

# **\$353 MILLION COUNTY FOSTER CARE BUDGET: WHERE ARE THE MEASURABLE OUTCOMES?**

## ***SUMMARY***

The San Diego County taxpayers contribute more than \$199 million annually to the noble efforts of the Child Welfare Service (CWS), out of a total budget of \$353,978,179.<sup>1</sup>

Studies from academia and other governmental entities have documented the lack of success experienced by foster care alumni as adults. The studies suggest that foster care alumni who are statistically high users of public welfare programs *transition from CWS-funded programs to general welfare programs as adults*.

The County of San Diego's Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) budget is more than \$1.8 billion for fiscal 2016-2017. What portions of the HHSA welfare services are used by the County's former foster care youth as adults is unknown.

Without long-term studies to determine whether or not County foster care alumni succeed, the CWS does not know the effects of its delivery of services. The 2016/2017 San Diego County Grand Jury found there is no known linkage between foster care investment and results achieved. By not knowing County Foster Care alumni outcomes, the County of San Diego cannot make major improvements to CWS programs or policies to reduce future HHSA general welfare expenditures.

Child Welfare Services' programs are finite, ending in most cases, at age 18. However, general welfare services are often open-ended with an unknown fiscal impact.

The CWS and general welfare programs are both under the umbrella of the County HHSA. The Grand Jury believes delivery-of-service refinements to the CWS programs may result in less dependence on the public purse after that transition from foster care.

The Grand Jury investigation found that neither HHSA nor CWS conducts research on the outcomes of County foster care alumni.

The San Diego County Grand Jury recommends the County of San Diego sponsor a university research effort to determine the effectiveness of CWS policies and programs in contributing to successful County foster care adult alumni.

## ***INTRODUCTION***

The Grand Jury's investigation focused on what research the County's CWS or HHSA conducted to determine if CWS programs and policies contributed to successful adult foster care alumni. The magnitude of County taxpayer's dollars funding CWS without substantial evidence

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<sup>1</sup> County of San Diego provided information December 8, 2016

verifying the long-term effectiveness of their programs and policies sparked the Grand Jury's investigation and is a cause for concern.

The Grand Jury believes that a primary goal of the CWS in its delivery of services should be contributing to successful adulthood outcomes of former foster care youth.

### ***PROCEDURE***

The Grand Jury reviewed various academic publications, and research sponsored by government entities, as well as private social service groups. Building on this foundation, the Grand Jury:

- Reviewed academic and governmental documents citing longitudinal outcomes of foster care alumni.
- Met with representatives from the San Diego County Probation Department.
- Met with representatives from the San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency.
- Interviewed staff of the San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency.
- Interviewed staff of the San Diego County Child Welfare Services.
- Reviewed San Diego County Child Welfare Services' reports and policies.
- Reviewed documents provided by the San Diego County Child Welfare Services.

### ***DISCUSSION***

The Grand Jury's focus for its investigation was on how the County of San Diego's CWS determined the effectiveness of its delivery of services relative to foster care children. CWS, in this year's budget, will spend approximately \$31 million for contractors provided remediation programs. The Grand Jury focused on whether there is a relationship between the funds expended by CWS and the success achieved by County foster care children as adults.

The County Board of Supervisors adopted Live Well San Diego as a regional effort in 2010. The goal is to improve citizen's health, support healthy choices, and live safely while thriving. The Grand Jury believes CWS programs and policies and their efficacy is not just a matter of dollars alone. Rather, improving the lives of County foster care alumni would be a positive and significant contribution to the Live Well San Diego partnership.

In academia the term "longitudinal studies" commonly refers to investigations or studies that take place over a period of years. A few abstracts of these longitudinal studies are provided here in order to understand the magnitude of the problems inherent in foster care alumni that affect the quality of their lives. These examples serve to sharpen the focus on foster care services.

- The Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study was published in 2006. The purpose of the study was to determine "the intermediate and long-term effects of family foster care on adult outcomes."<sup>2</sup> The study contributed to the question of what agencies and communities do to improve outcomes for youth currently in care that contributes to better

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<sup>2</sup> Peter J. Pecora et al, "Educational and employment outcomes of adults formerly placed in foster care: Results from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study," *Children and Youth Services Review*, February 2006.

adult outcomes. One outcome, among many, of the study was to encourage youth to graduate from high school rather than to accept a GED due to the diminished employment opportunities associated with a GED equivalent. Three universities (Harvard Medical School, the University of Michigan Survey Research Center, and the University of Washington), together with three social service organizations, conducted this study. Two of these social service organizations were public entities: the Oregon Department of Human Services and the State of Washington Department of Social and Health Services. The third entity was the Casey Family Programs, a private foundation.

- Employment of Former Foster Youth as Young Adults: Evidence from the Midwest Study was gathered from former foster care youth from three states: Illinois, Wisconsin, and Iowa. There were 732 young foster care alumni ages 17 to 24 in this study. There were multiple takeaways, including the primary need to stress early intervention by child welfare services in behavior problems in young men to prevent their interaction with the justice system. As evidenced in the study, by around age 23, “16 percent of young men who aged out of care were incarcerated and nearly three-fifths (58.8 percent) ... had been convicted of a crime since age 18”<sup>3</sup>
- Emancipating Foster Youth Literature Review was a 2007 effort by our local San Diego State University School of Social Work seeking answers to two main questions: “1) What are the characteristics and needs of older youth emancipating from foster care, especially those facing the transition from foster care to living on their own? 2) What kinds of services do exist and should exist to prepare youths for independent living and to support them after they have left care, and how effective are those services?”<sup>4</sup>

The Grand Jury believes the County Board of Supervisors should be asking some key questions: What is the cost to society in San Diego County of troubled former foster youth, now young adults? Could a finer-tuned delivery of services by the CWS result in fewer funds expended by the County HHSA while concurrently resulting in additional successful adults?

