Supporting Youth Transitioning out of Foster Care

Issue Brief 3: Employment Programs

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Youth transitioning out of foster care and into adulthood need many supports to navigate the challenges they face. Over the past three decades, federal child welfare policy has significantly increased the availability of those supports. In 1999, the Foster Care Independence Act amended Title IV-E of the Social Security Act to create the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (the Chafee Program). This amendment doubled the maximum amount of funds potentially available to states for independent living services and gave states greater discretion over how they use those funds. In addition to allowing states to provide services such as training in daily living skills, education and employment assistance, counseling, case management, and a written transitional independent living plan, this amendment also allowed them to use up to 30 percent of Chafee funds for room and board.[1] More recently, a provision in the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 gave states an option to extend eligibility for Title IV-E foster care for youth beyond age 18 until age 21. In states that have taken this option, young people can receive an additional three years of foster care support to prepare for the transition into adulthood.

Employment is a key area to consider in serving youth aging out of care. Youth prepared for employment not only benefit financially but also develop important work and relationship skills. In states that have expanded foster care eligibility to age 21, two ways youth are eligible to remain in care past age 18 are by working at least 80 hours per month, or by participating in a program that promotes employment or removes employment barriers. Employment programs serve an important function by helping youth stay in care in participating states. Staying in care has been associated with benefits such as higher earnings and college enrollment (Courtney, Dworsky, and Pollack 2007; Hook and Courtney 2011; Peters et al 2009). Even for youth who do not stay in care past 18 or do not live in states where staying in care is an option, effective employment activities are likely to help the transition to adulthood.

Chafee-Funded Independent Living Services: What We Know About What Works

The Foster Care Independence Act requires that a small percentage of Chafee Program funding be set aside for the rigorous evaluation of independent living programs that are "innovative or of potential national significance." According to the legislation, evaluations must assess programs' effects on employment, education, and personal development. In 2003, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) contracted with the Urban Institute and its partners, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago and the National Opinion Research Center, to conduct the Multi-Site Evaluation of Foster Youth Programs. Of the four programs evaluated using a randomized control design, only one had a statistically significant effect on youth outcomes.[2] Nearly 15 years after the Chafee Program's creation, the Multi-Site Evaluation of Foster Youth Programs is still the only rigorous evaluation of independent living programs for youth transitioning out of foster care. Thus, we still know little about which independent living programs are effective, for which youth they can be most effective, and which program components are essential.

Typology of Independent Living Programs

ACF has again contracted with the Urban Institute and its partner Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago to plan for the next generation of evaluation activities funded by the Chafee Program. As part of that planning process, the research team developed a typology to categorize the array of existing independent living programs. The typology includes 10 categories of independent living programs for youth transitioning out of foster care and into adulthood.[3] This issue brief focuses on the category of programs that aim to improve employment outcomes. It explains why these programs are important, suggests a way to think about the types of existing programs, and summarizes what we know about their effects. It then discusses the need to build an evidence base for these types of initiatives in the context of independent living programs and explores some next steps for moving toward that goal. Although the scope of this brief is limited to independent living programs with an employment focus, some of the issues it raises may apply to independent living programs in other categories.

Employment Outcomes of Youth Formerly in Foster Care

Many studies highlight generally poor employment outcomes for youth transitioning out of foster care. Across the existing literature, youth who age out of foster care are found to have less stable employment and lower earnings than youth in the general population (Courtney et al. 2005; Courtney et al. 2001; Dworsky 2005; Goerge et al. 2002), and many of these trends persist into early adulthood (Courtney, Dworsky, et al. 2011; Macomber et al. 2008; Pecora et al. 2006).

