

CTSI Standard Pilot Grant LOI

Title: Support in the transition to adulthood for youth in foster care

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On any given day there are about 60,000 California children in foster care; nearly 50% of these children reside in Los Angeles County.¹ The transition out of foster care is a particularly vulnerable time for youth. A national report noted that leaving foster care without connections to supportive adults and access to resources increase youths' risk of homelessness, poverty, and unemployment.² In fact, youth are less likely than peers to graduate high school (53% vs 83%) and experience high rates of homelessness (11-38%).³ Support has the potential to attenuate the negative outcomes associated with maltreatment experiences, specifically emotional and tangible support from within or outside the family system may buffer against the long-term outcomes of adversities. The federal Chafee Program provides funding to community-based organizations to support youth in/and transitioning out of foster care (TAY) with services and fiscal support to promote a positive transition to adulthood.⁴ Yet whether the support is enough to meet the needs of TAY is less clear. Given that TAY report smaller social networks⁵, often lack strong and supportive relationships⁶, and the lack of effective interventions targeting the needs of this population, the goal of this pilot funding is to produce foundational data to establish the support needs of service-connected TAY that facilitate a successful transition into adulthood.

Children's Institute, Inc (CII) is one of the largest children and family serving non-profits in Los Angeles County. CII supports TAY through the provision of case management and mentoring support that encourages high school graduation, college and/or job readiness, and independent living. Services are received in the form of 5 contact hours a month for 24-months. Feedback from providers is that 5 hours per month alone is not optimal for meeting the needs of TAY. While the 2-year model of services dictated by funders is a solid bridge for youth, if and how these services result in successful outcomes over time is unclear. Thus, the goal of the current proposal is to understand: (1) the benefits of service engagement and remaining perceived needs given the limits of services, (2) the desire for either a more structured (5 service hours/month plus intervention) or longer service engagement period (5 service hours/month for more than 24 months), and (3) establish the protocol and proof of concept in retaining/track program graduates in the domains of educational attainment, employment, housing, self-efficacy, self-sufficiency, social networks/support/capital, & self-esteem. The well-established relationship between CII and USC Social Work creates a unique opportunity to explore the needs of a vulnerable and hard to reach population and is aligned with the CTSI goal of funding community-university partner research. This work will provide pilot data for an R34 or R01 intervention proposal to NICHD.

If funded, we propose to (1) complete individual interviews with Chafee funded services providers in Los Angeles County (N=10), (2) complete a survey of current and former CII TAY service users to identify influence/impact of services on the wellbeing and success of transitional age foster youth (N=200), and (3) complete 2 focus groups with TAY currently receiving services (12-16 individuals) and 2 focus groups with alumni of the CII services (12-16 individuals) to understand service benefits, individuals needs that remain, and desire for more structured or more time in services. Using a sequential mixed methods design (completing the focus groups after the survey) will also allow for a better understanding of the "why" related to quantitative findings (which provide us with the "what").

The project team will consist of Julie Cederbaum (PI), an associate professor in the USC School of Social Work, Julie Harbutte (Co-I) CII clinical program manager in the transition-aged youth program, and Danette McBride (Co-I) CII vice president of strengthening communities and families. The PI has had prior NIH funding⁸⁻¹³ and a current scored R01 in resubmission (NICHD)¹⁴. PI has publications¹⁵⁻²⁷ and prior projects²⁸⁻²⁹ focused on TAY. The PI and Co-Is have collaborated since 2019 with the PI serving as the evaluator on a parenting intervention overseen by McBride.³⁰ PI has served for Harbutte on program visioning activities. Bill Monro, project director for PI, will serve as project staff. He has extensive experience working with CII on a number of federally funded projects. The teams have the expertise in subject, methods, and access to the population. The university-community partnership is fundamental to the project's success.