
Oregon Independent Living Programs

2010-2011 Comprehensive Program Review Findings

Submitted by:

Human Services Research Institute

7690 SW Mohawk St.

Tualatin, OR 97206

Sept. 15, 2011



Introduction

In June 2010, the Oregon Department of Human Services contracted with Human Services Research Institute (HSRI) to coordinate and conduct program reviews of each of the 20 Independent Living Programs in Oregon. The ILP review process is intended to ensure that contract requirements for ILP services are being met by contracted community providers around the state. The program review process documents the current operations of each ILP in terms of its program structure, case flow, services provided, youth satisfaction, and collaboration/communication with other service providers in the community, including DHS and foster parents. The program reviews also examine contract compliance through an audit of case files. At the end of each review, each program is given verbal and written feedback on the strengths and challenges faced in providing ILP services to foster youth in their community. This final report describes the process used by HSRI to complete the reviews, summarizes the common themes that arose in the reviews, reports on the extent of program adherence to ILP contract performance measures, and provides recommendations on what program areas arose as needing additional support and on how the review process could be improved upon, given the resources available for conducting reviews.

Oregon Independent Living Program Review Process

HSRI conducted the program reviews of the 20 Independent Living Programs in Oregon between July 2010 and July 2011. Given the scope of the reviews, HSRI scheduled approximately one and one-half days for each program review. This allowed time to conduct interviews, focus groups, a case audit, and an exit interview the following morning. To guarantee a broad perspective in each site review, the review team for each site included an HSRI representative, a DHS representative from the State ILP Desk (ILP Program Coordinator Rosemary Iavenditti, or ILP Youth Transition Specialist Carrie van Dijk), a peer reviewer (staff or program manager from another ILP in the state), and a youth reviewer (youth from another ILP in the state). Including a variety of people in the review process was valuable in many ways: the state representative was able to provide clarification and interpretation of the ILP contract and program guidelines; peer reviewers provided a practice-based perspective grounded in their experiences providing ILP services and were able to learn from and share ideas with ILP staff; and youth reviewers provided a client-based perspective based on their experiences of participating in an ILP and had many insightful questions and comments. Youth reviewers received a small stipend to compensate their participation in the review process.

The review process for each site visit included the following components:

Scheduling: The State ILP Desk provided ILP and DHS contact information to HSRI. HSRI took the lead in contacting all participants, including staff at satellite offices, to arrange the review schedule. HSRI attempted to schedule the review on a day that was the ILP's regular day for their skill-building workshop (if the program had one), in hopes of promoting youth attendance at the focus groups. HSRI asked ILP and DHS staff to invite youth and foster parents to focus groups, and asked one contact at DHS to schedule the DHS caseworker group interview. HSRI also ensured that all review team members had directions and hotel accommodations for each visit.

Pre-Review Online Survey: The State ILP Desk and HSRI developed a brief online survey of four open-ended questions that was distributed to ILP and DHS staff. ILP and DHS staff were encouraged to distribute the survey to community service providers as well as foster parents and youth who were not able to attend the review. These surveys were helpful in that they provided HSRI with a sense of some of the strengths and challenges of the program prior to each review.

Interviews: Each review included interviews with ILP managers and/or provider agency executive directors, ILP staff, and a group interview with DHS caseworkers and (sometimes) managers. Interviews consisted of mostly open-ended questions and lasted one to two hours. As many interviews were held simultaneously, the review team usually split up to conduct the interviews, sometimes conducting additional in-person or video-conference interviews at satellite ILP or DHS offices. Nearly all DHS group interviews were held at DHS offices to encourage participation and to ensure the opportunity for an open discussion. In some instances video conferencing was used to include caseworkers from more than one branch office, an approach that worked well.

Focus Groups: Usually held in the afternoon or early evening, youth and foster parent focus groups provided insight from the client perspective on the strengths and challenges of the program. The youth focus group was often led by the youth reviewer with assistance from another reviewer; this appeared to help ILP youth feel more comfortable with sharing their thoughts and concerns. Youth participation in the focus groups varied from program to program; attendance ranged from 0 to 18 youth and averaged 7 youth. Youth participation in the focus groups was lower or absent for programs where youth were spread out over a large geographic area, or when program review days fell near but not on a scheduled group workshop. Youth were asked mainly open-ended questions but were also asked to write down some feedback; the writing activity appeared to increase the level of participation from all youth who were present. For one review, when it became evident that youth were not likely to be able to attend the focus group, HSRI developed a written questionnaire which youth completed during a group workshop held a few days prior to the review. This strategy proved to be effective; the responses were detailed and thorough and provided HSRI with a genuine youth perspective to include in the program review report.

Foster parent focus groups were held at the same time as the youth focus groups and participation ranged from 0 to 6 participants and averaged 3 foster parents. Foster parent participation in the focus groups was lower or absent for programs that had less overall involvement from foster parents and in communities where many youth were in college and did not have foster parents, at least locally. Foster parent knowledge and involvement in ILP varied both within and between programs, thus participation in the focus groups sometimes provided foster parents with the opportunity to share experiences and learn more about the ILP, in addition to providing feedback to the review team (e.g. requests to receive monthly calendars or copies of youth assessments). HSRI provided pizza and soda for both the youth and foster parent focus groups to encourage participation, and youth who participated were entered into a drawing for a \$50 gift certificate.

Case Audit: Each review included an audit of the case files of a random sample of youth served by the ILP. The focus of the audit was on documenting the timeliness of the various assessments, plans, and

progress reports, in accordance with the contract performance measures. When time allowed, the review team also informally examined the content and completeness of the plans and progress reports. Time spent on the case audit varied depending on the number of cases being reviewed and the organization of the case files, but was generally quite intensive (e.g. taking one person one hour to review two to three files). The number of cases reviewed per program ranged from 5 to 25, depending on the size of the program.

Debrief: After the interviews and focus groups had been conducted, the review team spent approximately two hours debriefing the information received throughout the day. The debrief session ensured that all perspectives could be incorporated into the exit interview and program review report. Reviewers were asked take notes during their interviews and record participants' responses on written interview guides; these notes provided useful detail to HSRI as they wrote the program review report.

Exit Interview: The exit interview usually occurred the morning following the review and provided the opportunity to clarify any lingering questions and to hold an open discussion on issues that arose during the review. It was especially helpful when an ILP manager and a DHS representative participated in the exit interview, as many useful suggestions were made and roles were often clarified, even in situations where the program was running smoothly and the relationship between ILP and DHS was good. In most cases, attendees at the exit interview included the ILP manager, ILP staff, local DHS supervisor or program manager, HSRI, and State ILP Desk representative.

Program Review Report: HSRI was responsible for writing a report summarizing what was learned in each program review. Each report described strengths and challenges of the provider organization, the ILP case flow, services available, communication/collaboration, and youth satisfaction, along with the results of the case audit. HSRI submitted each report to the state and the provider organization within 30 days of the program review. Reports were also shared with the local DHS. Programs were then required to develop a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) to address how the ILP planned to adjust their services to strengthen the program. Each ILP had 45 days to submit their PIP to the State ILP Coordinator.

For a discussion of how the review process might be improved in the future, see page 22.

ILP Review Findings

This section summarizes findings from across the 20 program reviews to identify the program strengths, areas in need of assistance or guidance, and areas where the reviewers found differences from the findings of the 2007-2008 program reviews. This section is organized by the five topic areas explored during the program reviews.

