
A New Emerging Adult Design- Assessing the Unique Needs of Homeless Young Adults

**A Report Prepared for Lutheran Social
Service of Minnesota & the Youth
Moving Forward Coalition.**

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May, 2011

Humphrey School of Public Affairs

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Executive Summary

Recent legislation expanding federal foster care funding to eligible young adults up to the age of 21 acknowledges a need for continued services for this young adult age range. Lutheran Social Services is seizing this opportunity to address the issue of underserved homeless young adults. This report intends to develop an emerging adult system that serves this population while allowing these young adults to develop as youth - with the opportunity to discover themselves and make mistakes - as they also develop the skills it takes to become independent adults.

The system is based on an analysis of qualitative data provided by public and nonprofit providers of foster care services in Minnesota. Three main research sources were identified: existing secondary data concerning the homeless population, government administrators at both the state and county levels who work with Title IV-E funding and the foster care system, and service providers in organizations that currently serve homeless youth ages 18-21.

In 2006, only 36 percent of homeless young adults in Minnesota reported having stable housing after leaving a foster home. Of those surveyed in 2009, 49 percent had been without a permanent residency for more than one month (but less than one year), and 38 percent of those individuals had been without housing for more than a year.

This age demographic has been highlighted in the policy arena, partially due to a recently recognized developmental stage known as emerging adulthood. Homeless youth in the emerging adulthood phase have unique needs specific to their age. “18-21 year olds don’t fit in adult services, and they also don’t fit in youth services. They need their own niche because they’re different. What you’d do with adults isn’t going to work on them,” mentioned one service provider. Service providers reported transitional housing, case management, financial assistance for housing and utility hook-up, transportation, employment assistance, and life skills training as essential needs of this population. Key players in the service provider community are already aware of this unique set of needs and have begun efforts to address them.

“18-21 year olds don’t fit in adult services, and they also don’t fit in youth services. They need their own niche because they’re different. What you’d do with adults isn’t going to work on them.”
-- Service Provider

Based on the analysis, challenges to creating a new emerging adult system were identified. Many youth are resistant to remaining in care past the age of 18 due to a desire for independence. In addition, Minnesota’s Title IV-E system is decentralized, placing significant financial and bureaucratic obligations at the county level. A lack of awareness exists surrounding services available to 18-21 year-olds. Finally, Title IV-E is an insufficient funding source for providing assistance to this population.

The implementation of a state-funded pilot program for supported transitional living is recommended to form the new emerging adult system. Developing an improved outreach and tracking system for the emerging adult population will help the state align with organizations and counties and finally begin to identify those individuals not in the system. Additional strategies include: engaging in stronger advocacy on the national level to update income eligibility standards for Title IV-E funding, and increasing education at the high school level to ensure awareness among youth before they “age out.”

Introduction

Purpose

Recent legislation expanding federal foster care funding to eligible young adults up to the age of 21 acknowledges a continued need for services for this population. Lutheran Social Services is seizing this opportunity to develop an emerging adult system to address the issue of underserved homeless young adults. This report is intended to identify steps to create such a system, based on the analysis of qualitative data provided by public and nonprofit providers of foster care services in Minnesota.

Emerging Adulthood

The relevant legislation spurring this initiative – the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions of 2008 – highlights the age group of 18-21 year olds. This focus targets a newly recognized developmental life stage known as emerging adulthood. The emerging adulthood stage encompasses the late teens to early twenties; its name indicates a transitional, growing stage, as individuals in that age range are no longer children, but are not yet fully adults.

Emerging adulthood is not the first life stage to attempt to bridge the psychosocial gap between childhood and adulthood. Adolescence was not widely acknowledged as a distinct life stage until the early twentieth century. After the Industrial Revolution, children worked less and increasingly engaged in criminal activity by virtue of having little to do while their parents were working. As a result, “the nation became possessed of new contradictions characteristic of modern technological society, most serious among them the presence of a large number of persons who were mature by historical standards but immature in the new context¹.” Growing acceptance of this life stage significantly affected industrial patterns (through child labor laws) and educational structuring towards high schools or other secondary education (through education laws requiring schooling through a certain age in teenage years). The case of emerging adulthood is quite similar in that cultural shifts are taking place, resulting in an extended stage between childhood and adulthood.

Similar to the acknowledgement and adaptation in society to support adolescence, institutions and systems will need to adjust for the life stage of emerging adulthood. The State of Minnesota has already created and supported programs to provide support for homeless and struggling adolescents, such as foster care. As these adolescents age into the emerging adulthood stage of life, the state also needs to create a system to address their unique needs.

¹ Bakan, David. "Adolescence in America: From Idea to Social Fact." *Daedalus* 100.4 (1971): 979-95. Print.

Whether emerging adulthood will reshape policy structures completely is as yet unclear, yet the concept of emerging adulthood has already had several implications for society. Many young adults have delayed the traditional path leading directly from the secondary school system into marriage, family, homeownership, and a career – the life events commonly associated with full independence.² Some are choosing this alternate route, by attending college, serving in full-time volunteer positions through programs like AmeriCorps or Peace Corps, choosing alternative associations over marriage, or by working in a succession of shorter-term jobs. Some have found themselves taking this alternate route, struggling to secure living-wage employment in a deep recession. Even after completing a milestone like graduation from college, one might choose to or be forced to rely on financial or “in-kind” support from one’s parents.

The Fostering Connections Act may provide a financial route to state-provided services like foster care for young adults who must rely on those services as a means of support. Until very recently, individuals who turned 18 while in foster care might have faced significant limits or complete loss of foster care services, since they had achieved legal adulthood. Young adults who aged out of foster care services often had no stable housing after losing a placement, effectively “aging out” into homelessness.

Nature of Homeless Youth Problem

The Wilder Research Foundation estimates in its 2009 study that about 1,950 young adults aged 18-21 experience homelessness on any given night in Minnesota.³ Studies conducted by the Wilder Research Center Foundation in Minnesota highlight these youth through surveys and provide more information. On one single day, the Wilder team contacted 1,041 homeless young adults (aged 18-21); 817 homeless youth (unaccompanied homeless individuals under the age of 21) were interviewed at length.⁴ In Minnesota, the homeless youth population appears to have risen significantly during the years of the recent recession; the Wilder team’s estimate of the homeless young adult population indicates a 57 percent increase over the study’s previous findings from 2006.

A significant percentage of homeless young adults in Minnesota show some previous association with the foster care system. Particularly relevant findings of homeless young adults (age 18-21) show:

- A majority (65%) had once been placed in a foster home, group home, detention facility, or treatment center.

² Henig, Robin Marantz. "What Is It About 20-Somethings?" *The New York Times*. 18 Aug. 2010. Web. 30 Mar. 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/22/magazine/22Adulthood-t.html>.

³ Wilder Research. Homelessness in Minnesota 2009: Results of the Wilder Statewide Survey. October 2010. <http://www.wilder.org/download.0.html?report=2339>.

⁴ Ibid.

- 37% had lived in a foster home at some point in their lives.
- 10% had lived in an adoptive home at some point in their lives.
- 28% had run away from a placement.
- 12% had to leave a foster home or placement because they were too old to remain.⁵

From the 2006 study, which covered homeless young adults in more detail, only 36 percent of homeless young adults reported having stable housing after leaving a foster home. Of those surveyed in 2009, 49 percent of homeless young adults had been without a permanent residency for more than one month (but less than a year), and even more shockingly, 38 percent had been without housing for more than a year.⁶

36% of homeless young adults reported having stable housing after leaving foster care.

When asked to name factors that led to homelessness, homeless youth (age 21 and younger) reported most frequently: fighting frequently with parents/guardian, being locked out or told to leave, or the presence of someone in the home they couldn't stand to be around.⁷ Interestingly, however, 46 percent of homeless young adults (age 18-21) report that they could return home if they wished, but only 20 percent thought there was a chance they would live with family again.

Many young adults aged 18-21 are graduating from high school, going to college, seeking permanent employment, moving into their own apartments, and completing any number of other activities which will help them transition into independent adulthood. Homeless young adults, however, face serious challenges to achieving the very independence that is expected of their age group. They often struggle to find stable employment because they lack a stable living situation and, in many cases, the education, skills, and resources necessary to secure a job.

The outcomes for homeless young adults are striking in terms of education and employment, where lack of stable, affordable housing is an obvious barrier. Only 55 percent of homeless young adults surveyed in the Wilder study had their high school diploma or equivalent GED.⁸ In general, employment for homeless young adults is minimal. In the 2009 study, only 27 percent of homeless youth (unaccompanied youth aged 21 and younger) were employed; only 6 percent were employed full-time.⁹

⁵ Wilder Research. [Homelessness in Minnesota 2009: Results of the Wilder Statewide Survey](http://www.wilder.org/download.0.html?report=2339). October 2010. <http://www.wilder.org/download.0.html?report=2339>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

Since the 2009 Wilder report did not separate homeless young adults (aged 18-21) from homeless unaccompanied minors (younger than 18), more specific statistics from the more detailed 2006 report may be relevant (although economic developments may call that into question), as homeless young adults may have been more likely or able to maintain full employment than homeless youth under the age of 18. About 37 percent of homeless young adults reported employment at that time: 13 percent held full-time jobs, while the rest (24%) worked part-time.¹⁰ Almost half of employed young adults - 45 percent – had worked at their current job for over three months, earning about \$8.00 an hour or less. The three greatest reported barriers to employment for this population are lack of transportation (40%), housing (34%), and education (29%).

Education and Employment

*“There is no future if you don’t have a basic educational credential.”
–Service Provider*

Studies indicate that the difficult outcomes faced by homeless young adults continue on into full adulthood. Wilder Research reports that in 2009, 30 percent of homeless adults in Minnesota did not have a high school diploma or GED, 46 percent have only a high school diploma or GED, and only 24 percent have some college education.¹¹ However, data shows that median incomes are higher and unemployment rates are lower for high school graduates as compared to those without a high school diploma or GED. Educational outcomes strongly impact future earnings, and therefore the future ability to support one’s self. As Figure 1 shows, the median weekly income for high school graduates over 25 years of age is \$172 higher than that of non-graduates.¹² That totals nearly \$9,000 more per year for a high school education, and the number continues to increase with educational attainment. Figure 1 also shows that unemployment rates are higher for non-high school graduates when compared to high school graduates (14.6% and 9.7%, respectively). Simply put, Americans who achieve higher educational attainment earn more money and are more likely to obtain permanent employment, allowing them to be more productive members of society.

A 2009 Chapin Hall study of foster care programs in Illinois, where youth can stay in care beyond the typical age limit of 18, shows that at-risk youth who continue receiving support through their 21st birthdays were, when compared with their counterparts who do not receive

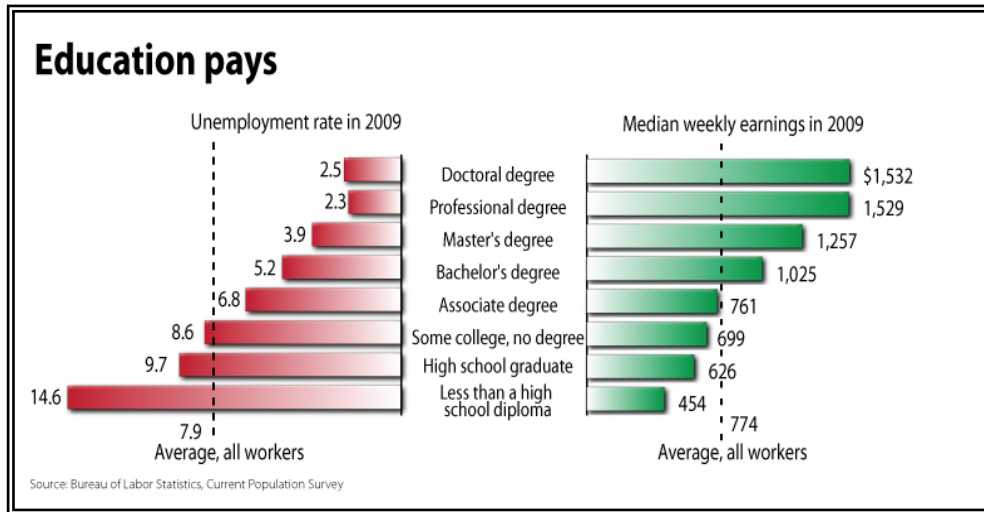
¹⁰ Wilder Research. Overview of Youth and Young Adult Homelessness in Minnesota: Facts and Analysis of Data from the 2006 Statewide Study. June 2008. www.wilder.org/download.0.html?report=2087.