In a study using 13 quarters of administrative records in California, Illinois, and South Carolina, Goerge and colleagues (2002) find that no more than 45 percent of youth aging out of foster care have

any earnings in a given quarter,[4] and a substantial portion (30 percent) of youth in each state had no earnings during the entire study period. Among those who did have earnings, mean yearly earnings were less than $6,000, well below the poverty threshold at the time of the study. Macomber and colleagues (2008) used similar methods to track former foster youth through age 24 in California, Minnesota, and North Carolina. While the majority of youth who aged out of foster care were employed at some point between the ages of 18 and 24, they were less likely to be employed and earned much less compared with youth of similar ages nationwide and compared with low-income youth in their respective states. These findings are consistent with previous studies using state administrative records that have found that the majority of youth formerly in foster care are employed at some point after aging out, but have yearly earnings well below the poverty threshold (Dworsky 2005; Singer 2006).[5]

Studies using survey data from former youth in foster care at different ages present equally concerning employment outcomes. The Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth (Midwest Study) finds that youth previously in foster care in Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin were less likely to be employed and earned lower wages when surveyed at ages 19, 21, 23, and 26 than young people in the general population, though the vast majority did have some work experience (Courtney, Dworsky, et al. 2011; Courtney et al. 2007; Courtney et al. 2010; Courtney et al. 2005; Hook and Courtney 2011). Fewer than half of Midwest Study participants were employed when surveyed at age 23 and age 26. Those who did have employment worked fewer hours per week on average than their like-age counterparts in the general population. Similarly, results from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study (Pecora et al. 2006) show that family foster care alumni between 20 and 33 years old in Oregon and Washington state were less likely than the general population to be employed at the time they were interviewed, and one-third lived in households at or below the poverty threshold.

Given the disconcerting employment outcomes for youth after exiting foster care, independent living programs that provide effective career development, employment training, and job placement services for youth in care as well as those who have transitioned out are especially important. Dworsky and Havlicek (2010) find that 63 percent of 17- and 18-year-old Midwest Study participants in Illinois reported receiving at least one employment or vocational support while in care. Among alumni in the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study, 84 percent reported having access to employment training or job location services (Pecora et al. 2006). Employment-related supports are less commonly received, however, after youth exit care: only 43 percent of Midwest Study participants in Illinois reported receiving any at age 19 and only 30 percent at age 21 (Dworsky and Havlicek 2010). In a study of foster care alumni in Utah, fewer than one in five reported receiving job training or workforce development services through Workforce Investment Act program providers within three years of leaving care (Singer 2006).

Existing Youth Employment Programs

Initiatives that aim to increase youth employment prospects or link youth to jobs have existed for decades and target several youth populations. The Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration administers several employment access and training programs for youth; locally, they

are usually run by workforce investment boards. These programs currently include YouthBuild, Job Corps, and the Summer Youth Employment Program, detailed in table 1. Further, Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funding for youth activities gives funds to states for a variety of work-related youth programs. Under the WIA's reauthorization in 2014 , it was replaced by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which requires that 75 percent of its funding support out-of-school youth, compared with WIA's 30 percent.[6]

Outside the Department of Labor, the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe program provides mentoring and training in a military-like environment, while the Youth Corps program combines job training with community service. Various nonprofit organizations, sometimes partly funded by one or more of these federal youth programs, also offer jobs or training for youth. Some of these, such as Year Up, the Urban Alliance High School Internship Program, and Juma Ventures' job program for youth, have expanded from one urban area to multiple sites.

Compared with adult employment programs, employment programs for youth tend to be both longer-term, usually lasting six months to several years, and more comprehensive, providing services other than a job or a training course. Commonly, programs will provide academic support, youth development or life skills training activities, and case management. The most intensive programs also provide a residential component. The provision of many different services at an intense level reflects the difficulty of generating positive youth employment outcomes and may explain why jobs programs for disadvantaged youth are expensive (Mitchell et al. 2003). Programs primarily serving out-of-school youth, many of whom have dropped out of high school, are the most intensive; they often involve a full-time commitment, and they outnumber job or job training programs for youth still in high school.

The programs discussed above serve foster youth to different degrees. Department of Labor youth services programs authorized by the Workforce Investment Act are open to youth ages 16–21 who are in foster care or emancipated. YouthBuild has a program population that is 10 percent youth currently or formerly in foster care—that population is 8 percent in the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe, 3 percent in Youth Corps, 20 percent in Juma Ventures, and 22 percent in Project Rise.[7] Though these programs are able to serve youth in or formerly in foster care, they do not typically target this population. However, as mentioned above, youth transitioning out of foster care often receive some employment services, such as help with job search or career counseling, through their general independent living program. Further, there are employment initiatives that exclusively serve these youth. Such programs often offer other services to address related needs such as education; examples are shown in table 2.