Provider Organization

Strength of ILP staff: As in the 2007-2008 reviews, one of the strengths of the ILP mentioned most often by DHS, foster parents, and youth was the high quality of the ILP staff. ILP staff were described as invested in youth, respectful of the ideas and opinions of youth, and professional (able to develop

strong bonds with youth while holding them accountable, and maintaining strong relationships with DHS, foster parents and other community partners). The vast majority of the ILP staff are viewed as passionate about their jobs, believe in what they do, and enjoy working with youth.

Retaining this high quality staff should be a priority of any ILP, given that satisfaction with the program is largely related to the quality of the ILP staff. ILP staff, DHS and youth all voiced frustrations when there was turnover in the ILP staff and management. Staff turnover appeared to have become a problem in five programs. In programs where turnover was high, reviewers noted that the reasons staff leave include low pay, lack of affordable benefits, reduced hours, and feeling that the program is not visible or valued by the provider organization. On the other hand, staff who have been in their jobs for a long time appreciate having a lot of flexibility and autonomy in how they run the program, high amount of responsibility and trust from the provider organization (e.g., agency credit cards to purchase needed supplies, ability to change forms as needed, having supportive managers to go to when needs arise), and other peers or managers around them who can step in for one another and share responsibilities or professional expertise. Agencies also talked about the importance of having the right people involved in hiring ILP staff. Some agencies have been able to promote ILP staff to ILP manager positions, when those positions exist and become open, in effect creating a career ladder for ILP staff.

The State ILP Desk encourages each ILP to develop a policy and procedures manual so that, as new ILP staff come into the program, there is consistent documentation to inform them of policies and procedures related to their provider organization and the ILP. These manuals can also contain information on resources in the community that are available to ILP youth, as well as community contacts who have a relationship with ILP (e.g. presenters at workshops). While all ILPs had some sort of policy and procedure notebook (containing standard ILP forms and documents), some were more comprehensive and up-to-date than others. The manual at Meadowlark (Deschutes, Jefferson and Crook counties) was noted as being quite comprehensive: it included contact information for workshop presenters, copies of several years' of budgets, a checklist of steps the program takes to get youth ready for college, and community-specific information on how to register a youth for Job Corps. It also included the Meadowlark policies, ILP contract and procedures, and current forms and instructions.

Provider Organization Support: There were many ways that provider organizations supported the ILP, including by providing training opportunities, management support, and employee benefits. Several organizations offer office space at little to no cost to the ILP. One particularly valuable method of support was the provision of substantial clerical support. At the Next Door (Hood River, Wasco, Sherman, Gilliam and Wheeler counties), clerical staff reviewed the monthly progress reports before faxing them to DHS to be sure that they were complete and consistent (e.g., the correct boxes were checked as being an individual or group learning experience). At Polk County Youth Services, clerical staff enter the ACLSA into the computer to get the score report and type the T2 plans. At Options (Douglas County), the ILP staff was able to use the agency's intern as well as clerical support staff to assist with paperwork.

Transportation: Lack of transportation was a common barrier to youth participation in ILP activities. A couple of programs have come up with creative ways to encourage foster parents to transport youth: 1)

Community Services Consortium (Linn, Benton and Lincoln counties) reimburses foster parents for their mileage; and 2) CAPECO (Morrow and Umatilla counties) has made agreements with foster parents to alternate responsibility for transportation between the ILP staff and the foster parent. In Polk County, DHS caseworkers commented that they appreciated that the ILP staff will call DHS and ask for help with transportation if they need it. Despite efforts to encourage foster parents to provide transportation or form carpools, many ILP staff find that they spend many hours either transporting youth or driving long distances to meet with youth. ILP staff employed by a provider that does not provide insurance coverage while they are transporting youth seem to especially find themselves at a disadvantage, as they cannot bring youth shopping, to job interviews, or to other group ILP gatherings.

When available, some programs have had success in encouraging youth to use public transportation. At LifeWorks (Washington County), youth are encouraged to get a bus pass through DHS so that they can take the bus to workshops (something not all DHS offices are able to do). At Catholic Community Services (Marion and Yamhill counties), the United Way donates bus passes to youth. Catholic Community Services has also secured the support of a local airport shuttle service, which donates the use of its van and driver for youth events.

The reviewers did not find any programs that are exploring the enhanced use of distance learning vehicles such as Skype to deliver ILP training or talk with youth. They also did not hear of any programs using DHS volunteers to help transport youth. The issue of transportation appears to be an area where programs could benefit from time to brainstorm, problem solve, and form connections with other community agencies that deal with this issue. It would also be worth exploring how some provider organizations are able to provide insurance coverage to staff while others are not.

Positive Youth Development: ILPs are encouraged by DHS to use a positive youth development approach in working with youth. The reviewers saw many examples of a positive youth development approach, including programs that provide youth with a safe and supportive environment, establish a positive peer group (through workshops and group activities), create opportunities for youth to pursue their interests, promote healthy life styles, and support youth in developing knowledge and skills. Youth felt that ILP staff considered their ideas and opinions when providing services. Reviewers heard of a couple examples of programs that encourage youths' cultural awareness and cultural expression: NAYA (Multnomah County) offers a range of cultural awareness activities which youth can be involved in, and the ILP staff at Polk County Youth Services opens herself to learning about the varied cultures the youth come from, by speaking conversational Spanish for fun with some of her Latino youth, going to the powwow in Grand Ronde, and learning the words in the Chinuk Wawa language that tribal youth teach her. Opportunities for youth to participate in formal planning and decision making roles appeared to be less frequent, though the reviewers did hear of the youth advisory council at Community Works (Jackson and Josephine counties) which plans workshops, the participation of NAYA youth in the District 2 Youth Advisory Group, and more informal examples of ILP staff responding to and taking into consideration youth's opinions about services. Several programs ask former ILP youth to present at their workshops on an infrequent basis (perhaps annually); yet these presentations were often cited by youth as being highly valuable.

Case Flow

Referral and waitlist processes: The program reviews explored the referral and waitlist processes and found that, as in the 2007-2008 review, there are many areas where ILP or DHS staff are uncertain, confused or frustrated. In some programs the waitlist is kept by ILP and in others it is kept by DHS. Some programs open cases when they first have contact with the youth and invite them to the initial orientation or meeting; others only open the case once the youth has attended the orientation and has expressed interest in continuing with the program. What is most important from the State's view is that the process is clear to the ILP and DHS offices involved. Regardless of how the specific processes varied by program, this review found that they were smoothest for ILPs that had a DHS liaison or that held regular staffing meetings with DHS. This formal communication link can ensure that referrals are promptly responded to and opened, that there are clear priorities for the order in which youth are taken off waitlists, that necessary information on a youth's needs and readiness is conveyed, that any concerns that arise between DHS and the ILP about the referral process can be more readily addressed, and that the process can maintain some continuity even if there are changes in ILP or DHS staff. In programs where the waitlist is kept by the ILP, the opening process is most clearly documented when a first response to referral is sent out within five business days indicating that the referral was received and the status of the referral (usually placed on waitlist), and a second response to referral is sent to DHS (sometimes with a copy of the original referral, as a reminder to the caseworker) indicating that a case on the waitlist is now being opened. See page 14 for information on the degree to which programs complied with the contract mandate that the response to referral be sent within five working days of the receipt of the referral.

