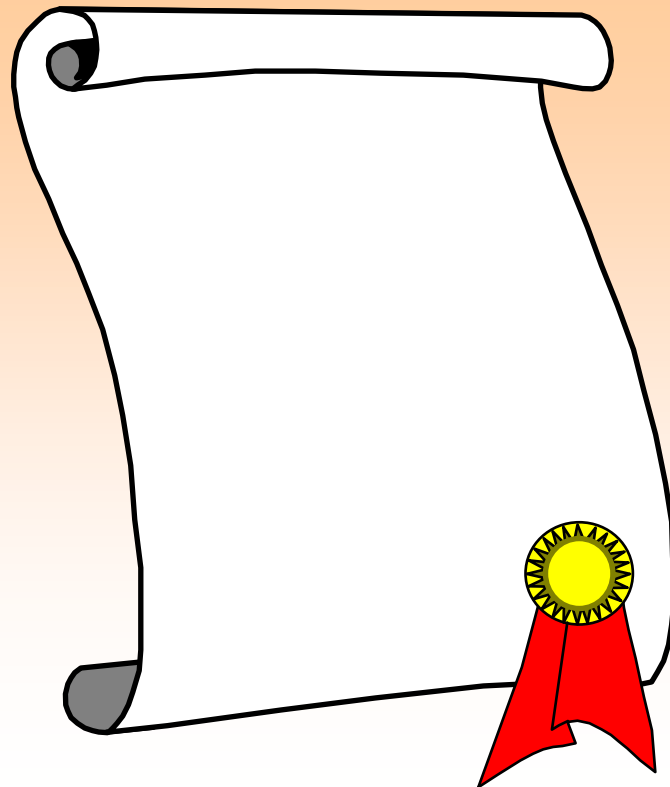



# Pathways to College for Former Foster Youth





# Need for Current Research on Former Foster Youth

- Outcomes for former foster youth in literature tend to be negative due to multiple factors
- Little known about post-secondary educational achievement for former foster youth
- Only two studies report college graduation rates for former foster youth (2-5% graduate from college)
- California lags behind national average in % of high school graduates enrolling in college (CA: 54.8%, national average: 62.9%)



# Purpose of Current Study (Merding, Hines, Lemon, & Wyatt, 2002)

- Primary purpose was to investigate the factors that enabled youth emancipated from the foster care system to achieve educational success.
- Three areas of focus:
  - individual
  - system related, and
  - county specific resources

# Research Design

- Three phases of data collection (2000-2002)
  - survey in the form of a self-administered questionnaire mailed to former foster youth on 10 CSU campuses (N = 189)
  - qualitative, in-depth interviews lasting up to 2 hours (N = 27)
  - ethnographic study of 9 counties in which CSU sites were located

# Descriptive Statistics for Survey

- 74% female
- Median age 22
- Ethnic breakdown: 42% White, 23% African American, 20.3% Latino/a, 30.1% Multiethnic
- Almost 20% had given birth or fathered children
- 36.4% received mental health services since discharge from foster care
- Mean age of first foster placement: 10
- Mean time in care: 7 years
- Mean number of placements: 3.4



# Factors Contributing to Negative Outcomes for Foster Youth

- Multiple placements and associated changes in schools
- Inconsistent social support
- Low educational expectations from caregivers
- Tracking of youth into vocational education
- Poor quality of education for group home and on-site schools
- Lack of access to educational assistance or college prep classes and advising

# Findings

- The most important activities in making the decision to attend college included:
  - information about financial aid
  - advising about college
  - attending college prep classes in high school

***The work of adolescence is school!***

## Findings: Importance of Role Models

- School provided most of the role models named by respondents (teachers, academic counselors, etc.)
- *Significant people* did extra to keep students in school and on path to college
- Former foster youth respondents found to be resilient



# Findings: External Factors Contributing to College Attendance

- Having a stable high school experience
- Expectations of college attendance by others
- Challenging high school curriculum
- Attending special programs focused on college
- Belonging to clubs, organizations, and playing sports

# Findings about ILP Services

- ILP services found to focus on instructional services geared towards skills:
  - money management
  - job readiness and retention
  - how to obtain housing and health care
  - nutrition and stress management skills
  - financial aid and college application workshops



# Summary of Research Findings

- Influence of *significant adults* is critical
- Challenging high school curriculum and stability is essential
- Important role models were often teachers and academic counselors
- Foster youth rely on a *system of care* for what a family normally provides



# Implications for Practice

- Multiple placements endanger opportunities to link up successfully with role models in schools
- Education of teachers, counselors, and social workers needs to include more on attachment theory, family dynamics, and developmental theory--especially on how children and youth develop in out-of-home placements



## Implications for Practice (cont'd)

- Social workers need to know more about schools and school systems as well as the importance of school stability, providing challenging curriculum, and the significance of adult role models in the lives of foster children