TABLE 1

Summary of National Youth Employment Initiatives

Program	Youth served	Duration	Program Elements: Training (hard skills)	Training (soft skills)	Job or internship	Job development	Mentoring, counseling	Educational support	Residential
Federal programs									
Job Corps	Ages 16–24, low-income, out-of-school, most lack high school diploma	8 months (average), 6 months follow up	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
National Guard Youth ChalleNGe	Ages 16–18, out-of school	5 months, 12 months follow up		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Summer Youth Employment Program	Ages 14–21 63% in school youth	Summer, 27 hours a week (average)	✓	✓	✓			✓	
YouthBuild	Ages 16–24, low-income, 94% out-of-school	6 months–2 years, 9 months follow up	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Youth Corps	Ages 16–25, 60% no high school diploma	6+ months for half of participants	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Examples of other multisite programs									
Juma Ventures	High school students	Part time			✓		✓		
Urban Alliance High School Internship Program	High school seniors at low-performing schools	12 months, 10 hours a week	✓	✓	✓		✓		
Year Up	Ages 18–24, low-income, high school graduates	12 months, full time	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Project Rise	Ages 16–24, out-of-school, low reading level, lack high school diploma	12 months, 25–30 hours a week		✓	✓		✓	✓	

Source: Authors' review of the literature and discussions with program administrators and evaluators.

Notes: Job development includes assistance with job search, job placement, shadowing, job fairs, etc. Educational support includes tutoring, postsecondary education planning, and academic classes. Foster youth are those currently or formerly in foster care. Other supportive services, such as referrals to other service providers, help opening a bank account, or rental assistance may be provided by some programs for a subgroup of participants in certain programs.

TABLE 2

Sample Employment-Focused Programs for Youth in Foster Care

		Youth Served		Program Elements					
Program	Duration	Age	Foster status	Training (hard skills)	Training (soft skills)	Job or intern-ship	Job develop-ment	Mentoring, counseling	Educa-tional support
San Diego Workforce Partnership foster youth program	18 months	16–21	In care and emancipated		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
First Place for Youth's Steps to Success program (California)	One year or longer	18–24	In care and emancipated				✓	✓	✓
New Beginnings Fellowship Program (Alameda County, CA)	6 months	18–24	Mostly emancipated	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Casa Pacifica CITY Youth Employment Program (California)	9-18 months	18–21	In care		✓	✓		✓	
Urban Alliance Young Adult Internship Program (Baltimore)	20 weeks	18–20	In care	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
The Academy at FEGS Health and Human Services (New York City)	No predefined length	16–21	In care		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Foster Forward's Works Wonders Initiative (Rhode Island)	6 months	14–21	In care and emancipated	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Community Assistance Programs (Chicago)	4 weeks training, <=8 weeks - job	16–21	In care	✓	✓	✓			
Added Chance, Alternative Schools Network (Chicago)	9 months	16–21	In care		✓	✓	✓	✓	
MY TIME, Lawrence Hall Youth Services (Chicago)	8 days training, job length variable	17–20	In care		✓	✓		✓	

Source: Authors' review of the literature and discussions with program administrators and evaluators.

Notes: Job development includes assistance with job search, job placement, shadowing, job fairs, etc. Educational support includes tutoring, education planning, and classes. Other supportive services, such as referrals to other service providers, help opening a bank account, or rental assistance may be provided by some programs for a subgroup of participants.

