, or roommates.
- Roughly one in five had a period of homelessness during the previous twelve months.
- Approximately 54 percent of study youth had obtained a high school diploma by age 19, with an additional 6 percent having a GED.
- About one-third of study youth had at some time attended college with about one quarter having attended a 2-year college and 7.5 percent having attended a 4-year college.
- Between their 18th and 19th birthday, nearly one quarter (23%) of study youth attended some form of vocational or job training. These trainings are likely beneficial; however few youth obtain certificates or licenses that allow a young adult to enter into a specific field.
- Seventy percent of the study youth worked in the year between their 18th and 19th birthday; however, only a small percentage of youth worked continuously. Less than one in seven youth worked in all twelve months between their birthdays; one in three worked more than six months. Youth who worked at all during the year, worked on average 6.7 of the twelve months.
- At their 19th birthday, over half of study youth were not working. Just over one quarter were employed full time (working 35 hours or more per week). One seventh were working part-time (20-34 hours per week) and another 5 percent worked 1-19 hours per week. Youth who were working at their 19th birthday worked an average of 35.9 hours per week.
- Those who worked did not earn much. The average wage earned by study youth was \$8.34 per hour, only modestly above California's minimum wage of \$6.75 at that time.

- Low wages and low hours worked translate into low annual earnings. The median annual earnings for those youth who worked during the year were \$4,600.
- After leaving care about one-fifth of all youth out of care at age 19 received food stamps. Females received food stamps at roughly double the rate of males.
- Only about half of age 19 former foster youth has either a checking or savings account. The total of all money in checking accounts, savings accounts, other accounts, and “under the mattress” averages \$819; however, the median is only \$100 as a few youth have saved a lot while most have little or no assets. Nearly one in three youth own a vehicle.
- In the year since leaving care, about one in eight at some point could not pay their rent on time. About 5 percent report having their gas or electricity shut off and a similar percentage report having been evicted. One in five youth reports having their phone service disconnected.
- At some point in the year since leaving care, 5 percent report having gotten food from a church, food pantry, or food bank; 2 percent report having eaten a meal at a soup kitchen. More significantly, 13 percent report having been hungry but not eating because they couldn’t afford enough food some time in the past year.
- Roughly three-quarters of youth out of care at age 19 have some form of health insurance, with the bulk of it being Medicaid (Medi-Cal).
- Just over half of the study sample has normal weight for their height. Nearly one-quarter are overweight with another one-fifth being obese. Compared with a national sample of similarly aged youth, study youth are somewhat more likely to be obese and less likely to be normal weight.
- Nearly three-quarters of study youth had a physical exam within the past year and three-fifths of study youth had a dental exam in the past year.
- About one-fifth of study youth had visited a hospital in the past year due to an accident or injury. However, about one-quarter of study youth did not seek medical care when they thought they should have. The reason given most often was that they couldn’t pay.
- Seven percent of study youth report having an emotional problem that periodically causes them to miss a day of school, work, or social or recreational activities; most of these are females.
- One eighth of study youth report having received psychological or emotional counseling in the past year. Similarly, 7 percent report receiving medication in the past year for a psychological or emotional problem.

- Over three-quarters of study youth at age 19 are in the normal range for behavioral and mental problems. However, one in ten is categorized as borderline and one in eight as in the clinical range.
- Most study youth have been sexually active with 85 percent having had sex at some time in their life. While 43 percent had initiated sex by age 15, 38 percent had not had sex before the age of 18.
- Nearly three-quarters had been sexually active in the past year. Multiple partners over the past year was common with 29 percent reporting two or more partners over the year; 4 percent reported five or more partners over the past year.
- Birth control or sexually transmitted disease (STD) protection was consistently used by about half of all sexually active youth. One third of sexually active study youth used protection less than half the times they had sex.
- Only one sixth of study youth received any family planning services during the past year. Even among sexually active youth, those having had intercourse in the past year, only 18 percent had received family planning services.
- At age 19, over one-sixth of the study youth were married or cohabiting. Females were more than twice as likely to be married or cohabiting as males.
- One fifth of youth were parents at age 19. Over one-quarter of females were mothers while nearly one in ten males reported being fathers. Two-fifths of parenting youth were married or cohabiting.
- For the study sample, 43 percent reported consuming alcohol some time in the past year. Thirty five percent reported consuming alcohol in the past 30 days.
- Binge drinking, an indicator of a more serious alcohol problem, was engaged in by 18 percent at least once in the previous month. Over one in twenty study youth reported heavy use of alcohol, defined as having five or more drinks on the same occasion (binging) on five or more days in the past thirty days.
- Approximately one quarter of the sample used marijuana in the past year, with approximately one fifth having used it in the previous 30 days. One in thirteen study youth reported using marijuana more than half of the days in the previous month.
- Use of other drugs was assessed only over the past year. Amphetamines were the most widely used drug (7%) followed by prescription drugs without a doctor's permission (4%), cocaine (4%), and club drugs (such as Ecstasy) (4%).
- At age 19, approximately one-fifth of study youth report having engaged in one or more criminal activities. The most common activity was stealing something worth less than \$50 (shoplifting) followed by selling drugs.

- By age 19, 22 percent of the study sample had been arrested and 14 percent had been incarcerated. Males are three times more likely than females to have been arrested and almost four times as likely to have been incarcerated.
- The most common victimization was to be robbed, reported to have occurred some time in the past year by 15 percent of the study youth. Twelve percent of study youth reported a gun being pulled on them and 10 percent reported having a knife pulled on them. Three percent reported being shot and 3 percent report being stabbed. Eleven percent of study youth reported being attacked or beaten up. Males were nearly always much more likely than females to be victimized.
- Over three-quarters of the study sample were enrolled in school, working, attending vocational training, or taking care of children at their 19th birthday.

How do L.A.'s former foster youth compare with other youth?

- Former foster youth in L.A. and in the Midwest had much lower educational attainment than youth nationally. While 81 percent of youth nationally have a high school diploma by age 19, only 54 percent of L.A. study youth had a high school diploma. Including GEDs only exacerbates the difference as 6 percent of L.A. foster youth had a GED compared with 9 percent nationally.
- Former foster youth in L.A. and in the Midwest had lower rates of college enrollment at age 19. Nationally, 41 percent of youth were enrolled in college at age 19, with 28 percent enrolled in a four-year college and 13 percent enrolled in a two-year college. Approximately one-fourth (26%) of L.A. study youth were enrolled in college at age 19. Unlike youth nationally, these youth were much less likely to be in four-year colleges (6%) and more likely in two-year colleges (19%).
- Vocational training appears to be an important resource for former foster youth, though not for youth more generally. Nearly one-quarter (23%) of the L.A. sample attended some vocational training between their 18th and 19th birthday, compared with only 1 percent nationally.¹
- Nationally, nearly all youth (91%) worked at some time between their 18th and 19th birthday. Former foster youth did not fare as well with 70 percent of L.A. youth working over that year. Similarly, youth nationally worked eight months of that year on average, while the L.A. foster youth worked only 4.7 months on average. Comparing only those youth who worked at some time during the year does not narrow the gap as the national

¹ Vocational training was defined as participation in any of the following: business or secretarial school; vocational, technical, or trade school; apprenticeship programs; nursing school; vocational rehabilitation center; correspondence course; community or junior college (other than enrollment in regular school, reported elsewhere); or government training.

sample workers worked 8.9 months of the year compared with 6.7 months for the L.A. study sample.

- While L.A. youth earned only \$8.34 on average, Midwest foster youth fared even worse, averaging \$7.54 per hour. Nationally, 19 year old youth earned \$10.07 per hour; however, this reflects many more youth earning at the higher end of the wage distribution than among foster youth. Comparing medians, the groups do not look as different, with L.A. youth having a median wage rate of \$8.00 per hour; Midwest youth a rate of \$7 per hour, and NLSY97 youth also having a median of \$7 per hour. Some of the difference is likely attributable to California having a higher minimum wage than most states, including the three Midwestern states studied.
- General economic hardships were similar between the L.A. and Midwest foster youth and generally greater than for youth nationally. Among discharged L.A. study youth, 13 percent had at least one month in the previous year when they could not pay their rent while this occurred to only 6 percent of 19-year olds nationally. L.A. youth had a slightly higher rate of having their gas or electricity shut off at 5 percent compared with 3 percent nationally. At some time in the previous twelve months, 5 percent of L.A. former foster youth were evicted, compared with only 1 percent of the national sample.
- While only 5 percent of L.A. youth had gotten food from a church, food pantry, or food bank, 13 percent had in the Midwest sample.² Similarly, only 2 percent of L.A. youth had gotten a meal at a soup kitchen, compared with 4 percent of Midwest youth. Perhaps as a result of more access to these types of services, Midwest youth were slightly less likely to not eat despite being hungry because they couldn't afford food (11% compared with 13% of L.A. youth).
- L.A. youth were more likely than Midwest youth to have a period of homelessness post-discharge (19% compared with 14% of Midwest youth).
- L.A. youth report rates of PTSD of roughly half the reported rates of Midwest youth (7% compared with 13%). Depression rates are more similar between the two samples.
- L.A. foster youth and Midwest foster youth have similar rates of health insurance coverage at age 19 (76% in L.A. and 71% in the Midwest) and both are similar to national estimates (72% in the NLSY97). This likely reflects the fact that former L.A. foster youth can access California's Medicaid program up to age 21. Youth who remain in care in Illinois also have access to Medicaid; 98% of these youth have health insurance while this is the case for only 44% of youth out of care in Illinois. Health insurance coverage is lower for youth from Iowa and Wisconsin, where Medicaid is not available to youth after exiting the foster care system.
- Health care utilization rates differ dramatically between L.A. youth and Midwest youth. L.A. youth are more likely to receive preventative care with 72 percent having had a

² In the Midwest sample, this was defined as "receiving emergency food."

physical exam in the past year and 61 percent having had a dental exam; Midwest rates were 47 percent and 13 percent respectively. On the other hand, L.A. youth reported higher rates of not receiving medical care when they needed it (24% compared with 14% of Midwest youth).

- L.A. youth report lower levels of mental health treatment than Midwest youth. One-eighth (13%) of L.A. youth reported receiving psychological or emotional counseling in the past year compared with one-fifth (21%) of Midwest youth. Only 7 percent of L.A. youth reported receiving psychological medication compared with 15 percent of Midwest youth and 3 percent of L.A. youth received substance abuse treatment compared with 8 percent of Midwest youth.
- Former L.A. foster youth show considerably higher rates of marriage/cohabitation than Midwest foster youth and somewhat higher than national samples of youth indicate. Seventeen percent of L.A. youth were either married or cohabiting compared with ten percent of Midwest youth, driven in part by L.A.'s higher proportion of Hispanic youth, one-quarter of whom are married or cohabiting. National numbers vary between 13-16 percent.
- The percentage of youth out of care in L.A. living with a relative was 41, higher than in the Midwest study (35%), but much lower than national estimates indicating 79 percent of 19 year olds living with relatives. Nearly all youth in the national sample living with relatives at age 19 were living with their parents (73%). This is in stark contrast to L.A. foster youth, 18 percent of whom were living with their parents after leaving care.
- Foster youth in L.A. were nearly as likely as Midwest foster youth to have become parents by age 19. Overall, 21 percent of L.A. youth had become parents compared with 23 percent of Midwest youth.³ For females, the figures are 28 percent in L.A. and 32 percent in the Midwest; for males they are 9 percent in L.A. and 14 percent in the Midwest. Both sites show much higher rates of parenting than for youth in the national samples. Nationally, 11 percent of youth were parents at age 19; 16 percent of females and 7 percent of males.
- Foster youth initiate sexual intercourse slightly earlier than youth nationally. Both the L.A. and Midwest samples show a median age of first intercourse of 15 with national medians at age 16.
- L.A. foster youth show higher rates of always using birth control when having sex with 54 percent saying they use it 100 percent of the time while only 45 percent of the Midwest sample said they used it "all of the time." The L.A. sample rates are similar to national rates of 57 percent of 19 year olds who say they use birth control 100 percent of the time. L.A. youth also report higher rates of having used a condom the last time they

³ The difference may be smaller than appears as the Midwest Study included some youth who may have become parents at age 20. However, controlling for race and ethnicity would widen the difference between the two samples, as Hispanic youth have higher rates of childbearing at age 19 (28.1% in L.A.) and are more predominant in the L.A. sample.

had sexual intercourse with 64 percent reporting having done so compared with 48 percent in the Midwest study and only 37 percent nationally. Finally, L.A. youth were more likely to receive family planning counseling in the previous year than in the Midwest sample (17% compared with 11%).

- L.A. foster youth are less likely than youth nationally to drink alcohol and drink less frequently when they do drink. While just over a third of L.A. foster youth (35%) reported consuming alcohol in the past 30 days, well over half of all 19-year olds did (57%). In addition, 8 percent of all 19-year olds reported consuming alcohol on at least half of the days in the previous month; frequent use of alcohol among L.A. foster youth was much lower at 3 percent. The level of binge drinking among L.A. youth is also lower; while 18 percent of these youth reported binge drinking in the past month, this is the case for twice as many youth nationally (35%).
- L.A. foster youth have similar rates of initiation into marijuana use as youth nationally, and use it more frequently. The rate among foster youth for marijuana use in the past year was 25 percent and was 20 percent for use in the past month, both similar to national rates. However, foster youth were more likely to report using marijuana on half or more of the days in the previous month (8% compared to 5% of youth nationally).
- Former L.A. foster youth appear to engage in fewer criminal activities than former Midwest foster youth. Former foster youth show somewhat higher rates than occur for youth nationally.
- Consistent with lower crime rates, L.A. youth are about half as likely as Midwest youth to be arrested. L.A. foster youth are arrested and incarcerated at much higher rates than 19 year olds nationally. Only 6 percent of 19 year olds report having ever been arrested and only 1 percent ever incarcerated compared with 22 percent and 14 percent, respectively, for former L.A. foster youth.

Estimating the number of youth likely to stay in care after age 18

- Applying varying assumptions about how the new law would be implemented, we estimate that 53 percent to 65 percent of youth who currently emancipate from foster care would still be in care at age 19. This percentage would decrease to 32 percent to 41 percent at age 20. At age 21, we estimate 25 percent to 35 percent of foster youth who currently emancipate would remain in care under the new law.
- These percentages imply that of the 4,474 youth who emancipated from care in California between April 1, 2008 and March 31, 2009, 2,368-2,924 would have still been in care at age 19, 1,450-1,835 at age 20, and 1,127-1,544 in care until age 21, had the law been in effect during that time period.

Implications

- With the passage of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, Congress provided States the option of using Title IV-E funds to allow youth to stay in foster care until age 21 if the youth meets certain conditions, particularly with regard to enrolling in school or working.
- We estimate that in Los Angeles, only 67%-85% would be eligible to stay in care, *even to age 19*, given the law's requirements; much fewer to age 21. Nearly one-third of these former L.A. foster youth were not in school, a vocational training program, or employed at age 19.
- After emancipation, some youth succeed while others struggle. The differences between these youth and their outcomes must be understood to design programs and services that can help them make a smooth and successful transition to adulthood.
- Without proper support and services while in care and during the transition out of care, foster youth face a potentially life-long deficit that will lead to economic hardship along with other undesirable outcomes. However, it is unlikely that one-size-fits-all programs are appropriate. Alternative avenues for additional education, vocational training, and work experience must be available as well as help with housing, parenting, and mental health problems.
- The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act, combined with Chafee and other funding, provides the State the opportunity to prepare foster youth for the transition out of care and develop the connections to support them after the transition.

