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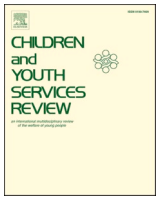

Independent living programs and services for youth 'aging out' of care in Canada and the U.S.: A systematic review

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ABSTRACT

Evidence from American and Canadian studies over the last three decades demonstrates that youth exiting foster care are at a much higher risk to face a multiplicity of challenges than their peers who are not in care. These challenges result in negative outcomes, such as high rates of homelessness, under-education, unemployment or under-employment, poverty, mental health issues and post-traumatic stress, substance abuse and early pregnancy or parenthood. This systematic review addresses Independent Living Program (ILP) and Independent Living Services (ILS) studies in the U.S. and Canada published between 2000 and 2018. In order to compile a list of relevant ILP and ILS impact studies, a bibliographic search of six databases was conducted for the peer-reviewed literature, and the grey literature was searched using Google and expert consultation. The search yielded a total of 64 studies after applying our study selection protocol, with 50 from the peer review literature and 14 from the grey literature. The clear majority of studies originated from the U.S., with only three Canadian studies emerging from the grey literature. This is most likely due to differences in mandated data collection and reporting. In the U.S., data collection and reporting is mandatory under the Foster Care Independence Act in 1999. In Canada, there is no such mandatory reporting as child welfare services are under the sole jurisdiction of the provinces, with no Federal government involvement aside from First Nations children and youth. Studies to date suggest that ILP and ILS are not producing the intended outcomes, with limited to no impact demonstrated on youth leaving care wellbeing outcomes. In fact, some of the studies found a negative impact, especially related to social support. Much of the ILP and ILS studies did not incorporate the voices of youth in care, but rather focused on program process and components, staff experiences, and outcome measures such as social support, employment, income, housing and self-sufficiency. Of the limited ILP and ILS studies incorporating youth perspectives, youth in care often indicated that emotional support and mentoring are crucial needs during the transition to adulthood, which are often not the focus of ILP or ILS. Moreover, compared to the U.S., program impact studies in Canada are sorely lacking; more research needs to be done in this area to build our knowledge of evidence-based and best practices. This systematic review highlights two main conclusions: (1) Both the U.S. and Canada sorely need innovation with respect to preparing youth in care for the transition to adulthood; and (2) We also must commit to using rigorous research designs with such programming to determine the impact of such new approaches. In sum, we must reconceptualize our investment in youth in care and focus on their interdependence in order to realize their potential.

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1. Introduction

'Aging out' is an institutionalized term[1] used in the research literature, social service agencies and the media to describe the emancipation of youth from the child welfare system. In other words, it describes the event of a youth leaving the formal system of foster or residential care at the age of majority or at a legislated cut-off age determined by the state or province (Berzin et al., 2014). In Canada, the age of majority is 18 or 19 depending on the province or territory of residence; in the U.S., the age of majority is 21. By removing them from their homes, the state becomes the legal parent and assumes the responsibilities associated with parenting, including preparing youth to live independently as adults (Bullock et al., 2006). Thus, the government decides when youth are ready to be on their own. This is determined through age-based legislative cut-offs and rarely based on the youth's own feelings of readiness nor their emotional and financial needs (Rutman et al., 2007).

According to Mann-Feder (2019), Erikson's developmental theory has been used as a justification for the legislated child welfare service cut-offs at the age of majority for youth exiting care, despite being dated and not connected to the significant contemporary shifts in the transition to adulthood. These societal shifts include an increasingly fluid life course pattern (Settersten, 2003), and significant delays in the achievement (or absence thereof) of traditional markers of adulthood (e.g., marriage, having children, finishing school, starting a career) (Beaupré & Le Bourdais, 2001; Côté & Bynner, 2008). The achievement of those traditional adulthood markers for youth in care, who do not get to experience a 'traditional' childhood and adolescence, proves to to be challenging at best as they are not suited to their particular developmental realities.

The requirement for youth to leave state care at the age of majority and transition to adulthood is much earlier than the timeframe of most of their peers. Youth in the general population tend to transition to adulthood today between the ages of 25 and 29, a phenomenon termed as *emerging adulthood* by Arnett (2015). Due to 'aging out', the accelerated transition to adulthood for youth in care has been shown to affect their ability to self-focus, and to build human and social capital to support them throughout adulthood (Courtney et al., 2012; Singer & Berzin, 2015; Stein, 2006). According to Stein (2006), it also places an unrealistic expectation upon them of *instant adulthood*, one that many of their same age peers in the general population are not held to.

Evidence from American and Canadian studies over the last three decades consistently demonstrates that youth 'aging out' of foster care are at much higher risk to face a multiplicity of challenges than their peers who are not in care. These challenges result in negative outcomes, such as high rates of homelessness, under-education, unemployment or under-employment, poverty, mental health issues and post-traumatic stress, substance abuse and early pregnancy or parenthood (Casey Family Programs, 2003; Day et al., 2011; Daining & DePanfilis, 2007; Koegel et al., 1995; Ontario Provincial Advocate for Children & Youth, 2012a; Rutman et al., 2007; Tessier et al., 2014). According to an unnoficial national estimate,[2] approximately 10 % (6,700) of the youth in care population transition out ('ages out') of the Canadian child welfare system every year (Flynn, 2003). Similarly, in the U.S., approximately 11 % (26,286) of youth in care exit the system around or at the age of majority (Courtney et al., 2013).

Programs referred to as Independent Living Programs (ILP) or Independent Living Services (ILS) have been developed in both countries with the intention of improving the outcomes for youth who age out of care. ILPs and ILS can vary widely, and typically include post-secondary support programs, tuition wavers, employment training programs, and life skills training programs. They are administered at the provincial/territorial or state levels, and are often accompanied by varying eligibility criteria (Gelles & Kirkman, 2019; Sukumaran, 2021).

Previous systematic reviews have sought to assess ILP/ILS effectiveness, but have been limited in their conclusions for several reasons, including a narrow timeframe, narrow inclusion criteria and the exclusion of grey literature.This systematic review[3] overcomes those limitations and is the first to provide a comprehensive look at the present state of the literature pertaining to ILP/ILS effectiveness in the American and Canadian context, including both the United States and Canada in one review.

1.1. Legislative context

Federal legislation implemented in the U.S. in 1999, the Foster Care Independence Act, provides matching federal funding to states who wish to continue supporting youth in care up to the age of 21 (Stott, 2013). However, the provision of extended supports under the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, such as life skills, employment and housing supports and programs, is discretionary to each state, and eligibility to receive continued supports is conditional. States are not required to serve the entire population of youth in care transitioning to adulthood, and the degree to which they support youth is also discretionary (Stott, 2013).

In Canada, child protection legislation, supports and services are a provincial jurisdiction, and the Federal government is responsible for funding child welfare services for Indigenous children living in First Nations communities (Trocmé et al., in press). While several jurisdictions offer various postmajority supports and services, they are not obliged to do so by law, are often accompanied by restrictive eligibility criteria and tend to be particularly targeted to those pursuing post-secondary education, employment training programs or diagnosed with a disability (Doucet & Mann-Feder, 2021; Ontario Provincial Advocate for Children & Youth, 2012b). This results in the majority of youth not accessing the transition supports they need; in British Columbia, for instance, it is estimated that only one-third of youth exiting care each year access some form of extended government supports (Hyslop, 2017). All services are offered on a voluntary basis, meaning that youth over the age of 15 (14 + in Quebec) can refuse services and then must immediately emancipate from the system (Trocmé et al., in press). Many jurisdictions are currently discussing child protection legislative reform related to the provision of continued

[1] The term 'aging out' refers to youth in care who have reached the age of majority and are no longer eligible for child protection services. Although it is a label that is not applied to youth in the general population, it is a term that most people who are/have been in care understand, and is widely used in the literature. 'Aging out' is in brackets throughout this article to de-normalize the term as it is a child welfare institution phenomenon, and is a purposeful writing practice utilized by one of the authors who has lived experience in the child protection system (see Doucet, 2020).

[2] In Canada, child protection services fall under the jurisdiction of the provinces and territories, making it difficult to compile statistics at a national level. In addition, not all provinces and territories publicly report on those numbers and Canada does not have a national data collection system. This is the only national estimate in Canada to date, and is unnoficial as it was calculated based on available numbers provided by the provinces and territories. It has been cited in several Canadian publications on youth 'aging out' of care (e.g., Mann-Feder, 2010; Rutman et al., 2007). The author was also conctacted for confirmation of the estimate.

[3] Systematic reviews are a "means of contributing to the answers to questions about what works and what does not" (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006, p.2); this review seeks to examine ILP/ILS effectiveness in Canada and the U.S. based on impact studies published in the peer reviewed and grey literature.

supports and services to youth leaving care, including British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Newfoundland. Some are starting to make changes to their child protection policies and regulations.

In both countries and across jurisdictions, Independent Living Programs (ILPs) and services (ILS) tend to vary widely in focus and delivery, ranging from a classroom-based curriculum model to coaching and case management. The majority tend to focus on teaching tangible life skills (hard skills) such as cooking, cleaning, budgeting, securing housing, CV writing, employment and career advising. Soft skills development focused on meeting emotional and relational needs tend to not be the central focus of ILPs and ILS. While in some cases soft skill acquisition does occur, it is often not the intended outcome of the ILP/ILS (e.g., Valentine et al., 2015). Youth in and from care express that ILPs and ILS alone are not sufficient to meet their needs, and that ideally support and training should be provided over an extended period by a parental figure (Geenen & Powers, 2007). Lee and Berrick (2014) also criticize current exiting care programs as overly focused on hard skill development, and call for a more holistic approach aiming to reduce the social capital deficits youth leaving care experience.