Assessment: The State ILP Desk has promoted the use of the Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment (ACLSA) as the common assessment across the state. One of the purposes of having a common assessment is so that there is a common baseline across the state for determining what services a youth needs. Nearly all programs have received training in the ACLSA and several ILP staff are trainers themselves. Some programs described how they use the ACLSA to see what a youth knows and what goals might be appropriate, and many providers discussed using the results as prompts to begin conversations with youth. At least five programs, even if they administered the ACLSA regularly, noted that they felt the ACLSA is too subjective, outdated, and they did not use it when determining what services a youth might need. These programs relied on their own interactions with youth to gain a sense of the youth's skills or used other assessments in addition to the ACLSA, such as the Daniel Memorial Life Skills Assessment or Foster Club's Transition Toolkit. Some programs use assessments for more widespread purposes as well. Meadowlark (Deschutes, Jefferson and Crook counties), while they believe that the ACLSA helps them to understand what a youth knows, uses other supplemental assessments to bring up issues with youth (e.g., if they feel hygiene is an area of need, giving youth an assessment focused on hygiene to help start a conversation about the topic). NAYA (Multnomah County) administers a cultural awareness tool, which is central to the way in which they provide culturally-based services and promote connecting clients to their culture and tribe as an important factor in their success. See page 15 for information on the degree to which programs complied with the contract mandate that the Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment be completed within 30 working days of the case opening.

Transition plans: The reviewers found several instances where the transition planning process was comprehensive and youth-driven. In TEC in Union and Baker counties, for example, the ILP staff explained that her role is to help youth think about their goals realistically and determine action steps. At times, she will meet with youth privately to discuss their hopes and goals prior to inviting foster parents and DHS caseworkers to ensure that youth's opinions are heard, and it is not uncommon for her to spend several hours going over the T2 in detail with youth. She looks at weak areas in the youth's assessments to help give youth direction when determining desired T2 goals. She helps youth break down their long-term goals into short-term goals and action steps. Youth at the TEC in Union and Baker counties described how the ILP staff motivates them to complete their T2 action steps. The ILP staff of this program frequently pulls out a youth's T2s during their one-on-one meetings and assists youth in making any needed changes to their action plans.

The reviewers also found that programs that were more comfortable with using the T2 as a transition planning tool also secured more involvement by DHS caseworkers, foster parents, and others in helping to formulate the plan. These programs described how the planning process flowed more smoothly when they were able to gather enough people around the table to have a full conversation, suggesting that there are benefits for ILP staff who are able to build relationships with DHS caseworkers or foster parents and encourage them to attend, and who are able to encourage youth to include other supportive adults in the planning process. In these programs, while ILP case managers, DHS workers and foster parents all provide input and ask youth directed questions, it is the youth who ultimately decide on their own goals. Youth in some programs, such as Looking Glass (Lane County), described how they believe the transition plans help the youth think about their goals realistically and understand the steps they need to take in order to reach them. They also stated that the T2 updates help to hold themselves accountable. Youth from the ILP in Polk County stated that it helps to be reminded of their goals at their one-on-one meetings.

On the other hand, many programs have difficulty getting youth invested in creating their plan. Many staff described how they themselves find the plan cumbersome and feel that working on it takes away from more useful interactions they could be having with the youth; once it is written, they generally put it away until an update is due—and even then the goals may rarely change, signaling that the plan may not be a good representation of what the youth is working on. Programs that required youth to hand-write the plan, in an effort to keep the planning youth driven, seemed to face more difficulty in that the writing became so cumbersome for some youth that it distracted them from thinking and planning. Where the plan is viewed as cumbersome, perhaps providers would find some relief by using the short form of the T2, which the ILP Desk advises is more appropriate for younger youth. ILP staff mentioned that it would be helpful to them if the T1 and T2 could be in a format that can be accessed on notebook computers, and translated into Spanish.

Nearly all of the programs struggled to complete the T1 and T2 updates every six months. Programs may need some guidance on what constitutes an update, as sometimes plans are updated on a more informal basis between the ILP staff and youth. The reviewers also heard that DHS caseworkers and foster parents are less likely to attend a T1/T2 update meeting than a T2 planning meeting; this is unfortunate as it may mean that these adults are less apprised of the youth's progress and less able to

support it (thus, for example, closing a youth's case and making them ineligible for the IL Subsidy Program). See pages 16-18 for information on the degree to which programs complied with the contract mandates that the T2 be completed with 60 days of the case opening, and that the T1 and T2 be updated every six months.

Services Provided

Skill-building workshops: In the sites where workshop attendance was high, youth repeatedly told reviewers that what encouraged them to attend the workshops were the chance to see friends and other foster youth, food, and opportunity to see ILP staff. To a lesser degree, youth also said that the workshop content was valuable; what stood out to the reviewers in several sites was the degree to which youth felt camaraderie among themselves, in one case describing the group as their family. Several sites that have a high level of workshop attendance hold workshops in regular but multiple locations (e.g., Bob Belloni Ranch [Coos and Curry counties] holds monthly workshops in 5 different communities, Meadowlark [Deschutes, Jefferson and Crook counties] holds monthly workshops in several foster homes). Others ILPs offer workshops on a weekly basis, which seems to help create momentum (e.g. Tillamook YMCA [Tillamook, Clatsop and Columbia counties], Meadowlark at its residential home, and Impact Northwest [Multnomah County] which offers a weekly "ILP Lounge" where youth can get a snack, talk with staff about their goals, and work on job applications, resumes, house hunting, etc.). Workshops that were series also seemed more popular: Impact Northwest offers a 12-week Job Readiness Training program two to three times per year, and a series at Planned Parenthood, both of which youth spoke of highly; and several programs offer cooking workshops one or more times per year. The Inn-Clackamas County appeared to have some success with offering workshops geared for specific age groups; most providers noted that the needs of younger and older youth were often different.

The reviewers learned of a few instances of ILPs expanding the audience available for ILP workshops in an effort to promote engagement and pool resources. Polk and Marion counties have worked together to provide a regular group for pregnant and parenting youth. Polk and Tillamook counties regularly hold retreats together, which helps to save resources and draw more youth into fun events. At Community Works (Jackson and Josephine counties) the ILP has invited youth from their transitional living program to also participate in workshops. Several programs also invite youth on the waitlist to participate in workshops—a practice that not all programs were aware was an option to them.

While the workshop topics usually appeared to be relevant, the reviewers did not find much evidence that providers were using ACLSA results or T2 plans to help them determine common areas of need which could be addressed in workshops. Providers sometimes mentioned that they ask or survey youth to find out what workshops they would be interested in. The reviewers heard several examples from youth of suggestions that they had made to the workshops and how the workshops had subsequently changed to incorporate their suggestions. The most formal example of youth-driven programming was at Community Works where youth have the opportunity to be on an advisory council which plans the workshops. Former or graduated ILP participants were occasional (e.g., perhaps once per year) presenters at workshops in several counties. Several providers struggled with workshop attendance in

the summer, either because their staff time had been consumed with conferences or because youth were busy with other summer activities. Programs where workshops were highly successful usually incorporated a mix of community presenters, the use of ILP staff to teach workshops, and hands-on learning opportunities, which youth consistently noted they enjoy.

One-on-one, face-to-face contact: As shown in the case audit results (page 19), the degree to which providers met with youth regularly for one-on-one, face-to-face meetings varied considerably. One issue that frequently arose during the reviews was that ILP staff had not offered enough detail on the monthly progress reports to explain to DHS and the State ILP Desk what services were being provided, and particularly what was happening during the face-to-face, one-on-one meetings. Meadowlark (Deschutes, Jefferson and Crook counties) addressed this by including their case notes for these meetings with the monthly reports. Other providers, including Looking Glass (Lane County), LifeWorks (Washington County), and Polk County Youth Services, were commended for the detailed case notes that they kept, which served to provide a detailed record of their work, even if they didn't necessarily paste these into the monthly reports.