Section 1: Introduction and background

In 2008, over 4,600 youth living in out-of-home foster care in California emancipated from the child welfare system, usually due to reaching the age of majority or upon graduation from high school. These youth face significant challenges as they transition to living on their own. Specifically, they have limited education and employment experience, relatively poor mental and physical health, and a relatively high likelihood of experiencing unwanted outcomes such as homelessness, incarceration, and nonmarital pregnancy (Courtney et al. 2005; Goerge et al. 2002; Pecora et al. 2005).

In October 2008, Congress passed the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-351). This law gives States the option to use Title IV-E funds to provide foster care to individuals who meet certain conditions up to age 21. To date, very little is known about how staying in care past age 18 impacts the lives of transitioning foster youth. While several States have allowed youth to stay in care past age 18, no evaluation has been done to assess the success of this option. Recent studies of three Midwest States - Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin - have found that youth who stay in care past age 18 fare better than those who leave the child welfare system (Courtney et al. 2007). Of these three States, Illinois is the only one that allows youth the option to stay in care past age 18.

The California State Legislature is currently considering whether to extend foster care beyond age 18. Although knowing that youth in Illinois fare better if they stay in care is suggestive that the same may be true in California, the two States differ in key ways. For instance, the racial and ethnic compositions of the foster care caseloads are different between California and Illinois. More importantly, the child welfare systems differ between the two States. Illinois is a state-administered system, while California is a county-administered system.

Different policies, practices, and state-level support imply differences between the outcomes for youth while in care and after leaving care, as well as the possible impacts of staying in care past age 18.

A recent study, the Multi-Site Evaluation of Foster Youth Programs, provides important data to help inform the discussion in California discussion about adopting the federal legislation and about the support that might accompany extending foster care. The study, mandated by the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, looks at four different independent living programs in the United States, including a classroom-based life skills training program serving youth in Los Angeles County. The Multi-Site Evaluation used an experimental design, whereby some youths were randomly referred to the service being evaluated, while others were referred to standard services or “services as usual.” For the evaluation of the Life Skills Training program (LST), youth in the sample had to be 17 years old, but had few other restrictions, thus providing a good sample of youth in foster care at age 17 in Los Angeles County. While the characteristics of foster youth in Los Angeles are not representative of all foster youth in California, the child welfare caseload in Los Angeles County comprises nearly one-third of child welfare cases across the state.

The youth in the LST sample were interviewed at ages 17, 18, and 19, which provides a valuable resource of longitudinal information that follows youth from their late foster care placements through their exit from care, and finally to their early experiences after leaving care. The youth survey contains information needed to understand the impacts of the program, but also provides information about youths’ characteristics and experiences. We describe these experiences across key domains below, focusing on their status at 19 when most youth have aged out of care. We examine most of these experiences separately by gender as well as by race and

ethnicity. Table 1 displays the sample sizes of youth both in and out of care at age 19 for each of these groups. Several measures are examined only for youth who had exited the foster care system at age 19.⁴

Table 1. Sample Sizes

	Total	Gender		Race/Ethnicity			
		Male	Female	White, non-Hispanic	Black, non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Other
All youth	410	162	248	36	168	178	28
Youth out of care	336	131	205	36	123	156	21
Youth in care	74	31	43	0	45	22	7

The rest of this report is organized as follows. Section 2 investigates the characteristics, experiences, and outcomes at age 19 of youth who were in foster care in Los Angeles County at age 17 and interviewed as part of an evaluation of the Life Skills Training Program. In Section 3, we discuss how these youth compare with foster youth in Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin who were interviewed as part of the Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth. In Section 4, we use LST data combined with other data sources to forecast how many youth would stay in foster care in California if the State adopts the provisions of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 and extends foster care eligibility to age 21. Finally, in Section 5, we discuss the implications of the findings.

⁴ The tables that follow are based on the full sample of 410 youth unless otherwise noted. Tables that are limited to youth out of care are based on a subsample of 316 youth; although 336 youth had exited foster care at age 19, 20 of these youth were not administered the sections of the youth survey pertaining to youth out of care.

Section 2: Characteristics of former foster youth at age 19 in L.A. County

1. Demographic Characteristics

Table 2 shows the demographic characteristics of the 410 young adults who participated in the third interview of the study. Most youth were 19 years old at the time of the interview. Although a modest number had turned 20 (and 3 had not yet had their 19th birthday), we will refer to the entire sample as 19-year olds.

Approximately three-fifths of the youth are female. This is consistent with tabulations from the California Child Welfare System Case Management System (CWS/CMS) which show that while children in foster care divide equally between the sexes, those who age out of care are roughly three-fifths female.

Over two-fifths (43%) of the youth identify themselves as Hispanic. Another two-fifths identify as black non-Hispanic, fewer than one in ten identify as white non-Hispanic, and 7 percent identify themselves as another race and not Hispanic. Throughout this report, we show tabulations by these mutually exclusive groups and for simplicity refer to them as white, black, Hispanic, and Other.⁵

Most youth were born in the U.S.; among Hispanic youth, 85 percent were born in the U.S. However, three in seven (42%) Hispanic youth identified Spanish as the first language they learned, implying that many of these Hispanic youth are children of immigrants.

⁵ Because the “other” category is a catch-all category, we will not discuss in the text how various measures compare for this group of youth.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics

	Total	Gender		Race/Ethnicity			
		Male	Female	White, non-Hispanic	Black, non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Other
Age							
18	0.2%	0.0%	0.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%	0.0%
19	86.6%	90.1%	84.3%	83.3%	88.1%	86.5%	82.1%
20	13.2%	9.9%	15.3%	16.7%	11.9%	12.9%	17.9%
mean	19.7	19.6	19.7	19.6	19.7	19.7	19.7
Gender							
Male	39.5%			33.3%	42.9%	34.8%	57.1%
Female	60.5%			66.7%	57.1%	65.2%	42.9%
Race/Ethnicity							
White, non-Hispanic	8.8%	7.4%	9.7%				
Black, non-Hispanic	41.0%	44.4%	38.7%				
Hispanic	43.4%	38.3%	46.8%				
Other	6.8%	9.9%	4.8%				
Nativity							
US-born	93.2%	94.4%	92.3%	100.0%	99.4%	85.4%	96.4%
Foreign-born	6.8%	5.6%	7.7%	0.0%	0.6%	14.6%	3.6%
Language learned first¹							
English	80.7%	82.6%	79.4%	97.2%	100.0%	57.6%	89.3%
Spanish	18.3%	16.8%	19.4%	2.8%	0.0%	41.8%	0.0%
Other	1.0%	0.6%	1.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%	10.7%

¹ N = 409

2. Foster Care Experiences

Current Care Status

Most foster youth in California emancipate while they are 18 years old. However, Los Angeles County has seen an increase in the number of youth remaining in care at ages beyond 18. Over four-fifths of all youth in foster care at ages 19 or 20 in California are in Los Angeles County. In our study, the vast majority of youth were out of care at the third interview; however 18 percent were still in care at age 19 (see Table 3). Significant differences are seen by race where no whites remained in care at age 19; about one in eight Hispanics and over one-quarter of blacks were still in care. Youth who were out of care had been out for 13 months on average.

Table 3. Care Status at Age 19

	Total	Gender		Race/Ethnicity			
		Male	Female	White, non-Hispanic	Black, non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Other
Care status							
Out of care	82.0%	80.9%	82.7%	100.0%	73.2%	87.6%	75.0%
In care	18.0%	19.1%	17.3%	0.0%	26.8%	12.4%	25.0%
Months out of care¹							
0 - 6 months	20.1%	26.0%	16.3%	11.4%	28.5%	16.1%	14.3%
7 - 12 months	26.6%	27.5%	26.1%	34.3%	26.8%	25.8%	19.0%
More than 12 months	53.3%	46.6%	57.6%	54.3%	44.7%	58.1%	66.7%
mean	13.0	12.3	13.5	13.3	11.4	13.9	15.5
median	13	11	14	14	11	14	15

¹ N = 334

Care History

Data from the CWS/CMS provide a picture of the study youths' foster care experiences from when they first came into care until they emancipated.⁶ Table 4 indicates that on average, youth were nine years old when they were first removed from their household and placed in foster care. On average, boys came into care earlier than girls (8.5 and 10 years old respectively). Blacks came into care while seven years old, on average, while whites came into care at age ten and Hispanics at age eleven.

Total time spent in out-of-home care averaged 8.5 years with a median length of 7.8 years. Males spent more time in care than females and blacks spent longer in care than either whites or Hispanics. Most youth experienced only one removal episode, though nearly one-quarter experienced more than one removal. One third of blacks experienced more than one removal (34%) compared to one in six whites (18%) or Hispanics (16%). On the other hand, youth experienced 5.8 placements on average, with the median number of placements being four. Nearly one in six (16%) experienced ten or more placements.

⁶ The data were drawn in July 2006. For those youth still in care at that date (approximately 18%) these numbers are not complete.

Looking at the “most recent” placement, likely the last placement for most youth before leaving care, shows nearly half of all youth at age 17 were placed with a relative (42%) or guardian (8%). Just under one-third were either in a foster family home (9%) or a FFA certified home (23%) and roughly 18 percent were in a group home. Some differences are seen by gender with girls more likely than boys to be in foster homes and less likely to be in a group home. Hispanics are less likely than white or black non-Hispanics to be placed with relatives or guardians and more likely to be in a foster home; there is little race/ethnicity difference in group home placement.

Looking at their entire placement history, seven in ten youth have been placed at some time with a relative with blacks having been placed with a relative somewhat more often than whites or Hispanics. Four in ten have been placed at some time in a group home and one in five placed at some time in a shelter.

In the survey, over a third of youth (36%) also report having run away at some time from a foster care placement.

Table 4. Foster Care Experiences

	Total	Gender		Race/Ethnicity			
		Male	Female	White, non-Hispanic	Black, non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Other
Age at first removal (mean)¹	9.4	8.5	10.0	10.5	7.2	11.3	9.5
Time in care²							
Mean years in care	8.5	9.5	7.8	7.2	10.6	6.6	9.1
Median years in care	7.8	9.4	7.4	5.1	11.2	5.4	9.5
Number of removals¹							
One	75.7%	72.0%	78.0%	82.4%	66.1%	83.6%	75.0%
Two	17.4%	20.5%	15.4%	5.9%	26.8%	10.2%	21.4%
Three or more	6.9%	7.5%	6.5%	11.8%	7.1%	6.2%	3.6%
mean	1.3	1.4	1.3	1.4	1.4	1.2	1.3
Total placements¹							
One	14.3%	12.4%	15.4%	17.6%	14.3%	13.0%	17.9%
Two	13.8%	14.3%	13.4%	14.7%	14.3%	14.1%	7.1%
3 - 5	33.7%	32.9%	34.1%	41.2%	30.4%	36.2%	28.6%
6 - 9	22.6%	23.0%	22.4%	14.7%	24.4%	20.9%	32.1%
10 or more	15.7%	17.4%	14.6%	11.8%	16.7%	15.8%	14.3%
mean	5.8	6.0	5.6	4.9	6.0	5.7	5.8
median	4.0	5.0	4.0	3.5	5.0	4.0	5.0
Last/most recent placement¹							
Court specified home	0.5%	1.2%	0.0%	2.9%	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%
FFA certified home	22.6%	16.8%	26.4%	20.6%	17.9%	30.5%	3.6%
Foster family home	8.6%	7.5%	9.3%	2.9%	9.5%	7.9%	14.3%
Group home	17.9%	23.6%	14.2%	17.6%	14.9%	18.6%	32.1%
Guardian home	7.9%	8.7%	7.3%	14.7%	8.3%	6.8%	3.6%
Relative home	42.0%	41.6%	42.3%	41.2%	48.2%	35.6%	46.4%
Small family home	0.5%	0.6%	0.4%	0.0%	0.6%	0.6%	0.0%
Types of placements²							
Ever placed in a shelter	19.4%	22.2%	17.5%	14.3%	19.0%	20.9%	17.9%
Ever placed in a group home	39.0%	48.8%	32.5%	37.1%	42.3%	30.5%	75.0%
Ever placed in a relative home	70.6%	69.1%	71.5%	65.7%	80.4%	61.6%	75.0%
Ever run away from foster care³	36.1%	37.7%	35.1%	36.1%	29.8%	39.9%	50.0%

¹ N = 407

² N = 408

³ Self-reported in the youth survey at age 17.

3. Living Arrangements

Living Arrangements at Age 19

Table 5 shows the living arrangements of study youth at age 19. At the time of the interview, three in seven youth (42%) were living with a relative. Some of these youth were still in care, in a kin placement, but 41 percent of out-of-care youth were still living with a relative. Roughly

one in eight youth was living in the same household as their mother, one in twelve with their father. About one in ten youth were living in the same household as an older sibling and 12 percent was living with a grandparent. About one quarter were living with another relative such as an aunt, uncle, or cousin. These categories are not mutually exclusive and many youth live with more than one relative.

About one-third of youth were living independently, either on their own or with friends, spouses, or roommates. Girls were more likely than boys to be living independently. Of interviewed youth 2 percent was homeless and close to 2 percent was in prison; however, these figures are likely understated as homeless and imprisoned youth are the least likely to have been found.

Table 5. Current Living Arrangements

	Care Status		Gender		Race/Ethnicity				
	Total	Out of care	In care	Male	Female	White, non-Hispanic	Black, non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Other
<i>Living arrangements at age 19</i>									
Independently	32.0%	37.2%	8.1%	21.0%	39.1%	36.1%	23.8%	40.4%	21.4%
With relatives	42.2%	41.4%	45.9%	46.3%	39.5%	41.7%	46.4%	37.6%	46.4%
With foster parents	8.5%	3.6%	31.1%	8.6%	8.5%	8.3%	10.7%	6.2%	10.7%
With a friend's family	4.1%	4.2%	4.1%	6.2%	2.8%	2.8%	3.6%	4.5%	7.1%
Group home or residential facility	5.1%	4.5%	8.1%	6.8%	4.0%	5.6%	7.1%	2.8%	7.1%
Homeless	2.0%	2.4%	0.0%	3.1%	1.2%	2.8%	1.2%	2.8%	0.0%
Prison	1.5%	1.8%	0.0%	3.7%	0.0%	0.0%	1.8%	1.1%	3.6%
Other	4.6%	5.1%	2.7%	4.3%	4.8%	2.8%	5.4%	4.5%	3.6%
<i>Relatives in household</i>									
Mother in household	12.4%	14.9%	1.4%	14.8%	10.9%	8.3%	10.7%	14.6%	14.3%
Father in household	8.0%	9.5%	1.4%	9.9%	6.9%	5.6%	5.4%	11.2%	7.1%
Older sibling in household	10.7%	9.8%	14.9%	15.4%	7.7%	2.8%	12.5%	9.0%	21.4%
Grandparent in household	12.0%	10.4%	18.9%	9.3%	13.7%	16.7%	15.5%	7.9%	10.7%
Other relative in household	23.9%	21.7%	33.8%	27.2%	21.8%	16.7%	28.0%	20.8%	28.6%

Living Arrangements in Past Year

Over the course of the year since leaving care, these former foster youth experienced many unstable living arrangements (see Table 6). Some youth are able to stay in their final placement, especially if they were placed with a relative. Nearly two-fifths of the study youth did not move

in the 12 months previous to the interview. For those who did move, they moved an average of 2.3 times during those twelve months.

In addition to staying with relatives and friends as a means of getting by, youth found themselves in more precarious situations. Roughly one in five had a period of homelessness during the previous twelve months, defined as having rented a room in a hotel, motel, or SRO; stayed in a car or other vehicle; stayed outside or in an abandoned building; or went to a homeless shelter.