1.2. Prior systematic reviews on independent living programs (ILPs) and services (ILS)

In the last 15 years, three large-scale systematic reviews have examined the impact and effectiveness of Independent Living Programs (ILPs). Donkoh and colleagues (2006) conducted a Campbell Systematic Review on the impact of ILPs between 1987 and 2005. None of the studies they found met their inclusion criteria for the review, as they were not experimental or quasi-experimental trials. However, they found eight studies using non-experimental group comparison methods, which they discussed in a subsequent publication (Montgomery et al., 2006). Seven of the non-experimental studies were conducted in the U.S. and one in the U.K. The studies found positive ILP impacts on education, employment, housing, health and criminality outcomes. However, due major methodological limitations such as small samples sizes, baseline differences, substantial variation in ILP design and inadequate information regarding effect sizes, no concrete conclusions could be drawn on the effectiveness of ILPs.

Naccarato and DeLorenzo (2008) conducted a systematic review on peer-reviewed ILP studies published between 1990 and 2006. Due to their much broader inclusion criteria and their focus on practice implications, the authors found 19 program evaluation studies from the U.S. and U.K. However, only four studies conducted program impact evaluations, and three out of the four used a non-experimental group comparison. Naccarato and DeLorenzo (2008) found there was no concrete evidence of the effectiveness of ILPs due to major methodological weaknesses of the existing studies.

A more recent review by Everson-Hock and colleagues (2011) focused on Transition Support Services (TSS) between 1990 and 2008. The authors found seven TSS program impact studies, with six originating from the U.S. and one from the U.K. None of the studies used randomized controlled trials (RCT) to assess effectiveness; five used a retrospective cohort design while the remaining two used a prospective cohort design. TSS positive impact was found on education, parenthood and housing outcomes. However, the authors caution that no firm conclusions can be drawn on the effectiveness of TSS on improving adult outcomes of youth in care alumni due to methodological limitations. The authors also found a gap in TSS effectiveness evidence pertaining to ethnic minorities, refugees, LGBTQ youth, youth with complex needs and those with disabilities.

A *meta*-analysis of American and Canadian interventions for youth exiting care (Healey, 2017) using Cochrane Collaboration criteria found a total of eight studies based in the U.S. examining the effectiveness of transition programs. The *meta*-analysis focused only on studies using RCTs or quasi-experimental design with pretest–posttest data. Similar to previous systematic reviews, results of the *meta*-analysis suggest that ILPs do not produce the intended outcomes and are no more effective than providing 'services as usual'. However, youth who participated in school-based self-determination ILP programs showed improvement in the areas of quality of life, self-determination and transition planning.

Data on ILP impact in Canada remains scarce, due to limited administrative data collection past the age of majority and very few published studies in the academic literature to date. To address the gaps in the literature in the United States and Canada, this systematic review considers Independent Living Program (ILP) and Independent Living Services (ILS) studies in the U.S. and Canada published between 2000 and 2018. It adds value to the current literature in two ways: first, it updates the prior systematic reviews to include more recent studies. Second, this present review includes studies emerging from the grey literature, particularly from the Canadian context, that were excluded by prior reviews.

2. Method

Our approach follows standard systematic review approaches (see Bolland et al., 2017; Petticrew & Roberts, 2006) in terms of defining a question, establishing inclusion and exclusion criteria, conducting a literature search, appraising the studies and synthethizing the findings. Both the peer-reviewed scientific and grey literatures were searched online, with a focus on articles and reports published between January 2000 and August 2018 on studies evaluating the impact or effectiveness of ILPs and/or ILS. The following key words were utilized in the search:

- Independent living programs for youth OR
- Transitional living programs for foster youth OR
- Transition support services OR older foster youth OR
- Aging out foster care.

Databases for the peer-reviewed literature included: *PsycInfo, PubMed Central, Scopus, Social Services Abstracts, Web of Science*, and *Google Scholar*. The grey literature was searched using *Google* and expert consultation. Based on the concensus between authors, book chapters, dissertations, duplicate studies, studies that did not focus on the foster care population nor ILPs/ILS were excluded from the final results.

The search and data collection procedure is outlined in Fig. 1. As indicated, the initial search (Round 1) produced 455 studies from 7 electronic databases using the search strings listed above. These studies were then screened based on title and abstract, with oversight from the second author, who is an expert in the field of ILP and ILS studies. This resulted in an exclusion of 370 works, which were book chapters, dissertations, duplicate studies, or studies not pertaining specifically to ILP or ILS. This screening resulted in 78 studies, of which 61 were peer-reviewed and 17 were from the grey literature. From these, we hand searched the references and found an additional five that met search criteria, resulting in a total of 83 studies, with 66 from the peer-reviewed literature and 17 from the grey literature. In Round 2, we screened these 83 studies based on the full text of the studies. We then excluded another 19 studies due to no mention of either ILP or ILS (n = 8), duplicate studies (n = 3), lack of a specific foster care population (n = 3), work conducted before 2000 (n = 2), or inability to locate the article (n = 3). This resulted in a total of 64 studies, 50 from the peer review literature and 14 from the grey literature. A data extraction form was applied to

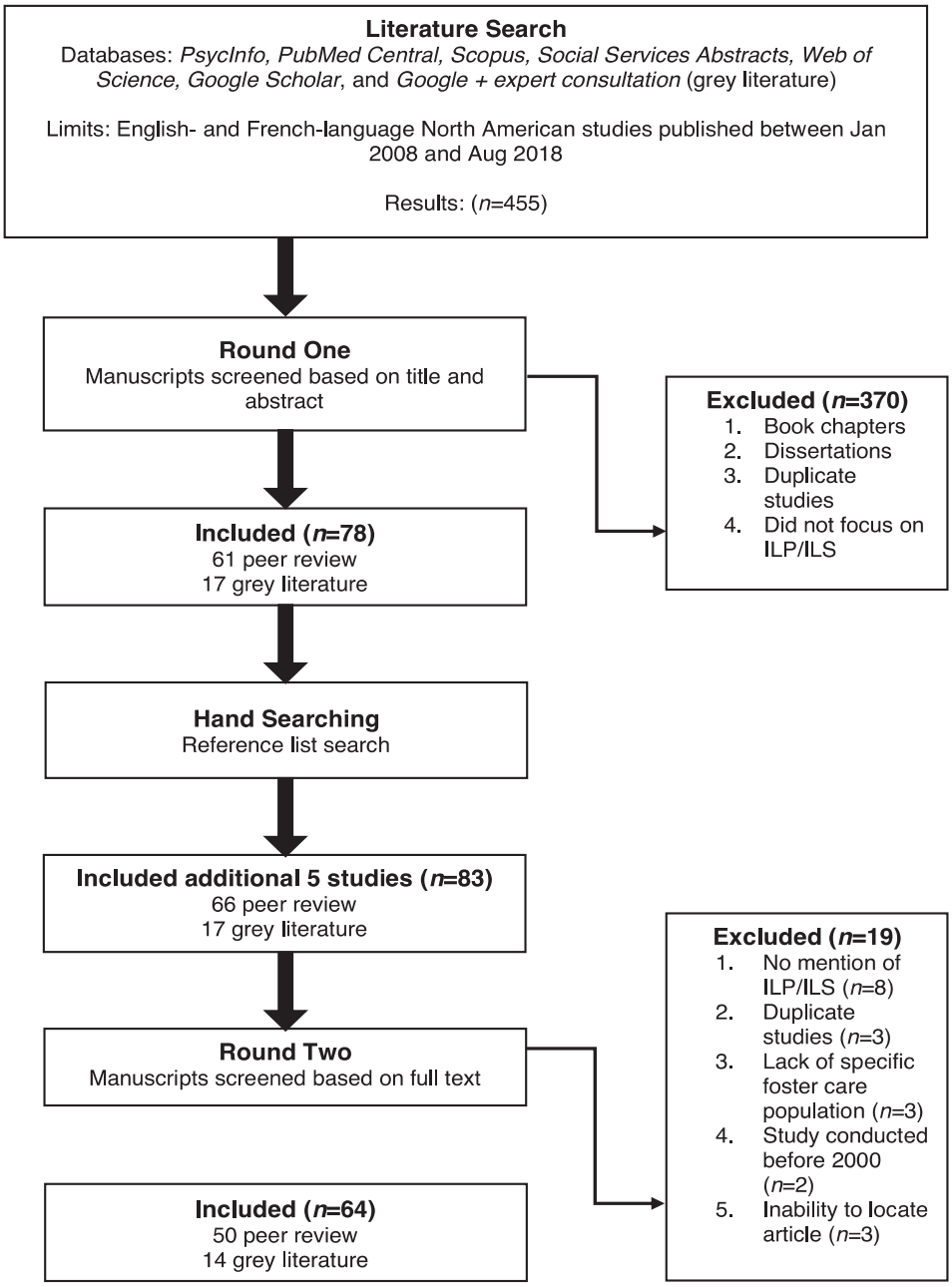

Fig. 1. Flow diagram of study selection protocol.

these publications, which was used to gather and assess[4] information about: (1) the authors, year, type of publication and location of the study, (2) the type of ILP or ILS evaluated, (3) the study design, setting and sample characteristics, (4) the key findings and conclusions of the work, including reporting of effect sizes and ILP/ILS impact (5) the implications and recommendations, and (6) the limitations. Data collection and analysis were facilitated through the use of Microsoft Excel and Word software. The first author is bilingual and reviewed the French publications, and translated the key information to English for the purposes of this review. Key emerging themes were identified via the data extraction form and are summarized in Section 3.