Effectiveness of Youth Employment Programs

Although youth employment programs have existed for decades, the field has not found much evidence of their effectiveness. There have been randomized controlled trials (RCTs) of several major federal programs—the Job Training Partnership Act programs, Job Corps, the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe, the Center for Employment Training model, and Youth Corps—but only the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe evaluation shows long-term positive effects specifically on youth employment (see table 3). After three years, the program group had an employment rate 7 percentage points higher and earnings 20 percent higher than a control group; they were also more likely to obtain college credits, a high school diploma, or a GED (Millenky et al. 2011). Job Corps also demonstrated short-term effects on earnings and employment, literacy, rate of receipt of GED or vocational certificate, and crime. However, after 5 to 10 years, only the subgroup of youth ages 20–24 at the time of participation had statistically significantly higher earnings than the control group (Schochet, Burghardt, and McConnell 2006).[8]

TABLE 3

Evaluations of Youth Employment Programs

Program	Key services	Method	Findings
Evaluations of federal programs for youth			
YouthBuild	Job training, job in construction, alternative school, leadership development	Cost study/ Implementation study	One study finds that compared with three other major federal jobs programs, YouthBuild is relatively costly and produces similar academic outcomes and worse employment outcomes (Mitchell et. al 2003). Youth report more engagement with their communities and a greater sense of personal responsibility after participating than at baseline (Tomberg 2013).
Job Corps	Job, life, and academic skills training; job search and placement; residential living	Randomized controlled trial (RCT)	Despite short-term effects on earnings and employment, only the subgroup of older youth, ages 20–24, had long-term earnings impacts. The program is cost effective for this subgroup, but not for the wider population served. It had a positive impact on receipt of GED and vocational certificates and literacy level, and reduced crime by 5 percentage points (Schochet et al. 2006).
Job Training Partnership Act	Job search, job training, basic education, work experience	RCT	Although Job Training Partnership Act programs had a positive impact on adult earnings and employment, they had little or no effect on youth employment or the earnings of female youth, and a negative impact on the earnings of male youth (Bloom et al. 1993)
National Guard Youth ChalleNGe	Job and life skills training, job and education counseling, residential living	RCT	The treatment group was 7 percentage points more likely to be employed and earned 20 percent more than the control group. The treatment group was more likely than the control group to obtain college credits, a high school diploma, or a GED (Millenky et al. 2011).
Center for Employment Training	Job training, academic skills instruction	RCT	There was no lasting impact on earnings or employment, though this may have been caused by widespread infidelity to the Center for Employment Training program model (Miller et al. 2005).

Program	Key services	Method	Findings
Youth Corps	Job training, job in community, academic support	RCT	No impacts were found on educational attainment or employment, but participants were more likely to report that they planned to complete at least some college (Price et al. 2011).
Evaluations of local programs for youth			
Young Adult Literacy Program (New York City)	Internship, literacy and math education, job skills training	Cluster randomized design	Students with a paid summer internship to complement the literacy program attended more class hours and improved their math grades a full grade letter more than those without the internship (Meisch et al. 2011).
AfterSchool Matters (Chicago)	Paid apprenticeship experience	RCT	No impacts were found on marketable job skills or academic outcomes, but the study found a reduction in problem behaviors and more markers of positive youth development (Hirsch et al. 2011).
Youth Violence Prevention Employment Initiative (Boston)	Paid internship, usually at a nonprofit organization	RCT	Participants evidenced a reduction in adverse social behaviors such as violence and drug use, compared with a control group that was randomly assigned but differed in statistically significant ways from the treatment group (Sum et al. 2013).
Summer Career Exploration Program (Philadelphia)	Summer job in the private sector, job training, college student mentor	RCT	There were no effects on high school graduation, college enrollment, attitudes toward work or school, or sense of self-efficacy. A positive impact was found on the likelihood of enrolling in a college preparatory or specialized academic program (12 percent, versus 8 percent for the control group) (McClanahan et al. 2004).
Year Up (Boston, New York City, Providence)	Job training, internship, mentoring	RCT	In the year following participation, program group youth earned on average $2.26 more per hour than the control group. There was no impact on likelihood of college attendance (Roder and Elliot 2011).

Source: Authors' review of the literature and discussions with program administrators and evaluators.

A study of the replication in five sites of the Center for Employment Training in San Jose found no lasting impact on earnings or employment, possibly because of a lack of fidelity to the program model (Miller et al. 2005). The Youth Corps evaluation found no effects except for an increased likelihood of planning to attend college (Price et al. 2011). YouthBuild has not yet been rigorously evaluated, though an RCT is currently being funded by the Department of Labor. A previous cost-effectiveness study finds that compared with Job Corps and three youth jobs programs no longer in existence, YouthBuild has no better outcomes and is more expensive (Mitchell et al. 2003).