Table 6. Living Arrangements in Past 12 Months (Youth out of Care)

	Total	Gender		Race/Ethnicity			
		Male	Female	White, non-Hispanic	Black, non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Other
<i>Places stayed in past year</i>							
Home of a relative	37.7%	41.3%	35.3%	29.4%	42.5%	36.5%	33.3%
Home of a friend	27.2%	27.0%	27.4%	32.4%	24.8%	27.0%	33.3%
Rented room in a motel	14.9%	15.1%	14.7%	17.6%	12.4%	14.9%	23.8%
Car or other vehicle	2.8%	5.6%	1.1%	5.9%	2.7%	2.7%	0.0%
Abandoned building or outside	4.1%	5.6%	3.2%	2.9%	2.7%	5.4%	4.8%
Shelter for battered women ¹	0.5%	na	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%	0.0%
Shelter for the homeless	3.2%	4.0%	2.6%	2.9%	3.5%	3.4%	0.0%
<i>Ever homeless in past year</i>	19.3%	21.4%	17.9%	23.5%	16.8%	18.9%	28.6%
<i>Moves in past year²</i>							
None	38.2%	37.6%	38.6%	44.1%	38.4%	35.4%	47.6%
Once	27.4%	24.0%	29.6%	20.6%	30.4%	28.6%	14.3%
Twice	17.8%	18.4%	17.5%	8.8%	18.8%	19.0%	19.0%
3 times	7.3%	12.0%	4.2%	11.8%	6.3%	6.1%	14.3%
4 times	4.1%	2.4%	5.3%	2.9%	3.6%	5.4%	0.0%
5 times or more	5.1%	5.6%	4.8%	11.8%	2.7%	5.4%	4.8%
mean (all)	1.4	1.6	1.3	1.6	1.2	1.5	1.3
mean (of movers)	2.3	2.5	2.1	2.9	1.9	2.4	2.5

¹ N = 190

² N = 314

4. Family Formation: Marriage, Cohabitation, and Fertility

Table 7 shows tabulations of family formation including marriage, cohabitation, and parenting. At age 19, few study youth were married (5% had ever been married and 4% were married and not separated at the time of the interview). However, an additional 13 percent were

cohabiting. Females were more than twice as likely to be married or cohabiting as males (22% compared with 9 respectively). Race and ethnicity differences appear as one quarter (25%) of Hispanic youth were married or cohabiting, while one in six white youth and only one in ten black youth were married or cohabiting.

One fifth (21%) of youth were parents at age 19. Over one-quarter of females (28%) were mothers while 9 percent of males reported being fathers. An additional 4 percent of females were pregnant with their first child at the time of the interview. Parenting rates at age 19 were much higher for Hispanics (28%) than for whites (19%) or blacks (14%). Two-fifths of parenting youth were married or cohabiting.⁷ This heavily reflects ethnic differences as over half (53%) of Hispanic parents were married or cohabiting while only one in eight white parents and one in six black parents were married or cohabiting.

Table 7. Marriage and Family

	Total	Gender		Race/Ethnicity			
		Male	Female	White, non-Hispanic	Black, non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Other
Current marital status							
Never married	95.4%	97.5%	94.0%	94.4%	98.2%	92.1%	100.0%
Married	3.7%	1.9%	4.8%	5.6%	1.2%	6.2%	0.0%
Separated	0.7%	0.6%	0.8%	0.0%	0.6%	1.1%	0.0%
Widowed	0.2%	0.0%	0.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%	0.0%
Cohabiting	13.4%	7.4%	17.3%	11.1%	8.9%	18.5%	10.7%
Married or cohabiting							
All youth	17.1%	9.3%	22.2%	16.7%	10.1%	24.7%	10.7%
Parenting youth ¹	40.2%	43.8%	39.4%	12.5%	16.7%	52.9%	75.0%
Parenting status							
Before age 17	5.4%	1.9%	7.7%	8.3%	3.6%	7.3%	0.0%
At age 17	11.2%	2.5%	16.9%	13.9%	7.1%	15.2%	7.1%
At age 18	16.3%	6.2%	23.0%	16.7%	10.1%	23.0%	10.7%
At age 19	20.7%	9.3%	28.2%	19.4%	14.3%	28.1%	14.3%

¹ N = 87

⁷ We cannot tell in the data whether the person with whom the youth was cohabiting is the other parent of the youth's child(ren).

5. Education

Reading Ability, Learning Disability, and Special Education

Many youth in foster care struggle with academics and achieving basic skills. As part of the youth survey, we administered the Letter-Word Identification Test from the Woodcock-Johnson III Tests of Achievement. This tests measures sight vocabulary, phonics and structural analysis as well as broad reading and academic skills. The output includes an age-level and grade-level assessment of reading ability. The youth in our survey read on average at a grade level of 8.5 when most of them were in eleventh or twelfth grade (see Table 8). Another way to look at this measure is to compare them nationally with youth of the same age. While the average youth should fall at the 50th percentile, the average 17 year old foster youth was approximately at the 28th percentile.

At age 17, roughly one-quarter of the youth reported having been told they have a learning disability with boys exceeding girls three to two. Over one-third reported ever having been placed in a special education program, with boys again exceeding girls significantly.

Table 8. Academic Skills

	Total	Gender		Race/Ethnicity			
		Male	Female	White, non-Hispanic	Black, non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Other
Reading ability¹							
Grade-level equivalent	8.5	8.2	8.7	10.2	7.9	8.7	8.9
Age-based percentile (mean)	27.8	26.2	28.8	37	24.5	28.7	29.7
Learning disability²							
Youth ever told has a learning disability (at age 17)	24.0%	31.1%	19.4%	27.8%	23.2%	24.7%	19.2%
Special education program²							
Ever placed in a special education program (at age 17)	34.8%	45.1%	28.0%	31.4%	35.7%	34.5%	35.7%

¹ N = 405

² N = 408

Attainment and Enrollment

Table 9 shows youths' educational attainment and enrollment. Approximately 54 percent of study youth had obtained a high school diploma by age 19, with an additional 6 percent having a GED. Females were more likely than males to have obtained a diploma. Race differences are small for having a diploma, but whites are more likely to have gotten a GED.

Nearly two-thirds (65%) of youth had been enrolled in school at some time in the previous twelve months. At the time of the interview, just over one-third (35%) was currently enrolled. About one-third of study youth had at some time attended college with about one quarter having attended a 2-year college and 8 percent having attended a 4-year college. Females were more likely than males to have attended college and Hispanics lagged both whites and blacks in college attendance. One quarter of study youth were enrolled in college at the time of the interview, with most enrolled in a 2-year college. Gender and race differences are similar as for the measures of ever attended, though blacks show higher rates of current college enrollment than whites. Hispanics still lag behind whites and blacks in current college enrollment.

Table 9. Education

	Total	Gender		Race/Ethnicity			
		Male	Female	White, non-Hispanic	Black, non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Other
High school completion							
HS diploma	54.4%	47.5%	58.9%	55.6%	57.1%	51.7%	53.6%
GED	5.6%	6.8%	4.8%	16.7%	5.4%	4.5%	0.0%
Currently enrolled in school							
	35.4%	35.8%	35.1%	33.3%	45.8%	26.4%	32.1%
Enrolled in previous 12 mo.							
	64.6%	63.6%	65.3%	63.9%	74.4%	57.3%	53.6%
Current college enrollment¹							
Two-year college	19.1%	16.0%	21.1%	16.7%	26.9%	13.5%	11.1%
Four-year college	6.4%	4.9%	7.3%	11.1%	8.4%	4.5%	0.0%
Ever attended college							
Two-year college	24.9%	20.4%	27.8%	27.8%	31.5%	19.1%	17.9%
Four-year college	7.6%	6.8%	8.1%	11.1%	8.9%	6.7%	0.0%

¹ N = 408

6. Vocational and Job Training

Between their 18th and 19th birthday, nearly one quarter (23%) of study youth attended some form of vocational or job training (see Table 10). Blacks were the most likely to attend a training followed by Hispanics and well more than whites. These trainings are likely beneficial; however few youth obtain certificates or licenses that allow a young adult to enter into a specific field.

Table 10. Vocational Training

	Total	Gender		Race/Ethnicity			
		Male	Female	White, non-Hispanic	Black, non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Other
Attended vocational or job training ages 18 - 19¹	23.2%	22.8%	23.5%	13.9%	26.8%	22.0%	21.4%
Vocational certificate or state license							
Vocational certificate ever received	3.9%	3.7%	4.0%	2.8%	4.8%	2.8%	7.1%
State license ever received	1.5%	1.9%	1.2%	2.8%	0.6%	2.2%	0.0%

¹ N = 409

7. Employment

Table 11 shows measures of youths' employment. Seventy percent of the study youth worked in the year between their 18th and 19th birthday.⁸ Males and females had similar employment rates as did each major race group. However, only a small percentage of youth worked continuously. Under 14 percent of youth worked in all twelve months between their birthdays; 35 percent worked more than 6 months. Youth who worked at all during the year worked on average 6.7 of the twelve months.

At their 19th birthday, over half of study youth (54%) were not working. Just over one quarter (26%) were employed full time (working 35 hours or more per week). One seventh

⁸ We calculate employment for the month starting after the 18th birthday and going through the month in which the youth turned 19 in order to standardize the measure across all youth. As the youth aged, employment rates increased. If we looked at employment in the year leading up to the interview, when youth were 19.7 years old on average, we find 74.9% to have been employed during that year.

(15%) were working part-time (20-34 hours per week) and another 5 percent worked 1-19 hours per week. Youth who were working at their 19th birthday worked an average of 35.9 hours per week.

Table 11. Employment

	Total	Gender		Race/Ethnicity			
		Male	Female	White, non-Hispanic	Black, non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Other
Employed between ages 18 - 19	69.8%	71.6%	68.5%	72.2%	72.0%	68.0%	64.3%
Months employed between ages 18 - 19¹							
0	30.1%	28.4%	31.2%	27.8%	28.0%	31.6%	35.7%
1	4.9%	6.8%	3.6%	11.1%	5.4%	3.4%	3.6%
2	6.6%	8.0%	5.7%	2.8%	6.0%	6.8%	14.3%
3	8.6%	7.4%	9.3%	5.6%	8.9%	9.0%	7.1%
4	3.7%	3.7%	3.6%	2.8%	2.4%	5.1%	3.6%
5	4.9%	4.9%	4.9%	2.8%	7.1%	2.8%	7.1%
6	6.4%	4.9%	7.3%	8.3%	6.0%	6.8%	3.6%
7	6.1%	5.6%	6.5%	2.8%	7.7%	5.6%	3.6%
8	4.4%	4.3%	4.5%	5.6%	4.8%	4.0%	3.6%
9	2.7%	1.9%	3.2%	2.8%	2.4%	2.8%	3.6%
10	5.4%	9.3%	2.8%	8.3%	6.5%	4.0%	3.6%
11	2.7%	1.9%	3.2%	2.8%	1.8%	4.0%	0.0%
12	13.7%	13.0%	14.2%	16.7%	13.1%	14.1%	10.7%
mean (all)	4.7	4.7	4.7	5.1	4.8	4.7	3.8
mean (of employed youth)	6.7	6.6	6.8	7.1	6.7	6.9	5.8
Hours worked/week at 19th birthday²							
None	54.3%	52.5%	55.5%	50.0%	52.7%	55.1%	64.3%
1-19 hrs	5.2%	3.8%	6.1%	2.8%	8.5%	2.8%	3.6%
20-34 hrs	14.6%	16.3%	13.5%	13.9%	15.8%	14.8%	7.1%
35 hrs or more	25.9%	27.5%	24.9%	33.3%	23.0%	27.3%	25.0%
mean (all)	16.4	18	15.4	23.1	14.4	17.4	12.9
mean (of employed youth)	35.9	37.8	34.6	46.3	30.5	38.8	36.1
median (of employed youth)	36	38	35	40	32	40	35

¹ N = 409

² N = 405

8. Earnings from Employment

Those who worked did not earn much. The average wage earned by study youth was \$8.34 per hour (see Table 12), only modestly above California's minimum wage of \$6.75 at that time.

Low wages and low hours worked translate into low annual earnings. The median annual earnings for those youth who worked during the year were \$4,600. Females earned somewhat

more than males (but were less likely to have worked). Whites earned the most (median=\$5,650) and blacks the least (median=\$3,750). In comparison, the federal poverty guidelines for 2006 (at the time of the interview) set the federal poverty level for a single person living alone at \$9,800. The federal poverty level for households with two persons (such as a single parent and a child) was \$13,200 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2006).

Teenagers frequently earn money through informal work activities such as baby sitting, mowing lawns, and braiding hair. Eighteen percent of study youth worked at formal jobs and supplemented their earnings with some informal work. An additional 6 percent did not work at formal jobs, but earned some income from informal work. At the median, those who did any informal work earned \$300 in the past year.

Table 12. Earnings

	Total	Gender		Race/Ethnicity			
		Male	Female	White, non-Hispanic	Black, non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Other
Wage rate at 19th birthday (mean, employed youth only)¹	\$8.34	\$8.53	\$8.21	\$8.13	\$8.23	\$8.32	\$9.92
Earnings in past 12 months from formal jobs²							
less than \$500	6.2%	5.1%	7.0%	12.5%	7.6%	3.9%	5.0%
\$500 - \$999	7.3%	6.8%	7.6%	4.2%	6.8%	9.4%	0.0%
\$1,000 - \$4,999	39.8%	43.2%	37.4%	29.2%	44.9%	37.0%	40.0%
\$5,000 - \$9,999	28.4%	28.8%	28.1%	37.5%	24.6%	28.3%	40.0%
\$10,000 - \$24,999	15.9%	12.7%	18.1%	16.7%	12.7%	18.9%	15.0%
\$25,000 or more	2.4%	3.4%	1.8%	0.0%	3.4%	2.4%	0.0%
median	\$4,600	\$4,438	\$4,800	\$5,650	\$3,750	\$4,967	\$5,000
Source of earnings							
Formal work only	50.5%	50.0%	50.8%	47.2%	46.4%	56.2%	42.9%
Informal work only	6.1%	6.8%	5.6%	2.8%	7.1%	5.6%	7.1%
Both formal and informal work	18.0%	21.0%	16.1%	19.4%	20.2%	14.0%	28.6%
No earnings	25.4%	22.2%	27.4%	30.6%	26.2%	24.2%	21.4%
Earnings in past 12 months from informal jobs³							
less than \$50	4.4%	4.2%	4.6%	0.0%	5.6%	0.0%	18.2%
\$50 - \$99	7.1%	8.3%	6.2%	0.0%	3.7%	12.8%	9.1%
\$100 - \$499	46.0%	39.6%	50.8%	66.7%	44.4%	51.3%	18.2%
500 - \$999	19.5%	27.1%	13.8%	22.2%	18.5%	20.5%	18.2%
\$1,000 or more	23.0%	20.8%	24.6%	11.1%	27.8%	15.4%	36.4%
median	\$300	\$300	\$300	\$300	\$350	\$300	\$600

¹ N = 180

² N = 289

³ N = 113

9. Government Benefits

After leaving foster care, youth may access government benefits in order to provide a base of support (Table 13). The most critical support appears to be food stamps, received by about one-fifth of all youth out of care at age 19. Females received food stamps at roughly double the rate of males (26% to 14%, respectively). General relief payments were received by 9 percent of all out-of-care youth with 4 percent receiving some other form of (non-TANF) welfare payment. SSI benefits, available to those who are disabled, were received by 9 percent of out-of-care youth

at age 19. Of females who became mothers between the first and third interviews, nearly half (46%) received TANF and four-fifths (80%) received WIC.⁹

Table 13. Government Benefits (Youth out of Care)

	Total	Gender		Race/Ethnicity			
		Male	Female	White, non-Hispanic	Black, non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Other
Receipt of benefits in past 12 months							
Food Stamps	20.9%	13.5%	25.8%	23.5%	23.9%	18.2%	19.0%
SSI	8.5%	11.9%	6.3%	8.8%	9.7%	6.8%	14.3%
General relief payments ¹	8.6%	7.9%	9.0%	5.9%	13.3%	5.4%	9.5%
Other welfare payments ¹	3.8%	1.6%	5.3%	2.9%	4.4%	4.1%	0.0%
TANF/WIC benefits in past 12 months (among women who gave birth between ages 17 and 19)²							
TANF	45.5%	na	45.5%	a	a	a	a
WIC	79.5%	na	79.5%	a	a	a	a

¹ N = 315

² N = 44

^a Sample size too small for reliable estimates

10. Assets

At age 19, youth have not saved much money. Only half of all youth (49%) have a checking account and only 38 percent have a savings account (see Table 14). Most of these are the same youth as just over half (54%) have either a checking or savings account. Table 14 also shows the total of all money in checking accounts, savings accounts, other accounts, and “under the mattress” indicating the average youth has monetary assets of \$816; however, the median is only \$100 as a few youth have saved a lot while most have little or no assets. Males have greater assets than females, likely reflecting a higher proportion of males working. While there is little difference in the average by race, whites have higher median assets (\$271) than blacks (\$100) or

⁹ Due to an error in the questionnaire, we were not able to ascertain TANF or WIC receipt for females who had given birth before the baseline interview and had not subsequent births.