Since the field of research on ILP and ILS impact in the U.S. and Canada is still forming, we decided to also include documented expert recommendations on ILPs and ILS effectiveness via peer-reviewed policy evaluations, cost-benefit analyses, as well as systematic, instrument, scoping and narrative reviews. While those publications did not involve specific ILP and ILS impact or effectiveness studies, we deemed it important to include those as a separate section and table (see section 3.5 and table 3). There is precedent for including such materials in a systematic review (e.g., Thompson et al., 2016), particularly when the frameworks for understanding a phenomenon are in the process of establishment. These publications provide additional insights on the

[4] While this review did not utilize a specific quality assessment tool, the data extraction form was provided by the second author, who has executed and published prior systematic reviews. The data extraction form and the process of assessing the quality of each study draws from the methodological literature on systematic analyses (e.g., Petticrew & Roberts, 2006) and contains elements from existing quality assessment tools such as the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (2019) and the Hong et al. (2018), especially related to identifying study design (e.g., qualitative, mixed method, quantitative Randomized Control Trial study, quantitative longitudinal analysis, quantitative descriptive analysis), assessing appropriate study design and rigour of data analysis.

Table 1
Peer Reviewed Studies: Impact or effectiveness of ILP & ILS (N = 42).

Quantitative studies (n = 26)			
Author(s) (year)	Location	Study design, setting and sample	Key findings
Barnow et al. (2015)	CA, IL, MI, NY & TX, (US)	• Longitudinal evaluation of education and employment ILS offered in 5 US cities over 2 years; 1058 transition-aged participants ages 17–23.	• 45 % of youth achieved one positive outcome: 35 % obtained employment; 23 % obtained a GED or diploma; 17 % enrolled in post-secondary education. youth from foster care need additional services as they transition into adulthood over a longer period of time
Brown & Wilderson (2010)	CA (US)	• Longitudinal group comparison of foster care alumni between two transitional housing ILPs over 3 years; ages 12–24 (n = 145 (prevention program), n = 146 (intervention program).	• Youth unemployment rates had dropped for youth in intervention programs (75 % to 62 %), not dropped significantly for those in prevention programs (41 % to 39 %).
Bruster & Coccoma (2013)	FL (US)	• Pilot study of university-based ILP education mentorship program; convenience sample N = 7 of youth mentees, age range 15–18 years.	• Youth who participated in the program already had high academic self-efficacy and the program reinforced their post-secondary aspirations; slight improvement in academic self-efficacy results in post-survey.
Chor et al. (2018)	National sample (US)	• Multi-level latent class analysis of subgroups of first-time youth who received John F. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) services in 2011–13 from the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD); n = 68,057, mean age 17.6 years	• Less than a quarter of youth had high service receipt (likely to receive 7 out of 15 CFCIP services) Youth ages 18 or above were more than three times less likely of being in the independent living assessment and academic support receipt profile compare to younger youth.
Gates et al. (2018)	RI (US)	• Evaluation of career readiness ILP; n = 180 youth ages 14–21 who were enrolled in the program for over 5 years	• Engagement in career readiness activities prior to program participation predicted engagement in these activities at program completion Those who completed the program and participated in a hands-on work experience were more likely to be working at follow-up compared to those that dropped out. Self-determination increased for young people who completed the program compared to those who did not. Program outcomes did not vary by gender, race or ethnicity.
Georgiades (2005)	FL (US)	• Longitudinal evaluation of ILP effectiveness with comparison group; n = 49 (ILP) and n = 18 (comparison), ages 18–26; data from self-administered mail-in survey and case record reviews.	• Program participation was associated with better educational, employment, income, housing, early parenting-prevention, transportation, anger control, criminal-prevention and self-evaluation outcomes. No difference between groups with social support, homelessness, perceived parenting competence, substance abuse-prevention, sexual risk-prevention outcomes, lower levels of depression, or increased knowledge in interpersonal skills, money management, job seeking and job maintenance skills.
Greeson, Garcia, Kim, Thompson et al. (2015)	CA (US)	• Randomized Control Trial (RCT) of multi-site life skills ILP over 2 years using secondary data from the Multi-Site Evaluation of Foster Youth Programs (MEFYP); n = 234 intervention group, n = 248 control, age 17 at baseline	• Significant reduction in social support across the three time points. No impact of LST on social support trajectory.
Greeson, Garcia, Kim, & Courtney (2015)	MA (US)	• RCT evaluating impact of social support ILP over 2 years using secondary data from the MEFYP; n = 97 intervention group, n = 97 control, ages 15–20.	• Program did not increase foster youth's social support, compared to services as usual and decreased over time for both groups. There was no short- or long-term effect of the program.
Heerde et al. (2018)	National (US)	• Meta-analysis of eight quantitative ILP evaluation studies between 1990 and 2014	• Small-medium correlation between participation in ILPs and post-transition outcomes of housing, education and employment, suggesting that some adverse health and behavioral post-transition outcomes may be mitigated by participation in ILPs aimed at developing independent living skills in these areas. ILP participants had often completed a high school diploma but rates of secondary education were low.
Hill et al. (2010)	MN (US)	• Study examining service delivery cohesion in county ILP for youth with disabilities via web survey with n = 36 county case workers	• 49 % provided disability-specific services and 43 % provided life skills training Majority indicated that ILP serves youth with disabilities but that services are not targeted for youth with disabilities; training on working with youth with disabilities needed
Katz & Courtney (2015)	IL, IA & WI (US)	• Examined self-reported unmet need for ILS of youth from the Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth between 2002 and 2007 ages 17–22; baseline n = 732, wave 2n = 603 and wave 3n = 591.	• 34.5 % of youth indicated an ILS need that went unmet at age 17, 27.9 % at age 21 and 35.5 % at age 23, with the largest percentage indicating they lacked preparation in the area of finance followed by housing. Youth who had mental health issues were more likely to report unmet needs, while those who received more social support and ILS were less likely to report unmet needs.
Kroner & Mares (2009)	OH (US)	• Evaluation of ILP participant outcomes at discharge, between 2001 and 2005 ages 16–20n = 455.	• 60 % completed high school/GED, 31 % employed, 33 % independently housed at discharge. Those with 4 + clinical risk factors and those in the program for less than 6 months were less likely to achieve those outcomes.
Lawler et al. (2014)	CA (US)	• Evaluation of residential education ILP for high school foster youth ages 12–19, n = 478, between 2012 and 2013; compared youth outcomes at discharge with federal outcome standards from National Youth in Transition Database and Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study. Excluded youth with severe mental health problems, substance use, chronic assault behaviours and sexual perpetrators.	• High school/GED graduation rates exceeded general population and foster youth outcomes in CA. Employment rates far exceeded foster youth outcomes (51 % vs 19 %), in addition to significant relationships (67 % vs 55 %). Longer duration of stay in program increased likelihood to achieve positive outcomes in housing, employment, post-secondary education and relationships.

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Table 1 (*continued*)

Quantitative studies (n = 26)			
Author(s) (year)	Location	Study design, setting and sample	Key findings
Lenz-Rashid (2018)	CA (US)	• Outcome evaluation of wraparound residential ILP via survey, between 2007 and 2015, ages 18–27, n = 55	• Majority were residing in stable housing (96 %) at discharge and employed (86 %), with a little over half enrolled in post-secondary education. Lower rates of income support compared to foster youth in other studies.
Mares & Kroner (2011)	OH (US)	• Follow-up study of 2009 evaluation of ILP, examining clinical risk factor groups between 2001 and 2005, ages 16–20, n = 385.	• Those with mental health problems were only half as likely as others to have attained all three outcomes (high school completion, employment, living independently). Youth who stayed in the program longer showed more favorable outcomes. No significance in outcomes based on receipt of any life skills training.
Naccarato et al. (2010)	IL, IA & WI (US)	• Evaluation of employment outcomes at age 21 with receipt of ILS, using Midwest study data wave 3, 2006–2007n = 591.	• Self-reported receipt of help related to employment did not impact yearly earnings. 68 % reported having received no help, with the mean number of types of employment ILS at 1.56.
Naccarato & Park (2009)	CA (US)	• Evaluation of ILP attendance across 5 agencies and education outcomes, 2001–2002, n = 365 ages 15–23.	• Low rate of attendance in ILP sessions – only 1 % participated in all, with youth from group homes in lowest attendance. Statistical relationship between attendance and self-reported goals for education.
Okpych (2015)	National (US)	• Examined differences in Chafee ILS receipt via two national datasets: Adoptions and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting (AFCARS) + National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD), 2011–2012; n = 131,204, ages 16–21.	• 50 % received at least one type out of 13 ILS, with great variation. Males less likely to receive at least one service, with African American youth less likely to receive one service out of all racial groups. Youth in large urban regions received less services, with substantial variation between states.
Powers et al. (2012)	OR (US)	• Comparison between to ILPs for foster youth in special education, n = 33 targeted intervention program n = 36 regular ILP, ages 16–17, with one year follow up.	• Moderate to large effect sizes at follow-up, especially for completion of secondary education (72 % vs 50 %) and employment (45 % vs 28 %). Self-determination was confirmed as a partial mediator of enhanced quality of life.
Rashid (2004)	CA (US)	• Evaluation of housing, wage, and employment outcomes of transitional living ILP for homeless former foster youth, 1996–2000, ages 18–22, n = 22. Also examined outcomes for youth who accessed job ready certification class (n = 13) 1998–2000.	• All youth were employed at exit vs 13 % at entry of ILP. All youth had successful housing outcomes at discharge, with 90 % in permanent, stable housing at 6-month follow-up. Youth with employment training had significant higher hourly wages.
Reynolds et al. (2018)	5 states (US)	• Examination of 'overburdening' hypothesis of whether taking on school and work at the same time can hinder healthy development of youth 'aging out' of care. Used admin data from national non-profit organization serving youth in 5 states 2010–2014, n = 2931, ages 17–22. Youth were enrolled in ILP focused on housing, education and employment.	• Little evidence emerged to support hypothesis; individually, school attendance and employment decreased risk for housing insecurity. Single best predictor for housing insecurity is prior experience of insecurity; 15–18 times more likely. Evidence suggests that for some youth, the decision to attend school and find employment may be a symptom and not cause of their housing insecurity.
Scannapieco et al. (2016)	TX (US)	• Examined self-sufficiency outcomes of ILS, 2005–2010, n = 329, average age 20 years.	• Self-sufficiency improved the longer youth had contact with Center providing ILS. Increased worker and mentor time with youth improved employment, financial literacy and shelter outcomes.
Sim et al. (2008)	National (US)	• Examined type of ILS utilization of post-secondary students from foster care who were also recipients of a national Casey Family Programs scholarship program; exploratory analysis of data from telephone and mail-in surveys; 2003, n = 115, average age 21–23.	• Youth used emotional support most frequently and medical support least frequently. Informal supports such as foster or birth family and friends were utilized most for academic and emotional assistance. Formal supports (i.e., school/institution, foster care agency resources, community resources) were utilized most for financial and medical/dental assistance.
Thompson et al. (2018)	National (US)	• Examined receipt of ILS based on data from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being II (NSCAWII) wave 3 2011–2012, n = 127 formerly in care and n = 106 currently in care, ages 13 and over.	• Former youth in care overwhelming reported lack of resources in areas of employment, education, finances, housing, ILP/ILS, personal care and networking with less than ¼ accessing support in finding employment and vocational/career counselling. Youth currently in care reported a lack of self-sufficiency skills and most were not attending ILPs.
Vorhies et al. (2009)	IL (US)	• Evaluation of effectiveness of residential ILP with wraparound services for pregnant and parenting foster youth with several mental illness, 2004–2009. All female sample, n = 25, ages 18–21, with majority Black (88 %). Used standardized assessments on parenting competency, child maltreatment risk and mental health symptoms at start of program, 10 months and at discharge..	• ILP participation was associated with positive changes in participants' familial relationships, family responsibility and care, proper parenting behavior and feelings, and parental distress and competency. No change in mental health symptoms. Positive behavior changes associated with ILP participation were observed in education, employment, and low numbers of suspected and substantiated child maltreatment reports. Negative behavior changes associated with frequency of AWOL incidents and subsequent pregnancies.
Zinn and Courtney (2017)	CA (US)	• Evaluation of employment ILS impact on employment, income and other self-sufficiency outcomes, at baseline and 2nd follow-up as part of the MEFYP study. Random assignment (n = 140 ILS, n = 122 control), ages 16 + between 2003 and 2006.	• No statistically significant program impacts found across groups in percentages receiving employment assistance, or any employment or self-sufficiency outcomes.
Mixed methods studies (n = 9)			
Courtney et al. (2011)	IL, IA & WI (US)	• Examined kinds of ILS foster youth receive and factors associated with help receipt, using Midwest Study data, n = 732, ages 17–24 across 4 waves of data collection. In depth qualitative interviews conducted with subset of participants.	• Decline over time in the likelihood of receiving help was consistent across all service domains. Months in care past age 17, previous receipt of ILS and group home placement versus foster family placement were consistently positive and statistically

