POLICY ANALYSIS OF CALIFORNIA FOSTERING CONNECTIONS TO SUCCESS ACT OF 2010

By

Brian W. Rose,
School of Social Work
California State University, Long Beach
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Introduction

- Emancipated, or “aging out” youth (18+) is considered to be the separation of a foster care youth from the State’s child welfare system (Berzin, Singer, & Hokanson 2014).

- Youth in transition from foster care to adulthood have an increased probability of not obtaining a high school diploma, have lower wages, lower earnings, higher rates of homelessness, an increased chance of becoming involved with the criminal justice system, and a high utilization of public welfare assistance services after exiting foster care (Courtney et al., 2007a; Courtney, Dworsky, Lee, & Raap 2010; Culhane, Metraux & Moreno, 2011; Hook & Courtney 2011; Osgood, Foster, & Courtney 2010).

- The California Fostering Connections to Success Act, or called Assembly Bill 12 (AB 12) is California’s legislation to improve the outcomes of foster care youth. This law permits the extension of assistance to eligible child welfare and probation youth who agree to remain in foster care until age 21.

- The purpose of this thesis was to analyze the California Fostering Connections to Success Act of 2010, by looking at the values, theoretical goals, implications of the policy, and the outcome of services for the target and non-target populations.
Social Work Resonance of the Policy

Knowing the most recent laws and guidelines set down by the government both locally and nationally is essential to the performance of an effective social worker. Social workers have a duty and responsibility to advocate for a disenfranchised population like emancipated foster youth.

This policy analysis of Assembly Bill 12 can help social workers understand the impact and options now afforded to transitional age foster youth (18-21) exiting the child welfare system.
Literature

- Former foster youths have lower levels of success completing high school, obtaining a General Education Diploma (GED), and attending a post-secondary educational institution (vocational, 2-year college, or 4-year college) than youths who were not in foster care. The education gap between the foster youth population and a non-foster youth group can be seen in many comparison studies (Berzin et al., 2014; Courtney et al., 2007b; Courtney et al., 2010; Culhane et al., 2011; Lee & Berrick, 2014).

- Not having a high school diploma or GED lead former foster youth to a lower likelihood of finding employment, keeping current employment, and earning a livable wage and therefore will not achieve an independent lifestyle (Culhane et al., 2011; Lee & Berrick, 2014; Macomber et al., 2008; Narccarto, Brophy, & Courtney, 2009).

- When exiting child welfare, former foster youth an increased risk of experiencing homelessness when compared to non-foster care youth with similar backgrounds (Berzin et al., 2011; Berzin, Singer, & Hokanson, 2014).

- A foster youth exiting the child welfare system have a higher rate of arrest and/or experienced multiple arrests when compared to their non-foster peers nationally (Courtney et al., 2010). Within Los Angeles county alone approximately two-thirds of former foster youth have had at least one stay in jail in the first year after exiting foster care (Culhane et al., 2011).

- The combination of low employment and low educational outcomes has consequences which effects former foster youth’s living conditions and will continue to make them a vulnerable population (Osgood et al., 2010). Former foster youth will then have higher rates of public assistance reliance than the rest of the population (Courtney et al., 2010). In California, this leads to older youth exiting foster care having a harder time adjusting to adult self-sufficiency and continue to rely on public support services (Byrne et al., 2014).

Thru AB 12, extending foster care services may give the youth a chance to becoming self sufficient.
Methods: Policy Analysis Framework

Gil’s (1992) methods are well established and will provide a clear and concise outline to a complex issue.

SECTION A: ISSUES DEALT WITH BY THE POLICY
2. Casual theory(ies) or hypothesis(es) concerning the issues.

SECTION B: OBJECTIVES, VALUE PREMISES, THEORETICAL POSITIONS, TARGET SEGMENTS, AND SUBSTANTIATIVE EFFECTS OF THE POLICY
2. Value premises and ideological orientations underlying the policy objectives: explicit and implicit value premises.
3. Theory(ies) or hypothesis(es) underlying the strategy and the substantive provisions of the policy.
4. Target segments(s) of society- those at whom the policy is aimed:
   a. Ecological, demographic, biological, psychological, social, economic, political, and cultural characteristics.
   b. Size of relevant subgroups and of entire target segments projected over time.
5. Short and long-range effects of the policy on target and non-target segment(s) in ecological, demographic, biological, psychological social, economic, political, and cultural spheres.
   a. Intended effects and extent of attainment of policy objectives.
   b. Unintended effects.
   c. Overall costs and benefits.