There are a handful of rigorous evaluations of local or regional youth programs, some of which have found modest positive impacts. In a random assignment evaluation, the Year Up program, designed for youth with a high school education, demonstrated a positive effect on earnings after one year (Roder and Elliot 2011). ACF is currently evaluating the Year Up program in eight sites as part of the Innovative Strategies for Increasing Self-Sufficiency Evaluation. Other programs have also shown positive effects, but not on employment outcomes. In New York City's Young Adult Literacy Program, funded by its Center for Economic Opportunity, youth participants who also worked in a summer internship program

attended more class hours and improved their math grades more than those without an internship (Meisch et al. 2011). Participants in the After School Matters apprenticeship program and in Boston's Youth Violence Prevention Employment Initiative had fewer problem behaviors than control group members (Hirsch et al. 2011; Sum, Trubskyy, and McHugh 2013), and youth involved in the Philadelphia Summer Career Exploration Program were 4 percentage points more likely to enroll in a college preparatory or specialized academic program than youth who did not participate (McClanahan, Sipe, and Smith 2004). The Young Adult Internship Program, a New York City Center for Economic Opportunity program offering disconnected 16–24-year-olds a 10–12 week paid internship followed by nine months of job and education placement assistance, is currently undergoing an ACF-funded RCT conducted by MDRC. A previous study of the program's participant outcomes found that having a high school diploma and having a higher level of family income were associated with program completion (Westat and Metis Associates 2009).

The literature on employment programs specifically for youth in foster care is limited (see table 4). Only one local program serving youth aging out of foster care has been rigorously evaluated. The experimental evaluation of the Kern County, California, Independent Living – Employment Services program found no positive effects on employment or other key outcomes (Courtney, Zinn, et. al 2011). The Kern program, operated in partnership with the county Temporary Assistance for Needy Families agency, provided limited outreach to and engagement of potential program participants; most youth referred to the program during the experiment received little more than a monthly newsletter and only about one-quarter received in-person help from program staff.

Other nonexperimental studies have investigated outcomes of participants in employment programs serving youth in foster care through tracking of program participants' outcomes. Only some studies have found a correlation between receipt of employment services through a general independent living program and improved employment outcomes. For example, using Midwest Study data to predict employment outcomes at age 24, Hook and Courtney (2011) found no association between the number of such services youth reported receiving and their employment and earnings. Alternatively, the Foster Youth Demonstration Project found that youth who receive employment services for more quarters are much more likely to secure a paid job after participating than those served for fewer quarters,[9] with 32 percent of youth with 1–3 quarters of job preparation services employed compared with 100 percent of youth with 7–9 quarters (Institute for Educational Leadership 2008). Youth in Sonoma County's Youth Ecology Corps gained work skills after a summer of participation, but current or former foster youth were less likely to gain entry level skills than other disadvantaged youth participants (Sirna 2013). The postprogram employment of youth served by the Employment Programs and Life Opportunities for Youth (EmPLOY) demonstration sites was not significantly impacted by what services they received (Ellis et al. 2011).

TABLE 4

Evaluations of Employment Programs for Youth in Foster Care

Program	Key services	Method	Findings
Kern County Independent Living – Employment Services program	Job search assistance, connecting with community resources	RCT	No impacts on employment or other key outcomes were found. Treatment group youth were also not more likely to report receiving employment related services (Courtney, Zinn, et al. 2011).
Foster Youth Demonstration Project	Varied: commonly job and college preparation; basic education	Nonexperi-mental	Youth who participated for more quarters were more likely than those participating for fewer quarters to secure a paid job. Among those with 1–3 quarters of job preparation services, 32 percent had a job, compared with 100 percent of youth with 7–9 quarters (Institute for Educational Leadership 2008).
Sonoma County Youth Ecology Corps	Workforce training, ecosystem education, career development	Nonexperi-mental	After the summer internship, current and former foster youth—who made up 13 percent of participants—were less likely to have obtained entry-level skills than the other disadvantaged youth served (Sirna 2013).
Employment Programs and Life Opportunities for Youth (EmPLOY)	Goal assistance, career planning, job search, academic assessment, transportation	Nonexperi-mental	The type of services accessed by participants had no significant impact on likelihood of employment after participating. Employment attainment was likely for youth with fewer foster care placements (Ellis et al. 2011).