¹¹ Wilder Research. (December 2010) *Long-term homelessness among individuals and families in Minnesota in 2010*. Accessed April 23, 2011: <http://www.wilder.org/download.0.html?report=2355>.

¹² Bureau of Labor Statistics. (May 2010) *Education Pays...* U.S. Department of Labor. Accessed April 15, 2011: http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_chart_001.htm.

supports, “twice as likely to have ever attended college and more than twice as likely to have completed at least one year of college by age 21.”¹³ If homeless youth in Minnesota can receive similar supports, their levels of educational attainment could increase, further increasing their ability to secure permanent employment and a stable income.

Figure 1



Specifically in Minnesota, where employment opportunities are predicted in upcoming years to exceed the number of available qualified workers, ensuring that people have the education and training to perform in available jobs is integral to the continued success of the state’s economy. According to Minnesota’s Department of Employment and Economic Development, construction, service, and professional jobs are each expected to grow by more than 12 percent over the next ten years.¹⁴

In addition, the Department of Employment and Economic Development, the Ramsey County Workforce Investment Board, and the Minnesota Business Partnership all warn that there will be a net labor shortage of 640,000 job openings over the next ten years, as a result of baby-boomer retirements or employees otherwise leaving the Minnesota workforce.^{15 16} Baby-boomer retirements are also anticipated to increase demands for public services such as health

¹³ Peters, Clark M, Amy Dworsky, Mark E. Courtney, Harold Pollack. “Extending Foster Care to Age 21: Weighing the Costs to Government against the Benefits to Youth,” Chapin Hall Issue Brief. University of Chicago. June 2009. http://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/publications/Issue_Brief%2006_23_09.pdf.

¹⁴ Senf, Dave. (July 2010) *Minnesota Job Outlook to 2019*. Department of Employment and Economic Development. Accessed April 23, 2011: http://www.positivelyminnesota.com/Data_Publications/Employment_Review_Magazine/July_2010_Edition/Minnesota_Job_Outlook_to_2019.aspx.

¹⁵ Ramsey County Workforce Investment Board. Accessed April 23, 2011: <http://www.rcwib.org/>

¹⁶ Minnesota Business Partnership. Accessed April 23, 2011: <http://www.mnbp.com/article.cfm?aid=2&atid=54&cid=1>.

care. This situation may create a significant imbalance in the economy, as retirees cease actively producing economically and fewer qualified workers remain to produce and support the very system of public services upon which retirees depend.

Homeless young adults represent a portion of the current population that, without support, may not be able to fully contribute towards replacing the economic output of retiring baby-boomers. Providing homeless young adults with stability and education will allow them to pursue and fulfill stable, permanent employment, increasing their personal, social, and economic value in society.¹⁷

Potential Outcomes

Homeless young adults represent a portion of the current population that, without intervention, is destined to become a part of the homeless adult population in Minnesota. From its 2009 study, Wilder Research reported that of homeless adults in Minnesota,

- 47% have lived in jail, prison, or a juvenile detention system;
- 46% have at least one serious physical problem;
- 55% have at least one serious mental illness; and
- 30% do not have a high school diploma or GED.

*“If
you don’t serve this
group of young
adults [today],
they’ll be
somewhere else in
our
system...tomorrow.
” –County
Administrator*

Wilder Research also cites five studies in the state of Minnesota that demonstrate a positive return on investment for homeless intervention and prevention programs.¹⁸ Beyond their inability to participate actively and fully in our economy, homeless young adults exhibit higher rates of substance abuse, depression, and risky sexual behaviors than their non-homeless counterparts.¹⁹ Additionally, homeless young adults are less likely to access regular, preventative medical care, increasing their likelihood of accessing expensive emergency care.²⁰ These behaviors result in an increased drain on physical, social, and welfare services. By directing public funding towards services preventing homelessness, it may be possible to reduce the need for later public investment in costlier and less politically popular services such as corrections or emergency room medical services.

¹⁷ Wilder Research. (April 2008) *Minnesota business and homelessness: Impacts and solutions*. Accessed April 23, 2011: <http://www.wilder.org/download.0.html?report=2064>.

¹⁸ Wilder Research. (April 2008) *Minnesota business and homelessness: Impacts and solutions*. Accessed April 23, 2011: <http://www.wilder.org/download.0.html?report=2064>.

¹⁹ Toro, Paul A, Amy Dworsky, Patrick J Fowler. (March 2007) *Homeless Youth in the United States: Recent Research Findings and Intervention Approaches*. Presented at the 2007 National Symposium on Homelessness Research, Washington, DC.

²⁰ Wilder Research. (June 2007) *Return-on-Investment analysis of supportive housing*. Accessed April 23, 2011: <http://www.wilder.org/download.0.html?report=2024>.

Investment in the Future

To invest money in this way now is intervention services and to provide some stability. If you want to look at it from a cost point of view, it probably is more cost-effective than paying for a corrections placement, someone going to hospitals and not having medical insurance, financial assistance – [in] all sorts of ways [not intervening] will probably be more expensive in the long run. –State administrator

All of the service providers and public administrators who were interviewed agreed that prevention and early intervention programs for homeless young adults would significantly reduce long-term costs to society. “Any funding that you put towards [this population]” will make a “lifelong impact,” said one service provider. Homeless young adults are less likely to attain educational credentials, less likely to maintain steady jobs, and more likely to exhibit risky personal and social behaviors. Proactive funding and services for this population will allow them to become more productive both economically and socially, reducing their future cost to society.

Impact on Service Provisions

Through the Fostering Connections Act, the federal government sought to expand supportive services to young adults by allowing states to continue directing Title IV-E funding to eligible recipients after the age of 18 to any age the state chooses up to 21. As a result, the state of Minnesota chose to extend the age that youth may remain eligible for Title IV-E reimbursement to 21. The Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) has been working to inform counties of how these changes can help them provide services to those homeless youth, ages 18-21, who have been or are currently a part of the foster care system. To explain the changes and their impact, DHS has had ongoing communication with the counties, including hosting various workshops across the state as well as providing counties with multiple documents outlining the significance of the new law and its effects on IV-E age eligibility and service implementation.

Ongoing Government Support

Title IV-E of the federal Social Security Act governs federal payments for foster care and adoption assistance.²¹ The payments essentially act as reimbursement for a portion of the costs to a state (or county, depending on how the funding is structured within each state) for providing out-of-home placements for eligible children.²² The funding can be applied to foster care payments to foster parents and foster-care-licensed facilities, training for state and county staff administrators of IV-E, administration expenses, and data collection expenses for required reporting. The payments are considered an uncapped entitlement, so the expense a state incurs in covering its eligible children will be matched at a particular rate, without limit on the number of children served or the amount of state funds spent.²³

To be eligible for IV-E funds, a child must:

- Receive a court determination stating that:
 - placing the child in care is “in the best interests of the child”
 - the state has made “reasonable efforts” to maintain the family and prevent an unnecessary removal of a child from its home.
- Be in the custody of the state (i.e. the state’s child welfare agency must have responsibility for the placement and care of the child).
- Have documentation showing that his/her parents’ income met income standards of need at the time of the child’s removal from home.

²¹ Social Security Act, Title IV. Social Security. http://www.ssa.gov/OP_Home/ssact/title04/0471.htm#ft170.

²² “Federal Foster Care Financing: How and Why the Current Funding Structure Fails to Meet the Needs of the Child Welfare Field.” Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. August 2005. <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/05/fc-financing-ib/#Background>.

²³ Ibid.

- Be placed in a foster home or facility that meets state licensure standards (including criminal background checks and safety checks).²⁴

Before the 1960s, foster care services were paid for exclusively by states.²⁵ From 1961 to 1980, the federal government began funding assistance to foster care through the federal welfare program. While foster care funds were authorized separately in 1980 under the Social Security Act, income eligibility standards remained linked to welfare. When the nation’s welfare system was dramatically reformed in 1996, the income eligibility standards for foster care stayed at the same pre-reform level, where they remain unchanged to this day.²⁶

Runaway and Homeless Youth Act of 2006

In 2006, Minnesota’s government expanded its definition of homelessness through the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, which essentially redefines homeless youth as:

*A person 21 years of age or younger who is unaccompanied by a parent or guardian and is without shelter where appropriate care and supervision are available, whose parent or legal guardian is unable or unwilling to provide shelter and care, or who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.*²⁷

This definition now includes youth who were “couch-hopping” and who may have previously been ineligible for services. While this legislation also allows for appropriation of state funds to be expended for street and community outreach and drop-in programs, emergency shelter programs, and supportive housing and transitional living programs for homeless youth, the allocation of these funds is minimal.

Fostering Connections Act of 2008

In 2008, Congress passed the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (often referred to simply as Fostering Connections), which extends supportive services to youth remaining in foster care past the age of 18, including those living independently in a supervised setting.²⁸

The Act achieves this goal by redefining “child” to include not only everyone under 18, but also anyone “who is in foster care under the responsibility of the State” who is 18 but could include

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ “Runaway and Homeless Youth Act.” 2010 Minnesota Statutes: 256K.45. Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes. <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=256K.45>.

²⁸ “Fostering Connections Guidance and Changes to Foster Care for Youth Ages 18-21.” Minnesota Department of Human Services. September 3, 2010. http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&Renderition=Primary&allowInterrupt=1&noSaveAs=1&dDocName=dhs16_151788.

ages 19, 20, or 21, depending on the state's decision.²⁹ The "child" must also be completing at least one of the following work-related activities on an ongoing basis:

- Finishing secondary education (either a high school diploma or equivalent credential such as a GED)
- Enrolled in a post-secondary or vocational institution of learning
- Participating in a program designed to promote employment or remove barriers to it
- Working at least 80 hours per month, or
- Providing information indicating that the child is incapable of completing any of the above activities due to a medical condition.

The law also redefines "child care institution" to include "in the case of a child who has attained 18 years of age, the term shall include a supervised setting in which the individual is living independently". These supervised settings can include apartments, dormitories, and host homes, and appropriate supervision is defined minimally as one face-to-face visit per month. Youth in this setting may receive foster care maintenance payments directly from the agency, as no direct caregiver may be in place.

Minnesota Statutes on Extending Foster Care

Minnesota's 2010 Statutes on foster care are tailored specifically to Fostering Connections. The relevant statute states:

A child *already in foster care* may continue in foster care past age 18. These individuals remain legal adults except for the continued receipt of foster care services. The child must meet at least one of the following conditions [identical to those noted in the Fostering Connections law] to be considered eligible to continue in foster care to age 21 (italics attributed to this paper rather than the statute).³⁰

The state law follows Fostering Connections, in that both laws directly address only children already accessing foster care services prior to their eighteenth birthdays. No reference is made to expanding eligibility on any basis other than age, or to providing services to any child not already part of the foster care system.