Another issue which impacted the case audit results was that some programs were not necessarily prompt in closing cases if a youth misses their one-on-one meeting more than one month in a row. If a youth misses their one-on-one meeting, the State ILP Desk expects that the ILP will reach out to the youth, foster parents, and DHS caseworker and let them know that the case will be closed if the youth does not make contact with ILP staff in the next 30 days.

Given the difficulty providers face in meeting with all youth on a monthly basis and providing monthly workshops, it might be appropriate to rethink the ways in which youth are served. It was evident during the program reviews that older youth have the greatest need for regular one-on-one contact, while younger youth benefit more from having the opportunity to engage with other foster youth, begin to think about their goals, and learn some basic skills. With this in mind, the State may wish to modify the program requirements to allow younger youth (ages 14-15) to be exempt from the requirement that they meet with ILP staff monthly one-on-one, provided that the youth attends a workshop in that month. However, caution should be maintained in implementing such a modification to ensure that younger youth still have adequate opportunities to develop a relationship with ILP staff (e.g. before or after workshops) that will enable them to successfully engage with the program.

The youth who spoke to the reviewers were generally highly enthusiastic about the time that they were able to talk one-on-one with ILP staff, saying that it helped to motivate them and remind them of their goals. They also appreciated having a supportive and non-judgmental person to talk to about issues and challenges they were facing. Foster parents and DHS caseworkers also appreciated the time that ILP staff spent with youth addressing their individual needs.

Communication/Collaboration

DHS involvement: The relationship between DHS and the ILP was viewed as a strength in 11 of the 20 ILP providers. These programs commonly had regular meetings to staff cases or had a DHS liaison who

served as a point person between the two entities. The ILP staff may have had desk space or office hours at the DHS site, enabling them to easily check-in with caseworkers. Supervisors from DHS and ILP had frequently taken an active role in promoting the relationship between DHS and ILP and determining each program's respective responsibilities—which may vary by each program's individual situation. In programs with strong relationships, ILP providers commonly consulted with caseworkers' schedules before arranging a T2 meeting (and in the case of two providers, the caseworkers scheduled the T2 meetings), and caseworkers reported that they felt it was their responsibility to participate in T2 planning. ILP staff at Meadowlark (Deschutes, Jefferson and Crook counties) pointed out that they felt DHS became more involved in T2 planning after staff from the State ILP Desk did a training for caseworkers on ILP; the reviewers heard examples from other providers that DHS involvement had improved after they themselves met with caseworkers (individually or at staff meetings) to talk about ILP. Caseworkers were involved in supporting ILP in other ways as well: by providing transportation to ILP events, participating in meetings to find ways to support a discretionary financial need, or creating and participating in a joint ILP/DHS Housing Committee to help prepare and screen youth who wish to receive a housing subsidy.

Caseworkers commonly remarked in interviews that they appreciate the support ILP provided to youth in assessing youth's needs and preparing the transition plan, serving as emotional support to youth, teaching life skills, and helping youth with the paperwork and budgets that enable them to receive housing and education subsidies.

In five programs¹, the ILP-DHS relationship was identified as an overall challenge. Factors that appeared to discourage communication and collaboration included high staff turnover (at ILP, DHS or both), confusion over roles, unrealistic and inconsistent expectations of each other, security procedures at DHS that did not allow ILP staff to easily visit DHS offices, and communications problems (including not being able to reach the other party, feeling ignored, not showing up to meetings or not hearing about them in time, and not being notified when cases are about to close).

One area in which it appeared that further communication and collaboration would be beneficial is in serving youth with developmental disabilities. In particular, the ILP staff and DHS caseworker should discuss what the caseworker expects ILP to do, knowing that ILP has no special training in meeting the needs of youth with developmental disabilities. The DHS caseworker can help ILP coordinate services with the other agencies the youth is working with that DHS had made referrals to (e.g., Voc Rehab, DD services). Catholic Community Services (Marion and Yamhill counties) provides a good example of DHS and ILP working together to meet the needs of youth with developmental disabilities, as the two agencies communicate often and have clear expectations of what ILP can offer. While it is not expected of ILPs, the ILP staff in Yamhill County has even prepared alternative and modified lesson plans specifically for youth with disabilities.

Involvement of foster parents: Many ILPs appeared to have ambivalent feelings about working with foster parents, citing the challenges they faced in engaging foster parents and that sometimes foster

¹ In the remaining four programs, the relationship between ILP and DHS was viewed as neutral.

parents hindered the process more than helped. There did not appear to be a clear understanding among ILP providers that they are expected to involve foster parents in the orientation, assessment, and transition planning process, and many providers made few efforts to invite foster parents to these meetings. Foster parents sometimes told reviewers that since the program was to teach *independent* living, they did not feel they had a role to play in participating. However, several programs have made significant efforts to work with foster parents and noted the benefits of doing so. Community Services Consortium (Linn, Benton, Lincoln counties) ILP staff attend the DHS quarterly foster parent trainings and talk about their program and the importance of foster parent involvement. Meadowlark (Deschutes, Jefferson, Crook counties) and TEC in Malheur County have had success with encouraging foster parents to record the time they spend with youth teaching independent living skills, such as cooking, cleaning or laundry, which the program then uses as part of its match dollars. ILP staff at the Next Door and Polk County talked about how they try to engage foster parents at the orientation by promoting the benefits of the program for them, sharing the importance of their support and involvement (including transporting youth to ILP workshops and appointments), and allowing the foster parents to get to know them as people. The Meadowlark and Polk County programs also invite foster parents to their fun and social activities to encourage relationship building. A few ILP staff, including the staff at TEC in Union and Baker counties noted she places a high value in building relationships with foster parents and acting as a support to help youth maintain positive relationships with their foster parents. Overall, foster parents who spoke to the reviewers were highly appreciative of the support ILP staff offer to youth.

Community Partnerships: While each community is different, the reviewers heard many examples of ILP staff working with high school counselors, college financial aid staff, landlords, mental health service providers, employment services and self-sufficiency services. Several ILP staff attend Citizen Foster Care Review Board (CRB) meetings so that they can meet and coordinate with all the providers working with a particular youth. Some programs set up community service or volunteering opportunities for youth (e.g. TEC in Malheur County, Next Door) or employment and internship experiences (e.g. Tillamook YMCA, Integral Youth Services in Klamath and Lake Counties). ILPs that are part of WIA-funded agencies were particularly more likely to encourage ILP youth to enroll in summer employment programs or other employment training. ILPs consistently noted that they lacked mentors for youth and supportive housing programs, both of which may also support youth after they are discharged; perhaps this is an area where programs could benefit from additional State support in sharing information and promoting partnerships.

Fundraising: The reviewers found that many providers raise funds to directly support ILP youth. For example: Bob Belloni Ranch (Coos and Curry counties) has secured grants from local businesses and foundations to support its skill building weekend and other activities, CAPECO (Morrow and Umatilla counties) and Inn Home-Clackamas have cultivated private donors whom they can turn to for specific requests for youth needs, and Next Door has several churches that will provide home goods for youth. At Bob Belloni Ranch and CAPECO, youth were also involved in asking for money, in an effort to build youth skills such as advocating for themselves. NAYA (Multnomah County) staff talked about how receiving a \$1000 grant from the local Rotary foundation enabled her for a year to take youth out to lunch or go shopping with youth for small items such as socks, outings which she felt helped her to build

relationships with youth and meet youth needs. Through a grant from United Way, the Looking Glass ILP (Lane County) runs the HOPE program for girls in ILP—a two year program which provides a cohort of young women with wrap-around case management, adult mentors, matched bank accounts, and advanced financial training. ILPs that are part of WIA-funded agencies were able to dual-enroll youth and thus expand the resources and funding available to support youth.