Source: Authors' review of the literature and discussions with program administrators and evaluators.

Considerations for the Field

In order to deepen our understanding of the field, in January 2014 we convened researchers, program managers, and federal staff with experience in employment programs and evaluations for youth generally and youth in foster care. Based on our research and this discussion, we have identified several broad issues for the field to consider as we move toward the next evaluation of the Chafee Program:

- **Combining employment with other services.** Employment services may be part of a broader package of supports for youth in foster care or they may be provided as a stand-alone service. Particularly in the case of employment programs offering a full-time job as the main component, there may be little room in the program for other services. But given that youth in foster care often benefit from multiple forms of support, there is a rationale to supplement employment services with other components to ensure that all needs are met, and programs must determine to what extent they will do so. Some programs find this to be a necessary step—for instance, staff at First Place for Youth in Oakland believe that employment services are not successful if not offered in conjunction with housing. Transportation is another potential complementary service; some youth struggle with affording or managing transportation to a job and would be helped by transportation subsidies or a savings match for vehicle purchase. Services that support young parents, too, could be combined with

employment services. Combining these different services may be complicated for programs that currently offer only employment services since they may need to develop partnerships, funding, and broader service expertise to create comprehensive programs. Combining services may also pose challenges for evaluation, because isolating the effect of the employment services will be difficult.

- **Program intensity.** As the evaluation of the Kern County program demonstrated, simply providing youth with a newsletter containing employment information is probably not sufficient to affect their behaviors. Still, it is unclear what level of program intensity, in terms of program length and time commitment during participation, is needed for positive impacts. Both intensity and an evaluation's ability to measure any treatment effect may be a factor in programs' measured success.

- **Targeted youth and their unique needs.** The specific attributes and needs of youth in foster care, and subgroups of these youth, may be important in designing employment programs. Age and job readiness may influence what type of program will be most effective. For example, age may influence whether a youth is best-suited to a program offering general career exploration or one designed to put youth on a specific career trajectory. Some youth may be ready for a job in a professional setting; others may lack basic skills and do best in a "sheltered" internship at the program provider's offices. Participants' foster care placement type, which is related to some employment and earnings outcomes (Dworsky and Havlicek 2010), can affect a program's success. For instance, an internship program may more successfully serve youth in family foster care because of the transportation the family can provide, while a job training program focused on computer literacy may be inappropriate for youth in transitional living settings that lack computers. Youth with a high degree of mobility, in terms of placement or geographic location, may need specialized services; those who are parents may need help accessing affordable child care; those with prior involvement in the criminal justice system may need support in addressing structural barriers to employment; those with physical or mental disabilities may need extra supports to obtain and maintain employment; and those with low levels of education, which have been associated with poorer employment outcomes for youth in foster care (Hook and Courtney 2011), may need services that address their specific employment obstacles. For example, programs may want to help youth in some of these subgroups earn a high school diploma or a GED while they gain workplace experience and skills.

- **Serving youth or the adults in their lives.** The intended recipients of employment programs are an important consideration. Some programs may wish to target foster parents, group care providers, or other adults as well as the youth, so that these adults can boost the youth's chances of success. For instance, some adults may not know how to prepare a youth for the workplace, or parents may take away a young person's job as a punishment, not understanding the detriment to the youth. Thus, in some cases, parents and other caretakers may also benefit from training in these and other topics.

- **Partnerships with employers.** For programs that involve a job or internship component, connections with employers are necessary in order to arrange for youths' job positions. The ease of establishing these partnerships will affect how many youth can be served and what type of job experience can be offered. As is common for many programs offering job placements, regardless of the program's target population, potential partners sometimes cannot participate due to financial constraints. Finding willing employers is not the only consideration; some programs may wish to provide employers with training on how to supervise and mentor youth in foster care. In a qualitative evaluation of the EmPLOY program, staff identified three key elements that supported positive employment outcomes: a job developer present on site, work experiences that are paid, and job retention services (Ellis et al. 2011). The program sites that lacked an on-site job developer to engage employers and youth were not as successful in maintaining strong connections with the employers.