Hispanics (\$70), though the amounts are small enough that the difference may not be too meaningful.

Beyond monetary assets, Table 14 shows that 30 percent of youth own a vehicle (car, van, truck, or motorcycle) with white youth more likely to own a vehicle than black or Hispanic youth.

Table 14. Assets

	Total	Gender		Race/Ethnicity			
		Male	Female	White, non-Hispanic	Black, non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Other
Financial accounts							
Have a checking account ¹	48.8%	43.8%	52.0%	52.8%	49.4%	48.3%	42.9%
Have a savings account ²	38.3%	36.4%	39.6%	38.9%	41.7%	34.3%	42.9%
Have either checking or savings account ¹	53.7%	50.0%	56.1%	55.6%	56.0%	51.7%	50.0%
Monetary assets³							
mean	\$816	\$1,110	\$621	\$719	\$891	\$792	\$632
median	\$100	\$146	\$98	\$271	\$100	\$70	\$100
Vehicle ownership⁴	30.1%	32.1%	28.7%	50.0%	28.0%	28.2%	28.6%

¹ N = 408

² N = 407

³ N = 382

⁴ N = 409

11. Economic Hardship

With low earnings and little savings, many former foster youth struggle to get by after leaving care. At age 19, approximately 45 percent of our study youth report they are saving a little money each month (see Table 15); approximately 37 percent say they are just getting by; and 18 percent say they are struggling to make it. Looking at specific hardships in the past year, about one in eight at some point could not pay their rent on time. About 5 percent report having their gas or electricity shut off and a similar percentage report having been evicted. One in five youth reports having their phone service disconnected. This includes either land lines or cell phones; many youth use pre-pay cell phones that are “disconnected” when the money runs out.

At some point in the year since leaving care, 5 percent report having gotten food from a church, food pantry, or food bank; 2 percent report having eaten a meal at a soup kitchen. More significantly, 13 percent report having been hungry but not eating because they couldn't afford enough food some time in the past year.

Table 15. Economic Hardship (Youth out of Care)

	Total	Gender		Race/Ethnicity			
		Male	Female	White, non-Hispanic	Black, non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Other
<i>How things are going with money</i> ¹							
Saving a little money each month	44.8%	44.8%	44.7%	47.1%	44.6%	45.9%	33.3%
Just getting by	36.8%	35.2%	37.9%	38.2%	33.0%	38.5%	42.9%
Struggling to make it	18.4%	20.0%	17.4%	14.7%	22.3%	15.5%	23.8%
<i>Economic hardships in past year</i>							
Couldn't pay rent/mortgage on time	12.7%	10.3%	14.2%	17.6%	10.6%	12.8%	14.3%
Evicted	4.7%	3.2%	5.8%	2.9%	4.4%	6.1%	0.0%
Gas or electricity shut off	5.1%	5.6%	4.7%	2.9%	5.3%	5.4%	4.8%
Phone service disconnected	19.9%	18.3%	21.1%	20.6%	21.2%	19.6%	14.3%
<i>Hunger in past year</i> ¹							
Got food from church, food pantry, or food bank	5.4%	7.1%	4.2%	5.9%	1.8%	8.8%	0.0%
Ate any meals at a soup kitchen	1.6%	2.4%	1.1%	2.9%	0.9%	2.0%	0.0%
Ever hungry but didn't eat due to lack of money	13.0%	14.3%	12.2%	11.8%	13.4%	12.2%	19.0%

¹ N = 315

12. Health Insurance

Roughly three-quarters of youth out of care at age 19 have some form of health insurance, with the bulk of it being Medicaid (Medi-Cal) (see Table 16). Two-thirds report receiving Medicaid while 8 percent report having insurance from another source. Females are more likely than males to be receiving Medicaid. Whites are more likely than blacks or Hispanics to get health insurance from another source, with nearly one-in-five whites reporting other insurance. Virtually everyone who reported having insurance coverage, either Medicaid or other insurance, reported having dental coverage. Youth receiving Medi-Cal are also eligible for Denti-Cal (Medicaid dental insurance), which likely reflects the high rates of dental insurance coverage.

Table 16. Health Insurance (Youth out of Care)

	Total	Gender		Race/Ethnicity			
		Male	Female	White, non- Hispanic	Black, non- Hispanic	Hispanic	Other
Has Medi-Cal (Medicaid) ¹	67.1%	56.4%	73.8%	55.6%	71.4%	66.9%	60.0%
Has other health insurance ²	8.1%	9.4%	7.4%	19.2%	5.3%	8.1%	10.5%
Has health insurance, any type ³	75.8%	66.4%	81.7%	76.9%	76.8%	75.2%	73.7%
Has dental insurance ⁴	75.3%	65.5%	81.4%	76.0%	76.6%	74.5%	73.7%

¹ N = 304² N = 307³ N = 302⁴ N = 296

13. Physical Health

General Health Status

Table 17 shows tabulations of youths' self-reported general health status. Approximately three-fifths of the study youth self-report their health as excellent or very good. Males report generally better health than females. When compared with a national sample, study youth were as likely to report excellent health, but were much more likely to report only good or fair health instead of very good health.¹⁰

A specific measure of health is the body mass index (BMI), which captures a person's weight status compared with a normal weight for someone at a given age. BMI is used to classify individuals as underweight, normal weight, overweight, or obese. Just over half (55%) of the study sample has normal weight for their height.¹¹ Nearly one-quarter (24%) are overweight with another one-fifth (18%) being obese. Compared with a national sample of similarly aged

¹⁰ Based on authors' tabulations using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth—1997 and tabulations of the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health as reported in Courtney, et al. (2005)

¹¹ BMI is calculated from youth self-reports on their weight and height.

youth, study youth are somewhat more likely to be obese (12% in the national sample) and less likely to be normal weight (62% in the national sample).¹²

Physical limitations are not common with 6 percent reporting having a chronic problem that limits their ability to walk, run, or play.

Table 17. Physical Health Status

	Total	Gender		Race/Ethnicity			
		Male	Female	White, non-Hispanic	Black, non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Other
General health status¹							
Excellent	33.5%	39.5%	29.6%	44.4%	37.5%	27.7%	32.1%
Very good	26.2%	25.3%	26.7%	25.0%	27.4%	24.9%	28.6%
Good	27.1%	24.1%	29.1%	16.7%	20.8%	34.5%	32.1%
Fair	11.7%	8.6%	13.8%	13.9%	11.9%	11.9%	7.1%
Poor	1.5%	2.5%	0.8%	0.0%	2.4%	1.1%	0.0%
Body Mass Index²							
Underweight	3.1%	1.9%	4.1%	0.0%	3.1%	3.7%	3.7%
Normal	55.0%	60.9%	50.7%	61.8%	59.1%	48.1%	63.0%
Overweight	23.8%	22.4%	24.9%	26.5%	20.8%	27.8%	14.8%
Obese	18.1%	14.9%	20.4%	11.8%	17.0%	20.4%	18.5%
Chronic problem limited ability to walk, run, or play in past year¹							
	5.9%	6.2%	5.7%	8.3%	3.6%	7.3%	7.1%

¹ N = 409

² N = 382; does not include pregnant females.

Health Behaviors

As seen below in Table 18, just over half (55%) of study youth report eating fruits or green vegetables four or more days per week. This compares favorably with a national sample where one-third (35%) of comparably-aged youth reported eating fruits or green vegetables at least four days per week.¹³ Similarly, half (51%) of the study youth report engaging in at least 30 minutes of exercise four or more days per week compared with only 31 percent of the national sample. Females in the study sample exercise less than males with over one-third of females reporting

¹² Authors' tabulations using youth self-reports of weight and height in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth—1997.

¹³ Authors' tabulations using NLSY97.

not getting 30 minutes or more exercise on any days in a typical week; the comparable figure for males is 12 percent.

Table 18. Health Behaviors

	Total	Gender		Race/Ethnicity			
		Male	Female	White, non- Hispanic	Black, non- Hispanic	Hispanic	Other
<i>Eat fruits or green vegetables:</i>							
<i>days per week¹</i>							
Never	8.8%	11.7%	6.9%	2.8%	11.4%	7.3%	10.7%
1-3 days	36.0%	35.8%	36.2%	36.1%	32.9%	41.2%	21.4%
4-6 days	22.8%	19.1%	25.2%	19.4%	21.0%	24.3%	28.6%
Every day	32.4%	33.3%	31.7%	41.7%	34.7%	27.1%	39.3%
<i>Exercise: days per week²</i>							
Never	27.0%	11.7%	37.0%	33.3%	20.8%	31.8%	25.0%
1-3 days	22.5%	23.5%	22.0%	13.9%	20.2%	25.6%	28.6%
4-6 days	18.9%	25.9%	14.2%	19.4%	20.2%	19.3%	7.1%
Every day	31.6%	38.9%	26.8%	33.3%	38.7%	23.3%	39.3%

¹ N = 408

² N = 407

Health Care

Nearly three-quarters (72%) of study youth had a physical exam within the past year with females (78%) more likely than males (64%) (Table 19). Three-fifths of study youth had a dental exam in the past year with females again being more likely than males.

About one-fifth of study youth had visited a hospital in the past year due to an accident or injury. However, about one-quarter of study youth did not seek medical care when they thought they should have. The reason given most often (32%) was that they couldn't pay.

Table 19. Health Care

	Total	Gender		Race/Ethnicity			
		Male	Female	White, non-Hispanic	Black, non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Other
Health problems and health care utilization in past year							
Visited hospital due to injury ¹	19.4%	18.0%	20.2%	25.7%	15.5%	19.8%	32.1%
Had a physical exam ¹	72.3%	64.0%	77.7%	62.9%	77.4%	69.5%	71.4%
Had a dental exam ²	60.9%	56.2%	64.1%	52.8%	64.7%	58.2%	66.7%
Didn't get medical care when should have ¹	24.5%	24.1%	24.8%	33.3%	20.8%	26.1%	25.0%
Reasons for not getting medical care³							
Didn't know whom to go see	10.0%	17.9%	4.9%	8.3%	11.4%	8.7%	14.3%
Had no transportation	13.0%	10.3%	14.8%	33.3%	8.6%	8.7%	28.6%
Difficult to make appointment	4.0%	5.1%	3.3%	8.3%	0.0%	6.5%	0.0%
Afraid of what the doctor would do	11.0%	12.8%	9.8%	16.7%	11.4%	8.7%	14.3%
Thought the problem would go away	24.0%	25.6%	23.0%	8.3%	31.4%	23.9%	14.3%
Couldn't pay	32.0%	25.6%	36.1%	25.0%	17.1%	43.5%	42.9%
Other reason	26.0%	25.6%	26.2%	33.3%	28.6%	23.9%	14.3%

¹ N = 408

² N = 407

³ N = 100

14. Mental Health

Table 20 shows several measures of mental health. Seven percent of study youth report having an emotional problem that periodically causes them to miss a day of school, work, or social or recreational activities. Most of these are females, 11 percent of whom report having such a problem, compared with only 2 percent of males. One eighth of study youth report having received psychological or emotional counseling in the past year, with gender differences being small. Similarly, 7 percent report receiving medication in the past year for a psychological or emotional problem with little difference by gender. Spending time in a psychiatric hospital is relatively rare with only 1 percent reporting doing so in the past year. Substance abuse treatment was reported by 3 percent of study youth.

The Adult Self Report (ASR) developed by Thomas Achenbach was administered to study youth at the second follow-up interview to capture behavioral and mental problems (Achenbach et al. 2004). The ASR is composed of multiple subscales capturing different aspects of mental health. Several of these are combined to provide a score for internalizing behaviors, others are combined to create a score for externalizing behaviors, and these plus the remaining subscales are combined to create a Total Problems Score. Each of these scores is compared with national norms to classify adults into normal, borderline, or clinical categories.

Over three quarters of study youth at age 19 are in the normal range for Total Problems. However, 11 percent are categorized as borderline and 13 percent as clinical for behavior and mental problems. Females show somewhat more behavioral problems than males with a significant difference in their rate of clinical categorization for internalizing behaviors (21% for females compared with 9% for males).

Foster youth may experience traumatic events leading to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). At the time of the last interview, 7 percent of youth had symptoms consistent with a diagnosis of PTSD. The rates of PTSD were roughly consistent between males and females and across race/ethnicity groups.

Table 20. Mental Health

	Total	Gender		Race/Ethnicity			
		Male	Female	White, non-Hispanic	Black, non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Other
<i>Mental health problems in past year</i>							
Emotional problem causing youth to miss school, work, or social activities ¹	7.1%	1.9%	10.5%	8.3%	6.5%	7.9%	3.6%
Received psychological or emotional counseling ²	12.5%	11.1%	13.5%				
Received medication for an emotional problem ¹	7.1%	6.8%	7.3%	8.3%	8.3%	5.1%	10.7%
Spent time in a psychiatric hospital ¹	1.2%	1.2%	1.2%	0.0%	1.2%	1.7%	0.0%
Received substance abuse treatment ²	2.9%	3.7%	2.4%	8.3%	1.2%	3.4%	3.6%
<i>Achenbach Adult Self Report (ASR) scale¹</i>							
<i>Total problems</i>							
Normal	76.5%	79.0%	74.9%	72.2%	78.6%	75.1%	78.6%
Borderline	11.0%	12.3%	10.1%	13.9%	12.5%	9.0%	10.7%
Clinical	12.5%	8.6%	15.0%	13.9%	8.9%	15.8%	10.7%
<i>Internalizing behaviors</i>							
Normal	74.1%	77.2%	72.1%	69.4%	76.8%	72.3%	75.0%
Borderline	9.8%	13.6%	7.3%	16.7%	9.5%	7.9%	14.3%
Clinical	16.1%	9.3%	20.6%	13.9%	13.7%	19.8%	10.7%
<i>Externalizing behaviors</i>							
Normal	70.7%	71.6%	70.0%	58.3%	72.0%	72.9%	64.3%
Borderline	10.3%	11.7%	9.3%	25.0%	10.1%	6.2%	17.9%
Clinical	19.1%	16.7%	20.6%	16.7%	17.9%	20.9%	17.9%
<i>Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)</i>	6.6%	4.9%	7.7%	5.6%	7.1%	6.2%	7.1%

¹ N = 409

² N = 407

15. Sexual Behavior¹⁴

Table 21 shows various aspects of youths’ sexual behavior. Four-fifths of study youth report being heterosexual with the remainder identifying themselves as homosexual (5%), bisexual (8%), or “other” (6%). Males were more likely than females to report themselves as heterosexual while females were more likely than males to report themselves as bisexual.