Youth Satisfaction

Youth who spoke with the reviewers were generally highly satisfied with the ILPs and credited them with helping them with a range of issues as they move towards independence. Some providers regularly survey youth while they are in the program or once they have exited, but generally ILP staff receive most of their feedback from youth informally, and say that youth are often not hesitant to give feedback. Feedback is generally sought on the workshops, but some providers also make a point of talking with youth about where and when they like to meet one-on-one, and what they like to do with that time. The reviewers heard several examples of ILP staff responding to youth feedback. Yet, youth could benefit from having opportunities to be more involved in steering the ILP activities, and perhaps this is an area that could be explored among the ILP providers.

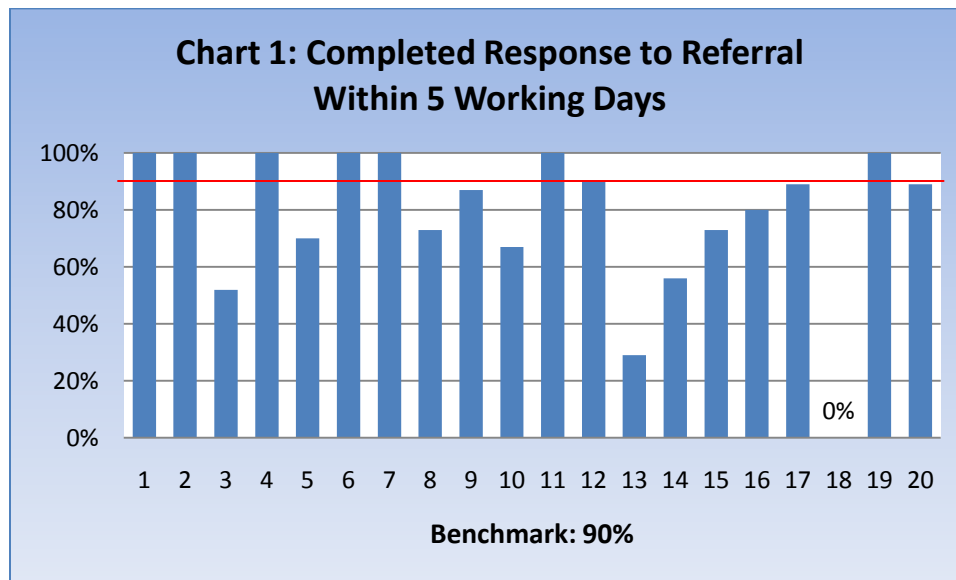
ILP Review Case Audit Findings

The program review process included an audit of the case files of a portion of the youth served by each ILP. The purpose of the case audit was to monitor contract compliance in delivering ILP services. To conduct this portion of the review, the State ILP Desk ran a report of all cases that were open to each program in the year prior to the review, and randomly selected at least 10 percent of the population served, with a minimum of 5 cases and a maximum of 25. The state then provided the program with the list of cases to be reviewed and ILP staff were able to have the files waiting when the review team arrived.

In a number of areas explored through the case audit, the ILP contract provides performance measures to encourage ILP required activities to be completed in a timely manner. When there is a performance measure in the ILP contract, this benchmark is indicated with a bold red line.

Below is a summary of the findings from the case audits.

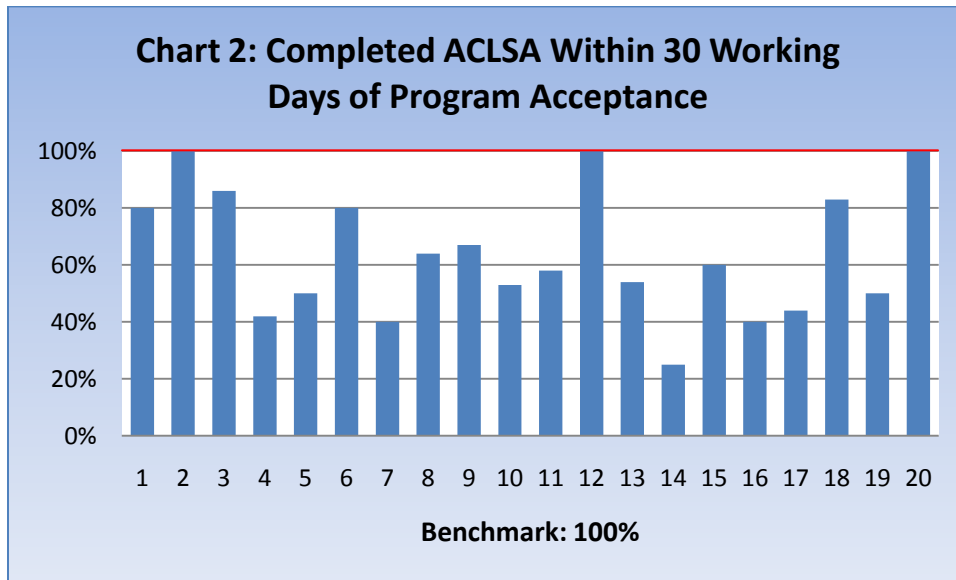
Response to Referral Within 5 Working Days



- Benchmark: 90%**
- Total ILP Average: 78%
 - Eight programs met benchmark

It is evident in Chart 1 that there is quite a bit of variation in this area; however more than half of the programs (12 out of 20) were at or above 80% compliance, and for seven programs, 100% of the cases reviewed included a response to referral within five working days. Only two programs fell below the 50th percentile. Staff from several programs that fell below the benchmark noted they speak with DHS caseworkers on a regular basis and often confirm acceptance to the program verbally prior to sending the response to referral. However, without documentation the review team was unable to give credit for this type of communication. See *Referral and waitlist processes*, page 7, for more information on county practice.

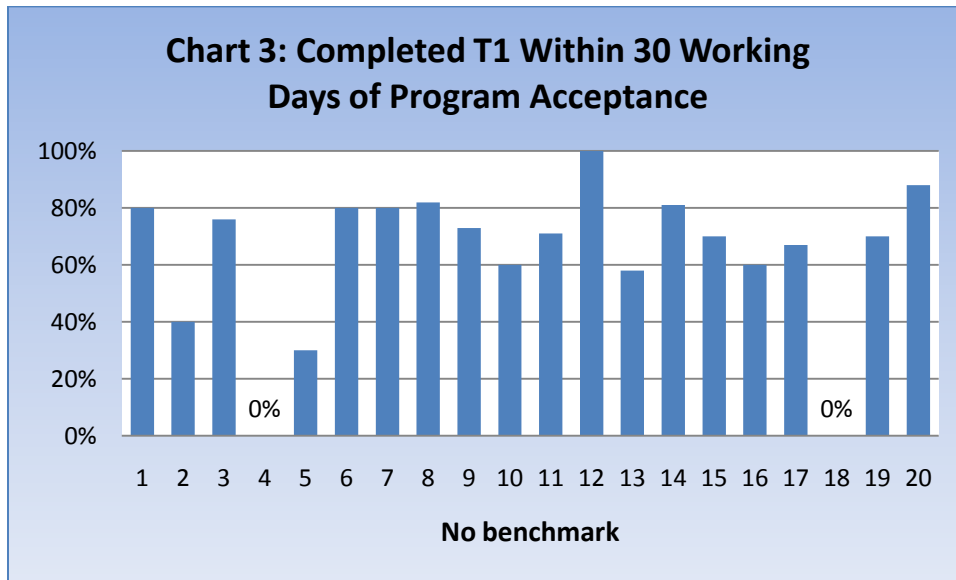
Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment



- Benchmark: 100%**
- Total ILP Average: 64%
 - Three programs met benchmark

As observed in Chart 2, three programs met the benchmark of completing 100% of the Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessments within thirty working days of youths' acceptance to the program. Programs that require youth to complete this assessment at the initial orientation meeting were more likely to meet the benchmark; however, staff from several programs noted they avoid asking youth to complete assessments at the first meeting to prevent youth from becoming overwhelmed. Most staff cited difficulty in scheduling meetings with various individuals involved in a youths' case as the primary reason for completing assessments past the thirty-day mark. See *Assessment*, page 7, for more information on county practice.