²⁹ "The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008." Public Law 110-351. October 7, 2008. http://www.fosteringconnections.org/tools/assets/files/Public_Law_110-351.pdf

³⁰ 2010 Minnesota Statutes 260C.451 Foster Care Benefits to Age 21. Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes. www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes?id=260C.451

Legislative Flexibility

In 1994, Congress authorized the federal Department of Health and Human Services to approve demonstration projects at the state level, waiving certain parts of Title IV-E.³¹ The waivers grant states a certain amount of flexibility in the services and supports that can be provided to IV-E-eligible children; however, it indicates no flexibility in the eligibility of the population served. Minnesota developed and executed a Title IV-E waiver program beginning in 2005, which raised the financial assistance benefits for adoption, but the program ended a few months earlier than anticipated due to cessation of county participation and challenges of cost-neutrality.

One of the most challenging requirements for states implementing waiver demonstrations is “that they must remain cost-neutral to the Federal government, i.e., States cannot receive more in Federal reimbursement than they would have received under Title IV-E of the Act in the absence of the demonstration”.³² For example, if Minnesota experienced an increase in Title IV-E eligible children and a corresponding increase in spending to provide services, then the federal government would have to match that additional state spending, at its set match rate. However, a waiver program could not increase the match rate, for in that case, Minnesota would receive a higher share of federal dollars than it would have without the waiver, which is prohibited.

One of the most challenging requirements for states implementing waiver demonstrations is “that they must remain cost-neutral to the Federal government,

Title IV-E Expansion Potential

In light of the recent legislative expansion of Title IV-E funding to Title IV-E eligible young adults through Fostering Connections, this consultant group has examined the potential for the development of an emerging adult system to expand services to homeless young adults who have not previously been participants in Minnesota’s foster care system. Due to the explicit limitations of IV-E eligibility, Title IV-E is not a financial route to providing services to people who have not previously accessed foster care. The consultant group performed qualitative research through interviews and focus groups with public and nonprofit professionals in the foster care and homeless services fields. The research was directed towards assessing the greatest challenges in providing services to Minnesota’s homeless young adults and developing an effective new system to serve the population, tailored to its unique needs.

³¹ “Summary of the Title IV-E Child Welfare Waiver Demonstrations.” Administration of Children, Youth, and Families. U.S. Department of Human Services. June 2010. http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/programs_fund/cwwaiver/2010/summary_demo2010.htm

³² Ibid.

Methodology

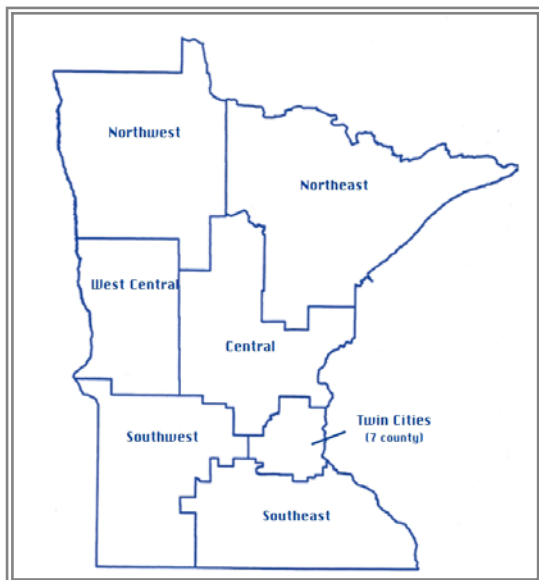
The consultant team used primary and secondary data to inform the analysis in this report and create an emerging adult system. The data collection methods used to obtain information from these sources included a literature review (secondary data), semi-structured interviews (primary data), and focus groups (primary data). (See Appendix A for complete research design.)

Secondary Data

Secondary data was needed to describe the homeless young adult population in Minnesota. Reports by the Wilder Research Foundation served as the primary source of statistics for the homeless population in Minnesota. The most recent Wilder publication was published in 2010 and addresses the entire homeless population in Minnesota. This study also includes statistics specific to young adults. The report also references Wilder Research studies from 2003 and 2006 that focus solely on homeless young adults. In addition to the Wilder Research reports, studies from Chapin Hall and the Minnesota Department of Human Services are used to further describe the homeless youth population.

Primary Data Collection: Sampling

The research sample of service providers and county administrators was derived using a regional map of Minnesota presented in the *Teens in Trouble – Regional Dialogue* report published by the Runaway and Homeless Youth Coalition. This report identifies seven regions of



Minnesota, naming particular and distinct challenges in serving homeless young adults for each specific region. Particular counties within each region were selected because they were highlighted as areas where services for homeless youth were provided and/or sought. Multiple counties in the Twin Cities metro area were chosen for interview requests because of the higher percentage of the state's total homeless youth population located in this region. Beyond the initial sample, the consulting team used the snowball technique to find additional service provider and county-level contacts.

The consultant team requested interviews or focus group participation from 15 counties and 15 service providers. Because of scheduling conflicts, not all who were contacted were able to participate; a total of 12 counties and 12 service providers participated in interviews or focus groups. Interviews and focus groups were conducted over a three-week period. Most interviews were

conducted over the phone to accommodate for time and distance challenges. When possible, the consultant team conducted in-person interviews with individuals in the metro area.

Primary Data Collection: Protocol and Analysis

The goal in contacting government administrators and service providers was to determine:

1. The service gap for homeless emerging adults in Minnesota
2. The limitations to providing services to this population
3. The implications of Fostering Connections and obstacles to expanding Title IV-E funding
4. The possibilities to bridging the current service gap and creating a new emerging adult system in the state of Minnesota

One team member conducted each interview, with at least one other team member present to observe and take notes. Two team members moderated the focus group, with all other members present to observe and take notes. All interviews as well as the focus group were recorded and transcribed in order to verify the information provided. Recordings were destroyed upon the completion of this report. The primary data contained in the transcriptions was coded by theme using the NVivo computer software.

To facilitate discussions with state and county government administrators, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Use of this method provided a thorough overview of the Title IV-E process; though all counties access the funding in the same way, the use of individual interviews also allowed each county administrator to offer their own unique experiences in working with Title IV-E funding, since the actual population served varies from county to county. Because the interviews were semi-structured, the interviewer had the flexibility to ask any additional questions that arose during the conversation.

The main data collection method for service providers was intended to be focus groups. However, due to the geographic area this research covers and the distances between many of the service providers (especially those in Greater Minnesota), focus groups were not convenient for all participants. Therefore, the consultant group used focus groups when possible, and spoke with other service providers through semi-structured interviews, which used a protocol similar to that of the focus groups.

Analysis

The four central points of research cited in the methodology section formed an organizational structure for the analysis of the data. Determining the service gap for homeless emerging adults provided a specific idea of what programs would best serve this population that were not already in existence. Learning the critiques of the current system allowed for a deeper understanding of the main challenges for serving this population. Assessing the limitations of current and potential funding sources was important for analysis of the current system and potential challenges facing a new system. Soliciting recommendations for addressing current challenges and improving future programs was the foundation of the final recommendations of the paper.

Difficult To Serve Underserved Emerging Adults

One of the limitations to developing a new emerging adult system for homeless youth is the overall difficulty of working with this particular population. Since there is an obvious lack of a system specifically serving this age group, the current system shoehorns those not yet ready to live independently either into services that force them into adulthood too soon or limit them to child welfare services, which deter them from receiving services at all. The youth's own response to care was a widely mentioned challenge by county administrators and service providers alike. Tellingly, perceptions of the developmental stage of this population across the state are varied, in terms of the language used to describe its members. For example, one single individual may be described as a "child", "youth", "young adult", or "client", based on the person describing them. Finally, a significant difficulty is that youth enter the system – and homelessness – for numerous reasons, and each youth's situation is different. This variance

makes it difficult to significantly prevent youth homelessness by any one measure, and it increases the variety of services needed by homeless young adults.

"The adult shelter is fantastic, it's great, but the reality is, it's scary as hell." –Service Provider

Lack of Appropriate System

Many parties interviewed who serve homeless emerging adults believe that the needs of that population are unique, and since no separate system is in place designed to assist that population, the population is not yet served appropriately. Nonprofit and county service providers have to fit 18-21 year olds into a system designed for adults. In the words of one service provider, "...[given] the stigma of going to a shelter with 5-year-olds, it's hard to get [young adults] there. And our 18, our 19 year olds, they would rather walk the streets in minus 20 [degrees]..." Title IV-E leaves many emerging adults without access to that system. The indication from several sources is that in practice, this method does not adequately address the needs of the population it is meant to serve. In the words of one service provider,

A lot of the work programs that we can refer kids to, I've heard, and I'm really sick of hearing this, but 'your kids aren't a fit for our program because they're not going to be successful'. Because they need their outcomes and they're so worried about their outcomes, and that doesn't help our kids. I think the hard thing with that is we're then not serving the highest-need young person.

Ultimately, service providers piece together many different resources to create a unique system within their own organization. This task can be a daunting one to accomplish, evidenced by the following comment by a service provider, “Oftentimes they’re not in a place where you can contact them easily. They may be couch hopping, staying at one friend’s house and that’s the contact information they give you and when you try and track them down they’re no longer there. They’re fairly transitory.” Many funding sources require records of homelessness, but given the mobility of the emerging youth who are homeless, this is extremely difficult to track. During the focus group, this problem was elaborated:

They will come in and say they are homeless, but then they’re more or less couch hopping, and we can’t document if they lived with a friend, or an aunt or what have you, so they have to be in a specific shelter for X amount of time, where that shelter verification is needed. –Service Provider

Providers also face the problem of unmet demand for services. One source shared this barrier: “Because there’s very few agencies that serve just youth, so when a youth is 18 or 19, they have to get on a list for long-term housing services. And that list is two or three or four years long. And they can’t get on it until their 18th birthday.” This remark starkly illustrates the difficulty in serving youth; the very programs designed to assist their transition to adulthood are denying them access to that opportunity. Achieving independence is extremely important to emerging adults, particularly so for those nearing the end of foster care. The recognition that the population of 18-21 year olds requires further guidance shown by the passage of Fostering Connections indicates political will to address their needs more formally.

*I think that the presumption is that we got them early enough and we pay for them long enough, so now they should be able to stand up a little bit more on their own. And that’s just not the case...we got a couple young ladies who didn’t even enter the system until they were 16 and had 16 years worth of crappy parenting and abusive situations and no support, and within a year and a half, they were supposed to pull it all together?
—Service Provider*

Youth Response to Care

Some youth are very interested in being able to continue the services they are currently receiving, while some work as hard as they can to be completely independent from any sort of assistance from the county and state. Understanding homeless youths' response and attitude towards continuing care is essential to understand what a potential emerging adult system must take into consideration for a design. For others, individuals are exhausted with the idea of continuing services. They may not yet have developed the skills to be on their own, but they want to try to make it without help. As a county administrator emphasized:

Our county has for many years encouraged youth to stay in care, at least until they complete their high school diploma, but because you can't control an adult, you can't force an adult to live somewhere, it's their decision at that point, and oftentimes, at 18 they just leave because they think they can do it themselves.

With the recent implementation of the age extension of Fostering Connections, few counties have had the experience of identifying why youth do or do not come back to services. One county administrator estimated that about half of the youth they work with continue to stay in care beyond the age of 18. One county administrator commented: "Maybe 50 percent stay in for a while. After they graduate school though, kids want to spread their wings and get out on their own, and they have some pretty strict guidelines that they have to follow in order to stay in." Others discussed the limited numbers of youth in this age group that they currently work with, which significantly affects the counties' ability to assess a new program. This relatively new system has forced counties to alter their system in order to begin this recruitment process. A county administrator said:

Again, we don't deal with a lot of kids in that age group [18-21] right now so it's hard to know how kids are responding to that by and large. I think again from the agency's standpoint it is at least we're informing kids earlier on that we will continue to be available to help support them where as I don't think that message was heard before.