¹⁴ The questions on sexual behavior; alcohol and drug use; delinquency, criminal behavior, and incarceration; and victimization were all collected from the youth using audio computer assisted self interviewing (audio-CASI). The youth uses a laptop computer with headphones to hear the questions and response options and then enters the response directly. This method is commonly used to improve the quality of responses to sensitive questions.

Most study youth have been sexually active with 86 percent having had sex at some time in their life. While 43 percent had initiated sex by age 15, 38 percent had not had sex before the age of 18.

Nearly three-quarters (73%) had been sexually active in the past year. Multiple partners over the past year was common with 29 percent reporting two or more partners over the year; 5 percent reported five or more partners over the past year. Males reported more partners than females with 6 percent of males reporting five or more partners in the past year compared with 3 percent of females.

Birth control or sexually transmitted disease (STD) protection was consistently used by about half (54%) of all sexually active youth. One third of sexually active study youth used protection less than half the times they had sex. Consistent with these findings, only 57 percent used a condom the last time they had sex. Slightly over three-fifths (62%) of study youth were tested for a STD in the past year; 6 percent were treated for a STD. Only one sixth (17%) of study youth received any family planning services during the past year. Even among sexually active youth, those having had intercourse in the past year, only 18 percent had received family planning services.

Table 21. Sexual Behavior

	Total	Gender		Race/Ethnicity			
		Male	Female	White, non-Hispanic	Black, non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Other
Sexual orientation ¹							
Heterosexual	80.8%	85.8%	77.5%	88.9%	82.6%	77.7%	78.6%
Homosexual	5.2%	6.2%	4.5%	0.0%	5.4%	5.7%	7.1%
Bisexual	8.4%	3.1%	11.9%	8.3%	5.4%	10.9%	10.7%
Other	5.7%	4.9%	6.1%	2.8%	6.6%	5.7%	3.6%
Ever had sex ²							
	85.8%	85.2%	86.2%	86.1%	83.9%	89.8%	71.4%
Age at first sex ³							
Less than 12 years old	4.2%	6.8%	2.5%	2.8%	4.8%	4.0%	3.7%
12 - 13 years old	13.4%	18.6%	9.9%	19.4%	10.3%	14.9%	14.8%
14 - 15 years old	25.1%	28.6%	22.7%	19.4%	27.3%	23.4%	29.6%
16 - 17 years old	19.6%	18.0%	20.7%	13.9%	19.4%	22.3%	11.1%
Not by age 17	37.7%	28.0%	44.2%	44.4%	38.2%	35.4%	40.7%
Sexual partners in past year ⁴							
None	26.7%	28.7%	25.4%	16.7%	27.3%	25.7%	42.9%
1	44.1%	32.5%	51.6%	47.2%	43.6%	47.4%	21.4%
2	14.4%	15.6%	13.5%	16.7%	14.5%	13.7%	14.3%
3-5	10.4%	16.9%	6.1%	13.9%	12.1%	6.9%	17.9%
More than 5	4.5%	6.3%	3.3%	5.6%	2.4%	6.3%	3.6%
Percent time using birth control ⁵							
Less than 50%	33.1%	27.7%	36.6%	37.9%	24.6%	40.3%	31.3%
50% - 99%	13.2%	13.4%	13.1%	17.2%	11.9%	13.7%	12.5%
100%	53.7%	58.9%	50.3%	44.8%	63.6%	46.0%	56.3%
Condom use last time had sex ⁶							
	56.8%	64.0%	52.2%	53.3%	67.5%	46.9%	62.5%
STD testing and treatment							
Tested for STDs in past year ⁷	62.2%	55.4%	66.5%	44.8%	69.7%	58.5%	68.8%
Treated for STD in past year ⁸	6.1%	5.3%	6.6%	10.0%	5.8%	4.6%	12.5%
Received family planning counseling							
Among all youth ⁹	16.9%	16.7%	17.1%	5.6%	23.2%	14.8%	7.1%
Among sexually active youth ⁸	17.8%	14.9%	19.7%	6.7%	24.2%	16.0%	6.3%

¹ N = 406

² N = 409

³ N = 403

⁴ N = 404

⁵ N = 287

⁶ N = 296

⁷ N = 294

⁸ N = 297

⁹ N = 408

16. Alcohol and Drug Use

Alcohol and drug use can become a serious problem for young people, especially those living in diminished circumstances or who lack adequate support and guidance. Table 22 shows measures of recent alcohol and marijuana use, alcohol bingeing and heavy alcohol use, and general use of other drugs. For the study sample, 44 percent reported consuming alcohol some time in the past year. Thirty five percent reported consuming alcohol in the past 30 days, though most had done so only a few times during the month. Binge drinking, an indicator of a more serious alcohol problem, was engaged in by 18 percent at least once in the previous month. One in twenty (5%) study youth reported heavy use of alcohol, defined as having five or more drinks on the same occasion (binging) on five or more days in the past thirty days.

Approximately one quarter of the sample used marijuana in the past year, with approximately one fifth having used it in the previous 30 days. One in thirteen (8%) study youth reported using marijuana more than half of the days in the previous month.

Use of other drugs was assessed only over the past year. Amphetamines were the most widely used drug (7%) followed by prescription drugs without a doctor's permission (4%), cocaine (4%), and club drugs (such as Ecstasy) (4%).

Table 22. Alcohol and Drug Use¹

	Total	Gender		Race/Ethnicity			
		Male	Female	White, non-Hispanic	Black, non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Other
Alcohol use in past year	43.5%	50.6%	38.8%	63.9%	35.9%	47.7%	35.7%
Days drank alcohol in past 30 days							
Never	64.9%	54.9%	71.4%	50.0%	74.3%	58.5%	67.9%
1-2 days	17.7%	22.2%	14.7%	27.8%	12.6%	20.5%	17.9%
3-4 days	7.1%	13.0%	3.3%	8.3%	5.4%	8.5%	7.1%
5-14 days	7.4%	8.6%	6.5%	2.8%	6.0%	9.7%	7.1%
15 or more days	2.9%	1.2%	4.1%	11.1%	1.8%	2.8%	0.0%
Days binged on alcohol in past 30 days							
Never	82.3%	75.3%	86.9%	80.6%	90.4%	74.4%	85.7%
1-2 days	8.1%	12.3%	5.3%	8.3%	4.2%	11.4%	10.7%
3-4 days	4.2%	6.8%	2.4%	0.0%	1.8%	7.4%	3.6%
5-14 days	4.4%	4.9%	4.1%	5.6%	2.4%	6.8%	0.0%
15 or more days	1.0%	0.6%	1.2%	5.6%	1.2%	0.0%	0.0%
Level of alcohol use in past 30 days							
Never	64.9%	54.9%	71.4%	50.0%	74.3%	58.5%	67.9%
drank at least once	17.4%	20.4%	15.5%	30.6%	16.2%	15.9%	17.9%
binged	12.3%	19.1%	7.8%	8.3%	6.0%	18.8%	14.3%
heavily use	5.4%	5.6%	5.3%	11.1%	3.6%	6.8%	0.0%
Marijuana use in past year	24.6%	32.7%	19.2%	38.9%	23.4%	23.9%	17.9%
Days smoked marijuana in past 30 days							
Never	80.3%	73.5%	84.9%	72.2%	79.6%	80.7%	92.9%
1-2 days	5.2%	5.6%	4.9%	8.3%	4.2%	5.7%	3.6%
3-4 days	3.4%	6.2%	1.6%	5.6%	4.2%	2.3%	3.6%
5-14 days	3.4%	2.5%	4.1%	5.6%	3.6%	3.4%	0.0%
15 or more days	7.6%	12.3%	4.5%	8.3%	8.4%	8.0%	0.0%
Other drug use in past year							
Amphetamines	7.1%	7.4%	6.9%	13.9%	3.0%	9.7%	7.1%
Barbiturates	2.0%	2.5%	1.6%	2.8%	1.8%	2.3%	0.0%
Tranquilizers	1.5%	0.6%	2.0%	2.8%	0.6%	2.3%	0.0%
Cocaine	3.9%	4.3%	3.7%	2.8%	1.2%	7.4%	0.0%
Hallucinogens	1.7%	1.9%	1.6%	2.8%	0.6%	2.8%	0.0%
Sniffed glue	1.2%	1.2%	1.2%	0.0%	0.6%	1.7%	3.6%
Club drugs	3.7%	3.1%	4.1%	8.3%	3.0%	4.0%	0.0%
Heroin	0.7%	1.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%	1.1%	0.0%
Prescription drugs	4.2%	1.9%	5.7%	11.1%	2.4%	5.1%	0.0%

¹ N = 407

17. Delinquency, Criminal Behavior, Arrests, and Incarcerations

Table 23 shows youths' self-reports of criminal activities, arrests, and incarcerations. At age 19, approximately one-fifth (21%) of study youth report having engaged in one or more criminal activities. The most common activity was stealing something worth less than \$50 (shoplifting) followed by selling drugs. An interesting point to note is that while only two percent of the entire sample were paid for having sex or traded sex for food or drugs, one-tenth of youth who had been homeless at some time in the past year had engaged in this behavior. Similarly, 16 percent of homeless youth sold drugs in the past year, 18 percent stole something worth less than \$50, and 12 percent stole something worth more than \$50, compared with 7 percent, 9 percent, and 4 percent of the entire sample, respectively (not shown in table). Prostitution, selling drugs, and stealing/shoplifting are common survival methods for homeless youth.

By age 19, 22 percent of the study sample had been arrested and 14 percent had been incarcerated.¹⁵ These are likely under-estimates as it is difficult to interview prisoners. Not surprisingly, males are three times more likely than females to have been arrested and almost four times as likely to have been incarcerated.

¹⁵ This could have been either a juvenile or adult facility.

Table 23. Criminal Activities and Criminal Justice System Involvement

	Total	Gender		Race/Ethnicity			
		Male	Female	White, non-Hispanic	Black, non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Other
<i>Criminal activities in past year</i>							
Any criminal activity	20.9%	25.3%	18.0%	25.0%	17.4%	23.3%	21.4%
Involved in a gang fight	4.7%	8.0%	2.4%	0.0%	3.6%	6.8%	3.6%
Carried a handgun	4.2%	6.2%	2.9%	0.0%	3.0%	6.3%	3.6%
Damaged property	3.9%	5.6%	2.9%	2.8%	4.2%	4.0%	3.6%
Arson	1.2%	2.5%	0.4%	0.0%	0.6%	2.3%	0.0%
Stole less than \$50 value	8.8%	11.7%	6.9%	8.3%	7.8%	10.2%	7.1%
Stole more than \$50 value	4.4%	7.4%	2.4%	2.8%	3.0%	5.7%	7.1%
Other property crime	3.7%	7.4%	1.2%	0.0%	3.0%	5.1%	3.6%
Attacked someone	5.9%	7.4%	4.9%	5.6%	6.0%	5.1%	10.7%
Sold drugs	7.1%	8.0%	6.5%	11.1%	5.4%	8.0%	7.1%
Attempted to rape	0.5%	0.6%	0.4%	0.0%	1.2%	0.0%	0.0%
Was paid or traded for sex	2.0%	1.9%	2.0%	0.0%	2.4%	1.7%	3.6%
<i>Arrest and incarceration</i>							
Ever arrested	22.1%	37.0%	12.2%	19.4%	22.2%	22.2%	25.0%
Ever incarcerated	13.5%	24.1%	6.5%	8.3%	11.4%	14.8%	25.0%

¹ N = 407

18. Victimization

Some youth in our study faced violence and other acts that put them in danger, shown in Table 24. The most common victimization was to be robbed, reported to have occurred some time in the past year by 15 percent of the study youth. Twelve percent of study youth reported a gun being pulled on them and 10 percent reported having a knife pulled on them. Three percent reported being shot and 3 percent report being stabbed. Over ten percent of study youth reported being attacked or beaten up. Males were nearly always much more likely than females to be victimized, except for sexually or being paid to be photographed with clothes, each reported to have occurred by 4 percent of both sexes.

Table 24. Victimization in Past Year¹

	Total	Gender		Race/Ethnicity			
		Male	Female	White, non-Hispanic	Black, non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Other
Robbed	15.2%	19.8%	12.2%	16.7%	13.8%	16.5%	14.3%
Attacked or beaten up	10.8%	15.4%	7.8%	11.1%	9.0%	12.5%	10.7%
Victimized sexually	3.7%	3.7%	3.7%	2.8%	4.8%	3.4%	0.0%
Paid to be photographed without clothes	3.7%	3.7%	3.7%	5.6%	3.6%	2.8%	7.1%
Gun pulled on youth	11.5%	20.4%	5.7%	5.6%	10.8%	11.9%	21.4%
Knife pulled on youth	9.8%	15.4%	6.1%	8.3%	8.4%	10.8%	14.3%
Shot	2.9%	6.2%	0.8%	2.8%	3.6%	2.3%	3.6%
Stabbed	2.9%	3.7%	2.4%	5.6%	1.2%	4.0%	3.6%

¹ N = 407

19. Connection to Society

Connecting to School and Work

Making a successful transition to adulthood involves being involved in society’s institutions. A common measure of connectedness captures whether a youth is either enrolled in education or employed (Table 25). In our study sample, nearly two-thirds (64%) were enrolled in school or working at their 19th birthday. Given that vocational training is of importance to this population, we add attending vocational training to the usual connectedness measure and find 69 percent of the study sample to be connected. Males were somewhat more likely than females to be “connected.” Taking into account parenting, over three-quarters (78%) of the study sample were enrolled in school, working, attending vocational training, or taking care of children at their 19th birthday, eliminating the gender difference. Unfortunately, these numbers imply that between 22-32 percent of study youth were not connected to school, work, or vocational training at age 19.

Table 25. Connection to School and Work¹

	Total	Gender		Race/Ethnicity			
		Male	Female	White, non-Hispanic	Black, non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Other
Enrolled in school or employed	64.3%	69.8%	60.7%	61.1%	69.0%	61.0%	60.7%
Enrolled in school, employed, or enrolled in vocational training	68.5%	72.2%	66.0%	61.1%	72.0%	67.8%	60.7%
Enrolled in school, employed, enrolled in vocational training, or parenting	78.0%	76.5%	78.9%	75.0%	78.0%	80.8%	64.3%

¹ N = 409

Connecting to Relatives

In addition to education and employment, youth can connect with society in other ways. Keeping in contact with family may provide youth an important source of support, both financial and social. We have already seen that a significant share of study youth was living with a relative at age 19. Another 42 percent have contact with a relative at least once a week (see Table 26). However, seven percent report having either no contact with any relative or having contact not even once per month.

Table 26. Connection to Relatives

	Total	Gender		Race/Ethnicity			
		Male	Female	White, non-Hispanic	Black, non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Other
<i>Highest level of contact with any relative¹</i>							
No contact	4.1%	4.3%	4.0%	8.3%	3.0%	3.9%	7.1%
Not even once a month	2.9%	4.9%	1.6%	5.6%	3.0%	2.2%	3.6%
Once or twice a month	8.5%	10.5%	7.3%	13.9%	8.3%	7.9%	7.1%
About once a week	8.8%	7.4%	9.7%	5.6%	7.7%	11.8%	0.0%
Several times a week	12.7%	13.6%	12.1%	13.9%	10.7%	13.5%	17.9%
Every day	20.0%	12.3%	25.0%	16.7%	20.2%	21.9%	10.7%
Lives in home	42.9%	46.9%	40.3%	36.1%	47.0%	38.8%	53.6%

¹ Any relative includes biological mother, biological father, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, or older siblings.