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Table 1 (*continued*)

Quantitative studies (n = 26)			
Author(s) (year)	Location	Study design, setting and sample	Key findings
			significant predictors of ILS receipt. Many reported that they would have liked more help than they received.
Dworsky and Pérez (2010)	CA & WA (US)	• Evaluation of campus-based ILP implementation and feasibility of program impact evaluation across 10 campuses, 2006–2007, n = 98, ages 18 +. Qualitative phone interviews with program admin and quantitative web-based surveys for ILP participants.	• Challenge in recruiting eligible students to do reluctance to openly identify as foster care alumni and lack of encouragement to pursue PSE. ILP had difficulty meeting non-academic and mental health needs of youth. Most youth accessed the ILP via a worker or someone from the ILP, with help focused on choosing courses, tutoring and financial aid. Lack of funding for purchasing laptop/computer and less focus on mentoring. Feasibility of ILP impact evaluation is very limited or impossible due to lack of data collection.
Georgiades (2005)	FL (US)	• Examined youth perspectives of ILPs via mail-out survey questionnaires; n = 67 (n = 49 received ILP, n = 18 no ILP), ages 18–26. Qualitative thematic analysis and descriptive statistical analysis.	• Most youth fail to attend ILPs because they are uninformed about them (64 %), think ILPs do best at preparing for educational success (88 %) and least well at teaching parenting skills (64 %). More outreach is needed. Youth who participated in ILPs wished they had closer relationships with program staff and one-on-one training, with a greater focus on money management and organizational skills.
Jones (2014)	CA (US)	• Examined youth's perspectives of independent living preparation 6 months post residential ILP, n = 95, ages 18–19. Standardized needs assessment tool (Ansel-Casey Life Skills Assessment-Short Version, ACLSA) and qualitative interview.	• Majority (85 %) felt somewhat prepared for independent living; strongest in daily living skills such as doing laundry and meal prep, and weakest in money management and education competencies. 36 % indicated being dissatisfied with ILP services, reporting lack of provision of transportation, housing, college preparation and basic necessities; problems with staff and not feeling prepared upon discharge. Need for financial assistance and follow-up services were identified as program issues.
Kirk & Day (2011)	MI (US)	• Evaluation of first 2 years of short-term 3-day residential campus-based summer ILP (2008–09), n = 38, ages 15–19. Outcome evaluation using pre-post questionnaire and Michigan Educational Opportunities for Youth in Care Questionnaire (MEOYICQ), with semi-structured interviews with ILP coordinators and focus groups with youth to evaluate process.	• Youth reported an increase in personal, educational and life skills development outcomes upon completion of ILP; however, slight decrease on most outcomes reported at follow-up (3 months post-ILP). ILP leadership by foster care alumni and role modelling was seen as the highlight of the program. ILP added more alumni counsellors and expanded their roles in 2nd year of program, with subsequent program improvement observed.
Lemon et al. (2005)	CA (US)	• Examined the role of ILPs in supporting successful transitions to adulthood using data from Pathways to College for Former Foster Youth Study. Comparative analysis of youth enrolled in ILPs (n = 81) vs those who were not (n = 113), ages 21–24. Conducted semi-structured interviews with n = 9 ILP coordinators for ethnographic analysis of services offered.	• Non-ILP participants were more likely to have a job immediately after leaving care. Both groups were comparable in experiences of homelessness, problems with the law, receiving mental health services and being able to get medical care. Typical ILP services (7/9 counties) included instructional model teaching discrete and concrete skills considered to be associated with self-sufficiency. Unique ILP services (2/9 counties) included computer training, role playing activities and workforce partnerships.
Lemon et al. (2006)	CA (US)	• Evaluation of mentoring ILP over 2 years via self-administered youth questionnaire and semi-structured interviews and focus groups with youth and mentors; n = 52 youth ages 15 + and n = 18 mentors.	• Youth overall satisfied with ILP, particularly experiences with mentors which were more experiential and hands-on than program itself. Felt lives had improved since being in the program and an increase in independent living skills. A high degree of trust and understanding between youth and mentors was reported. Mentors shared that although some improvement in functioning and well-being was observed in youth participants, ILP not sufficient on its own to prepare youth for independent living.
Mares (2010)	OH (US)	• Assessment of ILS needs of youth leaving care in Ohio county, 2005–2007, using administrative client data of ILP (n = 108); focus groups with current and former foster youth (n = 31); and self-administered survey with ILS providers (n = 23).	• Youth expressed the need for home-based life skills training by foster parents versus classroom-based training that is typical to ILPs. Most commonly available ILS from both private and public providers were secondary education support, budgeting, health education, family support and mentoring. Least commonly available were financial support for housing and college, other financial support, driving assistance and legal assistance.
Ringle et al. (2008)	10 sites (US)	• Process description of preparation for transition to adulthood for foster youth in large residential ILP offered across 10 sites throughout the U.S. Examined subsample who left the program with at least high school education (n = 106), 2005–06. Comparison between those who graduated high school while in the program (n = 40) with those who graduated while elsewhere or did not complete the program (n = 66). Survey administered by phone, mail or internet to measure social functioning and quality of life, with qualitative statements from youth on ILP satisfaction.	• Youth who completed the program reported more positive functional outcomes than those who did not, including more positive employment outcomes (73 % vs 62 %). Those who completed the program were significantly older than those who did not. Youth appreciated the value of real-life scenario practice of independent living skills.
Qualitative studies (n = 7)			

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Table 1 (*continued*)

