



# Time banking service exchange systems: A review of the research and policy and practice implications in support of youth in transition

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## ABSTRACT

Youth and families in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems reside in high poverty communities and often have multiple, interlocking needs that require community support long after youth age out of care or are free from mandated service requirements. Time banking is a unique transaction based system for mutual aid and assistance that fosters economic opportunities, social inclusion, community self-help and enhances civic engagement among often marginalized community members. This article reviews the literature on time banking service exchange systems and its impact on youth in transition. This research reveals the potential of youth participation in time banking service exchanges as assisting in engagement and active participation in services as well as in helping youth achieve the developmental assets they need to be successful upon discharge from formal systems. Policy and practice recommendations for incorporating time banking to help vulnerable youth are also included.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Challenges

The child welfare and juvenile justice systems face formidable challenges as they strive to meet the needs of youth and families. Community child welfare and juvenile justice programming is usually short term, intensive and designed to serve as a transitional service to facilitate successful community re-integration and family stabilization (e.g., Bazemore & Karp, 2004; Bazemore & Terry, 1997; Fraser & Nelson, 1997; Marks & Lawson, 2005). Preparing youth and their families for successful discharge necessitates that participation and engagement are swift and that community supports are in place to ensure that the gains made are sustainable post discharge. This article reviews the literature on time banking service exchange systems and assesses its potential impact on assisting youth in transition including youth returning to community from foster care placement, detention or incarceration and youth aging out of the foster care system.

For youth in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, challenging life circumstances and complex service needs often make it difficult for youth and family members to participate in services and comply with court mandates (Dawson & Berry, 2002; Littell, 2001; Littell & Tajima, 2000; Mandel, 2001; Marks & Lawson, 2005). Many of the youth in these systems are involuntary participants (see Rooney, 1992), either mandated to work with an agency due to a court order or

pressured to accept help from agencies. Getting youth and families to actively participate in, and accept joint responsibility and accountability for their service plan's success is a persistent challenge (Beckerman & Hutchinson, 1988; Bruns, 2004; Marks & Lawson, 2005). High dropout rates often plague community service agencies serving involuntary youth (Dawson & Berry, 2002; Kazdin, 2000; Owens et al., 2002).

In addition, many youth in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems “cross” multiple service systems or “cross-over” from one service system to another. “Cross-system” and “cross-over” youth often evidence a multitude of co-occurring problem behaviors. These problems include substance abuse, risky sexual behaviors, school-related problems, mental health problems, especially depression, and association with peers involved in illegal activities (i.e., gang association) (Wandersman & Florin, 2003; Yohalem & Pittman, 2001). Research suggests that the many of these problems are interlinked and often sequential (Smith & Carlson, 1997), leading to poor outcomes (Resnick, Harris, & Blum, 1993) including ongoing delinquent and criminal behavior (Hawkins, Jensen, Catalano, & Lishner, 1988).

Maintaining and enhancing “social capital” networks, defined as resources cultivated during service provision that can accessed and mobilized for purposive action in the future (Lin, 2001), is important for vulnerable youth to succeed post discharge from foster care or returning home from prison or detention (Avery, 2010; Furstenberg & Hughes, 1995; Marks & Lawson, 2005; Raffo & Reeves, 2000; Teachman, Paasch, & Carver, 1996; Wright, Cullen, & Miller, 2001). Cultivating engaged and sustainable family teams is a core strategy used to build social capital (Burns, Schoenwald, Burchard, Faw, & Santos, 2000). Family teams involve the convening of professionals as well as important people in the child's life (parents, teacher, clergy,

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therapist, friend, and relatives), in support of the youth and family (VanDenBerg & Grealish, 1996).

Cultivating engaged and sustainable family teams for vulnerable youth is rife with challenges. These challenges include extreme poverty, poor prospects for positive economic and social trajectories, shame and stigma, the burning of family and social bridges, the presence of illegal activity in the home and social exclusion. One consequence is that staff struggle to build plans that are primarily reliant on sustainable, indigenous informal services. Instead of cultivating informal resources, professional services dominate and families become increasingly reliant on staff to address their needs (Huffine, 2002; Marks & Lawson, 2005). When supports are provided, they are usually geared to helping youth and their families address immediate crisis needs. Little attention is paid to linking supports for asset building, social capital gains and thriving related outcomes (see Walker, 2004; Walker, Koroloff, Schutte, & Bruns, 2004; Walker & Sage, 2006).

