

BRIEF REPORT ON SUPPORTS ACCESSED BY YOUTH FROM CARE

Based on the *Link* Program Evaluation Study



Link Evaluation - Overview and Methodology

For the past 25 years, Aunt Leah's Place has been providing programs for youth in foster care, teen moms, and those transitioning out of foster care.

The *Link* Program - designed for former foster youth aged 19 and older - provides: housing-related support, life skills workshops, help with resumes, job searches and applications, drop-in, emergency food and clothing, outreach and one-to-one support tailored to issues identified by each youth.

In 2012-2014, researchers from the University of Victoria School of Social Work conducted and evaluation of the *Link*. A total of 53 people were interviewed twice at 6-9 month intervals.

- 21 *Link* program participants
- 22 youth from care who had not accessed the *Link* program (comparison group)
- 6 program staff; and
- 4 support people (of the youths)

This brief report offers a summary of findings related to support based on interviews with a total of 43 youth from foster care at Time 1 and 31 at Time 2.

WHAT "FORMAL" SERVICES DO YOUTH FROM CARE REPORT USING (OTHER THAN THE *LINK*)?

Highlights of the Findings

- Overall, youths' use of various health and support services was relatively low (see Table 1); moreover, there weren't strong differences between *Link* participants and the Comparison Group youth in their self-reported regular use of different types of formal services.
- At the same time, noteworthy between-group differences included:
 - The percentage of *Link* participants who accessed alcohol and drug counseling was higher relative to the Comparison Group, likely because of Aunt Leah's strategic partnership with Odyssey, an alcohol and drug program for youth that has been providing counselling on-site at Aunt Leah's. In the words of one youth:
"The drug and alcohol counselor comes to Aunt Leah's. It makes a big difference that she's there."
 - More Comparison Group participants relative to *Link* participants accessed a mental health professional, likely because many of the Comparison Group were recruited from youth-serving organizations that offered coordinated/integrated services with mental health care providers¹.

¹ For example, Inner City Youth Mental Health program works in strategic partnership with Covenant House and other youth-serving shelters/ supported housing facilities in the Lower Mainland.

WHAT “INFORMAL” SUPPORTS DO YOUTH FROM CARE REPORT RECEIVING REGULARLY?

Highlights of the Findings

- At least half of youth indicated that they regularly received support from family. However, in describing the type(s) of support they received, the majority said that family member(s) provided emotional support only.
- At Time 1, nearly one third of Link participants reported receiving support from a former foster parent; at Time 2, however, only 19% reported receiving support from former foster parent(s). None of the Comparison Group reported getting support from their former foster families.
- A number of youth stated that they regularly received support from their partner’s family. The type(s) of support that youth received from the partner’s family included emotional, practical, financial and housing-related support.
- A few youth from both the Link and the Comparison group named mentors, peer mentors and colleagues from youth-driven organizations such as the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks as key supports.



Table 1: Youth study participants’ reported use of “formal” services

TYPE OF SERVICE	Link		CG	
	Time 1 (n=21)	Time 2 (n=16)	Time 1 (n=22)	Time 2 (n=15)
1-1 worker	29%	6%	41%	27%
Mental health professional	14%	19%	41%	47%
Alcohol & Drug counsellor	19%	25%	9%	7%
Community-based counsellor	14%	6%	9%	7%
Employment counsellor	0%	13%	9%	13%
Other	19%	31%	24%	27%
None	27%	13%	14%	7%

Table 2: Youth study participants’ receipt of “informal” supports

TYPE OF SUPPORT	Link		CG	
	Time 1 (n=21)	Time 2 (n=16)	Time 1 (n=22)	Time 2 (n=15)
Family	48%	50%	73%	40%
Friend	48%	69%	64%	60%
Partner/girlfriend/boyfriend	14%	13%	9%	14%
Partner’s family	24%	25%	0%	20%
Former foster parent	29%	19%	0%	0%
Former social worker	14%	0%	5%	7%
Roommate/ neighbour	5%	6%	14%	0%
Other	10%	19%	18%	7%
None	5%	6%	9%	7%

WHAT TYPE(S) OF SUPPORT DO YOUTH FROM CARE REPORT RECEIVING FROM FAMILY?

Highlights of the Findings

- The most frequently reported type of support received from family was **emotional support**; many youth said that their mom, dad, or sibling(s) were “someone to talk to.”
- The next most frequently mentioned type of support from family was financial support. However, only a handful of youth² reported receiving financial support. Moreover, a few suggested that this support came “with strings attached”.
- Four youth (two from the Comparison Group and two Link participants) reported that their parent(s) provided them with housing-related support.
- At Time 2, two Link participants reported receiving help from their mother in relation to child care.

² Two Link participants and five Comparison Group youth at Time 1, and two Link youth and three Comparison Group youth at Time 2.

WHAT TYPE(S) OF ADDITIONAL SUPPORT DO YOUTH FROM CARE SAY WOULD BE HELPFUL?

Highlights of the Findings

- At both Time 1 and 2, the most frequently named area of support that youth said would be helpful was support related to employment. Other types of additional support that youth said they would find helpful included budgeting/financial literacy, education, and, amongst the Comparison group, support in accessing mental health services.
- At Time 2, a substantially higher percentage of Link participants (44%), relative to the Comparison group (13%), stated that they didn’t need any additional supports.

In sum, although youth indicated that support made an important difference to them, many also noted that for day-to-day living, they were on their own. In other words, family did not provide them with significant material/financial and/or housing-related support such as the majority of their ‘parented’ peers rely upon at an equivalent point in their lives, and relatively few study participants regularly accessed formal services.

A full report of the evaluation can be accessed at:
<http://www.uvic.ca/hsd/socialwork/research/home/projects/index.php>

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Paintings (“The Things We Remember”
and “Toy Soldier”) by Cori Creed