Quantitative studies (n = 26)			
Author(s) (year)	Location	Study design, setting and sample	Key findings
Berzin & Taylor (2009)	CA (US)	• Evaluation of ILP service provision and collaboration with community-based youth-serving agencies, suing open-ended survey and semi-structured interviews with County employees (n = 10), ILP staff (n = 11) and community-based partner agencies (n = 11).	• Found three key difficulties in collaboration. Differences in the vision of ILP as community partners viewed ILP as a source of resource referral to community-based services, while ILP staff saw their functioning as service capacity for youth. Mechanisms for collaboration are not currently institutionalized, and no protocols exist for info sharing between partners. Lack of resources for youth to achieve self-sufficiency, especially related to financial support, employment and housing.
Curry & Abrams (2015)	CA (US)	• Examined youth in care alumni experiences with transitional housing ILPs through photo elicitation interviewing (PEI), n = 14, ages 18–24.	• Participants highlighted a newfound sense of control while living in transitional housing as opposed to instability in foster care placements. However, they felt less control in their ability to juggle school, work and ILP responsibilities. They viewed their time in transitional housing as a period of sacrificing short-term rewards for long-term goals, with little time for self-exploration or relaxation. Youth expressed need for a balance between support and independence.
Geenen & Powers (2007)	OR (US)	• Examined the experiences of youth 'aging out' of care participating in an ILP via focus groups (N = 88), including youth currently in care (n = 19), alumni (n = 8), foster parents (n = 21), child welfare professionals (n = 20), education professionals (n = 9), ILP staff (n = 9) and other key professionals (n = 2)	• Participants reported there is a wait-list for ILP case managers and most youth indicated they had only attended a few classes or were not actively participating in the ILP. The few who were assigned a case manager felt the one-on-one assistance was helpful. The current nature and level of ILP services are not sufficient to meet the transition needs of foster youth. Recommended that foster parents give the transition support and training that ILPs are funded to provide, which would allow for a more natural setting and avoid introducing multiple professionals into the youths lives which contribute to a lack of collaboration and confusion about roles between different systems and agencies.
Iglehart & Becerra (2002)	CA (US)	• Examined the experiences of African American (n = 18) and Hispanic (n = 10) former foster youth who participated in some type of ILP, ages 17–25, via ethnographic interviews.	• 64 % were employed at the time of the study, 29 % had experienced homelessness for some period after emancipation, 18 % had been arrested and 48 % of the females had at least one child while in foster care. Over a third of participants recalled their ILP experience as positive in terms of the relationships with the people they met during the programs. Over a third had difficulty recalling the ILPs they participated in because of how early they were offered prior to emancipation. Over a third suggested that former foster youth should be used as teachers in ILPs.
Klodnick et al. (2014)	IL (US)	• Examined experiences of former foster youth with serious mental health conditions enrolled in therapeutic transitional living program pre-transition (n = 16) and post (n = 13), ages 20–24, via semi-structured interviews at the two time points.	• Found excessive hopefulness and high level of service engagement at pre-exit versus helplessness, frustration, and minimal service engagement at post-exit. ILP services were appreciated for the relationships and safety net they fostered. Future plans were positive, but vague, and worries about the future were prevalent. Youth expressed desire to do independent living tasks themselves with support rather than having tasks done fort them. Struggles with independence post-emancipation were common despite adult service use.
Petr (2008)	KS (US)	• Examined youth perspectives of ILP, 2004–2005, N = 27, ages 16–21, with youth currently in care (n = 19) and alumni (n = 8). Semi-structured interviews focused on quantity and quality of ILP received.	• Youths, particularly those still in care, were generally dissatisfied with the ILPs they were receiving or expected to receive. Majority of alumni expressed ILPs received were inadequate or nonexistent. 26 % reported they had not received any life skills training. Youth who received ILPs as classes gave mixed reviews: some learned a lot, others said they were bored and knew the material. 70 % of the youth knew about benefits they qualified for after aging out, but 30 % were not informed.
Rosenwald et al. (2013)	FL (US)	• Examined youth perspectives of ILS, n = 6, ages 18–23, via interviews.	• Youth reported needing family-based and ILS case manager emotional support, with regular check-ins. ILS pertaining to financial resources for basic necessities, life skills and daycare were requested. Better communication about ILS benefits and resources available to youth is needed.

effectiveness of ILPs and ILS, and thus their inclusion is warranted.

3. Results

The clear majority of studies originated from the U.S., with a count of 61 out of 64, including all peer reviewed articles. This is most likely due to differences in mandated data collection and reporting. In the U.S., data collection and reporting is mandatory under the Foster Care Independence Act in 1999. In Canada, there is no such mandatory reporting as child welfare services are under the sole jurisdiction of the provinces, with no Federal government involvement aside from First Nations children and youth. Most of the peer-reviewed studies utilized quantitative approaches (n = 26), including three RCTs. Nine utilized mixed methods, and six out of the seven qualitative studies examined youth perspectives on the effectiveness of ILPs and ILS. Only three Canadian studies emerged from the grey literature search, originating from B.C. and Quebec, with the remaining 11 studies from the grey literature originating from the U.S.

Table 2
Grey Literature Research Reports: Impact or effectiveness of ILP & ILS (N = 14).

Quantitative studies (n = 10)			
Author(s) (year)	Location	Study design, setting and sample	Key findings
Center for Innovation Through Data Intelligence (CIDI) (2014)	NY (US)	• Quasi-experimental study comparing ILP participant outcomes with comparison group of eligible youth unable to participate due to availability, at program entry and 1 year post-program. Youth ages 18–25 aging out of care, homeless and/or at risk of being homeless in ILP between 2006 and 2013; n = 138 (participant) n = 159 (comparison).	• Preliminary results only. Statistically significant differences found in use of the single adult homeless shelter system and jail system during the two years after the program start date or eligibility date. Controlling for other factors, ILP participants were 36 % less likely to have a stay in the single adult shelter system and 55 % less likely to go to jail during the evaluated time period.
Courtney et al. (2008a)	CA (US)	• Study part of Multi-Site Evaluation of Foster Youth Programs (MEFYP), examining classroom-based life skills ILP. Experimental design with random assignment and intent-to treat analysis, with treatment (n = 222) and control (n = 245) groups, age 17, followed at three time points.	• ILP had no significant positive impact on any indicators of successful transition to adulthood (sense of preparedness, personal documentation, educational attainment, employment, housing, earnings and avoidance of economic hardship). No significant differences between groups in delinquency or pregnancy. The evaluation questions whether classroom-based life skills training is impactful on the well-being of foster youth in transition to adulthood.
Courtney et al. (2008b)	CA (US)	• Study part of Multi-Site Evaluation of Foster Youth Programs (MEFYP), examining tutoring ILP. Randomized Control Trial (RCT) with intent-to-treat analysis, with intervention (n = 236) and control (n = 209) groups, ages 14–15, interviewed at three time points over 2 years.	• ILP had no impacts on educational outcomes. No statistically significant differences were observed between groups in any of the outcomes at the second follow-up. No significant changes over time in grades for the sample as a whole.
Courtney, Zinn, Koralek et al. (2011)	CA (US)	• Study part of Multi-Site Evaluation of Foster Youth Programs (MEFYP), examining employment-related ILS. Experimental design with random assignment and intent-to treat analysis, with treatment (n = 136) and control (n = 118) groups, age 16, followed at three time points (baseline, 1 year, 2–4 years).	• Few statistically significant differences in the proportions of youths reporting receipt of ILS by second follow-up, and no differences in receiving employment related services. A larger portion of control group reported receiving assistance finding an apartment or training related to health and hygiene than ILS group. A larger proportion of ILS group report receiving help using a budget than control group. No significant differences in employment or other key outcomes measured at second follow-up between ILS group and comparison group. No longer-term ILS impacts identified using unemployment insurance wage records.
Courtney, Zinn, Johnson et al. (2011)	MA (US)	• Study part of Multi-Site Evaluation of Foster Youth Programs (MEFYP), examining ILP for youth in intensive foster care. Experimental design with random assignment and intent-to treat analysis, with treatment (n = 97) and control (n = 97) groups, age 17, followed at three time points.	• Mixed findings on effectiveness of ILP. ILP group more likely than control group to have ever enrolled college, and to persist in college across more than one academic year. ILP group reported receiving more help than control group in some areas of educational assistance, employment assistance, money management, and financial support in obtaining housing. ILP group did not report better outcomes than control group in employment, economic well-being, housing, delinquency, pregnancy, or self-reported preparedness for independence. ILP did not have an impact across the full range of transition outcomes it is designed to influence (education, employment, stable housing, healthy behaviors, and supportive relationships).
Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) (2008)	CA, IL, MI, NY & TX (US)	• Evaluation of demonstration ILP/ILS across 5 states, 2005–2007, including 2 site visits and phone interviews. Descriptive statistical analysis of participant data from each site, youth ages 16–21, N = 1058.	• 46 % participated in programs long-term (7–9 quarters), with 22 % short-term (1–3 quarters). Youth who received services for more quarters more likely to attain positive outcomes than those who received same service for fewer quarters. Services received: job (76 %) and college (31 %) preparation; GED/basic education (20 %); life skills (41 %); parenting (7 %); health (35 %); income support (33 %); substance abuse (4 %); other (47 %). Outcomes achieved: GED/diploma (23 %); post-secondary education (17 %); employment (35 %); any positive outcome (45 %). Age, schooling status at entry, housing status at entry, and foster care status had significant impact on outcomes. Only one of the sites reported a positive outcome for more than half the participants. Two of the sites reported positive outcomes for less than one-third of the youth.
Lemley & Niarhos (2015)	CA (US)	• Descriptive analysis of two transitional housing ILP program for youth ages 18–24 transitioning from foster care (n = 1436) and youth transitioning from juvenile probation system (n = 1696), 2014–15. Also interviewed ILP staff.	• Youth transitioning out of care ILP: placements in program increased by 39 % from previous year, with 80 % of youth in individual rental units. 1 in 6 youth are parents, 1 in 3 are women. Lack of childcare is a barrier to pursuing education or employment. Over half of staff were concerned regarding addressing special needs youth, with majority (80 %) indicating a lack of affordable housing for youth exiting the program.
Lewis-Crow (2017)	CA (US)	• Evaluation of summer employment-focused ILP (in ecology) in 2016 for youth ages 16–24, n = 80, via close-ended surveys pre- and post-ILP. Program not exclusive to current or former foster youth (only 16 % of program participants). Staff	• ILP achieved all of its short-term objects. 100 % participants improved in at least one skill deficits in work readiness, and 90 % felt prepared for future employment or education. 98 % reported a post-summer plan for school or work and 81 % became aware of jobs and careers in environment or ecology-related

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Table 2 (*continued*)