Fostering Connections has helped to build support for these service providers and counties to extend care, but the counties also must focus on reaching young adults who will willingly accept the services. "So we're excited about that [Fostering Connections], and I think that will help some of the homeless youth, but again, they have to be willing to accept services," explained one county administrator.

It is no surprise that many of the young adults who left their housing situation to be on their own and become adults often respond negatively to care, which is drawn from their drive for independence. When interviewees were asked for their thoughts on why youth leave, many answered, "Freedom." One county administrator stated: "The freedom, for lack of a better word. I think they just think that if they stay on they don't have as much

control over their lives.” Another county administrator said, “They, at 18, are sick of the system. They think the system is a problem. They may have refused to use therapy or counseling to their benefit, and they want to leave because they’re tired of people telling them what to do.” These young adults want to try being out of the system, especially if they have been in it throughout their entire lives.

Those who do choose to stay in the system and extend the services they are currently receiving overall have a very positive outlook; some individuals simply are not fully ready. One county worker expressed, “Each child is unique in terms of whether they would want to continue in foster care or why they wouldn’t want to. Usually youth just prior to 18 maybe get additional fears about emancipation and decide, ‘Yeah, I want to stay in foster care longer.’” Yet in general, most are excited about the opportunity to continue. For these individuals, the implications are to receive a better quality of life. They are able to examine post-secondary education options and to become more established and stable in a housing situation; they are learning to be an adult with the safety net of assistance.

When I told a few kids after the law change that they could come back into care, a number of them did. It was like they were so excited when I told them they could come back into care; it was like they got an extra Christmas! You don’t understand until you understand, and so even that brought kids back in. –County Administrator

Varied Definition of Young Adults

A vast majority of sources routinely described the emerging adult population as “kids,” indicating the duality between the legal definition of emerging adults and the actual

characteristics they possess. One nonprofit provider put it succinctly saying, “And they are kids. I could care less if they’re 20. They’re kids...” Service providers at the county and local nonprofit level uniformly considered 18-21 year olds as maintaining some of the elements of childhood while entering legal adulthood.

“You are working with a population that in every other aspect of their life are legal adults. But they’ve expanded this for purposes of foster care, Fostering Connections, then we can still consider them a child so we can consider them under a child system.” – County Administrator

A county administrator explained: “To some extent [Fostering Connections] is a tacit acknowledgement that they need support, that they need development stability that they cannot provide themselves.” It suggests that 18-21-year-olds are more appropriately defined programmatically (and in terms of funding) by their developmental achievements rather than by a chronological cut-off. In the words of the same administrator, Fostering Connections legally redefines childhood: “You are working with a population that in every other aspect of their life are legal adults. But they’ve expanded this for purposes of foster care, Fostering Connections, then we can still consider them a child so we can consider them under a child system.” Government at all levels as

well as nonprofit service providers are beginning to collectively define 18-21 year olds in alignment with the emerging adult concept and related needs rather than by the legal separation of minor and adult, and this definition is also beginning to shape the policy and programs offered to support this population.

Reasons for Youth Homelessness

Each homeless youth has a unique reason for becoming homeless. One service provider stated, “That’s what makes this so hard, it’s because there are lots of different circumstances. And it’s not one factor that you could prevent or control for, that would help these kids not need it.” A common assumption among individuals who do not work with this population is that teenager-parent conflict drives youth to leave home, which does happen, but the majority of homeless young adults leave for far more severe reasons. Many service providers working with homeless youth and young adults feel it is necessary to characterize those individuals who are in need for crisis, and those who are in need by choice, working aggressively to find housing first for those in crisis. One service provider emphasized, “We work with homeless, though if they’re runaways, we absolutely try to assist them, but really we are so overwhelmed we look at what is crisis and what is choice.”

One reason of crisis that was mentioned various times throughout the data collection process was family crisis. Many youth and young adults struggle with family issues that are out of their control, such as abuse and neglect. Sexual and physical abuse history is prevalent among these individuals. For example, “they may have moved in with a boyfriend who beat the crap out of them, or a girlfriend that beat the crap out of them, and now they have nowhere to live,” explained a service provider. 37 percent of homeless young adult females and 23 percent of their male counterparts report they have been assaulted or threatened with violence in a relationship during the past year.³³ The overall abuse and neglect statistics for homeless young adults are even more startling. Of the 455 homeless young adults in Minnesota that were interviewed in the 2006 Wilder Research Foundation survey:

- 57% have been neglected, physically abused, or sexually abused.
- 46% had been physically mistreated.
- 31% had been sexually mistreated.
- 34% reported their parents neglected to provide food, shelter, or medical care, or consistently ignored their physical or emotional needs.
- 32% stayed in an abusive situation because they had no other housing options.³⁴

³³ Wilder Research Foundation. Overview of Youth and Young Adult Homelessness in Minnesota: Facts and Analysis of Data from the 2006 Statewide Study. June 2008.
<http://www.wilder.org/download.0.html?report=2087>

³⁴ Ibid.

The most common reoccurring theme of choice presented among this population however, was the idea that young adults do not want help and want the ability to try things on their own. They want to be able to take the next step in their life and achieve independence normally. One service provider said, “They want desperately to make it on their own, I’d say 90 percent of them want to make it on their own.” Often this idea of independence ultimately results in their homelessness, as they venture into independence before they are fully ready as adults. One interviewee noted that especially for those individuals in the 18-21 age range:

Generally, someone has decided they should be an adult before they are ready. That could be then because of the history, and they’re like, ‘I would rather do this on my own’, but they don’t have the skills or the support to do that. The system currently is: you’re 18, you’re out and on your own now.

An interesting reason that youth leave home is the increasing trend of departing the family home once a teenager turns 18 due to lack of space or resources, effects of the economic recession. Many more homeless youth are seeking housing options and other services based on “generational poverty.” Their families can no longer afford them once they reach a certain age. “We’re seeing this more and more, it seems like there’s always been—a youth to be 16, 17 years old, some families at that point, they need to go and fend for themselves,” explained one county administrator. Many adults are working as hard as they can to provide for their families; often these families, particularly families of racial or ethnic minorities, have many children. Once individuals are 18, they are expected to become adults and provide for themselves, because their parents can no longer provide for them, effectively forcing the youth to leave. A service provider described: “So your parents love you very much, but they can’t afford to feed you anymore, so you need to go. And it’s not a lack of family support or caring, it’s simply a lack of resources at home.”

Other less frequently mentioned, but more expected explanations still occur, such as drugs and alcohol, which are significant contributors to youth homelessness. Many service providers mentioned that they see many individuals come into care who are failing out of their treatment centers. Providers also see youth who are homeless due to sexual orientation issues, as well as youth who are leaving corrections with no appropriate re-entry strategy, finding themselves unequipped to lead an independent life in the community.

Title IV-E Funding and Process

When youth experience homelessness and access support services, one of the major challenges faced particularly by county human services departments is how to cover the cost of care. Title IV-E is a longstanding source of federal partial reimbursement, but

“So your parents love you very much, but they can’t afford to feed you anymore, so you need to go. And it’s not a lack of family support or caring, it’s simply a lack of resources at home.”—Service Provider

its structure, extent of funding, and eligibility requirements were strongly criticized by county administrators.

Determining Eligibility

The most widespread critique of IV-E funding has been its “very stringent,” “outdated” income standards, which are still tied to income eligibility standards from AFDC, reflecting 1996 standards of welfare qualification. “Who could live on the income that families have to have to be eligible?” asked one county administrator, reflecting the continually decreasing number of families in poverty who are poor enough to qualify under income standards set fifteen years ago.

County administrators also see the restrictive timing of the eligibility determination as a barrier, since the income eligibility is also determined only at the time of placement. If a child’s parent’s income is above eligibility standards at the time of placement – or if the child’s parent’s income cannot be verified at all, if the parent cannot be contacted - the child will not be IV-E eligible. This determination of ineligibility holds, even if the parent’s income decreases below standards, even as soon as the next month. The child cannot reapply for IV-E eligibility if parental income verification is later provided or if parental income decreases.

County Administrator: A parent could be out of work this month, but because they were working last month and made too much money last month, that child is not IV-E eligible.

Interviewer: But they would be eligible the following month if the parent continued to work?

County Administrator: No, once eligibility is established, it’s established for the whole placement.

Consequently, a young adult could remain in foster care without IV-E funding supports for over a decade based on financial eligibility at the time of placement, even if a later determination would have resulted in IV-E eligibility.

IV-E eligibility varies widely by county. As income eligibility requirements remain tied to standards that appear outdated against current levels of income and poverty, the extent of Title IV-E eligibility in a given county appears to have a positive correlation with the same county’s level of poverty. However, although a higher share of children may be eligible for IV-E reimbursement in a poorer county, IV-E reimbursement only covers about half of the total cost of care for a child.

Decentralization and County Matching Funds

By accepting federal Title IV-E funds, a state must meet certain requirements of care, which must be extended to all children in care, regardless of their IV-E eligibility status. As Minnesota's foster care system is highly regionalized, predominantly administered at the county level, the remaining cost of foster care is a significant financial obligation for counties. Counties must find additional funds to make up the difference for IV-E eligible children and completely fund services for IV-E ineligible children.

The significant variances among counties – in financial wealth, levels of need, existing nonprofit service provider infrastructure – is reflected in varying levels of service and funding abilities. Counties raise funds through property tax levies, and many poorer counties have a limited tax base, or a particularly limited willingness or ability of their residents to pay additional property taxes. County workers decried IV-E standards as “unfunded mandates” from the federal and even state levels, which require counties to provide specific services with no assurance of additional funding.

We do the best we can to follow the rules and statutes as they come out of the legislature and DHS. But eventually you have to look at financial viability, whether or not you have the dollars to provide the services in the way that the state suggests you do it. – County administrator

Since IV-E funding acts only as a partial reimbursement, and often relatively few children are deemed IV-E eligible at all, counties and service providers often seek out and depend on other funding sources as well, which may have additional funding requirements.

Decentralization and Administrative Disconnect

Although Title IV-E funding is viewed as important, county administrators – as well as the State of Minnesota administrators – also view it as extremely complicated. Within one county, even a smaller one, many different workers know many different pieces of the IV-E puzzle. Intake for county services is provided by a caseworker, yet a financial worker may determine the child's financial eligibility. A judge determines that foster care services are in the best interests of the child. Yet another person – a local nonprofit organization's staff, for example – may provide the actual services to the child. A state administrator processes paperwork from all these sources to ensure that the child is IV-E eligible; the state may audit the counties to ensure compliance. Federal administrators receive state information to determine appropriate dispersal of federal funds in reimbursement, and may audit states.

“better communication and understanding what the criteria and expectations for accessing the services...a stronger set of criteria that could be followed”

A question that was raised in various forms throughout the research is: who truly knows about IV-E requirements, and who truly needs to know about them? Many caseworkers and social workers admitted that they did not understand the qualifications for IV-E. Although some

caseworkers appreciated not having to master the financial nuances of IV-E funding, some maintained that “better communication and understanding what the criteria and expectations for accessing the services...a stronger set of criteria that could be followed” are greatly needed changes to the foster care system and to Minnesota’s administration of IV-E funding. Most social workers don’t really understand IV-E, and if they do, they’re usually incorrect. “I’ve done different workshops, and anyway, I’m glad I don’t totally have to understand it,” admitted one county social worker.