Connecting to Society

Other ways in which youth stay connected are through participating in organizations or clubs and through attending religious services. Only one-seventh (15%) of study youth belong to any organization or club (see Table 27).¹⁶

On the other hand, two-fifths (39%) of study youth report attending religious services at least once a month; over half of whom report attending once a week or more. These numbers are comparable with a national sample where 35 percent attending religious services at least once a month.¹⁷ The vast majority of study youth (86%) report that religion is either very important or somewhat important to them.

Table 27. Connection to Society

	Total	Gender		Race/Ethnicity			
		Male	Female	White, non-Hispanic	Black, non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Other
<i>Belong to any organizations or clubs</i>	14.6%	16.7%	13.3%	13.9%	17.3%	10.7%	25.0%
<i>Attendance at religious services</i>							
Once a week or more	22.0%	18.5%	24.2%	19.4%	25.6%	16.9%	35.7%
At least once a month	17.1%	18.5%	16.1%	5.6%	22.6%	15.2%	10.7%
Less than once a month	20.7%	20.4%	21.0%	16.7%	19.0%	22.5%	25.0%
Never	40.2%	42.6%	38.7%	58.3%	32.7%	45.5%	28.6%
<i>Importance of religion</i> ¹							
Not important at all	6.6%	8.7%	5.3%	16.7%	3.6%	8.5%	0.0%
Only a little important	7.1%	6.8%	7.3%	8.3%	5.4%	9.0%	3.6%
Somewhat important	31.6%	37.3%	27.9%	27.8%	22.8%	40.1%	35.7%
Very important	54.7%	47.2%	59.5%	47.2%	68.3%	42.4%	60.7%

¹ N = 408

¹⁶ No national comparison could be found, so it is unknown how former foster youth compare with other youth.

¹⁷ Authors' calculation from NLSY97.

Section 3: How do L.A.'s former foster youth compare with other youth?

Foster youth typically do not resemble the national population of all youth. They are generally more minority and more disadvantaged. Their outcomes are known to be worse than average youth (Barth 1990; Courtney et al. 2001). However, it is still of interest to compare the youth in our study, who have aged out of foster care, with a national sample, in order to understand when and to what degree they fare worse. Toward that end, we compare the study youth with two nationally recognized large-scale data sets: the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth—1997 (NLSY97) and the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health (AddHealth). Because these data sets are based on national sampling frames, we cannot compare specifically with other Los Angeles youth, or even California youth; thus some differences may reflect geographic variation as opposed to involvement in the child welfare system. Differences may also be attributable to differences in race/ethnicity distributions, with minority youth comprising a vastly higher percentage of L.A. foster youth.

To provide further context, we also compare the study youth from Los Angeles with foster youth interviewed as part of the Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth (see Courtney, et al 2005). This study sampled foster youth who were age 17 in Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin in 2002-2003, roughly one year before our study youth were interviewed. The youths' age, time period, and other inclusion criteria make this sample an excellent comparison for our study youth. Midwest youth were interviewed at ages 17, 19, 21 and most recently at age 23. For comparison purposes, we use findings reported for age 19. Like our study, some youth had reached age 20 at the survey date.

It is worth noting that the Midwest sample occurs disproportionately across the three states with 477 of the original 736 interviewed youth living in Illinois (386 in the age-19 follow-up),

196 in Wisconsin (163 at the follow-up), and 63 in Iowa (54 at the follow-up). One important implication of this is that youth in Illinois can choose to stay in care until age 21. Thus at age 19, forty-seven percent of the Midwest youth were still in care

Furthermore, the race/ethnicity distributions are quite different between the L.A. and Midwest samples. While nearly half (43%) of the L.A. sample identify as Hispanic, only 8 percent of the Midwest sample identify as Hispanic. The percentage in the Midwest sample who identify themselves as African American is higher than in L.A., but the difference isn't nearly as large as the Hispanic difference. On a national level, AFCARS data indicate eighteen percent of 17-year olds nationally who were in foster care in September 2004 were Hispanic, while one-third were African American and 46 percent were white.¹⁸ Among all age-19 youth nationally, 13 percent are of Hispanic origin and 15 percent African American.

1. Education, Vocational Training, Employment, Earnings, and Connectedness

Study youth had much lower educational attainment than youth nationally. While 81 percent of youth nationally have a high school diploma by age 19, only 54 percent of L.A. study youth had a high school diploma. Including GEDs only exacerbates the difference as 6 percent of L.A. foster youth had a GED compared with 9 percent nationally. Midwest youth had similar outcomes as L.A. youth with 58 percent having a high school diploma and 5 percent having a GED at age 19.

Nationally, 41 percent of youth were enrolled in college at age 19, with 28 percent enrolled in a four-year college and 13 percent enrolled in a two-year college. L.A. study youth were enrolled at lower rates with approximately one-fourth (26%) in college at age 19. Unlike youth

¹⁸ Based on author's calculation of Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) Foster Care File, 2004.

nationally, these youth were much less likely to be in four-year colleges (6%) and more likely in two-year colleges (19%). Midwest youth had a similar overall rate of college enrollment as L.A. youth, at 24 percent, and were also more likely to be enrolled in two-year colleges (17%) than four-year colleges (7%). Youth in Illinois were enrolled in college at a somewhat higher rate (30%) than in California as well as Iowa and Wisconsin, but still lagged behind youth nationally.

Vocational training is not widely used for youth nationally; however, it appears to be an important resource for former foster youth. Nearly one-quarter (23%) of the L.A. sample attended some vocational training between their 18th and 19th birthday, compared with only 1 percent nationally.¹⁹ The Midwest study did not calculate attendance over this time period, but showed 9 percent enrolled in vocational training at the date of their interview. For the L.A. study youth, enrollment in vocational training at the interview date was comparable at 8 percent.

Nationally, nearly all youth (91%) worked at some time between their 18th and 19th birthday. Foster youth in L.A. did not fare as well with 70 percent working over that year. Similarly, youth nationally worked eight months of that year on average, while the L.A. foster youth worked only 4.7 months on average. Comparing only those youth who worked at some time during the year does not narrow the gap as the national sample workers worked 8.9 months of the year compared with 6.7 months for the L.A. study sample. The Midwest study found that 67 percent of their youth had worked some time during the year leading up to the interview date, a roughly comparable time frame. They did not calculate the total number of months worked by their sample youth.

¹⁹ In both the LST and NLSY97 samples, vocational training was defined as participation in any of the following: business or secretarial school; vocational, technical, or trade school; apprenticeship programs; nursing school; vocational rehabilitation center; correspondence course; community or junior college (other than enrollment in regular school, reported elsewhere); or government training. The Midwest Study specified vocational schools or job training school as an alternative source of educational enrollment.

For those L.A. youth who were working at their 19th birthday, we calculated they worked on average of 35.9 hours per week. This compares with an average of 32.9 hours per week in the NLSY97 sample and is similar to the Midwest foster youth who worked 32.6 hours per week on average.²⁰ For both the L.A. foster youth and the Midwest foster youth, those who worked were less likely to work fewer than 20 hours per week than the NLSY97 sample and more likely to be employed full-time.

While L.A. youth earned only \$8.34 on average, Midwest foster youth fared even worse, averaging \$7.54 per hour. Nationally, 19 year old youth earned \$10.07 per hour; however, this reflects many more youth earning at the higher end of the wage distribution than among foster youth. If we compare medians, the groups do not look as different, with L.A. youth having a median wage rate of \$8.00 per hour; Midwest youth a rate of \$7 per hour, and NLSY97 youth also having a median of \$7 per hour. Some of the difference is likely attributable to California having a higher minimum wage than most states, including the three Midwestern states studied.

Former L.A. foster youth compare favorably with the national AddHealth sample in terms of annual earnings with 18 percent earning over \$10,000 per year compared with 21 percent in the national sample. On the other hand, only 10 percent of Midwest foster youth earned over \$10,000 per year.

Given the higher rates of college enrollment and similar rates of employment between L.A. youth and Midwest youth, it is not surprising to find that L.A. youth are modestly more likely to be “connected” when defined as being in school or work at age 19 (64% compared with 59%). When expanding the definition to include parenting youth, the difference disappears with approximately three-quarters of youth in both sites being either in school, working, or parenting.

²⁰ The median hours worked per week in the Midwest sample was 35; in the L.A. sample the median was 36 hours per week.

These rates are much lower than national rates. The AddHealth sample shows 88 percent either in school or working and 90 percent in school, working, or parenting. The NLSY97 sample shows even higher rates of 97 percent and 98 percent, respectively.

2. Economic Hardship, Homelessness

General economic hardships were similar between the L.A. and Midwest foster youth and generally greater than in the AddHealth sample. Among discharged L.A. study youth, 13 percent had at least one month in the previous year when they could not pay their rent. Similarly 12 percent of Midwest former foster youth could not pay their rent on time at least once while this occurred to only 6 percent of 19-year olds nationally. L.A. youth had a slightly higher rate of having their gas or electricity shut off at 5 percent compared with 3 percent in the Midwest sample and 3 percent nationally. About one fifth of former foster youth (20% in L.A. and 21% in the Midwest) had their phone disconnected because they couldn't pay the bill²¹ compared with 14 percent in the national sample.²² At some time in the previous twelve months, 5 percent of L.A. former foster youth and 4 percent of Midwest former foster youth were evicted, compared with only 1 percent of the national sample.

Measures of hunger differed somewhat between the L.A. youth and the Midwest youth. While only 5 percent of L.A. youth had gotten food from a church, food pantry, or food bank, 13 percent had in the Midwest sample.²³ Similarly, only 2 percent of L.A. youth had gotten a meal at a soup kitchen, compared with 4 percent of Midwest youth. Perhaps as a result of more access

²¹ It is possible that youth could have interpreted this as including not having money to continue a pay-as-you-go cell phone.

²² The national number, derived from AddHealth, overstates the comparison as it measures being without a phone for any reason.

²³ In the Midwest sample, this was defined as "receiving emergency food."

to these types of services, Midwest youth were slightly less likely to not eat despite being hungry because they couldn't afford food (11% compared with 13% of L.A. youth).

L.A. youth were also more likely than Midwest youth to have a period of homelessness post-discharge (19% compared with 14% of Midwest youth).

3. Health Status, Health Insurance and Health Care Utilization

Approximately one-third of 19 year old youth assess their health as "excellent," with little variation between the two foster care samples and two national samples. The distributions of self-assessed health status do not differ much between the L.A. youth and Midwest youth; however, foster youth from both sites are less likely than youth nationally to choose "very good" and more likely to choose "good" or "fair." Few youth in any sample choose to assess their health as "poor."

Although mental health has many dimensions, we have comparable measures with the Midwest study for only post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression. L.A. youth report rates of PTSD of roughly half the reported rates of Midwest youth (7% compared with 13%). Depression rates are more similar between the two samples. Nine percent of L.A. youth indicate clinical depression while 8 percent of Midwest youth indicate major depression and another 1 percent indicate dysthymia.²⁴

L.A. foster youth and Midwest foster youth have similar rates of health insurance coverage at age 19 (76% in L.A. and 71% in the Midwest) and both are similar to national estimates (72% in the NLSY97). This likely reflects the fact that L.A. foster youth can access California's Medicaid program up to age 21. Youth who remain in care in Illinois also have access to

²⁴ The Multi-Site Evaluation used the Achenbach Youth Self Report to measure mental health problems. Two subscales, "anxious/depressed" and "withdrawn/depressed" were combined to obtain this estimate. The Midwest Study used the Composite International Diagnostic Interview (CIDI) to measure mental health.

Medicaid; 98 percent of these youth have health insurance while this is the case for only 44 percent of youth out of care in Illinois. Health insurance coverage is lower for youth from Iowa and Wisconsin, where Medicaid is not available to youth after exiting the foster care system.

Despite the similarity in rates of insurance coverage across the samples of foster youth, their health care utilization rates differ dramatically. L.A. youth are more likely to receive preventative care with 72 percent having had a physical exam in the past year and 61 percent having had a dental exam; Midwest rates were 47 percent and 13 percent respectively. On the other hand, L.A. youth reported higher rates of not receiving medical care when they needed it (25% compared with 14% of Midwest youth).

L.A. youth also report lower levels of mental health treatment than Midwest youth. One-eighth (13%) of L.A. youth reported receiving psychological or emotional counseling in the past year compared with one-fifth (21%) of Midwest youth. Only 7 percent of L.A. youth reported receiving psychological medication compared with 15 percent of Midwest youth and 3 percent of L.A. youth received substance abuse treatment compared with 8 percent of Midwest youth.

4. Marriage and Family

Former L.A. foster youth show considerably higher rates of marriage/cohabitation than Midwest foster youth and somewhat higher than national samples of youth indicate. Seventeen percent of L.A. youth were either married or cohabiting compared with ten percent of Midwest youth.²⁵ National numbers vary with the NSLY97 showing 13 percent of 19 year olds married

²⁵ The higher rate of marriage or cohabitation among L.A. youth is driven in part by this sample's higher proportion of Hispanic youth, one-quarter of whom are married or cohabiting.

or cohabiting and AddHealth showing 16 percent. Both national surveys fall between the Midwest sample and L.A. sample.²⁶

Earlier we saw that many L.A. youth were living with relatives at the time of their age-19 interview. The percentage of youth out of care living with a relative was 41, higher than in the Midwest study (35%), but much lower than national estimates as the NLSY97 shows 79 percent of 19 year olds living with relatives. Nearly all youth in the national sample living with relatives at age 19 were living with their parents (73%). This is in stark contrast to L.A. foster youth, 18 percent of whom were living with their parents after leaving care.

Foster youth in L.A. were nearly as likely as Midwest foster youth to have become parents by age 19. Overall, 21 percent of L.A. youth had become parents compared with 23 percent of Midwest youth.²⁷ For females, the figures are 28 percent in L.A. and 32 percent in the Midwest; for males they are 9 percent in L.A. and 14 percent in the Midwest. Both sites show much higher rates of parenting than for youth in the national samples. The NLSY97 sample showed 11 percent of youth overall were parents at age 19; 16 percent of females and 7 percent of males. The comparable AddHealth percentages are 10, 12, and 7, respectively.

5. Sexual Behavior

Similar rates of sexual initiation by age 19 can be seen for both the L.A. and Midwest samples at 86 percent and 88 percent, respectively. These rates are slightly higher than seen in the AddHealth sample (78%), but closer to the rates found in the NLSY97 (82%). Foster youth

²⁶ Differences in measurement could account for some of the differences; however, the calculations for the L.A. youth and in the NLSY97 were achieved using the same methods, indicating L.A. youth have significantly higher rates of cohabitation.

²⁷ The difference may be smaller than appears as the Midwest Study included some youth who may have become parents at age 20. However, controlling for race and ethnicity would widen the difference between the two samples, as Hispanic youth have higher rates of childbearing at age 19 (28.1% in L.A.) and are more predominant in the L.A. sample.

initiate sexual intercourse slightly earlier than youth nationally. Both the L.A. and Midwest samples show a median age of first intercourse of 15 while AddHealth and the NSLY97 both show medians at age 16.

L.A. foster youth show higher rates of always using birth control when having sex with 54 percent saying they use it 100 percent of the time while only 45 percent of the Midwest sample said they used it “all of the time.” The L.A. sample has rates similar to the NLSY97 which shows 57 percent of 19 year olds nationally use birth control 100 percent of the time. L.A. youth also report higher rates of having used a condom the last time they had sexual intercourse with 57 percent reporting having done so compared with 48 percent in the Midwest study and only 37 percent in the AddHealth sample. Finally, L.A. youth were more likely to receive family planning counseling in the previous year than in the Midwest sample (17% compared with 11%).