Author(s) (year)	Location	Study design, setting and sample	Key findings
Quantitative studies (n = 10)			
		conducted two youth performance evaluations to measure participant progress.	fields. 95 % reported awareness of environmental issues and 98 % reported overall satisfaction program.
Sirna (2013)	CA (US)	• Evaluation of summer employment-focused ILP (in ecology) for youth ages 14–24, n = 198, via close-ended surveys pre- and post-ILP. Program not exclusive to current or former foster youth (only 27 % of program participants).	• Current/former foster youth more likely to not complete program (30 %) than non-foster youth (13 %). At the end of the program, 48 % had work skills at entry level or exceeding entry level for all twelve skills measured, double the number at baseline. Majority felt program helped improve essential skills (problem solving, time management, teamwork, communication, leadership). 90 % overall program satisfaction. No notable difference in community connectedness or environmental beliefs pre and post participation.
Valentine et al. (2015)	TN (US)	• Evaluation of transitional living ILP for youth with foster care or juvenile justice histories ages 18–24. Random assignment design, 2010–2012, N = 1322.	• During the first year of the study, ILP group had improved outcomes in three of six domains: boosted earnings, increased housing stability and economic well-being. Had some improved outcomes related to mental health problems. Impacts of ILP were consistent across different subgroups of youth including history of juvenile justice or foster care and urban versus non-urban settings. Program did not improve outcomes in areas of education, social support, or criminal involvement.
Mixed Method studies (n = 4)			
First Place For Youth (2012)	CA (US)	• Evaluation of housing and employment focused ILP offered in four counties. Data collection over 2 years through site visits, interviews with youth, staff and advocates, staff survey and case file reviews. Youth ages 18–24 (n = 46). ILP excludes youth with severe mental health issues, criminal record of sexual offence or violent felony.	• Participants experienced significant, positive change in education, employment, housing and healthy living while in program. 68 % enrolled in education programs; 72 % found employment. Significant improvement in housing regarding quality, safety and security. Indicated lower levels of depression and greater positive social supports. 3/4 of participants compliant with program expectations including pursuing schooling and job opportunities and paying rent. Estimated cost savings of $44,000 per youth in ILP versus placement in traditional group home.
Goyette et al. (2006)	QC (CA)	• Longitudinal evaluation of pilot intensive ILP for at risk/high risk foster youth ages 16–19 offered in four regions. Interviews with youth (n = 61) and social workers (n = 9), and quantitative analysis of youth trajectories using assessment and case file data. Data collected over 7 time points, youth ages 17–20.	• Risk profile scores decreased slightly from T1 to T4 from 9.84 to 6.52, while personal aptitudes/skills scores increased significantly from 7.57 to 15.44. Independent living skills increased from T1 to T7 – youth reported an increase from 77 % to 84 %, social workers reported an increase from 62 % to 82 %. ILP did not meet objective of inserting youth in job market/training programs. Youth were less likely to leave/quit jobs they were acquired via someone in their network (including social worker) than jobs found on their own.
Goyette et al. (2012)	QC (CA)	• Evaluation of two group ILPs offered in four youth centres, with interviews with youth participants and social workers. Quantitative analysis of assessment scores, pre- and post-participation. Youth ages 16–17 (ILP1 n = 12, ILP2 n = 19).	• No outcome score differences pre- and post-participation in both programs. No conclusions can be drawn regarding difference between programs. Majority of youth (79 %) satisfied especially pertaining to group intervention approach including: learning environment, forging relationships with peers, sense of belonging and validation.
Rutman et al. (2014)	BC (CA)	• Quasi-experimental program impact evaluation of housing and employment focused ILP for former foster youth ages 19 +. ILP participant (n = 21) and comparison (n = 22) groups. Youth interviews conducted at two time points. Also interviewed ILP staff (n = 6) and support people (n = 4).	• Percentage of youth engaged in education or training remained consistent throughout ILP, while interest in attending school decreased (21 % to 36 %). Education need area requires additional supports. ILP participants reported doing well in more areas of their lives at time 2 than control group, in health (93 % vs 67 %), mental health (75 % vs 50 %), career planning & employment (64 % vs 40 %) and daily living (81 % vs 60 %). Program offered a 'home-like' environment where youth felt welcome.

3.1. Summary of U.S studies

3.1.1. Quantitative studies

Twenty-six quantitative studies were found in the peer reviewed literature (see Table 1), and an additional 10 studies were found in the grey literature (see Table 2). The samples examined by the 36 quantitative studies varied in setting, size, age and location. Data collection ranged from phone or in-person interviews pre- and post-program participation, interviews or self-administered surveys with program staff/service providers, administrative program data, clinical records, pre- and post-program self-administered surveys, national database service data, national survey database, and secondary data. Sample sizes ranged widely from a large national sample (n = 131,204) to a small pilot study sample (n = 7). The ages of the youth ranged from 12 to 27, with the majority focusing on transition-age youth (17 and older). Forty percent of the quantitative studies (n = 15) were set in California, and 5 studies used a national sample.

Many of the quantitative studies in both the peer reviewed and grey literature found moderate to no significant impacts of ILP/ILS on transition to adulthood outcomes. These outcomes ranged from sense of preparedness, education, employment, housing, supportive relationships to mental health and substance use. While a little more than half of the studies reported effect sizes (53 %), only one-third of all studies reported moderate to large effect sizes for transitional outcomes. For instance, Courtney, Zinn, Johnson and colleagues (2011) reported moderate to large effect sizes when examining differences in service

Table 3
Peer reviewed policy evaluations, cost benefit analyses and reviews on ILP and ILS effectiveness (N = 8).

Author(s) (year)	Location	Publication type	Key conclusions
Collins (2004)	National (US)	• Policy evaluation of Foster Care Independence Act (FCIA) and Chafee Education and Training Voucher Program (ETV).	• Legislation does not provide needed resources or a shift in the child welfare system. Needs of foster care adolescents leaving care exceeds the resources provided by FCIA. Need for two incremental shifts possible through FCIA: more attention to adolescent and young adult needs, emphasizing a youth development model of practice instead of traditional child welfare model; provision of concrete supports instead of independent living skills alone. Policy implementation needs to consider equity, as state implementation has varying eligibility criteria and distribution of resources is currently inequitable.
Hill (2009)	National (US)	• Policy evaluation of The Chafee Foster Care Independence Act (1999) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) (IDEA)	• Youth with disabilities transitioning out of foster care are at high risk for poor adult outcomes. Research estimated that between 50 and 80 % of youth in child welfare are with disabilities. Although both policies call for collaboration with service providers outside their respective service silos, not evident that collaboration is taking place. Side-by side analysis of policies suggests changes to Chafee Act and IDEA including: recognizing multiple eligibilities; enhancing accountability measures; requiring involvement of other systems; creating timelines for sharing information; involving key stakeholders.
Montgomery et al. (2006)	National (US)	• Systematic review of effectiveness of ILPs (controlled comparisons only), excluding programs for youth with special needs	• Unable to find any RCTs but the results of eight non-randomized controlled studies suggest that some ILPs may have protective effects for youth aging out, especially housing programs. However, the weak methodological quality of evidence affects the validity and generalizability of these conclusions.
Naccarato et al. (2008)	National (US)	• Rapid Instrument Review (RIR) about existing evaluation tools measuring ILP effectiveness	• 8 evaluation tools within 10 articles identified. Little uniformity in the way life skills and program effects for youth transitioning from foster care to adulthood are currently evaluated. Ansell-Casey Life Skill Assessment (ACLSA) and Daniel Memorial Independent Living Assessment for Life Skills (DMILA) include more comprehensive evaluation domains related to independent living, with ACLSA moderately reliable. ILP evaluation tools have the ability to be implemented at multiple points but are rarely used this way.
Naccarato & DeLorenzo (2008)	UK & US	• Systematic review of impact of ILPs on practice, policy and research; focus on the US and UK.	• 19 articles identified for review. Make recommendations for practice, policy, research and ILP implementation Practice: ILP practitioners should recruit youth and assure they are engaged in ILP training and attend consistently; standardized curriculum across states needed; need mechanisms to ensure youth's needs and skills are matched to interventions offered. Policy: input from youth and practitioners to policy makers; need a system where all states are able to adhere to legislative ILP mandates. Research: further research to identify most effective ILP medium for youth (e.g. classroom, group, individual, online); develop standardized outcome measures to adequately measure ILP effectiveness. Implementation: highly tailored ILPs with clear goals and outcomes; aftercare services post-discharge; collaboration with caregivers and other professionals responsible for providing services to youth; strengthen housing programs; encourage youth to earn a GED and attend college; do not prejudge foster care youth as not being able to succeed; infor sharing among ILP co-ordinators about effective strategies for transitioning youth.
Packard et al. (2008)	CA (US)	• Cost-benefit analysis of Transition Guardian Plan (TGP) for youth ages 18–23	• After 4 years, costs will reach over $123 million for the five cohorts in the program at any one time. If the program is successful for all youth, would increase lifetime earnings over 40-year careers and taxes received from youth who earn more income due to higher levels of education, and would lower costs from less use of temporary assistance and prison, resulting in a benefit-cost ratio of 1.5 to 1, using discounted present value dollars. At 75 % success, the ratio is 1.2 to 1, showing a net benefit to society.
Woodgate et al. (2017)	Canada, Finland, France, Hungary, UK & US	• Scoping review of interventions available to youth who are aging out of the child welfare system (excluding youth who are pregnant, involved in the justice system or emancipated).	• Identified 68 articles for review Youth who received interventions in domains of housing, employment, education and mentorship mostly had better outcomes compared to youth who did not. Some studies reported ILPs did not meet or improve outcomes and some had mixed reviews on effectiveness. Methods of evaluations were methodologically weak in determining the effectiveness of interventions in ensuring youth's successful transitions to independence.