Many government administrators also acknowledged the role of judges in IV-E eligibility. Although some claimed that it did not often occur, administrators explained it as a “tension”; if the judge does not initially find that placing a child in care is in the “best interests of the child” and that “reasonable efforts” have been made to avoid removing a child from the family home, the child will not be IV-E eligible. The language requirements are explicit; it cannot be close or similar to that language, it must be the exact verbiage specified in law.

Many counties asserted that it was unlikely that the nonprofit service providers with which they worked had a solid understanding of IV-E eligibility or whether or not the children they served were IV-E eligible. Nonprofit providers themselves acknowledged a limited understanding: they claimed that it was difficult to access, that they had heard different eligibility requirements from different sources. One provider had been told that a child needed to be discharged from placement on the eighteenth birthday and re-enter to access care as an adult, which is not necessarily the case. The providers seemed aware that very few of their children they served appeared to be eligible. This confusion on IV-E process and services is particularly relevant, as service providers no doubt are a major source of this information for their clients.

Fostering Connections

The Fostering Connections Act enables not only counties and service providers to continue to provide services to older individuals up until the age of 21, it also allows those recipients who have previously been involved with the system to enter back into services if they have left. The implementation process has been relatively slow due to its recent enactment last year, but potential impacts can already be seen. This new flexibility has allowed both county administrators and service providers to begin thinking strategically about how to provide services for as many youth as possible who are in need of care.

“I’ve done different workshops, and anyway, I’m glad I don’t totally have to understand it [Title IV-E],” admitted one county social worker.

Implementation in Minnesota

The implementation process has varied across the state, which is partially due to the fact that the ages of youth in care differ greatly between counties. Some

counties have very few young adults in care, so the county administrators have limited experience in putting the program into practice. To some extent, this direction of IV-E is a new dimension of an old practice. As one administrator explained, “There’s so much more flexibility under Fostering Connections and the flexibility actually makes it harder.” Since most counties are dealing with very small numbers of youth in care who are prepared for this program, implementation has the potential to become highly individualized, which may best suit the youth, but may be work-intensive for IV-E administrative staff, and require them to “re-invent the wheel” for each new Fostering Connections participant. Further, the responsiveness of the youth has also varied, so some counties have seen more youth opting to stay in care than others.

In order to convey information about the changes to youth, county administrators have begun conversations with youth already in care, to inform them of their options for care once they turn 18. Those youth who choose to stay in care have to complete a living plan for the time period between their 18th and 21st birthdays. One county administrator related that since the implementation of Fostering Connections, they have started to really challenge the youth “as to what their plans will be and have them develop probably a more detailed plan than in the past.”

As related by one county administrator, “the opportunity for a youth to live in her own apartment and be responsible for her own bills will result in “a huge learning curve” for that youth.

Impact

In general, county administrators believe that the various components of the Fostering Connections Act hold the potential to have a significant impact on the 18-21 homeless population. One of these factors is the ability of youth to live on their own while still receiving the support system associated with foster care. As related by one county administrator, “the opportunity for a youth to live in her own apartment and be responsible for her own bills will result in “a huge learning curve” for that youth. County administrators also believe that the ability of youth to reenter the system will have a large impact. This aspect gives youth the opportunity to try living on their own, but allows them to have the opportunity to continue care, if they find they once again need support. In addition, more youth may be able to qualify for funding under Title IV-E, given that their own incomes can be used to determine eligibility.

The requirements of staying in care were also cited as an important effect that Fostering Connections has on this population. In order to continue in foster care, a youth must meet educational or work-related criteria. Further, each youth must establish a transition plan for when she leaves care. One interviewee stated, “The youth is going to be in the

driver’s seat of their independent living plan. We want the youth to really start gaining some skills about making decisions with their life and taking ownership of their case and the choices

that they make.” By engaging in these activities, youth are able to gain the skills necessary to be able to live on their own after they are no longer eligible for foster care.

Fostering Connections is seen as a valuable extension of IV-E funding in many ways. Some counties have become more intentional in their attempts to ensure that as many children as possible are determined to be eligible for IV-E funding, seeing greater potential in the extension of foster care as the children enter adulthood. One county worker explained that the county had already been extending foster care to the age of 21, and that the changes mostly affected re-entry. Previously, only state wards could re-enter care after leaving; now, any person in foster care would be able to leave care and re-enter as desired. Fostering Connections is seen as a route to allow all foster care children, not just state wards, to re-access care in young adulthood, even supporting more flexible housing options. Perhaps the most potentially transformative piece of the new legislation is that many counties see it as a route to “gain” IV-E eligibility for children in foster care whose parents’ income did not qualify them for IV-E during their initial placement, but upon leaving and re-entering care as adults, may now qualify for IV-E through their own income.

Flexibility

One significant component of the Fostering Connections Act is that it recognizes the unique life stage of the emerging adult population. This acknowledgement indicates that this entire demographic, beyond just those in the foster care system, requires a different set of services than what is currently available either to children or adults. However, county administrators agree that Fostering Connections does not provide flexibility in serving those who are not involved in the system by utilizing this funding stream, due to the language of the law and the Title IV-E funding process.

In explaining why Fostering Connections is unable to provide care for those who have no previous relationship with the system, one administrator stated, “That’s not the population that Fostering Connections is meant to serve. It’s meant to keep youth in care so they can get more stability, education, and other things grounded underneath them to help them have better outcomes for when they do leave care.” Many county workers further related that without a change to the federal statute, this provision would continue to be available only to those involved with the foster care system. One county administrator commented: “It’s been clear in the formation we’ve been given from DHS – this is for kids who have been in foster care.”

They made the law change for the 18-21 year olds. I understand why because I’ve been studying the outcomes of those kids in our system for a long time. They don’t do well. They do need services. However, just to throw it at the counties and hope that the counties are going to be able to scrounge some money out of their budgets while operating within levy limits is kind of shortsighted. – County administrator

Concerns of how to provide the matching funds for those who are eligible under Title IV-E and wish to remain in care until age 21 were also mentioned by county administrators. The amount of taxable land varies among counties, making it difficult for some counties to invest more into the system than they currently do. As one person mentioned, “It’s nice to be able to offer that service to families, in this case children, but if there isn’t money available, we’re not able to do it.” County administrators reported having to turn away children and young adults who were not IV-E eligible, because of the lack of alternative funding sources.

Many county administrators are very enthusiastic and supportive of the concept of extending foster care. However, the law maintains that services will be extended if funding is available, and many county administrators fear that they will not be able to afford to extend services, even though they would wish to. A county administrator stated, “I want to provide services, but I need to also be sure that the services we are currently providing will be provided for the next couple of years.” Another commented, “It doesn’t mean that this [Fostering Connections] would bring in additional revenue per se to develop new programs. What it does is it allows us to better serve those youth that already qualify and are willing to accept services.” When so much of the foster care funding depends on local property taxes, sustainability becomes a pressing issue, in light of the unreliability and political unpopularity of a particular level of funding.

Administrators in more populous counties express concern that a state or federal mandate will force them to provide the same dollar amount to every child accessing care. As such counties have more significant populations of foster care participants, they will not have enough tax revenue to continue to provide care to every child, since the low rate of eligibility requires the county to fund the full cost of care for most participants. Further, the current budget deficits in Minnesota were cited as a challenge to providing funding to the entire population of homeless youth in the state.

Youth Accessing Services

Another challenge faced by providers is how to inform local youth in need about the relevant services that are available. Many youth who have never been involved with the child welfare system find access to services through word of mouth, and their service needs are varied. Many of the resources they need come from programs that do not distinguish between IV-E eligible and ineligible clients. Unfortunately, the welcoming nature of these programs poses a potential threat to their sustainability, due to increasing funding needs from helping *all* youth, regardless of their eligibility of access to government funding supports.

Direct Access

As a county administrator frames the question: “How do you reach out and let them know, here are our services, what are they, where are they, what are the criteria or eligibility?” Youth access services from many different avenues, but the most common way that youth and young adults access services is through word of mouth. “First of all, word of mouth. Word of mouth,

youth telling youth,” is given as the most effective reference source by one county administrator. Many of the youth who use service sporadically maintain contact with friends and family who help direct them to the resources they need. Often county administrators will help youth get connected to the things that they need:

They [a specific county] have a wonderful worker over there who works with this population who’s just really passionate about these youth and wanting to make sure they get the best foot forward that they can, upon leaving care and they really advocate for wanting youth to stay in care past the age of 18 and as of now, they’re feeling is that if you want to come back to care, regardless of their status, they want to do everything they can to make that happen. –County Administrator

Individuals access services to varying degrees depending on their need. Their needs run the whole gamut from absolutely everything, to a bed for the night, to the simplest requests: “We had a client in the last year and a half who sat down and did this budget, and he came up with the amount that ‘all I need is \$30 for a monthly laundry bill. I can cover all my other expenses, but all I need is \$30 for my monthly laundry.’”

Programs Outside the Foster Care System

The services that are available for homeless young adults who have not been involved in the foster care system are limited and vary across the state. In Greater Minnesota, these resources are especially scarce. County administrators and providers indicated that a lack of resources as well as a lack of organizations that work with the homeless population present challenges to establishing services. One service provider specifically noted that the closest shelter was a 75-minute drive away. Although the Twin Cities area has more organizations that serve this population, their resources are also limited. In addition, different organizations offer different services, so it can still be difficult for youth to access the specific services needed.

County resources are also limited for the demographic of 18-21 year olds. This lack of resources is due in part to the unique life stage of this age range. One county administrator said:

They’d have to meet an adult mental health criteria or a developmental disabilities criteria. For the most part, they’re not going to be eligible for even Minnesota Care, or hardly any more, or medical assistance to purchase services. And if they haven’t met the criteria for SELF funds, there aren’t a lot of adolescent services for 18-21 year olds out there.

Homeless young adults who were not involved in the foster care system previously would have to find access into an adult program. However, criteria for government programs can be

difficult to meet at this life stage. The most frequently mentioned source for services readily available to those who have not been in foster care was Lutheran Social Services (LSS). The specific services offered by LSS varied across responses. However, geography and population were not apparent factors in whether LSS was cited as a service provider.

Many counties take a more expansive approach, stepping beyond the bonds of their county and making the connections to the people who can help these youth, if they are unable to do so. One county administrator presented a scenario: “If the kid is here from another county, so the kid’s been living at his aunt’s house, and the aunt kicked him out and he aged out of foster from a county, she may call and I’ll give her that contact so she can work with them.”

The youth may benefit from other systems beyond the county network. Other systems - where youth are in a more connected environment already - include places like social services, hospitals, church, jail and parole offices, and school settings. Often in schools, there are programs and counselors in place that will help connect them to the counties. County administrators have been intentional about reaching out to schools and community events with flyers and youth-friendly information, to reach out to youth who may need services and who may not be connected to more traditional support systems. One county administrator theorizes:

Part of what I think is going on, is that when they’re in school they’re a little bit connected and kind of held together and when school ends, they really have no support system, and they’re not fitting well into the work world. You know, they’re not a student that’s going to go on to that secondary, postsecondary education, and so there’s just this kind of gap for them.

Service providers and county administrators are greatly aware of the needs and attitudes of these youth who are less connected to more traditional support systems. They recognize that youth need help, and often prefer to be the active contact engaging the youth, rather than waiting for the youth to come to them. One county administrator remarked, “All these kids are hurting, these youth may take anywhere from a week or more to literally six months to a year, and what we do then, is we search for them...” These organizations help make youth feel safe. A county administrator described a local organization that works in conjunction with the county: “This organization has a youth drop-in center, it’s open from 3-9, for those who are at-risk, homeless youth, they walk in the door everyday to get food, build relationships with adults, and through that, we try to make those healthy connections.” Many service providers and county administrators want to provide broader awareness to their communities. One organization has started a new community awareness program: “What we do with this program is invite people from the community to come and learn more about us. And it’s a way that we are improving and letting people become aware of us.”