SECTION C: IMPLICATIONS OF THE POLICY FOR THE OPERATING AND OUTCOME VARIABLES OF SOCIAL POLICIES
1. Changes concerning reproduction, socialization, and social control.
2. Consequences of changes concerning resources, work and production, rights, governance and legitimating, and reproduction, socialization, and social control, for:
   a. Circumstances of living of individuals, groups, and classes.
   b. Power of individuals, group, and classes.
   c. Nature and quality of human relations among individuals, groups, and classes.
   d. Overall quality of life (Gil, p.71-75)
Methods: Sources Used

All primary and secondary information was gathered via Internet. The access to various websites included databases, the California Child Welfare Indicators Project, EBSCO, ProQuest, ScienceDirect, the Chapin Hall Database at the University of Chicago, and the CSULB Library database. Other websites involved government or government linked sites from the Children’s Bureau, California Department of Social Services (CDSS), the Social Security Administration, etc. Finally, the use of Google and the links to other information sources were found in the reference sections scholarly journals.
Policy Analysis

The California Fostering Connections to Success Act in 2010 immediately followed the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (FCSIAA) passed by Congress in 2008. California lawmakers took advantage of the FCSIAA's Title IV-E federal funds now allocated to extend foster care, Kin-GAP, and adoption assistance program benefits to age 21 (A.B. 12, 2010). The official implementation of A.B.12 started in extension covered January 2012 to cover 19 year olds, then 20 year olds in 2013, and finally to 21 year olds in 2014 (A.B.12, 2010).

Two new placements developed specifically for nonminor dependents (18-21) were the THP-Plus-FC program and SILP. The THP-Plus-FC program provides additional services to nonminor dependents (NMDs) such as financial and banking service, job preparedness training, life skills training, counseling, and mentoring. These additional services available to NMD makes THP-Plus-FC an excellent choice for NMDs who want adult freedoms but with support to rely on. Unfortunately, the general lack of THP-Plus-FC placements made this program unavailable to accommodate an increasing foster youth population (NMDs). Over the years (2012-2014) the number of THP-Plus-FC placements has increased but still are only able to assist one fourth of NMDs in a given year. The state of California will need to increase the volume of placements, significantly to provide space and services. This can be done by increasing the monetary support of each county in need of creating and maintaining THP-Plus-FC placements.

An alternative placement option offered to nonminor dependents was SILP. SILP has been used the most by NMDs accounting for a third of NMD placements in the first years it was available (2012-2013). SILP is a good option to balance an individual’s right to self-determine but only benefits those who are capable of living independently. However, the program offers no supportive services to the NMD, such as ILPs, counseling, or job preparedness. With that said, the financial support to NMD under SILP has a universal rate structure of approximately $800 dollars monthly. When considering the changes in living conditions between counties, the housing allowance may be insufficient to attend to the NMD’s needs and the cost of living. A change to housing assistance should be adjusted when factoring cost of living trends. Also, while in SILP, ILPs and/or other training services, other than a monthly meeting with a caseworker should be offered to the NMD. As of now additional programs are only voluntary.
Policy Analysis continued

Foster youths usually do not have, or will have minimal, support in place after exiting foster care. Typically, non-foster youth will have a family structure to rely on and have access to resources through their family’s support when seeking post-secondary education or employment (Atkinson, 2008). Non-foster youth will then fair better in self-sufficiency when compared to NMD due to an on-going support structure beyond age 18 (Atkinson, 2008; Courtney et al, 2010).

The implementation of A.B.12 creates a pseudo-family support structure with financial funding to NMD and gives them a better chance to be on the same level as their non-foster youth peers. If NMDs gain an equal footing to non-foster youth then they may succeed more. As the “surrogate parent” the state understood their responsibility and the importance of providing a better transition plan for foster youth into independent adulthood (Courtney, 2009). By giving more transitional support services, a NMD will have better access to education and employment opportunities, which will lead to self-sufficiency (A.B.12, 2010).

One of the first tasks of A.B 12 was informing the county workforce of the changes in the child welfare system. It took the state almost two years (2010 and 2012), to prep the county workers with a series of All County Letters (ACL), which broke down A.B. 12 and the implementation of new services (TILP, Kin-GAP, THP-Plus-FC, SILP, etc.). Staff members reportedly felt a lack of understanding regarding A.B. 12 due to the numerous ACL notifications spread out over time, and this delay in knowing on how to implement A.B. 12 made the county workers feel as if they were “playing catch-up” (Courtney et al., 2013 p. 27).
Summary of the Policy

Strengths

- A.B.12 implies a high value on education and employment. Requiring an NMD to achieve a higher education (or to obtain employment) as a condition of Title IV-E funding will motivate service providers to encourage NMDs to succeed. This affirmation of educational improvement can enhance the skills and employment prospects for NMDs and improve their futures.

- More money given to the housing assistance programs (SILP and THP-Plus-FC), allow NMDs to stay safe and secure in a stable environment to reduce the high rate of homelessness among exiting foster care youth.

Challenges

- The increase in the nonminor dependent population can also impact the caseloads for social workers. By increasing the amount of services but not increasing the hiring of new personnel can strain already overworked employees.

- By adding caseworkers, that the older foster youths will need until they “age-out” at 21, may add to county budget expenditures and drain resources for the state (Courtney et al., 2013; Delgado, 2013).

- Also, caseload increases can lead to sub-standard attention of each individual (Delgado, 2013).
References


Delgado, M., (2013). California’s fostering connections: Ensuring that the AB 12 bridge leads to success for transition age foster youth. Children’s Advocacy Institute, University of San Diego School of Law, CA.