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Table 3 (*continued*)

Author(s) (year)	Location	Publication type	Key conclusions
Yelick (2017)	National (US)	• Narrative review to determine if sufficient evidence exists to substantiate statements regarding the effectiveness of ILPs	• Identified 6 outcome studies for review. Lack of consistency in the types of services provided by ILPs and no general standards that ILPs follow. Differences in ILP components make comparisons difficult. No studies used a RCT to determine effectiveness of ILPs. Weak evidence that ILPs effectively aid youth aging out of care.

received and transition outcomes; however, this may be due to the fact that the ILP was targeted to high risk youth in intensive foster care. The researchers found the largest effect sizes in college enrollment when any type of education assistance was provided, and youth receiving help with a down payment or security on an apartment when they remained in foster care past the age of majority. In another study evaluating a transitional living ILP, Valentine and colleagues (2015) found moderate to large effect sizes on transition outcomes when youth had frequent contact with their case manager (once per week) and received help from their worker.

The peer reviewed studies reporting greater positive impacts on transition outcomes tended to have small samples, and in the grey literature, were evaluated by the agency responsible for delivering the ILP/ILS. A common finding emerging from five of the quantitative studies highlights the importance of offering supports over extended periods of time: the longer youth participated in a ILP/ILS, the more they could benefit from the transitional supports. In addition, Chor and colleagues (2018) found that older youth over age 18 were three times less likely to receive ILP/ILS compared to younger youth, suggesting that earlier youth engagement in transitional supports may increase their likelihood to have their transitional needs met. In another study examining the unmet needs of former foster youth eligible for ILP/ILS, Katz and Courtney (2015) found that youth experiencing mental health issues were the most likely to indicate they had unmet needs, both at baseline and wave 3 of the study. A few studies found that certain transition outcomes worsened after ILP/ILS participation; for instance, Lemley and Niarhos (2015) found that post-secondary dropout rates increased post-participation in a transitional housing placement program.

Given that randomized controlled trials (RCT) are considered as the gold standard of research design for program impact evaluations, we provide a more detailed summary of those studies in the following section.

3.1.1.1. Randomized controlled trials (RCT) of ILPs[5]. Greeson, Garcia, Kim, Thompson and Courtney's (2015) longitudinal RCT using secondary data from the Multi-Site Evaluation of Foster Youth Programs (MEFYP) found that participants (n = 482) in both a life skills training program and in the control group in LA County, California experienced a significant reduction in social support over time. The life sills program had no positive impact on the participant group's social support trajectories. No racial or ethnic differences were detected in the social support trajectories, and work status was found to be negatively correlated to a significant social support change over time. In another longitudinal RCT study using MEFYP secondary data examining the Outreach program impact on social support for youth in intensive foster care in Massachusetts (n = 194), MA, Greeson, Garcia, Kim and Courtney (2015) found no short- or long-term effect of the program on participant outcomes, as the program did not increase foster youth's social support compared to the control group. In addition, no racial, ethnic or gender disparities in program effect were detected.

In their longitudinal RCT study of an employment assistance program in Kern County, California (n = 254), Zinn and Courtney (2015) found no statistically significant program impacts on any of the employment assistance, employment and self-sufficiency outcomes of the participants. However, participants from minority groups reported experiencing financial hardships, and were receiving financial assistance. To date, these are the only three RCTs[6] in the American and Canadian peer reviewed literature examining ILP impact on youth leaving care outcomes.

In the grey literature search results, an additional RCT study was found. The evaluation of the Early Start to Emancipation Preparation Tutoring Program in Los Angeles County (Courtney et al., 2008b) (n = 455 youth in care ages 14–15) found no program impacts on educational outcomes. The study also found no statistically significant impact on any other outcomes, including school grades, behaviours and educational attainment, between the two groups at second follow-up.

3.1.2. Mixed method studies

Nine mixed methods studies emerged from the peer reviewed literature, while only one emerged from the grey literature. The samples varied in setting, size, age and location. Data collection ranged from qualitative phone or in-person interviews with youth participants, program staff and mentors/advocates, focus groups, to case file reviews, administrative data, participant surveys and questionnaires, and secondary data. Sample sizes ranged from a large multi-state sample (n = 732) to a small ILP-specific sample (n = 31), with most samples consisting of under 100 participants. The ages of youth ranged from 15 to 26, with the majority focusing on transition-age youth (18 and older). As with the quantitative studies, half of the mixed methods studies were set in California, with one study using a nation-wide sample across 10 ILP sites.

Given the exploratory and descriptive nature of the studies, none reported effect sizes. In addition, over half of the studies (60 %) did not evaluate ILP/ILS impact, but rather explored the feasibility of an impact evaluation study, ILP implementation processes, receipt of ILS, assessment of transitional needs and youth perspectives on ILP/ILS received. Interestingly, several of those studies had common findings relating to the lack of ILP/ILS access for youth 'aging out' of care. For instance, Courtney et al. (2011) found that only 30 % of youth in their study accessed the ILS they were eligible for, which decreased further to 12 % by wave 3. Dworsky and Pérez (2010) found a disconnect between ILP participants' perceived needs and the services provided by the program, while Georgiades (2005) found that most youth in care (64 %) fail to attend ILPs because they are uninformed about them.

The four remaining studies examined ILP impact on transition to adulthood outcomes, ranging from low to high impact; two of those studies used a comparative analysis with a control group. The outcomes ranged from education, employment, housing, healthy living, finances, life skills to risky behaviours. The study reporting the highest positive impacts was from the grey literature, did not use a control group, and was internally evaluated by the agency responsible for delivering the ILP. One of the studies using a control group found that the group that

[5] Reports for the LA County and Massachusetts studies in the grey literature were excluded from our search results due to being duplicate studies. These reports provide results for many more outcome areas than those provided in the peer reviewed journal articles.

[6] For further details on the RCT studies, see Table 1: Summary Table of Peer-Reviewed Articles.

did not participate in the ILP were more likely to have a job immediately after leaving care than the ILP participant group (Lemon et al., 2005), showcasing no ILP impact on youth outcomes.

Another study showed slight improvement in life skills post-ILP, but showed a negative impact in certain outcome areas such as money and time management, as well as problem-solving and planning skills (Kirk & Day, 2011).

3.1.3. Qualitative studies

Seven qualitative studies emerged from the peer reviewed literature, while none emerged from the grey literature. The samples varied in setting, size, age and location. Data collection ranged from structured or semi-structured phone or in-person interviews with youth participants, program staff and/or foster parents, focus groups, to open-ended participant surveys and questionnaires, and photo elicitation interviewing. Sample sizes ranged from a larger focus group sample (n = 88) to a small ILS-specific sample (n = 6), with most samples consisting of under 30 participants. The ages of youth ranged from 16 to 25, with one study focusing on professionals and ILP staff. As with the quantitative and mixed methods studies, 42 % (3 out of 7) of the qualitative studies were set in California.

Three of the studies did not examine specific ILP/ILS impact but rather a more general experience with ILP/ILS and the challenges experienced by professionals and ILP staff in meeting the needs of transition-aged youth in care. Interestingly, all three studies reported similar findings related to the lack of adequate ILP/ILS resources to help youth achieve self-sufficiency. Geenen and Powers' (2007) study, which incorporated foster parent perspectives in addition to youth and key professionals, found that the ideal transition supports and training should be offered by trained foster parents to provide a more natural setting for learning independent living skills. Similarly, youth participants in Iglehart and Beceera's (2002) study suggested that former youth in care should be hired as teachers in ILPs to encourage peer support and natural mentoring.

Four of the studies examined youth perspectives on ILP/ILS impact. Youth participants in two of the studies reported not feeling ready for independent living despite participating in a program, and expressed a need for a balance between independence and interdependence. In another study, youth expressed that the services they received were inadequate and were generally dissatisfied with the ILP they participated in. The need for a focus on relational and emotional support was a recurring theme in nearly all of the seven qualitative studies.

3.2. Summary of Canadian studies

Three Canadian studies[7] were found through the grey literature search; all used a mixed methods research approach. Goyette and colleagues (2012) conducted a program effectiveness study examining two different ILPs offered to youth in the process of leaving care (ages 16–17) at 4 Centres Jeunesse in Quebec: the Moving On (*Droit devant*) program focused on emotional maturity (n = 12 males), and the Friendship Group (*Moi et cie*) program focused on social skills (n = 19 females). While most youth participants (79 %) expressed satisfaction with the group intervention approach of both programs, no significant outcome differences were found pre- and post-participation.

In an earlier Quebec-based mixed methods longitudinal study of an intensive pilot ILP (*Project qualification des jeunes, PQJ*) for youth ages 17 to 20 (n = 61), Goyette and colleagues (2006) found that the program did not meet the objective of inserting youth into the job market or job training programs by wave 7 of data collection. However, personal skills and aptitudes scores significantly increased from 7.57 to 15.44, and youth reported a statistically significant 7 % increase of independent living skills between pre- and post-intervention. It is important to note that comparison groups were not included in the Quebec-based studies, which limits the ability to assess ILP impact.

Rutman and colleagues (2014) conducted a mixed method quasi-experimental ILP impact evaluation of the Link program offered in the Greater Vancouver area in B.C., with former foster youth between the ages of 19 and 26 who participated in the program (n = 21) and who did not (n = 22). A greater percentage of Link program participants were doing significantly better in more areas of their lives after nine months in the program than those who did not participate in the program, especially related to health (93 % vs 67 %), mental health (75 % vs 50 %), career planning and employment (64 % vs 40 %) and daily living (81 % vs 60 %). Youth participants expressed during the interviews that the Link program offered a 'home-like' environment that made them feel welcome. However, the researchers also found that while the percentage of Link youth engaged in education and training remained consistent throughout the program, their interest in attending school decreased from 36 % to 21 % by the end of the program.