In San Diego State University’s “Emancipating Foster Youth Literature Review,” some general welfare financial costs were presented *in 2007 dollars*.

Some typical annual costs:

- “Housing an emancipated foster youth in a program supporting services (mental health, educational and vocational counseling, job placement, financial literacy and life skills training, mentoring) such as Hillside in Pasadena - between \$20,000 and \$25,000.”

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<sup>3</sup> Jennifer L. Hook, “Employment of Former Foster Care Youth as Adults: Evidence from the Midwest Study,” *Chapin Hall Issue Brief*, March 2010. ,

<sup>4</sup> Anita Harbert and Donald Dudley, “Emancipating Foster Youth Literature Review,” *Southern Area Consortium of Human Services*, , August 2007.

- “Incarceration for the same young adult - between \$55,000 and \$115,000 (depending upon the type of facility), according to the State’s Safety and Welfare Remedial Plan filed in April 2007.”
- “Residence in a mental health facility - \$215,000.”
- “Supporting a single homeless adult - \$54,996, according to National Coalition for the Homeless (taking into account people who are homeless utilize expensive programs, such as emergency shelters, jails, and psychiatric hospitals).”<sup>5</sup>

The State of California and CWS make available, on a voluntary basis, extended foster care to youth who have aged out at 18. The program, The California Fostering Connections to Success Act (AB 12), incorporates takeaways gathered from the earlier longitudinal studies cited. The program is the result of shortfalls in identified skill sets that longitudinal studies highlighted. It is the belief of the Grand Jury that longitudinal studies of former San Diego County foster youth are warranted to determine the efficacy of CWS programs and policies.

The County of San Diego’s HHSa and CWS have verified that the County does not conduct follow-up research on County foster care alumni. The reason given for the lack of follow up is based on a concern over the privacy of the individual. Additionally, according to HHSa and CWS, there are no laws indicating such follow up is authorized.

The rationale by CWS and HHSa for not following adult foster care alumni outcomes is unclear since studies cited earlier found a way to examine the lives of former foster care youth as adults without sacrificing their privacy.

### ***FACTS AND FINDINGS***

***Fact:*** The County of San Diego HHSa does not collect data on the outcomes of County foster care alumni as adults.

***Fact:*** The County of San Diego CWS does not collect data on the outcomes of County foster care alumni as adults.

**Finding 01:** There is no known relationship between CWS programs and policies and taxpayers contributions to the long-term success of County foster care alumni.

**Fact:** The County HHSa does not know how many former foster care youth utilize the County’s welfare services.

**Finding 02:** The County HHSa has no data to determine if delivery of services by the CWS results in lower/higher dependence on general welfare programs by former County foster care youth.

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<sup>5</sup> *Supporting THP+ for California’s Emancipating Foster Youth: A Compilation of Statistics* (2006).

**Fact:** States and academic institutions have collected data on the outcomes of foster care alumni for the purpose of improving delivery of services by public and private social services agencies.

**Finding 03:** Data from longitudinal studies of foster care alumni has resulted in improvement and understanding of the foster care programs and policies.

### ***RECOMMENDATIONS***

**The 2016/2017 San Diego Grand Jury recommends that the San Diego County Board of Supervisors:**

- 17-53:**        **Reduce HHSA welfare costs by foster care alumni through a cooperative effort with a local university with the mandate to conduct a longitudinal research effort to determine the effectiveness of CWS policies and programs in contributing to successful foster care alumni.**
- 17-54:**        **Utilize existing County databases to determine how many individuals who have been subject to CWS have ultimately been users of the adult welfare system or subject to the criminal justice system.**

### ***REQUIREMENTS AND INSTRUCTIONS***

The California Penal Code §933(c) requires any public agency which the Grand Jury has reviewed, and about which it has issued a final report, to comment to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of the agency. Such comment shall be made *no later than 90 days* after the Grand Jury publishes its report (filed with the Clerk of the Court); except that in the case of a report containing findings and recommendations pertaining to a department or agency headed by an elected County official (e.g. District Attorney, Sheriff, etc.), such comment shall be made *within 60 days* to the Presiding Judge with an information copy sent to the Board of Supervisors.

Furthermore, California Penal Code §933.05(a), (b), (c), details, as follows, the manner in which such comment(s) are to be made:

- (a) As to each grand jury finding, the responding person or entity shall indicate one of the following:
  - (1) The respondent agrees with the finding
  - (2) The respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding, in which case the response shall specify the portion of the finding that is disputed and shall include an explanation of the reasons therefor.
- (b) As to each grand jury recommendation, the responding person or entity shall report one of the following actions:
  - (1) The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implemented action.
  - (2) The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a time frame for implementation.
  - (3) The recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a time frame for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or head

of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. This time frame shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the grand jury report.

(4) The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefor.

(c) If a finding or recommendation of the grand jury addresses budgetary or personnel matters of a county agency or department headed by an elected officer, both the agency or department head and the Board of Supervisors shall respond if requested by the grand jury, but the response of the Board of Supervisors shall address only those budgetary or personnel matters over which it has some decision making authority. The response of the elected agency or department head shall address all aspects of the findings or recommendations affecting his or her agency or department.

Comments to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court in compliance with the Penal Code §933.05 are required from the:

<b><u>Responding Agency</u></b>	<b><u>Recommendations</u></b>	<b><u>Date</u></b>
<b>San Diego County Board of Supervisors</b>	<b>17-53 through 17-54</b>	<b>9/4/17</b>