Sustainability

When discussing service provision for homeless young adults, service providers, state workers, and county workers alike talked about a variety of funding sources outside of the Title IV-E system. Service providers and county human services departments provide services using funds from federal and state grants and contracts, as well as private donations. Interviewees from the state, counties, and service providers mentioned the Minnesota Family Investment Program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Runaway Homeless Youth funding, the Family Homeless and Prevention and Assistance Program, the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program, Chafee funds, and Support Emancipation and Living Functionally as just a few funding sources which they draw on to provide services to emerging adults.

Service providers and county administrators spoke specifically about two challenges associated with drawing on such a variety of funding sources: restricted service provision and program sustainability. One service provider stated: “Youth-serving nonprofits tend to be...the bastard stepchild of the nonprofit movement when it comes to money.” When asked whether funding types/sources dictated the populations they could serve or the services they could provide, all of the nonprofit staff we spoke with confirmed that this was absolutely the case. One service provider explained: “At one point, due to funding limitations, we helped kids for four months...In the past year we’ve had more money and [are able to serve kids] for as long as 12 or 18 [months] for particular young adults.” A major challenge for both counties and service providers then is being able to provide a consistent continuum of services. “Services come and go based on available money, and even the best nonprofit in the world can’t do a perfect job making sure that their program is sustainable when the grant funding ends,” noted one service provider.

In addition to being able to provide a consistent continuum of services, county administrators and service providers that were interviewed struggle at times even to maintain the services they do provide. The challenge of program sustainability was referenced directly by three county workers. One county worker noted that many funding types do not allow enough administrative funding to hire permanent staff members, which support service delivery. “It’s expensive to hire staff,” the county representative said. “You have to have the funding to pay for it. If you hire staff then you’ve got to provide all the insurance and benefits.” Service providers noted the same concern, explaining that “a lot of funders don’t want to fund your administrative support, and

Service providers noted the same concern, explaining that “a lot of funders don’t want to fund your administrative support, and yet it is essential” to our work.

yet it is essential” to our work. Another county administrator explained that funding which is tied directly to one population or service provision makes it difficult to develop new programs.

Challenges

Based on analysis of the primary data, the consultant team has identified four key challenges to providing services to homeless emerging adults.

Challenge 1: The emerging adult developmental stage affects their response to care.

The emerging adult life stage offers a unique set of challenges in determining how to provide services to this population. Individuals in this age range can be resistant to continuing in the foster care system past the age of 18, and those who do access care require a unique array of services which are not encapsulated in any current system.

Youth Resistance to Care

According to county administrators, some young adults who are eligible to remain in care under the Fostering Connections Act may be resistant to do so as a result of fatigue from previous experience in the system. Many youth also choose to leave the system because of their strong desire for independence. According to one county administrator, many young adults want to make it on their own: “A lot of it is the child not wanting – it’s adolescent development. They think that they know it all, they think they don’t need help, they think they’re more skilled and prepared than they probably are.” Another county administrator explained: “For them [the youth], to fire us is empowering.” The clients’ sense of independence may lead them to leave care even when it is not the best choice for them; perhaps that cannot be prevented, perhaps it should not be. “Firing” a worker – and subsequently attempting to live independently in the real world - will be a learning experience that they should be allowed to have, without sacrificing a second chance to return to care.

Lack of Appropriate System to Address Unique Needs of Population

Because emerging adults do not fit into systems intended for adolescents or adults, it is difficult to meet their needs. Many homeless young adults need not only a stable living situation, but they also need support to be successful in school, training to pursue permanent employment, and education in basic life skills. Currently, the lack of an appropriate system leads emerging adults to be shoehorned into systems developed for youth or adults, systems which, according to county administrators and service providers, are not appropriate to the unique needs of emerging adults.

Challenge 2: The system is decentralized.

Service provision to those in foster care as well as homeless young adults is decentralized across the state and even within each county. This decentralization affects how counties establish Title IV-E eligibility for young adults and how they access related funding and services. In addition to this, the decentralized system requires services providers to conduct an intake

process with all young adults, regardless of whether those youth have accessed similar services from another provider or another county.

Title IV-E Reimbursement Process

Currently, Title IV-E reimbursements are funneled from the federal level through the Minnesota Department of Human Services and then down to each county. Within each county, there is not one place or position that is an authority or “one-stop shop” for Title IV-E funds. Financial workers, caseworkers, judges, and social workers all must take certain steps to ensure that an eligible youth actually receives Title IV-E funds, yet each of these officials has a different level of understanding of Title IV-E processes and standards.

The decentralization of services also poses a challenge to accessing Title IV-E funds for young adults who can be very transient. Members of this population often move between counties or even out of the state in order to find jobs, attend a postsecondary school or job-training program, or try to find a stable home. However, under the Title IV-E system, it is the responsibility of the young adult’s home county to provide services and receive reimbursement. This task can be difficult for counties as there is no central system to help them find out what services are available in other areas.

Service Provider Intake Process

The information obtained during the intake process for youths accessing services is similar among service providers. In general, youth must provide basic information that can include details about income, current housing, education, work history, and social history, among other things. Many service providers use the Homeless Management Information System, which standardizes some of the inquiries that are made on applications. However, organizations use different databases and intake processes depending on their licenses and the programs they offer, as well as different grantors to whom they must report specific information. Therefore, the specific questions they ask and information they require varies.

The application process is time-consuming for most service providers, as there is a great deal of information that must be provided to determine what services a youth needs. This process can also be intimidating for youth as it is time-intensive and some of the questions asked may concern sensitive subjects.

Title IV-E Process

At the county level, there are currently several staff members and separate offices involved in Title IV-E reimbursement, disbursement, and service provision. This makes it difficult for any one person to truly understand how Title IV-E funding works. One county administrator explains, “Each county child foster care division has several layers of personnel determining eligibility and ensuring documentation, with few seeming to understand any piece of the puzzle beyond their own direct work.” According to the primary data, county financial workers, social workers, judges, case managers, and nonprofit service providers all have different levels of

understanding of Title IV-E processes and standards, despite the fact that they all work with Title IV-E dollars and eligible young adults.

Challenge 3: A lack of understanding and awareness of Title IV-E and Fostering Connections exists.

A lack of understanding about the eligibility requirements and the process of Title IV-E funding exists among county administrators. This disconnect makes it difficult for counties to ensure that they are drawing on Title IV-E funding for all of their eligible youth. In addition, homeless youth may not be aware of the services that are available to them. Without this knowledge, youth do not know where to turn for services.

Title IV-E

Title IV-E funding comes with a set of eligibility requirements that must be learned by county administrators in order to identify which individuals qualify for that particular funding stream. Title IV-E is one of many funding sources, each with their own set of requirements. As one county administrator phrased it, “IV-E, to access it, there’s so many rules, and then the amount that they reimburse us isn’t even half of what a placement costs.” Although DHS has worked with counties to train administrators in how Title IV-E can be utilized for their own clients, there remains a lack of understanding among some county service providers around the state. One county administrator said, “Most social workers don’t really understand IV-E. And if they do, they’re usually incorrect. I’ve done different workshops, and anyway, I’m glad I don’t have to understand it.” A clear disconnect remains between county administrators and the requirements of the funding sources they utilize for service reimbursement.

Limited Communication with Population

Many homeless young adults who access services find out about services through word of mouth communication, leaving out those individuals who may not be a part of any network of homeless youth. In addition, youth who left the system before the implementation of Fostering Connections may not be aware of the changes that the Act made available to the 18-21 year-old population. This puts the burden on service providers and counties to begin identifying these youth who are left out. While most have the attitude that it is their obligation to reach out to these youth, there are few resources to begin that process. As one service provider noted, “We are not a great example of this, because without a program running [due to limited funding], we haven’t done much marketing.”

Challenge 4: Funding is insufficient for services.

Title IV-E is not a viable or significant source of foster care funding for counties. This is in part due to the match that counties must provide for any Title IV-E funds they use. Further, the outdated income standard used to establish Title IV-E eligibility limits the number of youth who can access this funding stream.

County Matching

Currently, in order to access Title IV-E funding, each county must match federal reimbursements using local property tax levies. These reimbursement amounts vary greatly, dependent both on numbers of eligible youth and levels of available county funding to match and to provide additional services. For rural counties especially, this means that Title IV-E is not a viable funding source because the county property tax values are so low. More urban counties struggle with matching funds not because they have too little property tax value, but because they have so many eligible homeless youth that the money they do have is spread very thin. This makes it difficult for several counties to sustain services and programs based on Title IV-E dollars.

Title IV-E Income Requirements

The income requirements for establishing Title IV-E eligibility for a youth entering foster care are one of the most significant barriers to providing services. As was previously discussed, the income standard has not been changed since 1996. Since this level has not been modified to account for inflation or the increased cost of living, it severely limits the number of eligible youth. Equally problematic is the timing of the income eligibility determination, which is made when a youth is first placed in foster care and cannot be changed thereafter regardless of any change in parental income. Those youth for whom parental income cannot be established are automatically determined ineligible.

Policy Options

Based on the aforementioned challenges and the goals of this project, the consultant team has designed four policy options that the clients should pursue:

1. Propose an emerging adult transitional living pilot program
2. Develop an Outreach and Tracking System for the emerging adult population
3. Increase Title IV-E education and awareness for homeless youth, service providers, and county administrators
4. Advocate at the federal level for updated Title IV-E standards

Policy Option 1: Propose an emerging adult transitional living pilot program

The consultant team has determined that the best way for Lutheran Social Services and the Youth Moving Forward Coalition to achieve expanded service for homeless emerging adults is to propose a pilot transitional living program to the Dayton Administration. The proposed emerging adult pilot program directly addresses two challenges identified by the consultant group – that the developmental stage of emerging adulthood affects their specific needs and response to care, and that the current system is decentralized, resulting in inadequate services and unequal resources among counties throughout Minnesota.

Eligibility and funding for the pilot program are based on the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act. The pilot program would contain four primary components: a Title IV-E approved housing situation, a Casey Life Skills-certified adult to provide parental guidance, independent living plans, and a comprehensive database to maintain records on participants and program availability. Initially, the program would be implemented in two counties – one rural and one urban – with the plan that the state and participating counties would evaluate the program’s success after two years to determine expansion goals.

The concept of the transitional living pilot program arose from the recommendations of service providers and county administrators who discussed the value of transitional living programs for emerging adults.

They don't want to be in a shelter, they want to be in a house. If they could come up with, you know, good 4-bedroom homes or miniature apartments or utility type apartments ...we've also talked that it's nice if they have a house mom that...has their own unit within the house, but that [youth residents] can go to for assistance with homework, or they can go to for assistance with, you know, transportation, or filling out an application or something. – County administrator

I'd like to have a program...not really a shelter, not really a group home, but like a supportive living environment. Somewhat set up like a dorm, where kids could have an efficiency apartment with a house parent. They still need a parent. They could pay 30% of their income, and they could live with some supports and extending foster care type services, have them participate and have groups available to help them and build some skills.... That's my magic wand. –County administrator

The design and implementation of the pilot program are further detailed in Appendix B.

Policy Option 2: Develop an Outreach and Tracking System for the emerging adult population

The consultant team believes that the best way for Lutheran Social Services and the Youth Moving Forward Coalition to establish a statewide system or network of service provision is to establish a statewide database to track homeless emerging adults and service providers. The proposed statewide database addresses a specific challenge identified by the consulting team - that the system for homeless youth service provision is decentralized.