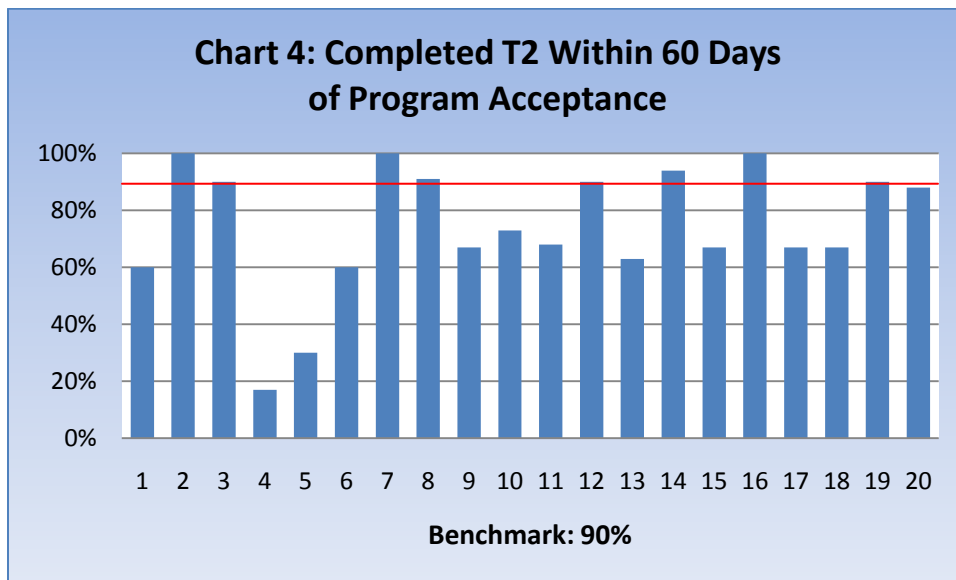
T1 Assessment



- No Benchmark**
- Total ILP Average: 63%
 - Seven programs were at 80% or higher

Similar to the ACLSA results, many programs struggled to complete T1s within thirty working days of program acceptance. Less than half of the programs (seven of twenty) were at 80% or above, though cumulatively programs have improved – the total ILP average was 63%, while at the time of the last review (2007 – 2008) the ILP average was only 50%. Several ILP staff felt there are too many forms for youth to complete and suggested that the state merge the T1 and T2 into one document.

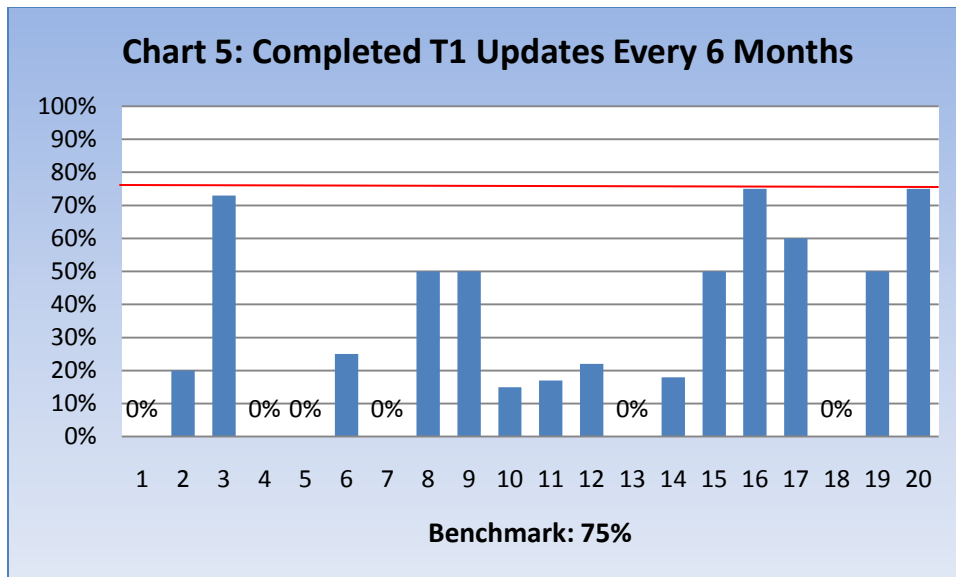
T2 Transition Plan



- Benchmark: 90%**
- Total ILP Average: 74%
 - Eight programs met benchmark

Eight programs met the T2 benchmark by completing T2s within 60 days of program acceptance on at least 90% of the cases reviewed; three of these programs met this timeline in 100% of the cases reviewed. After the last round of reviews, the state clarified the benchmark from requiring programs to complete the T2 within 45 working days of acceptance to the program, to requiring T2s to be completed within 60 calendar days of acceptance. Programs have improved noticeably since the last review; the total average ILP score has increased by 10% and twice as many programs met the benchmark this round of program reviews. Counties varied greatly on the process of completing the T2 transition plans. Many programs encourage youth to complete the ACLSA, the T1, and the T2 all together while other programs prefer to spread them out. Programs that allow youth to complete the assessments over an extended period of time had a more difficult time meeting the timelines, mostly due to scheduling conflicts as multiple meetings with various individuals are involved. See *Transition Plans*, page 8, for more information on county practice.