3.3. Implications and recommendations

The following three themes were highlighted across 61 % (39) of the studies in terms of implications for child welfare research, policy and practice: 1) interdependence 2) hands-on natural learning 3) extended transition period. Over a third of all studies emphasized the need for a focus on interdependence, or relational needs, rather than solely on independent living skills. This entails ensuring care leavers are connected to strong, supportive and long-lasting relationships with adults, peers, and mentors in the community. In line with this approach, five of the mixed methods studies recommended that ILPs/ILS be offered within a relationship-based framework, as opposed to the current bureaucratic approach which does not connect well with youth. Several studies recommended that further research is required to examine the connection between social support and notions of self-sufficiency for youth 'aging out' of care, as well as how to balance the provision of formal and natural/relational supports.

Several studies, including some of the RCTs, also questioned the impact of classroom-based approaches of ILPs, as they tend to be short-term and leave little to no room for hands-on learning and trial and error. Some of the studies proposed a shift of funds to a home-based approach, where foster parents are trained to provide the skills training that ILPs/ILS are currently funded to implement. Others recommended a shift towards self-directed support approaches to allow for more individualized transition planning. Another recurring recommendation across studies was the call for extended transitions to adulthood to provide youth more time and space to gradually acquire the skills and supports necessary to thrive post-care. For instance, Iglehart and Becerra (2002) criticized current ILP/ILS approaches as not being aligned with adolescent development due to their intensive and short-term implementation. They recommend that a full continuum of care, including post-care services, needs to be established to provide developmentally appropriate programs and supports to youth 'aging out' of care.

3.4. Limitations of ILP and ILS studies

The studies had several limitations. A primarily limitation consistent with most the studies is the inability to generalize the findings. ILPs and ILS vary widely in both the U.S. and Canada, and can range from a focus on housing, employment, education to wraparound supports and residential settings. Only five studies used nationally representative data, with an additional study using nationwide ILP site-based data across 10 sites. Several studies analyzed multi-state data; however, the sample sizes were not sufficiently large to be representative of each state. Much of the studies utilized small sample sizes; however, for the qualitative studies this is a typical occurrence as the goal is achieve depth in data analysis rather than breadth. Another common limitation is the inability

[7] For further details on the Canadian studies, see Table 2: Summary Table of Grey Literature Reports.

to truly identify ILP/ILS impact as most of the quantitative and mixed methods studies focused on ILP/ILS correlation to youth outcomes rather than causation. Additionally, several of the grey literature ILP/ILS impact studies were conducted by the agency implementing the program or service, which carries the risk of researcher bias. The short duration of most ILP/ILS also made it difficult for some studies to evaluate their impact on foster youth trajectories, particularly when the studies were not longitudinal in nature. Most of the ILPs and ILS studies included in our review did not entail a full program/service impact evaluation, and thus intervention fidelity is difficult to ascertain. In addition, most studies did not evaluate specific ILP/ILS components, which make it difficult to conclude which aspects of a transition program or service is achieving the most impact with youth participants. Finally, most of the studies did not include youth input; only six studies (all qualitative) examined youth perspectives on the effectiveness of ILPs and ILS.

3.5. Peer reviewed policy evaluations, cost benefit analyses and reviews on ILP and ILS effectiveness

The peer reviewed publications found in Table 3 were comprised of policy evaluations, a cost benefit analyses, as well as systematic, instrument, scoping and narrative reviews. Most of the publications outlined the need for more resources, increased collaboration between service providers and a significant shift in how the child welfare system meets the need of youth transitioning to adulthood. A lack of methodologically strong ILP/ILS impact studies were highlighted across reviews, with mixed to no impact found on youth outcomes.

4. Discussion

Studies to date suggest that ILP and ILS are not producing the intended outcomes, with limited to no impact demonstrated on well-being outcomes for youth leaving care. In fact, some of the studies found a negative impact, especially related to social support. One potential explanation for the overall low impact of ILP and ILS is that many youth 'aging out' of care do not access those services despite needing transition supports. For instance, Courtney and colleagues (2001) found that only a minority of youth in the Midwest from their sample (n = 141) reported receiving concrete support and training for a variety of life skills prior to exiting care. About one-quarter to one-third reported a lack of preparedness in various life skills such as obtaining a job, managing money, securing housing and living on their own. Okpych (2015) found that only half of American youth between ages 16 and 21 eligible for Chafee Program services (50.2 %) received such services. Katz and Courtney (2015) found similar results for youth in the Midwest. According to their findings, 34.5 % of youth in care from their sample (n = 732) had unmet needs at age 17, which increased to 35.5 % by age 23. The most common unmet need was related to finances and financial planning, followed by housing. In addition, those who participate in ILP/ILS are most likely amongst the most highly motivated youth in care, which can result in sample bias; multiple studies included in this systematic review indicated that this was one of their major study limitations. These findings highlight that many young people are not getting what they think they need from ILP/ILS and/or are not participating in transition support programs due to this perception of support inadequacy; this most likely impacts the efficacy of ILP and ILS.

4.1. Practice implications

Since outcomes studies demonstrate that under half of youth in care graduate from high school (Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS), 2010; Rutman et al., 2007), it is no surprise that ILPs offered in a classroom setting demonstrate inadequate outcomes in relation to their impact goals. The literature suggests that classroom-based ILPs may not be an appropriate instructional approach to prepare youth in care for independent living, and more relationship-based approaches, such as mentoring, are needed (Greeson, Garcia, Kim, Thompson & Courtney, 2015; Greeson, Garcia, Kim & Courtney, 2015; Mares, 2010; Zinn & Courtney, 2017).

Courtney and colleagues (2001) argue that independent living training programs may not provide sufficient tangible practice opportunities for youth. In support of this argument, Lee and Berrick (2014) also criticize current exiting care programs as overly focused on hard skill development, and call for a more holistic approach aiming to reduce the social capital deficits youth leaving care experience. Yet, policies on leaving care in both countries continue to focus on independence as a main target outcome and ILP/ILS participation as the focus of transition planning for youth 'aging out' of care.

5. Research implications

It is also noteworthy that much of ILP and ILS impact and evaluation studies utilize quantitative approaches that do not incorporate the voices of youth in care, but rather focus on program process and components, ILP/ILS staff experiences, and demographic and outcome measures such as social support, employment, income, housing and self-sufficiency. These research approaches limit the ability of youth in care to define their own needs, goals and expectations of success related to their transition to adulthood. In addition, the understanding of key concepts and priorities by youth in care are often different from those reported by adults in their lives such as caregivers, child protection workers and policy makers (Holland, 2009); consequently, omitting their perspectives in ILP/ILS studies provides a very limited picture of the needs and realities of youth 'aging' out of care.

Of the limited ILP and ILS studies incorporating youth perspectives, youth in care often indicate that emotional support and mentoring are crucial needs during the transition to adulthood, of which are often not the focus of ILPs or ILS (e.g., Curry & Abrams, 2015; Lemon-Osterling & Hines, 2006; Rosenwald et al., 2013).

6. Conclusion

This systematic review highlights that compared to the U.S., program impact studies in Canada are sorely lacking. However, this is most likely due to the legislative differences between the two countries as the U.S. has operated under national exiting care legislation since 2008 and Canada has no such legislation nor a national reporting structure. The lack of a national legislative framework in Canada can also partially explain the lack of data collection and transition outcome reporting by child welfare jurisdictions, as it is not a requirement for provinces and territories to report on the ILP/ILS they offer to youth exiting care. More research needs to be done in this area to build our knowledge of evidence-based and best practices within the Canadian context.

Though this systematic review is the first to combine a broad selection of studies conducted on ILPs and ILS in both the U.S. and Canada and provides a much needed update on the present state of the literature pertaining to ILP/ILS effectiveness throughout both countries, there are several limitations that should be noted. First, we only included in our search studies available in English and French. Second, we restricted our search to studies in the U.S. and Canada. Third, the differing child welfare policy contexts in the U.S. and Canada might impact ILP/ILS study outcomes. Fourth, there could be additional terms to describe ILPs and ILS that we are not aware of. Fifth, there could be additional documents in the grey literature that we did not find in our search, such as conference presentations and local reports. And finally, the small number of studies available might limit the conclusions of this systematic review.

However, this peer-reviewed systematic review is the first to take stock of the present state of the literature on ILPs and ILS in both the U.S. and Canada since 2011. While a *meta*-analysis was conducted in 2017, it was not published in a peer-reviewed journal; the focus was also solely

on RCTs and quasi-experiemental design with pretest–posttest data, resulting in no Canadian studies included in the analysis. As such, this review highlights two main conclusions: (1) Both the U.S. and Canada sorely need innovation with respect to preparing youth in care for the transition to adulthood; and (2) We also must commit to using rigorous research designs, like RCTs, with such programming to determine the impact of such new approaches. By synthesizing the documents from our review, we are able to gain a better understanding in regard to the present status of the ILP/ILS field as well as outline a number of research and practice recommendations to advance the field.

In sum, given that this review suggests that ILP and ILS do not generally produce intended self-sufficiency outcomes for youth leaving care, we are called to re-conceptualize our investment in youth in care and focus on their *inter*dependence in order to realize their potential (Greeson & Thompson, 2017). The current dichotomy between the dependence of youth in care on formal caregiver relationships for support and the independence and self-sufficiency goals set by the child welfare system for their transition to adulthood sets them up for failure and further marginalizes their experience of becoming an adult (Singer et al., 2013). A paradigm shift is required, moving from an idealized and staged transition to adulthood that uses traditional milestones as markers of success (Allan et al., 2013), towards a more realistic focus on the complex interactions youth in care experience with social structures and systems as they transition out of care and into adulthood.

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CRediT authorship contribution statement

Melanie M. Doucet: Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Resources, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Project administration. **Johanna K.P. Greeson:** Methodology, Validation, Resources, Supervision, Writing – review & editing. **Nehal Eldeeb:** Methodology, Validation, Resources, Investigation, Formal analysis, Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

The authors are unable or have chosen not to specify which data has been used.

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