Service providers and county administrators alike identified emerging adults as being a transitory population – moving from one county to another to pursue education or work opportunities. The current system for homeless youth services, however, is not conducive to a transitory population, as the state does not have a unified system that allows counties and service providers to view availability of resources. Many service providers noted that a single system through which they could access information about service availability would be extremely useful:

The only thing that a homeless youth system could do is try to have a single point of entry. A single place that you call. We've played around with figuring out how to do that on a pretty informal, low-tech scale, but that's something that we talk about.

–Service provider

The purpose of the statewide database is two-fold. First, it would allow counties and service providers to access information on the availability of programs throughout the state. For example, if a youth came into Hennepin County in need of housing, but all of the sites were full, the county worker could check availability in surrounding counties and direct the youth to an open facility, while submitting an online request to reserve the space. The second purpose of this database is to create a tracking system for those homeless youth who have never been a part of the state foster care system. Staff who could access the database would be able to find information about the youth's background and service provision. All staff that access the database should be required to undergo regular data sensitivity training to ensure privacy and confidentiality.

Policy Option 3: Increase Title IV-E education and awareness for homeless youth, service providers, and county administrators

The consultant team believes that the best way for Lutheran Social Services and the Youth Moving Forward Coalition to address the lack of awareness and understanding of Fostering Connections and Title IV-E funding is to increase awareness among homeless youth, service providers, and county administrators. To increase awareness of what services the Fostering Connections Act offers to 18-21 year olds, Lutheran Social Services should implement an outreach program that focuses specifically on the changes to Title IV-E funding options. Specifically, they should ensure that counties, service providers, and youth are aware that

- Emerging adults aged 18-21 can now be covered by Title IV-E funds;
- Those youth aged 18 or older who did not previously qualify for Title IV-E under their parents' income, may now qualify based on their own income;
- Emerging adults may re-enter care at any time; and
- Title IV-E funds an array of transitional and independent housing options.

The youth education and awareness program should target high schools, with the goal of proactively informing youth about their option to stay in care beyond age 18. The program should also utilize social media, which is frequently used by emerging adults regardless of their homeless status. One county administrator explains, "More information needs to be given while they're still in high school." Another county administrator says:

[Youth need to have this] information before they leave that safer environment of the high school. Of course, it's difficult with those kids because they're not always going to be...we should probably have a Facebook app. That's probably the one way they found about information. At least that age group.

In promoting a better understanding of Title IV-E funding as it relates to the Fostering Connections Act, Lutheran Social Services and the Youth Moving Forward Coalition can ensure that those who are currently eligible maximize this valuable resource.

Policy Option 4: Advocate at the federal level for updated Title IV-E standards

The consultant team believes that the best way to increase the number of young adults who qualify for Title IV-E funding is to update the income eligibility standards, which have not been modified since 1996. Congress sets this federal standard and thus the law must be changed at the federal level.

Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota has the benefit of a national network (Lutheran Services of America, Lutheran Social Services affiliates of other states) that can be leveraged to bring this campaign to the federal stage. LSS can also engage local affiliates – faith partners, public policy organizations, and other allies – to raise awareness and build a strategy around moving this

issue onto the agenda in Washington. There are additional actions that can be taken locally such as informing and mobilizing community members across the state to influence Minnesota's Congressional delegation. Other state foster care providers can also be engaged, as they are knowledgeable, committed advocates to the cause of providing an updated income threshold, to ensure more care can be provided to youth. As one service provider noted:

We all do grassroots education because we have to, to survive. But we also know that it's extremely important to do, for the purpose of, eventually there has to be more resources to do more work. The youth services network, our collaborative of the executive directors of all the agencies, has advocacy on its agenda, and part of that is working with Youth Moving Forward...and I do think that we need to be more focused on advocacy at that level and just putting resources behind it.

Updating the eligibility income standard to align it with current family incomes would increase IV-E eligibility considerably and provide significant reimbursement dollars for many children and young adults in care. Rather than attempting to expand foster care legislation to fund homeless prevention and care programs for all emerging adults, it may be more politically feasible to update the federal Title IV-E standard to reflect current costs of living and the federal poverty line.

Conclusion

Homeless young adults are not receiving needed services because the state lacks a system in place that addresses their specific needs. Legislation passed over the last few years has extended the age of those previously in foster care who can continue receiving services. Still, many young adults who have never been involved in the child welfare system require assistance, and their needs have not been addressed.

The purpose of this report is to assess the current situation of the homeless young adult population through discussions with both the nonprofit and public sectors in the form of interviews and focus groups. Secondary data from sources such as the Wilder Research Foundation was utilized throughout as a supplementary resource, highlighting the demographic makeup of this population. The consultant team recommendations were based on the specifications of the client, Lutheran Social Services, a review of relevant literature, and a thorough analysis of qualitative data shared by service providers and county administrators in the state.

The main challenges identified are: the influence of the emerging adult developmental stage on the individual's response to care, significant decentralization of the system that serves the young adult homeless community, insufficient funding for services needed, and an overall lack of understanding and awareness about Title IV-E and Fostering Connections from county administrators, service providers, and youth.

Based on those challenges, the policy options created could improve the efficacy of services currently provided to the homeless young adult population. These options include a young adult transitional housing pilot program, implementation of a statewide database, increased education among county administrators, service providers and youth, and a federal advocacy campaign to bring the Title IV-E eligibility requirements up to current standards.

The pilot program maintains a focus on providing transitional housing and also includes several ways through which homeless emerging adults can achieve independence and become productive Minnesotans. While residing in transitional housing, residents will learn life skills shared by a full-time "house parent". The pilot program will incorporate the use of a database so that caregivers and administrators can reference them to efficiently determine what services are utilized or needed.

The implementation of a statewide database will improve communication across county borders and service agencies and allow those homeless young adults previously not in the foster care system to be entered into a system that can begin the tracking and monitoring of these individuals. The pilot program and the statewide database would both centralize service provision (both state and nonprofit), and would begin closing the service gap that these young adults face.

Both the education program and the advocacy option could increase the number of youth who are able to access Title IV-E funds through expanded services provided by the Fostering Connections Act. Increasing education could help counties and service providers ensure they are maximizing access to Title IV-E funds for all eligible youth. Furthermore, educating young adults could normalize choosing to remain in care once they are 18 years old. Updating eligibility standards to be more in line with current costs of living will also increase the number youth who qualify for Title IV-E funding.

The policy options can be implemented independently or concurrently. Lutheran Social Services can implement these options to champion policies that will increase the number of homeless young adults receiving developmentally appropriate care.

Appendix A- Research Design

Research Goals	What do you want to know and why do you want to know it?	Specific points or questions	From whom do you need to gather information?	How will you gather that information?	What form does data need to be for data analysis of the research questions?
1) Describe the current homeless youth population in Minnesota.	We need to determine the parameters of homeless youth between the ages of 18-21 in Minnesota, so we are addressing the concerns of the appropriate population.	Describe the age, gender, location, disability status, ethnicity, current resources, and family situation of the population.	Current service providers Public agencies who maintain relevant statistics/data (such as the Department of Human Services)	Literature review Semi-structured Interviews with service providers Secondary data from service providers and agencies	Qualitative data transcribed in a word document Excel data Nvivo Coding
2) Determine the extent and appropriateness of services for emerging adults. a) In Minnesota, what services are currently being provided to homeless youth aged 18-21? b) What limitations are service providers currently facing? c) What are limitations for homeless youth?	We need to know: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What services are currently provided. ○ What services are needed that aren't already provided. ○ Which organizations are providing services. ○ What is limiting them from offering more, and what is limiting the target population from accessing offered services. 	Which organizations are providing services to homeless youth, and which services are they providing? What needed services which are not currently being offered, and why? How could those services be provided? What legal, logistical, and economic barriers do service providers face in delivering services?	Current service providers from a variety of locations who offer a variety of services Department of Human Services	Focus group(s) with public agencies Focus group(s) with service providers Literature review to identify stakeholders Semi-structured Interviews	Qualitative data transcribed in a word document Excel data Nvivo Coding

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowing this will allow us to address the extent and appropriateness of current services, along with any logistical, legal, or economic obstacles/barriers to providing and accessing new, needed services. 	What legal, logistical, and economic barriers do the target population face in accessing services?			
Research Goals	What do you want to know and why do you want to know it	Specific points	From whom do you need to gather information	How will you gather that information?	What form does data need to be for data analysis of the research questions?
<p>3) Determine the obstacles to extending Title IV-E funding to homeless youth who have not been in foster care.</p> <p>a) What are current uses of Title IV-E funds in Minnesota and how are the funds administered?</p> <p>b) How do homeless youth access current services and what criteria are currently used for determining their</p>	<p>We need to know what the current law and statutes specifically allow and forbid for IV-E eligibility and the specific requirements for matching those funds. This will help us understand the barriers to extending IV-E funding to the target population.</p> <p>We need to obtain a better understanding of how IV-E funds are being used so that we can determine how flexible the funds currently are.</p> <p>We need to know how the target population currently accesses services</p>	<p>Is there a policy rationale or moral statement in the distinction between youth who have and have not been in the system, or is it just a question of limited availability of services, certainty of need of the recipients, and records for accountability?</p> <p>What providers receive IV-E funds, and how are the funds used?</p>	<p>Service providers currently serving the target population</p> <p>State and federal laws and funding information (i.e. Minnesota statutes, rules, & laws)</p> <p>Public agencies</p>	<p>Focus group(s) with service providers</p> <p>Literature review of laws, statutes, and funding information (Minnesota & other states)</p> <p>Semi-structured Interviews with public agencies</p>	<p>Qualitative data transcribed in a word document</p> <p>Excel data</p> <p>Nvivo Coding</p>

<p>eligibility? Do these factors differ for youth who have and have not been in the foster care system?</p> <p>c) Identify alternative funding sources and services for homeless youth who have not been in foster care.</p>	<p>(i.e: do they go directly to the provider, or is there some intermediary?), and how service providers determine whether those people are eligible for services. This will help inform us about potential access and eligibility criteria which ensures that the target population can access a new emerging adult system.</p>	<p>Who determines what organizations receive funds and how they are dispersed?</p> <p>Does receiving these funds limit providers in any way?</p> <p>Who is accessing services? How do homeless youth find out about these services?</p> <p>What criteria, if any, must an individual meet in order to obtain services?</p> <p>How do these criteria differ for youth who have and have not previously been in the system?</p>			
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Appendix B-A Pilot Program

Emerging Adult System Pilot Program Design and Implementation

Purpose

The purpose of this pilot program is to create a micro-system designed around the needs of emerging adults experiencing homelessness in Minnesota. Approaching the Dayton Administration and a Republican-controlled legislature in this economic climate will be challenging. By introducing a mediating step like a pilot program, rather than a full-scale statewide implementation plan, Youth Moving Forward is more likely to capture the attention of key members of the administration and legislature. The pilot program is intended to be a unique system to serve the needs of emerging adults experiencing homelessness. The system’s design is based on an analysis of the current state of services for homeless youth, feasible funding options, and recommendations of current service providers and county administrators.

Eligibility and Funding

Eligibility and initial funding for the pilot program would be based on the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act. The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act defines a homeless youth as:

A person 21 years of age or younger who is unaccompanied by a parent or guardian and is without shelter where appropriate care and supervision are available, whose parent or legal guardian is unable or unwilling to provide shelter and care, or who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.³⁵

This definition fits perfectly with one needed to meet the needs of homeless emerging adults, as it opens the program to any homeless youth, regardless of their relationship to the foster care system. County administrators and service providers expressed an interest in creating a common definition of homelessness that encompasses levels of homelessness not currently supported by many funding options.