## 1.2. The innovation

There is renewed interest by researchers and practitioners in understanding interventions that produce developmental gains for high risk youth, including youth in transition from the child welfare and juvenile justice systems (Butts, 2008; Butts, Mayer, & Roth, 2005; Collins, 2001; Mandel, 2000, Yohalem & Pittman, 2001). This interest stems in part from a growing recognition that most service programs are not currently structured to address the challenges noted above, including the persistent poverty faced by many youth and their families (Briar-Lawson, 2000; McGowan & Walsh, 2000). For youth with co-occurring needs, more is needed than conventional services, especially if long-term impacts are to be realized (Burt, Resnick, & Novick, 1998; Marks & Lawson, 2005; Public/Private Ventures, 2002; Ryan, Davis, & Yang, 2001; Smith, Lizotte, Thornberry, & Krohn, 1995). For many youth where protective factors are not occurring naturally, new environments will need to be “manufactured, recreated for youth whose life structures lack such opportunities” (Smith et al., 1995, pp. 238–239). These special interventions are especially needed for troubled youth to be safely maintained in their home community or be successfully re-integrated into communities after having spent time in residential facilities, detention centers, or juvenile justice placements (Mandel, 2001, 2000; Yohalem & Pittman, 2001).

In response to these realities, a number of leaders are experimenting with developing community-based time bank service exchange systems to include child welfare and juvenile justice involved youth and families. Time bank service exchanges are a social network of members who exchange services with each other to address economic needs, foster mutual aid and community self-help. These community exchange projects hold promise in achieving individual results for marginalized populations such as youth in transition as well as positively impacting on organizations and communities.

### 1.2.1. History and origins of time banking

Time banking (Cahn & Rowe, 1992; Time Dollar Institute, 2004), begun by Edgar Cahn in the 1980s, is a unique transaction based system to create economic opportunities, mutual aid and assistance. It involves the creation of a social network of members who exchange services, with each member committing to both giving and receiving services. Time bank members can include youth, family members, local businesses, staff from participating organizations and organizations themselves.

Members can provide services to one member of the time bank and receive services from another member in the network. For example, one member can cut another person's hair. The person who receives the haircut delivers groceries for an elderly person. Members can also exchange services with organizations that they are involved with as clients, such as youth providing mentoring or tutoring services to others or receiving such services from fellow clients. In time

banking, each kind of service has equal value, whether it is running errands for a senior citizen or providing legal care for immigrants. Each hour of service equals a time dollar. Hours of service are entered into a computer bank for use when members need help or support from others.

Time banking has become an international movement. Time banks operate in 22 countries spanning six continents. England has over 130 time banks, most of which have been developed within the past 5 years. Forty exist in London alone. 53 official time banks operate in the United States (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/TimeBanking>).

Time banking has traditionally been designed for impoverished communities where the mainstream economy is not serving local interests. Economic benefits are afforded to participants as they “cash in” their earned hours for needed services often inaccessible due to low wages or unemployment. This paper explores the potential social development benefits occurring from time bank participation by vulnerable youth in transition from care systems.

## 2. Time banking exchange systems

### 2.1. Neighbor-to-neighbor time banking

Time banking schemes often originate in neighborhoods and communities and are open to residents in a geographic area. These so-called “neighbor-to-neighbor” (N2N) or “person-to-person” (Ryan-Collins, Stephens, & Coote, 2008) time banking models have been described as “community-based volunteer schemes whereby participants give and receive services in exchange for time credits” (Seyfang, 2003, p. 258). Members list the services they can offer and those that they need and are matched with other members by computer and the help of a time bank coordinator. Every transaction is recorded on a computer “time bank” with members receiving a regular “bank” statement. Once a N2N time bank reaches a certain size, a paid staff position is usually required. This person serves as a coordinator and handles administrative tasks associated with running the time bank. Estimated start-up costs to operate a time bank range from 30 to 50 K (The Time Dollar Institute, 2004).

While many N2N projects are housed in local charities or public agencies (Seyfang, 2002), these models are not restricted to an organization's clientele. Their missions usually are broader, transcending just one organization. These broadened missions include the fostering of social inclusion, generating community self-help and enhancing voluntary activities among community members who do not normally volunteer (Seyfang, 2003, p. 258).

Consistent with these missions, local charities commonly become members of neighbor-to-neighbor time banks that they do not directly operate. These other organizations are recruited so that the range and kind of services that can be exchanged among enrollees are expanded. For example, community child welfare and juvenile justice agencies can join a N2N time bank and involve their clients in service exchanges. To ensure client and community safety, staff accompany youth on exchanges.

Local businesses also become members. For example, local cinemas are recruited to attract time bank enrollees with the promise of discounted movie tickets that can be “purchased” through their service contributions. Businesses are attracted to becoming time bank members in order to market their product or service and enhance their standing among community members. Businesses can also “purchase” needed services from an active volunteer base that can assist their business operation (Cahn, 2004; Seyfang, 2001a).