- **Soft skills versus hard skills.** Employability is not affected solely by possession of the technical skills required for a job; youth also must learn soft skills necessary for a collaborative work environment, such as interpersonal skills, conflict resolution, self-advocacy, and emotion regulation. Given the likelihood of a trauma history for youth transitioning out of foster care, emphasizing the development of such skills in employment programs could be especially important, and setting goals for their attainment—instead of a goal of increased wages or hours worked—may be appropriate for some programs.

Conclusion

Helping young people transitioning out of foster care connect to employment and develop the skills necessary to succeed in the workplace is important to ensuring lasting economic self-sufficiency for this vulnerable population. Without steady employment and a livable wage, economic stability is an elusive goal for anyone—especially former foster youth who may not have many social supports. Despite the importance of preparing youth for employment, there is little rigorous evidence indicating whether and how employment programs for disadvantaged youth lead to positive long-term employment outcomes. Currently, it is common for youth programs to combine employment-related services with education supports or a caring mentor, but further research is needed to identify the effective mechanisms and scalability of these interventions.

As the field of youth employment continues to experiment with and evaluate the effectiveness of program models for vulnerable youth, particular attention should be paid to the specific challenges and barriers to employment that young people face when transitioning out of foster care. In recent years, programs designed specifically for young people aging out of foster care have emerged, but the field's understanding of the successes and challenges of these programs is still limited. Only one program designed specifically for this population has been rigorously evaluated and it found no positive effect on employment or other key outcomes. Better understanding the effective components and approaches of such programs will be critical to serving this population and ensuring positive life outcomes for future generations of youth who transition out of care into adulthood.

Notes

1. The use of Chafee room and board funds varies by state. The most common uses of these funds include covering rental start-up costs, ongoing support, and emergency uses. More information on how states use Chafee funds for housing needs can be found in Pergamit, McDaniel, and Hawkins (2012).
2. For the final reports from the Multi-Site Evaluation of Foster Youth Programs, please see "Multi-Site Evaluation of Foster Youth Programs (Chafee Independent Living Evaluation Project)," Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, accessed June 26, 2014, http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/abuse_neglect/chafee/index.html.
3. The 10 categories include education services, employment services, housing, mentoring, behavioral health services, permanency enhancement, pregnancy prevention, parenting support, financial literacy and asset building, and multicomponent services.
4. The 13 quarters included the 4 quarters leading up to the youth's 18th birthday, the 8 quarters after his or her 18th birthday, and the quarter that included the youth's birthday.
5. Dworsky (2005) and Singer (2006) use administrative data from Wisconsin and Utah, respectively, to examine employment outcomes for youth after discharge from foster care. These studies look at outcomes two and three years, respectively, after exiting the foster care system.
6. The Workforce Investment Act funds workforce development programs for youth age 14 to 21 who meet one of the following criteria: deficient in basic literacy skills; a school dropout; a homeless, runaway, or foster child; pregnant or a parent; a criminal offender; or in need of additional assistance to complete an educational program or to secure and hold employment.
7. Estimates of the percentage of participants currently or formerly in foster care for the other programs listed in table 1 were not readily available.
8. The age of participants ranged from 16 to 24. Neither the group as a whole nor the subgroup of younger youth had sustained earnings impacts.
9. Because youth participation across the five sites was staggered but employment data was collected up to one common end date (June 30, 2007), employment data were available for some youth for approximately two years after enrollment, while only one year of data were available for others.

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Acknowledgments

This issue brief is one of three that focus on programs providing services to youth transitioning out of foster care in three common service domains: education, employment, and financial literacy and asset building. These briefs highlight why these services are important to youth currently or formerly in foster care, what we know about the current types of programs and services offered, and the effectiveness of these services. Drawing on a review of existing research and convenings conducted with researchers, program managers, and federal staff, the briefs also address remaining research gaps and how the available evidence should inform future planning for evaluation activities. This brief series is a product of the Planning a Next Generation Evaluation Agenda for the John H.

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