<p>“I would love for the homeless definition to be the same regardless of what program it is. It’s getting a little frustrating...I want to see a more uniform definition of homelessness. For people, it’s so involved to try to prove that they’re homeless. It can be overwhelming.” –Service provider</p>	<p>“I also think if the federal definition of homeless was a little less strict. Just because in the rural area a lot of our kids are couch-hopping as opposed to truly on the street, homeless. Because that’s just not an option in a small, rural town. And so it would be nice if that were considered homeless, because that’s probably the biggest population that we see.” –County administrator</p>
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³⁵ “Runaway and Homeless Youth Act.” 2010 Minnesota Statutes: 256K.45. Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes. <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=256K.45>.

In addition to defining homeless youth, the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act allows for appropriation of state funds to support “[t]ransitional living programs [which] help homeless youth and youth at risk of homelessness to find and maintain safe, dignified housing. The program may also provide rental assistance and related supportive services, or refer youth to other similar organizations or agencies that provide such services.” Such supportive services may include: career planning, counseling, medical referrals, life skills training, and job placement. Additionally, up to four percent of the appropriated funds “may be used for the purpose of monitoring and evaluating runaway and homeless youth programs receiving funding” ensuring a reporting mechanism on the success of the pilot program.³⁶ Beyond appropriations, Department of Housing and Urban Development and, when possible, Title IV-E funds could be used to support participation in the program.

Program Design

The design of the pilot program was inspired and informed by interviews with service providers and county administrators. Several individuals described a “house parent” model. The following excerpt from two county administrators perhaps best illustrate this concept:

<p>“They don’t want to be in a shelter, they want to be in a house. If they could come up with, you know, good 4- bedroom homes or miniature apartments or utility type apartments ...we’ve also talked that it’s nice if they have a house mom that...has their own unit within the house, but that [youth residents] can go to for assistance with homework, or they can go to for assistance with, you know, transportation, or filling out an application or something.” –County administrator</p>	<p>“I would like to see funding that we could have another program like that where the youth who are aging out of foster care could transition into that apartment program. We have a live-in house mom, whatever you want to call her. She has her own apartment and she’s the caretaker, but she also mentors the kids that live there. If we could have a program like that for youth aging out of foster care within our own county, we’d like to keep our kids in our county here.” –County administrator</p>
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As such, each transitional housing location will house five to six emerging adults in a house or small apartment building used specifically for this program. The program may also accommodate the participation of individuals living in dorms. Individuals attending college who do not reside in the house full-time may be approved to participate in and complete similar programming (i.e. the Casey Life Skills plan); these students will still have access to the house during holiday breaks, on weekends, to attend life skills courses, or whenever else they feel compelled to do so.

The house will be managed by at least one individual, a house parent, who has obtained Casey Life Skills certification, which is already utilized by Minnesota’s Department of Human Services. This house parent will provide resources, stability, and parental guidance to residents. The house parent will work with the county on the intake process and with updating records of care. The house

³⁶ “Runaway and Homeless Youth Act.” 2010 Minnesota Statutes: 256K.45. Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes. <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=256K.45>.

parent will also be responsible for overseeing the residents' independent living plans as designed by the Casey Life Skills program. The end goals of the life skills program will include determining future housing and transportation options as well as securing employment, all goals which were described in interviews.

Building upon discussion from the focus group, this pilot program would utilize the database described in Policy Option 2 of this report. The database would allow house parents, county administrators, and other necessary parties to access residents' records, which could be routinely updated and viewed as needed in one central data location. One service provider explained: "There are some funders who are interested in that possibility [a database], because it would help everybody, obviously. Many of our forms would be...almost exactly the same." The standardization of records will increase the efficiency with which county administrators and service providers can determine a resident's progress and services required, and further help provide an ideal setting to demonstrate the potential of a statewide system for emerging adults experiencing homelessness.

Appendix C-Legislative Proposal

**Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota
2485 Como Avenue
St. Paul, MN. 55108**

PROPOSAL TO APPROPRIATE FUNDING FOR PILOT PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION TO AID WITH ASSISTANCE TO THE HOMELESS EMERGING ADULT POPULATION OF MINNESOTA

LEGISLATIVE PROPOSAL

TO: Office of Governor Mark Dayton
FROM: Consultants on behalf of Lutheran Social Services & Youth Moving Forward
DATE: May 2, 2011
RE: Proposal to Appropriate Funding for Pilot Program Implementation to Aid with Assistance to the Homeless Emerging Adult Population of Minnesota

Statement of the Issue

Currently, homeless young adults in Minnesota experience a serious lack of services directed to their needs as legal adults who still require significant support towards achieving the capability to lead independent adult lives. Existing social services are structured in a dichotomy divided between services either for children or adults. Young adults experience an intermediate developmental stage and are not appropriately served by either system. Their unmet needs hinder them from becoming independent, highly functioning members of society.

Although the Fostering Connections Act allows extension of Title IV-E funding to expand foster care to eligible individuals until they are 21 years old, many homeless emerging adults are ineligible and do not have access to appropriate care. As it stands, there are an estimated 1,950 homeless young adults on any given night in Minnesota.^{i ii}

Proposal

Program will support the development and independence of homeless young adults whose needs would not be adequately met through existing services. It will provide developmentally sensitive and effective services through a transitional living program offered to homeless young adults aged 18-21, so that they can attain full independence through stable housing and life skills education programs.

Each transitional housing location will accommodate five to six emerging adults in a house or small apartment building used exclusively specifically for this program. These residents will pay a specified percentage of their income (e.g. 30%) towards the program as rent. Individuals attending college who do not reside in the house full-time may be approved to participate in and complete similar programming (i.e. the Casey Life Skills plan); these students will still have access to the house during holiday breaks, on weekends, to attend life skills courses, or whenever else they feel compelled to do so. The house will be managed by at least one "house parent" who has obtained Casey Life Skills certification, a program already utilized by Minnesota's Department of Human Services.

This house parent will provide resources, stability, and parental guidance to residents. The house parent will work with the county on the intake process and updating records of care. The house parent will also be responsible for overseeing the residents' independent living plans as designed through the Casey Life Skills program. The life skills program will include determining transportation options (which may require funding through the pilot program), obtaining independent and stable housing, as well as securing employment. Residents will "graduate" from the program upon successful completion of the residents' own Casey-Life-Skills-structured developmental life plan.

This pilot program will utilize a database that only house parents, county administrators, state administrators, and other necessary parties trained in privacy protocol can access, so that residents' records can be routinely updated and viewed as needed. This unification of records across participating counties will increase the efficiency with which county administrators and service providers can determine a resident's progress and services required.

Rationale

This proposal will address several concerns for this population. Homeless young adults are less likely to attain educational credentials, less likely to maintain steady jobs, and more likely to experience substance abuse and dependency, depression, and risky physical and sexual behaviors than their non-homeless counterparts. Additionally, homeless young adults are less likely to receive regular, preventative medical care, increasing their likelihood of accessing expensive emergency care.ⁱⁱⁱ

Without intervention, this population is likely to become a part of the homeless adult population in Minnesota. In 2010, Wilder Research reported that of homeless adults in Minnesota in 2009,

- 47% have lived in jail, prison, or a juvenile detention system;
- 46% have at least one serious physical problem;
- 55% have at least one serious mental illness; and
- 30% do not have a high school diploma or GED.^{iv}

This proposal will also address the state's economic concerns. Employment opportunities are projected to exceed available qualified workers in Minnesota; construction, service, and professional jobs are each expected to grow by more than 12% over the next ten years.^v The Department of Employment and Economic Development, the Ramsey County Workforce Investment Board, and the Minnesota Business Partnership warn that there will be a net of 640,000 job replacement openings over the next ten years.^{vi} Providing homeless young adults with the stability and education that will allow them to secure stable, permanent employment could address this forecasted labor shortage; their productivity may be vital to improving the state's economy. Proactive funding and services for this population will allow them to become more productive both economically and socially, reducing their future cost to society.

Supporting Research and Reports

- **"Long term homelessness among individuals and families in Minnesota 2009."** Statewide survey of persons without permanent shelter, conducted by Wilder Research
- **"Long term homelessness among individuals and families in Minnesota in 2003."** Detailed report by Wilder Research on those who are homeless more than one year OR more than four times in three years.

- Independently conducted research on behalf of Lutheran Social Services and the Youth Moving Forward Coalition

Impact

Homeless young adults - as well as the state and county administrators and organizations that provide services to this population - stand to be positively impacted by this proposal's enactment. State and county administrators will have access to an enhanced resource through which they can track and appropriately provide services for individuals served by homeless prevention and intervention programs. Homeless emerging adults will have a developmentally appropriate system of resources available to them so that they can achieve full independence and become productive Minnesotans. This initiative also has the potential to increase the number of educated, qualified workers who will produce and participate in the state economy, benefiting employers as well as the general public.

Funding

The pilot program could be primarily funded through the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA). Per the RHYA definition, “[a] person 21 years of age or younger who is unaccompanied by a parent or guardian and is without shelter where appropriate care and supervision are available, whose parent or legal guardian is unable or unwilling to provide shelter and care, or who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence” is determined to be homeless, and thus eligible for care.^{vii} Therefore, the pilot program could be accessed by homeless youth whether or not they had previously been in foster care.

The legislation allows for the use of state funds to support “[t]ransitional living programs [which] help homeless youth and youth at risk of homelessness to find and maintain safe, dignified housing. The program may also provide rental assistance and related supportive services, or refer youth to other similar organizations or agencies that provide such services.” Such supportive services may include: career planning, counseling, medical referrals, life skills training, and job placement. Additionally, up to four percent of the appropriated funds “may be used for the purpose of monitoring and evaluating runaway and homeless youth programs receiving funding” ensuring a funded reporting mechanism on the success of the pilot program.^{viii}

This pilot program will require funding for:

- At least one FTE house-parent per housing structure
- DHS employee program oversight hours, up to one FTE
- Training house parents, county and state administrators on the database including privacy sensitivity training
- Training for each house parent in Casey Life Skills certification
- Potential licensing costs
- Food, clothing, and transportation
- Utilities and additional housing costs

Effective Date: Indicate either “Upon enactment” or a specific date.

Upon enactment.

ⁱ “The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008.” Public Law 110-351. October 7, 2008. http://www.fosteringconnections.org/tools/assets/files/Public_Law_110-351.pdf.

ⁱⁱ Wilder Research. Homelessness in Minnesota 2009: Results of the Wilder Statewide Survey. October 2010. <http://www.wilder.org/download.0.html?report=2339>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Wilder Research. (June 2007) *Return-on-Investment analysis of supportive housing*. Accessed April 23, 2011: <http://www.wilder.org/download.0.html?report=2024>.

^{iv} Wilder Research. Homelessness in Minnesota 2009: Results of the Wilder Statewide Survey. October 2010. <http://www.wilder.org/download.0.html?report=2339>.

^v Senf, Dave. (July 2010) *Minnesota Job Outlook to 2019*. Department of Employment and Economic Development. Accessed April 23, 2011:

http://www.positivelyminnesota.com/Data_Publications/Employment_Review_Magazine/July_2010_Edition/Minnesota_Job_Outlook_to_2019.aspx.

^{vi} Ramsey County Workforce Investment Board. Accessed April 23, 2011: <http://www.rcwib.org/>

^{vii} “Runaway and Homeless Youth Act.” 2010 Minnesota Statutes: 256K.45. Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes. <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=256K.45>.

^{viii} “Runaway and Homeless Youth Act.” 2010 Minnesota Statutes: 256K.45. Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes. <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=256K.45>.