T1 Updates

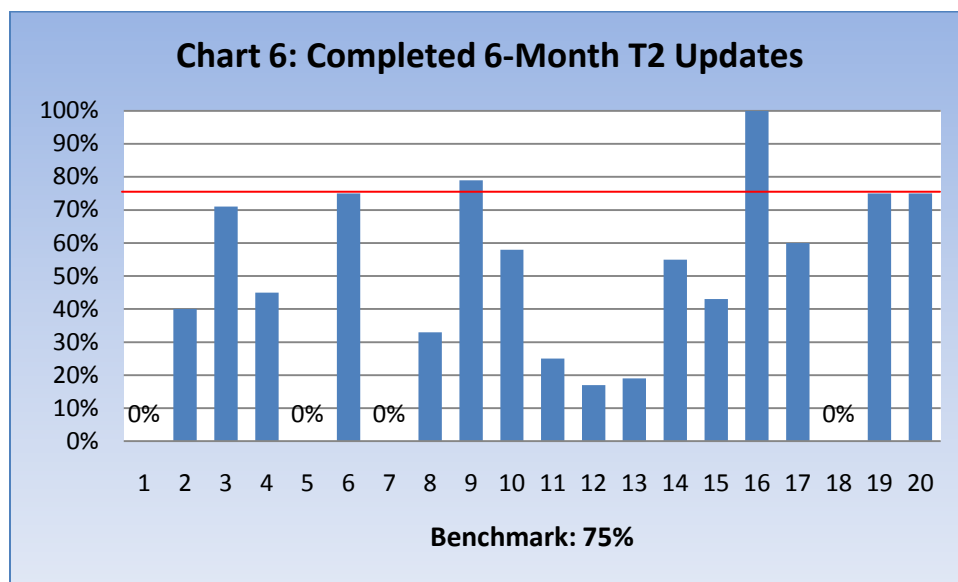


- Benchmark: 75%**
- Total ILP Average: 30%
 - Two programs met benchmark

Most programs struggled quite a bit with completing the T1 Updates every six months; only two programs met this benchmark and twelve of twenty programs fell below the 50th percentile. Most programs cited scheduling difficulties as the main setback, pointing to the trouble with gathering several parties around the table in a timely fashion. ILP staff also noted that it's not uncommon for emergency situations to arise, especially with this population of youth, and assisting youth with immediate concerns always takes priority over paperwork. However, this appears to be an area of concern and programs are

performing even worse than they did at the time of the last review; the ILP average for the last round of reviews was 53% and only three of nineteen² programs were at or above the 75th percentile.

T2 Updates

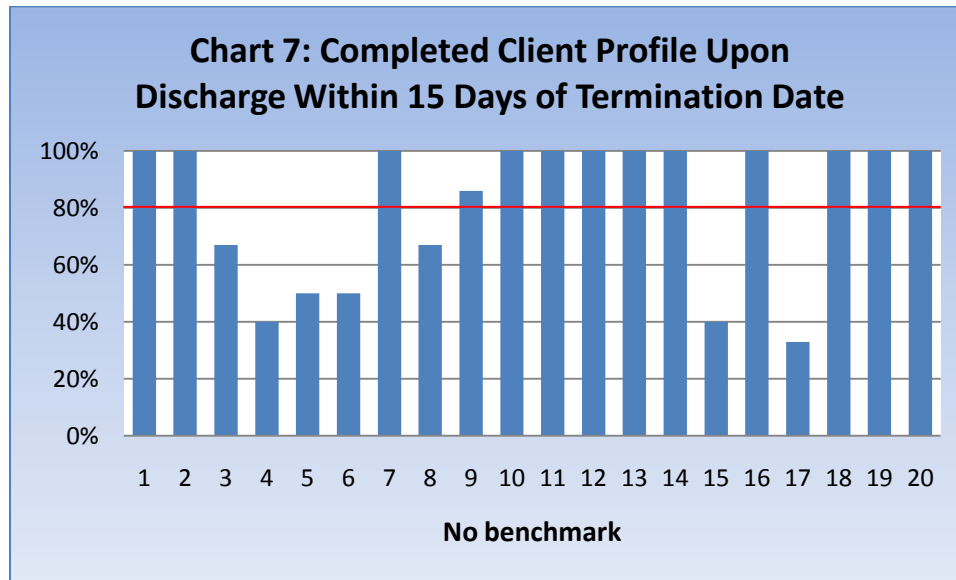


- Benchmark: 75%**
- Total ILP Average: 44%
 - Five programs met benchmark

For many of the same reasons, programs struggled to complete the T2 Updates every 6 months, though they performed slightly better; the total ILP average was 44% and five out of twenty programs met this benchmark. These findings suggest that 6-month T1 and T2 updates timeline is an area that should be addressed by both the ILPs and DHS.

² A twentieth program did not have documentation in this area because of recent change in the provider organization.

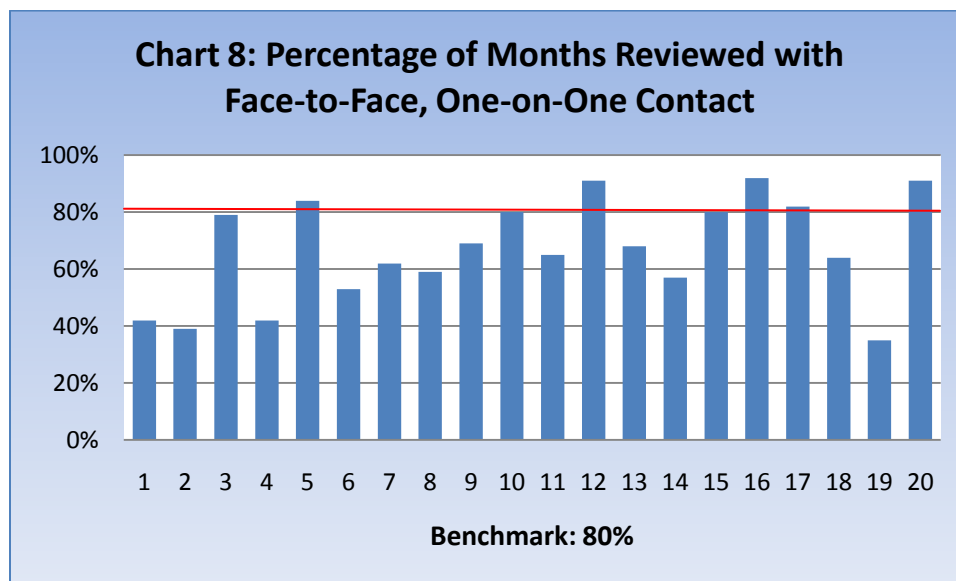
Client Profile Upon Discharge



- No Benchmark**
- Total ILP Average: 82%
 - Twelve programs reached 100%

Most programs did extremely well in this area. For 12 programs, 100% of the cases reviewed included documentation that a Client Profile Upon Discharge (CPUD) form was sent to DHS within 15 days of case closure. However, five programs fell below the 60th percentile. Most programs that struggled in this area completed CPUDs, but submitted them late to DHS.

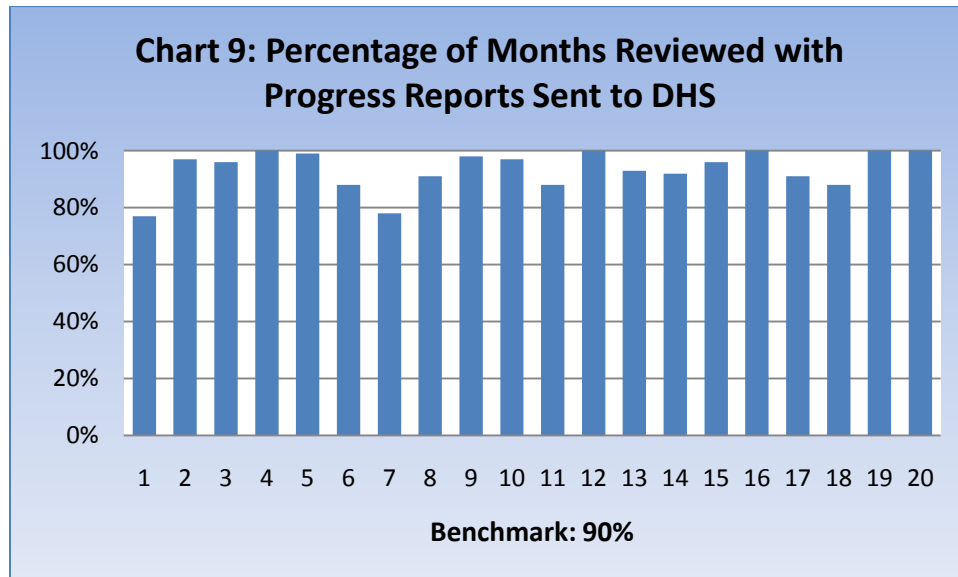
Face-to-Face, One-on-One Contact



- Benchmark: 80%**
- Total ILP Average: 67%
 - Seven programs met with youth in 80% or more of the months reviewed

In order to demonstrate the total amount of face-to-face, one-on-one contact that is being provided, Chart 8 demonstrates, on average, what proportion of the months ILP youth received face-to-face, one-on-one contact out of the total months cases are open. For all 20 programs, on average, face-to-face contact was provided in 67% of the total months reviewed. Seven programs met with youth in 80% or more of the months reviewed. It was evident from looking through the files that ILP staff attempt to schedule one-on-one meetings with youth, yet are often faced with unreturned phone calls and no-shows. See *One-on-one, face-to-face contact*, page 10 for more information on county-practice.