6. Substance Use

L.A. foster youth are less likely than youth nationally to drink alcohol and drink less frequently when they do drink. While just over a third of L.A. foster youth (35%) reported consuming alcohol in the past 30 days, well over half of NLSY97 youth did (57%). In addition, 8 percent of youth in the NLSY97 sample reported consuming alcohol on at least half of the days in the previous month; frequent use of alcohol among L.A. foster youth is much lower at 3 percent. The level of binge drinking among L.A. youth was also lower; while 18 percent of these youth reported binge drinking in the past month, this is the case for twice as many youth nationally (35% of NLSY97 youth).

On the other hand, L.A. foster youth have similar rates of initiation into marijuana use as youth nationally, and use it more frequently. The rate among foster youth for marijuana use in

the past year is 25 percent, close to the rate of 22 percent for youth from the NLSY97 sample. Rates of marijuana use in the past month were also similar, with 20 percent of L.A. foster youth and 21 percent of NLSY97 youth reporting use in the past month. However, foster youth were more likely to report using marijuana on half or more of the days in the previous month (8% compared to 5% of NLSY97 youth).

7. Criminal Activities, Arrest, and Incarceration

L.A. foster youth appear to engage in fewer criminal activities than Midwest foster youth. For example, 9 percent of L.A. youth stole something worth less than \$50 in the past year, 4 percent stole something worth more than \$50, and 7 percent sold drugs. The comparable numbers for Midwest foster youth are 11 percent, 7 percent, and 13 percent, respectively. In each case, foster youth show somewhat higher rates than the NLSY97 sample which had rates of 6 percent, 2 percent, and 7 percent, respectively. These same patterns can be observed in measures of other crimes.

Consistent with lower crime rates, L.A. youth are about half as likely as Midwest youth to be arrested and perhaps one-third as likely to be incarcerated, though the latter measure may not be comparable.²⁸ Despite being lower than Midwest foster youth, L.A. foster youth are arrested and incarcerated at much higher rates than 19 year olds nationally. The NLSY97 indicates only 6 percent of 19 year olds ever arrested and only 1 percent ever incarcerated compared with 22 percent and 14 percent, respectively, for L.A. foster youth.

²⁸ The Multi-Site Evaluation asked about being incarcerated due to being convicted of a crime. The Midwest study measured having “spent at least one night in a jail, prison, juvenile hall, or other correctional facility,” which can include incarcerations that were not related to a conviction.

Section 4: Estimating the number of youth likely to stay in care after age 18

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 specifies five conditions that allow youth to remain in foster care and receive federal Title IV-E funds. To qualify, the youth must (a) be enrolled in secondary school or a GED program, (b) be enrolled in post-secondary or vocational education, (c) participating in a program or activity designed to promote, or remove barriers to, employments, (d) work at least 80 hours per month, or (e) be incapable of doing any of the activities described in (a)-(d) due to a medical condition.

We use the LST data, combined with information from two other sources, the Midwest Study of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth in Illinois (hereafter referred to as the Illinois sample) and the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth-1997 (NLSY97), to estimate how many youth would have stayed in care in Los Angeles had the law been in effect during our study period. Additional details for creating these estimates are included in the Technical Appendix.

We first use the LST data to estimate how many youth would have met the eligibility criteria to stay in care until their 19th birthday had the law been in effect. To do this, we created several series approximately matching the conditions for staying in care after age 18. These series indicate on a monthly basis if each condition is met beginning with the month of the youth's 18th birthday through the month of the youth's 19th birthday.

A key issue in making eligibility estimates is that it is unknown at this time how the criteria specified in the law will be implemented. For example, what medical conditions will justify staying in care without meeting the schooling or employment criteria? How long could a youth fail to meet the criteria before being discharged from care?

We use mental health measures available in our sample to represent conditions that might prevent a youth from meeting the schooling or employment criteria. We examined combinations

of measures for mental health and behavioral problems and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The Achenbach Adult Self-Report and Youth Self Report are used to identify youth in the clinical and borderline ranges for mental health problems and the Composite International Diagnostic Interview (CIDI) is used to measure PTSD. We created estimates that reflect different combinations of these conditions. We have not accounted for physical disabilities as few youth have extreme enough situations that would prevent them from meeting the schooling or employment criteria. We also do not account for foster youth with severe developmental disabilities.

Since it is unknown how long a youth can fail to meet the criteria before being discharged from care, we make estimates under two different scenarios: (1) that they must leave care after three months of failing to meet the criteria and (2) that they must leave care after four months of failing to meet the criteria.

The Multi-Site Evaluation only followed LST youth to age 19. To determine whether or not a youth would have been eligible to stay in care at ages 20 and 21, we use propensity score matching to re-weight youth in the NLSY97 so that the sample mimics the education and employment patterns from age 18 to 19 of those in the L.A. sample of foster youth. Based on these matches, we impute the school enrollment and employment for each of our sample youth for each month after their 19th birthday until the month of their 21st birthday.²⁹ We adjust the NLSY97 estimate at the 19th birthday to equal the LST estimate at the 19th birthday.

We then account for the fact that not all eligible youth will choose to stay in care. The Midwest study provides data on Illinois where youth already can choose to stay in care, and can do so without meeting any conditions; thus this sample provides an estimate of the percentage of

²⁹ We are not able to capture in the NLSY97 the other conditions that would allow a youth to stay in care. However, most likely education or employment will be the main criteria keeping youth in care after age 19.

youth who would choose to stay in care (Courtney and Dworsky 2006; Courtney et al. 2007).

After calculating the number of Illinois youth who would have met the new eligibility criteria, we calculate the percentage of these eligible youth who chose to stay in care and apply this to our estimates of eligible youth in the LST sample. We apply separate percentages at each age as youth progressively choose to leave care as they get older.

This combination of data from the Multi-Site evaluation LST sample, the Illinois sample, and imputations based on the NLSY97 provide us with estimated percentages of youth in California who would have been eligible to stay in care under the new law and who would have chosen to do so. Table 28 shows the percentages of youth who would still be in care at their 19th, 20th, and up to their 21st birthdays. The rows represent the different criteria covered by the new law with variations in how we represent health conditions. Each is shown where the youth is allowed to fail to meet the criteria for up to three months and up to four months.

The first row reflects the education, employment, vocational training, and other job-related criteria, forming a base measure. As can be seen, nearly half (48%) would remain in care at their 19th birthday and just over one in five (21%) youth would remain in care until their 21st birthday if we allow them to fail the criteria for fewer than three months. Similarly, 53 percent would remain in care at their 19th birthday and nearly one in four (24%) would remain in care up until their 21st birthday if we allowed them to fail the criteria fewer than four consecutive months.

Adding in various mental health measures intended to capture the criterion for a medical condition that would prevent the youth from meeting the other criteria raises the percentage of youth who would remain in care at each age. By age 21, the percentage of youth remaining in care ranges from one-quarter (25%) to one-third (33%) under the “3-month” condition and from 29 percent to 35 percent under the “4-month” condition. Looking across all estimates that

include at least one health condition under either “month” rule gives us a range of 25 percent to 35 percent of youth who would remain in care through age 21 under the new law.

Table 28. Youth Eligible and Choosing to Remain in Care

	3-month			4-month		
	Age 19	Age 20	Age 21	Age 19	Age 20	Age 21
Criteria a, b, c, d (education, employment, vocational training, other employment-related activities)	47.9 %	27.8 %	20.6 %	52.5 %	30.8 %	24.1 %
Include current measure of mental health conditions ¹	52.9 %	32.4 %	25.2 %	57.4 %	35.4 %	28.7 %
Include broader measure of mental health conditions ²	57.4 %	35.7 %	28.4 %	61.2 %	38.1 %	31.2 %
Include broadest measure of mental health conditions ³	62.7 %	39.6 %	32.5 %	65.4 %	41.0 %	34.5 %

¹Includes a categorization of “Clinical” on the Achenbach Youth Self Report Total Problems Index at age 19 or having

²Includes a categorization of “Clinical” on the Achenbach Youth Self Report Total Problems Index at age 17, 18, or 19 or having PTSD at ages 18 or 19

³Includes a categorization of “Clinical” or “Borderline” on the Achenbach Youth Self Report Total Problems Index at age 17, 18, or 19 or having PTSD at ages 18 or 19

To estimate how many youth would stay in care if California adopts the federal legislation, one would take a cohort of foster youth that emancipate from care at age 18 and project forward to age 21 to estimate how many would stay in care. Given that some youth in California currently remain in care after age 18, we need to include youth who emancipate at ages 19 and 20 as these youth also reached their 18th birthday while in care. Between April 1, 2008 and March 31, 2009, 4,474 youth ages 18-20 emancipated from foster care in California and comprise the youth who would have been impacted by the new law.³⁰

Applying our estimated rates to the number of youth who emancipated from care yields the number of youth who would stay in care if the new law were put into effect in California (see Table 29). Under our three scenarios that include mental health conditions and looking across both “month” scenarios gives us a range of 2,368-2,954 youth who would have remained in care

³⁰ Including youth of all ages, 4,625 youth emancipated from foster care in California during this time period. However, we presume that youth who emancipated before the age of 18 have already made the choice not to remain in care, and would not be affected if California chose to implement the federal legislation.

at age 19 or 53-66 percent of youth who turn 18 while in foster care. Our estimates further indicate that 1,127-1,544 youth who would have remained in care until their 21st birthday.

Table 29. Youth Eligible and Choosing to Remain in Care in California

	3-month			4-month		
	Age 19	Age 20	Age 21	Age 19	Age 20	Age 21
Baseline: criteria a - d (education, employment, vocational training, other employment-related activities)	2,141	1,244	922	2,348	1,380	1,077
Include current measure of mental health conditions ¹	2,368	1,450	1,127	2,569	1,583	1,282
Include broader measure of mental health conditions ²	2,570	1,599	1,268	2,739	1,706	1,397
Include broadest measure of mental health conditions ³	2,807	1,770	1,455	2,924	1,835	1,544

¹Includes a categorization of “Clinical” on the Achenbach Youth Self Report Total Problems Index at age 19 or having PTSD at age 19

²Includes a categorization of “Clinical” on the Achenbach Youth Self Report Total Problems Index at age 17, 18, or 19 or having PTSD at ages 18 or 19

³Includes a categorization of “Clinical” or “Borderline” on the Achenbach Youth Self Report Total Problems Index at age 17, 18, or 19 or having PTSD at ages 18 or 19

Discussion

These estimates indicate that roughly between one-quarter and one-third of all youth who currently age out of foster care in California would be eligible to stay in care and would do so until age 21 if the new law is adopted. Certain caveats must be noted with regard to these estimates. The estimates are derived based on behaviors of youth determined under the existing laws in California whereby youth mostly must exit care after turning 18 or after they complete their secondary schooling, if it will occur before they turn 19. It is possible that passing the new law may change youth’s behavior. Youth who currently do not continue into post-secondary schooling may choose to do so in order to stay in care longer. Likewise, they may choose to enroll in vocational training or other employment related programs.

Furthermore, with a change to keep youth in care, other services that promote these activities may come into being or evolve to serve more transition-age youth. Having people who help the

youth continue with their education, identify vocational training programs, or obtain and keep a job, may keep youth in care longer.

Finally, we note that if one were to estimate the costs to the State of California of keeping additional youth in care, several factors must be considered. Peters, et al. (2009) have discussed a number of these issues including the costs of caring for a young adult, the expected time a youth would stay in care, as well as offsets from reduced usage of other assistance programs (e.g. TANF and food stamps). These costs would have to be augmented by the costs of any additional services to the youth, but should also reflect additional offsets such as lower substance abuse problems, less use of homeless shelters, and lower incarceration rates.

One other important offset is that the a share of the costs now borne by the State or County for youth who are already allowed to stay in care would now come from the federal government through Title IV-E funds. Although most counties in California allow youth to stay in care only until age 18 or until they complete high school (if they will do so before turning 19), Los Angeles County has seen a significant increase in the number of youth allowed to stay in care to later ages. In fact, L.A. County accounts for over four-fifths (82%) of all California foster youth ages 19 and 20.³¹

³¹ As of April 1, 2009. Tabulated from Needel, B., Webster, D., Armijo, M., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Excel, M., Glasser, T., Williams, D., Zimmerman, K., Simon, V., Putnam-Hornstein, E., Frerer, K., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Lou, C., Peng, C. and Holmes, A. 2009. *Child Welfare Services Reports for California*. University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research, <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare>.

Section 5: Implications

In FY2008, nearly 30,000 youth emancipated from foster care in the United States with over 15 percent of these youth in California. Policymakers have come to recognize the difficulty these youth face making the transition to adulthood. The passage of the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act in 1999 provided funding for States to help youth make this transition. With the passage of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, Congress provided the States the option of using Title IV-E funds to allow youth to stay in foster care until age 21 if the youth meets certain conditions, particularly with regard to enrolling in school or working.

Courtney, et al. (2007) show that youth remaining in care past age 18 in Illinois seem to fare better than youth who leave care at age 18. However, a significant percentage of these youth would not be eligible for Title IV-E funds under the new law. This report has demonstrated that in Los Angeles, only 67-85 percent would be eligible to stay in care, *even to age 19*, given the law's requirements; much fewer would be eligible to stay in care to age 21. Nearly one-third of these former L.A. foster youth were not in school, a vocational training program, or employed at age 19.

Few studies have followed former foster youth significantly past the point of leaving care and thus little is known about their pathways into adulthood. Macomber, et al. (2008) showed that youth who age out of foster care have poor employment outcomes at age 24 in general, but follow different trajectories with some youth having relative success in the labor market. After leaving care, some youth succeed while others struggle. For example, it is important to note that nearly one quarter of youth had enrolled in a vocational training program between their 18th and 19th birthdays, a much higher rate than observed in a national sample of 19 year olds. On the

other hand, at age 19 nearly one quarter of males had at some point been incarcerated and over 28 percent of females had become mothers.

The survey described in this report has shown some of the different directions youth take after initially leaving care. However, what becomes of them as time passes? Most former foster youth lack the resources and guidance that other youth receive from their families. Although the former L.A. foster youth have contact with relatives fairly regularly in their first year out of care, only about 43 percent live with relatives at age 19, compared with 79 percent of 19-year olds nationally.

It is the differences between the youth who succeed and the youth who struggle and their outcomes that must be understood in order to design programs and services that can help former foster youth make a smooth and successful transition to adulthood. The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act, combined with Chafee and other funding, provides the State the opportunity to prepare foster youth for the transition out of care and develop the connections to support them after the transition. Without proper support and services while in care and during the transition out of care, foster youth face a potentially life-long deficit that will lead to economic hardship along with other undesirable outcomes. However, it is unlikely that one-size-fits-all programs are appropriate. Alternative avenues for additional education, vocational training, and work experience must be available as well as help with housing, parenting, and mental health problems.

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Technical Appendix

Creating Estimates of Youth Eligibility and Choice for Staying in Foster Care past Age 18 in California

Creating estimates of youth who would be eligible to remain in care and who would choose to remain in care after age 18 required combining information from several data sources. We built upon our initial estimates of eligibility of the Los Angeles Life Skills Training sample with a matched sample from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 Cohort, and refined our estimates to account for youth's choice to remain in care with information from the Illinois sample of the Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth. This appendix will describe each source and how they contributed to our estimates.

Eligibility at Age 19

The Multi-Site Evaluation of Foster Youth Programs examined four independent living programs across the country. The Life Skills Training Program in Los Angeles is a classroom-based life skills program for foster youth. Our estimates are based on information from the sample drawn for the evaluation of this program (LST sample). The evaluation included a survey administered to the youth at ages 17, 18, and 19. The survey comprised a range of topics including youths' living arrangements, physical and mental health, employment, education, criminal behaviors, and victimization, among other topics. We analyzed these areas for youth who had completed both baseline and second follow-up interviews.