Monthly Progress Reports



- Benchmark: 90%**
- Total ILP Average: 93%
 - Fifteen programs met benchmark

Overall, programs did exceptionally well in this area; fifteen programs met the benchmark and 12 out of 20 programs sent monthly progress reports in 100% of the months reviewed. This is a significant improvement over the last review, when only 8 of 20 programs met the benchmark (which was lower at the time: 80%) and the total ILP average was 63%. One issue that arose during the review was that programs were not always consistent in noting the date that they submitted the progress report to DHS. While the State ILP Desk expects that progress reports are submitted within one month of the end of the month, in several programs it was evident that progress reports were being submitted several months late.

Overall Recommendations

The ILP review process provides insight to the State ILP Desk and the provider organizations into areas where ILP programs are doing well and where they are struggling. The following list summarizes some

suggestions for areas where the state should consider providing additional technical assistance to the local programs in improving their practice.

1. Provider organizations should place a high priority on implementing practices and providing resources to their staff which will help them to retain high-quality staff. Provider organizations should consider wages, benefits, flexibility, hiring practices, visibility/support within the agency, and management/peer support.
2. Transportation is a common barrier faced by nearly all ILPs. This is an area where programs could benefit from time to brainstorm, problem solve, and form connections with other community agencies that deal with this issue. Programs could consider opportunities to use foster parents, DHS volunteers, distance learning, public transportation, and private donors/volunteers.
3. Programs need to continue to clarify their referral and waitlist policies and the ILP and DHS roles as they relate to these policies. Regular staffing between ILP and DHS and/or an ILP liaison at DHS seem to help.
4. Further exploration of the case files would be needed in order to understand the degree to which assessments are used to develop transition plans, which are then used to provide services. This issue is currently only understood at a cursory level.
5. T1 and T2 updates are seldom completed on time, and the completion rates have not improved since the prior review period. Programs may need further guidance on what constitutes an update, and on the ways DHS and ILP can work together to make sure that updates are completed on a more timely basis.
6. The case audit shows that many youth are not having one-to-one meetings with ILP staff on a monthly basis. Programs may need additional assistance on how they can engage youth. The lack of detail provided in many monthly progress reports makes it difficult for DHS and the State ILP Desk to understand what is happening during the one-to-one meetings that do occur.
7. In several programs, the relationship between ILP and DHS needs improvement. Frequent communication between ILP and DHS at the management and staff level seems to improve these relationships and lead to more cooperation and collaboration for the benefit of youth.
8. Programs need a clear message from the State ILP Desk about the ways in which they are expected to engage foster parents, and some strategies for doing so. A few programs have had success in involving foster parents in the orientation, assessment, and transition planning, in addition to encouraging foster parents to give youth opportunities to practice skills at home.
9. All programs struggle with a lack of resources in their communities which can help to support youth. In particular, several programs noted that they faced a lack of mentors who can support youth even after they exit the program and supportive housing programs. Perhaps the state can assist programs in these areas by sharing information and promoting partnerships to help address these community needs.

Review Process Recommendations

While it yields important information, the program review process in its current form is quite resource-intensive. The review team typically spent 10 to 12 hours gathering and sharing information on the first day of a program review, followed by preparation for the exit interview the following morning. HSRI staff spent one and one-half to two days writing each program review report. Scheduling the review took between one and four hours per site. Finally, some sites required significant travel time and expense.

The current program review process is overwhelmingly shaped by the opinions of the participants in the process. Given the small amount of funding providers are asked to work with, the state is understandably in a tough position to push for much in the way of program performance monitoring. The performance measures that currently exist are focused on the timeliness of paperwork completion (including assessments and transition plans), and the review does not measure any outcomes of the program (e.g. why do youth exit the program and whether they have housing and employment, etc., upon exit). Yet, HSRI offers a few suggestions to potentially address the current limitations and improve the process:

Pre-Review Written Interviews: To save time on-site, ILP and DHS staff and managers could complete written interviews prior to the program review. These written interviews would take the place of verbal interviews conducted on-site. The evaluator could then review all responses prior to the site visit, perhaps spend a short amount of time with ILP staff for any needed clarification, and then lead a group discussion at the on-site exit interview, making sure to raise concerns and general themes voiced in the written interviews. HSRI recommends that the programs' annual reports be used as an additional source of information by the reviewers and that efforts are made to reduce the duplication of data requested by both the annual reports and the interview protocols.

Create a Standardized "Report Card": To establish a sense of standardization between program reviews, less swayed by the reviewers' interests at the time, a "report card" could be developed which identifies the elements of high-quality programs that the reviewers should expect to find. Providers across the state could be involved in developing this report card, using their expertise and the research available to identify the most important elements for a program to have. For example, these elements might include: systematic skills assessment, independent living skills training, involving caregivers as instructors, and developing community relationships. Each element could have more detailed sub-parts within it. The involvement of ILP staff in developing the report card might also promote a sense of ownership of the review process, and help prevent the sense of uncertainty and apprehension that many providers felt prior to the review. The review team could use the interview data to fill in the report card, providing ratings on each element and describing the evidence to back up their ratings. This report card would take the place of the program review report.

Modified Case Audit: As mentioned previously, while conducting the case audit the review team had little time to review the content of the assessments and transition plans, much less compare needs assessments to services which were offered to youth. The State ILP Desk has stressed the need for a

flow or connection between the assessments, transition plans, and services available to youth. If more time were set aside for this portion of the review, the review team could further explore the extent to which this is occurring in each program, perhaps spending more time reviewing each file, but decreasing the overall number of files reviewed. Doing so might mean spending less time on the report card or on documenting the timeliness of the paperwork. As a side note, as more programs move to a computerized system of keeping case files and notes, future reviews should be prepared and organized to review computerized case files if appropriate.

Begin to Examine Youth Outcomes: While any examination of youth outcomes is inherently difficult, it will be impossible to understand what kinds of programs and strategies are most successful without taking a look at its results. One step in this process might be to further examine the Individual Client Profile Upon Discharge forms to begin to gather data on why youth exit the program and their status when they do so. In a few years, the National Youth in Transition Database may also yield some information which can be examined at the provider-level.

The ILP review process yields useful information that can be used to enhance all ILPs statewide. Clearly, many local programs have activities and processes that benefit ILP youth and can be adopted by other ILPs. Through technical assistance, peer mentoring and information sharing, our hope is that the program review process will spark discussions and program improvements at the state and local level. ILPs are a great asset to youth transitioning out of foster care, who have few other resources to help them move towards a stable and successful independence, and we hope this report leads to further ILP enhancement in Oregon.