Youths' responses to the survey were used to determine their potential eligibility to remain in care at age 19. Our estimates were based upon the federal legislative requirements for reimbursement for youth in care after age 18 in the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-351). This legislation would enable states to use federal dollars to match their funding to allow youth to remain in foster care up to age 21. To be funded through the federal match, youth must fulfill at least one of the following requirements:

- be enrolled in secondary school or a GED program,
- be enrolled in post-secondary or vocational education,
- participating in a program or activity designed to promote, or remove barriers to, employments,
- work at least 80 hours per month, or
- be incapable of doing any of the above activities due to a medical condition.

To determine the eligibility of the LST sample at age 19, we constructed histories of their involvement in activities that would qualify them under federal law to stay in care starting in the month of their 18th birthday and continuing to the month of the second follow-up interview, which occurred for most youth when they were 19 years old. For each month during this time frame, we constructed a series of variables to indicate whether they were 1) enrolled in high school; 2) enrolled in a GED program; 3) enrolled in college; 4) enrolled in vocational training; 5) enrolled in an activity to promote employment; and 6) employed at least 80 hours per month. Criteria (1) and (2) fulfill the first legislative requirement and (3) and (4) address the second legislative requirement, while (5) and (6) correspond to the third and fourth legislative requirements, respectively. Youth were considered to be engaged in these activities in a given month if they were either actively engaged at any time during the month.

The survey included questions about youths' educational enrollment, which included whether currently enrolled, the month and year in which they were last enrolled (if not currently enrolled at the interview), the grade they were enrolled in, the type of school, the highest grade they had completed, and whether they held a high school diploma or a GED (in addition to other information). A youth's school enrollment was therefore based on the grade they reported attending or having last attended, whether they held a high school diploma, and the highest grade they had completed.³²

Youth were considered to be enrolled continuously in school between two interviews if they reported being enrolled at each interview date. For some youth, their transition from high school to post-secondary education occurred in the period between interviews. Based on the dates of their interviews, we assumed that the transition occurred in the July preceding the interview in which they were enrolled in college. If youth had not been enrolled at an interview, but reported having been enrolled since that interview at a subsequent interview, they were considered to be enrolled in school starting in the September prior to either their subsequent interview (if enrolled) or prior to the date they had last been enrolled.

Youth were also asked in the survey about the other types of schooling and training in which they participated. This section yielded information on their enrollment in GED programs, vocational training programs, and other activities to promote employment. Youth were considered to be enrolled in a vocational training program if they indicated involvement in any of the following schools or training programs: business or secretarial school; vocational, technical, or trade program; nursing school; or community or junior college (other than college

³² A couple of youth did not report the grade in which they were enrolled, which meant that they did not specify whether they were enrolled in high school or in college. In these cases, their enrollment was determined based on whether they had a high school diploma and the highest grade they had completed. The distinction between high school and college enrollment does not affect their eligibility.

enrollment already reported). Other school and training program experiences that youth reported were classified as “activities to promote employment.” These included apprenticeship programs; attending a vocational rehabilitation center; being enrolled in Adult Basic Education (or pre-GED programs); or government training. For each of these types of schooling and training, youth provided start and end dates that enabled us to determine the months of their involvement. If youth continued to be engaged in an activity that they had also been engaged in at the previous interview, their participation was considered to be continuous.

The survey also contained a section on employment. This section asked about start and end dates of each job the youth held, as well as other information such as the youth’s hours and wages at each job. To consider whether youth were employed at least 80 hours in a given month, we examined whether they held a job in which they worked at least 20 hours per week at any point in a given month. If youth were employed at one interview and were still working for the same employer at the next interview, they were considered to be continuously employed during the period between the two interviews.

For some youth who began jobs between the baseline and first follow-up interviews, the start date of these jobs were mistakenly not recorded. For these youth, we counted them as employed beginning on their eighteenth birthday.³³ Some youth also refused to provide the start and end dates of their jobs. We considered a range of information to determine when they were employed, including their interview dates and dates of other employment; however, several times we were unable to classify some youth as employed due to this missing information. Lastly, some corrections of reported dates were made when the information was inconsistent with several other pieces of information; for instance, when a job was reported to have ended in a

³³The first follow-up interview was usually not long after their eighteenth birthday, so we assume this did not overestimate employment by any significant amount.

month that preceded its start date, we used information about other jobs to narrow down the correct time frame and apply a corrected date.

With information on the activities in which youth were engaged during each month between their 18th and 19th birthdays, we evaluated whether youth would be eligible to be in care in the month of their 19th birthday. It is unknown how the eligibility requirements will be implemented, but we assume that generally youth will be given time to begin involvement in a qualifying activity or have a period of non-involvement before being released from the child welfare system. Therefore, we estimated rates of eligibility based on two different possibilities: that youth will no longer be permitted to remain in care after three consecutive months of non-involvement in any qualifying activity; or, that they will be given the chance to begin an activity for four consecutive months before becoming ineligible. Therefore, any youth who was not involved in a qualifying activity for three (or four) consecutive months during the period between their 18th and 19th birthdays was considered to be “ineligible” as of their 19th birthday. It should be noted that our calculations presume that youth will not be permitted to re-enter care if they begin to engage in a qualifying activity after entering a period of ineligibility.

The last criterion that would make youth eligible to stay in care under the federal legislation is incapacity to engage in any of the other activities due to a medical condition. The survey administered to LST youth constrains our ability to estimate how many youth might qualify under this criterion; in addition, some youth with severe mental or physical disabilities would have been excluded from the sample altogether. However, we do have several sources of information about the mental health status of youth in the LST sample and it is likely that some youth from the sample would qualify to stay in care due to a mental health issue. Without knowing how states will choose to identify a qualifying medical condition, we present several

possible scenarios of different eligibility rates based on differing definitions of mental health problems.

We first establish a baseline scenario for eligibility limited to the criteria discussed above relating to the first four legislative options. We then augment this baseline using two sources from the youth survey to refine the eligible group based on mental health: the Achenbach Adult Self-Report (ASR) and an assessment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The ASR measures problem behaviors such as anxiety and depression, thought problems, and aggressive behavior. It generates a score that can be classified into either a “clinical,” “borderline,” or “normal” range. We examine three combinations of these two mental health measures: having an ASR score in the clinical range at the second follow-up interview or a positive PTSD assessment at the second follow-up interview; having a clinical ASR score³⁴ in any of the three rounds of interviews, or a PTSD assessment at either the first or second follow-up interview; or having either a clinical or borderline ASR score at any interview, or a PTSD diagnosis at either the first or second follow-up interview. These generate four different possible estimates of eligible youth at age 19.

Eligibility at Ages 20 and 21

The federal legislation grants states the ability to draw matching federal funds for youth up until the age of 21. We cannot assume that youth who meet the criteria at age 19 would continue to do so for the next two years; however, the LST sample was followed only to age 19. To

³⁴ While all youth were administered the Achenbach Adult Self-Report (ASR) at the second follow-up interview, earlier interviews may have included the Achenbach Youth Self-Report (YSR). The YSR is substantively similar to the ASR but intended for youth under age 18. All youth were administered the YSR at the baseline interview. At the first follow-up interview, youth were administered the YSR if they were under 18 or still in care at the time of the interview. Therefore, measures of each youth’s Achenbach score across multiple interviews will include scores from both the ASR and the YSR.

estimate continued eligibility at ages 20 and 21, we used the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth--1997 Cohort (NLSY97). This nationally-representative survey, sponsored by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, includes information on youths' educational enrollment and employment histories. To begin with a more comparable sample, we selected a subset of the NLSY97 youth whose families were below 200 percent of the federal poverty level when the youth was a teenager. Propensity score matching was used to re-weight the NLSY97 sub-sample to look like the LST sample with regards to youths' employment and educational enrollment in each month between the ages of 18 and 19. We then used the re-weighted NLSY97 group's employment and educational status in each month from their 19th to 21st birthdays to extrapolate the LST sample's eligibility to stay in care on their 20th and 21st birthdays, using the process described above.

Since the eligibility rates of the matched NLSY97 sample were based solely on employment and educational enrollment, the difference in eligibility between the LST sample and the matched NLSY97 sample at their 19th birthday was added to the estimated eligibility at ages 20 and 21 to account for the differing definitions of eligibility.

Estimating Choice

Not all of youth who are eligible to stay in care choose to do so. The eligibility rates that we have calculated should therefore not be understood as an estimate of the number of youth who would remain in care if the legislation were implemented. To account for youth's choice to stay in care, we utilized information from the Illinois sample of the Midwest Study of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth (the Illinois sample).

In Illinois, youth are given the choice to remain in care after their 18th birthday, without eligibility requirements. In the Midwest Study sample for this state, the youth who are in care after age 18 are therefore youth who have *chosen* to stay in care. We used Illinois youth who participated in activities similar to those used to calculate eligibility among youth in the LST sample to estimate how many youth in the LST sample who were eligible might choose to remain in foster care. The Illinois sample of 386 youth comprises 280 youth still in care at the age 19 interview (73%) and 106 youth out of care.

The Midwest Study measures many of the same domains as the LST survey. In many cases, the questions asked of LST youth were taken from the Midwest Study and at other times from national surveys utilized by both studies. This creates a significant degree of overlap that enables comparisons between the Illinois sample of the Midwest Study and the LST sample.

To understand how many youth who are eligible to stay in care would choose to do so, we examined what would be the eligibility rates of youth in and out of care in Illinois, if the same eligibility criteria were imposed. We began with the measure of youth's *connectedness* in the Illinois sample, i.e. being either enrolled in school or employed at the time of the interview at age 19. The rate of connectedness among youth in care and youth out of care was used to determine the number of eligible youth in each group, which then yielded the total number of eligible youth in Illinois using the following equation:

$(\text{Rate of connectedness among youth in care}) * (\# \text{ of youth in care}) + (\text{Rate of connectedness among youth out of care}) * (\# \text{ of youth out of care}) = \text{total \# of eligible youth in sample}$

By dividing the number of eligible youth in care (as determined by connectedness) by this total number of eligible youth, we were able to determine the rate of choosing to stay in care among eligible youth (79%).

We then adjusted this estimated rate to account for the other activities that would qualify a youth to stay in care under the new federal legislation. To determine if involvement in vocational training might qualify a youth to stay in care, we needed to estimate the number of youth from the Illinois sample who were involved in vocational training but *not* otherwise connected, i.e. youth who would qualify to stay in care due to enrollment in vocational training who did not already qualify based on working or being enrolled in school.

We used the LST sample to provide the percentage of youth in training programs who were not connected. Applying this rate to the Illinois youth both in and out of care who were in vocational training programs produced percentages that were added to the percentage of eligible youth (based on connectedness) from each group. The same process as described earlier was used to determine the percentage of eligible youth who chose to stay in care (78%) based on these adjusted rates of eligibility.

Lastly, we adjusted the calculations of eligible youth in the Illinois sample based on the mental health eligibility criteria that were selected. The percentage of LST youth meeting each of these criteria who were not already considered to be eligible to stay in care was taken of youth both in and out of care for a comparable group of youth from the Illinois sample. The first criteria for qualifying mental health conditions matches the Illinois youth who have a current assessment of major depression or of PTSD at the age 19 interview. The youth who have a current assessment of depression and are estimated not to be connected are then added to the percentage of youth eligible to stay in care. We then add youth with a current PTSD assessment who are estimated not to be assessed with depression or connected to the group of eligible youth. The same process as described above is then used to determine the rate of choosing to stay in care among eligible youth at each age, with the updated definition of eligibility.

This process is done separately for each group defined by the different mental health criteria. The second group, defined by a clinical ASR or YSR score in any round or PTSD in either of the follow-up interviews, is compared against youth from the Illinois sample with a “lifetime” assessment of major depression (i.e. having had major depression at some time) and youth with a lifetime assessment of PTSD. For the last mental health criterion, no measure in the Illinois sample corresponds well with a borderline ASR or YSR score. Thus, for the group with a clinical or borderline ASR or YSR score in any round or PTSD in either of the follow-up interviews, the percentage of youth from the LST sample who had a borderline ASR or YSR score in any round but never a clinical score (and who are also not eligible under other criteria) was taken of youth with a lifetime assessment of major depression in the Illinois sample. The percentage of youth who had a PTSD assessment in either follow-up interview and never had a clinical or borderline ASR or YSR score is taken of youth from the Illinois sample with a lifetime assessment of PTSD, and added to the group of eligible youth to recalculate rates of choice.

We used the Illinois sample’s interview conducted when the youth were age 21 to estimate the rates at which foster youth would choose to stay in care at ages 20 and 21. Since the youth from the LST sample were not interviewed at 21, we cannot use the same method of adjusting the eligibility rates based on activities other than connectedness.

We determined the overall rate of staying in care among youth in Illinois at age 21 by using the timing of youth leaving care. The Midwest Study report of the Illinois sample provides the number of youth who were discharged from foster care after their 21st birthday. It also reports the number of youth both in and out of care who might be eligible to stay in care based on

connectedness. To determine the rate at which eligible youth choose to stay in care, the following calculation can be used:

$$(\text{Rate of staying in care among eligible youth}) * (\# \text{ of eligible youth}) + (\text{Rate of staying in care among ineligible youth}) * (\# \text{ of ineligible youth}) = (\text{Overall rate of staying in care}) * (\text{total \# of youth})$$

Youth in the Illinois sample were not interviewed at age 20; therefore, we used the midpoint of their connectedness rates at age 19 and age 21 to estimate eligibility. This rate can be applied to the sample of 386 from age 19, and numbers of eligible and ineligible youth substituted into the equation above. The right-hand side of the equation, with the overall rate of staying in care, is based on information from the interview at age 21 on the length of time since leaving care. Youth who had left care within the year preceding the interview are the youth who were in care at age 20. Incorporating each of these elements of information using the equation above, including the ratio of the rates of eligibility to rates of ineligibility, yields the percentage of eligible youth who chose to stay in care at age 20 (61.8%).

The rates of staying in care among eligible and ineligible youth are unknown at age 21 because the interview took place after all youth had left care. We thus assume that the ratio of these rates remained constant from ages 19 to 21. The ratio of the rates that were determined for age 19 is therefore used to solve for the rate of staying in care among ineligible youth at age 21, in terms of the rate of staying in care among eligible youth at age 21. This value is then substituted into the equation above to solve for the rate of staying in care among eligible youth.

Applying Eligibility and Choice Rates

To recapitulate, the base of our estimates for the number of youth who would stay in care in California if the new allowances in the federal legislation were implemented is the rate of eligibility among youth from the LST sample at age 19, as defined through our interpretations of

the qualifying criteria in the legislation. These rates were calculated under two assumptions for how long of a “grace period” youth might have before needing to be involved in a qualifying activity, and were also calculated for three interpretations of how mental health may qualify youth to stay in care. The NLSY97 provided estimated eligibility rates at ages 20 and 21, which were adjusted to match the eligibility of youth from the LST sample at age 19. Each of these rates was multiplied by the rate at which eligible youth would choose to stay in care, calculated based on the experiences of youth in Illinois from the Midwest Study. This produces a percentage of youth in foster care who are both eligible and would choose to remain in care.

To apply this rate to youth in foster care in California, the online Child Welfare Dynamic Reporting System at the University of California at Berkeley was used. This reporting system collects information on foster youth throughout the state and includes their location, age, placement type, and exit type. We examined the number of youth ages 18 to 20 whose exit type was emancipation between April 1, 2008 and March 31, 2009 (the most recent year for which data are available). By multiplying this number by the rates of choice and eligibility for each age, mental health qualification, and grace period assumption, we produce estimates of the number of youth in California who would remain in foster care if youth were allowed to remain in care up to age 21.