### 2.2. Individual-organizational time banking

Another type of time banking, sometimes called individual-organizational (Marks, 2009) or person-to-agency (Ryan-Collins et al., 2008) time banking, is time banks created by service organizations whereby recipients receive “time credits” for their skills and assets

through service to the organization or to improve communities. Here, the agency, can serve as the “bank”, issuing time bank credits for hours spent contributing to their mission or goals. The agency also provides opportunities for clients to “cash-in” goods and services for hours earned. For community child welfare and juvenile justice organizations, individual–organizational time banking is attractive because it facilitates staff and youth to work together on projects of mutual interest, enhancing client engagement and building mutual trust (Marks, 2009).

For example, youth can “cash” in hours to participate in trips, special events or for special privileges such as access to computer labs. The “buying” of services by clients from community members or other clients involved in the organization can be empowering for youth and families in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, who often feel disempowered and hopeless. These exchanges can build a sense of community and collective purpose among clients and staff in the organization, creating a long term sense of belonging and bonding (Marks, 2009). Time banks that include vulnerable populations require sufficient staff support to arrange and supervise exchanges, necessitating a higher level of start-up funding not required of most N2N time banks (Marks, 2009).

An example of individual–organizational time banking is the Time Dollar Youth Court in Washington, D.C. In this program, time banking is integrated into the operation of the youth court. Here, youth are enlisted as “co-producers” with staff to achieve enhanced juvenile justice and educational outcomes. In D.C., youth comprise a teen jury that hears cases of first-time non-violent offenders. The jurors earn time dollars for serving on the jury and helping others. Jurors can cash in their time dollars earned for incentives and rewards such as a refurbished computer. Sentences imposed include community service and a requirement that the offenders serve on a jury, enabling them to also help other youth (Flowers, 2010, Time Dollar Institute, 2003).

### 3. Theoretical bases for time banking

Time banking is based on the principles, values and tenets of co-production. Co-production is an asset-based approach that rewards contributions and alters the notion of work within human service programs and in communities (Cahn, 2004). It also comprises an intervention framework which sets forth practices and strategies that guides practitioners on methods of empowering clients (Marks, 2009).

Co-production adherents seek to create an environment in service programs where everyone’s work is valued and clients help others as well as themselves. The ultimate aim of co-production within social service programs is to enhance client engagement and sustain their participation while enrolled and to prepare clients for success post discharge.

#### 3.1. Fostering engagement

Cahn (2004) observes anecdotally that professionals lament client “no-shows” and low turnout rates, especially for court involved and involuntary clients. For co-production theorists, service provision and the expectations placed on clients are implicated in these unacceptable, problematic levels of service engagement, participation and retention (Cahn, 2004). For example, clients have routinely not been asked to play an active role in producing outcomes, have not contributed their own energies in search of solutions. An unintended consequence of this relationship with clients is that many have not accepted the services and benefits afforded to them (Marks & Lawson, 2005).

Co-production interventions seek to enlist active client engagement in service provision. Within service programs, co-production includes the notion of clients as “partners in the treatment process”

(see McCammon, Spencer, & Friesen, 2001), providing their own time, financial, physical and social resources in bettering their circumstances (Miller & Stirling, 2004). However, co-production theory and processes go further, insisting that the recipient assist in the design, planning and delivery of services in order to improve service outcomes and rebuild the local community (Bruns, 2004; Cahn, 2004). Service participants are rewarded for time spent in mission enhancing activities by receiving time bank credits which in turn can be spent on accessing desired services such as training or refurbished computers (Cahn, 2004; Seyfang, 2001a). Through participation in these activities, clients are transformed into resources, contributors and agents of change, morphing from being passive service recipients to becoming actively engaged in designing and implementing interventions and services. In turn, staff could also participate in the time bank while on the job assisting the youth or by earning actual time bank hours by participating on their own time (Marks, 2009; Time Dollar Institute, 2004) or on time allowed for by their employer (Callison, 2003).

Through time bank involvement, it is hypothesized that clients, including youth involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, will be more engaged and active participants in services, resulting in higher retention and fewer “no-shows.” Active participation will also enable clients to benefit further from services provided. For example, by serving as “contributors,” youth will enhance their self-esteem and social skills (Cahn, 2004, p. 210; Marks, 2009). By helping peers who are going through struggles that young people have experienced, both the helper and the younger peer benefit (see Gambone, 2006; Nicholson, Collins, & Holmer, 2004). Youth and family members will bond together while working on service projects and develop trust and collaboration with staff in the process. Youth will also meet new peers and adults with whom they might not have had a chance to previously engage thus building family support and augmenting protection in the broader environment (Marks, 2009). Each of these desirable outcomes has been highlighted as foci of interventions that enhance protective factors for vulnerable youth (Smith & Carlson, 1997).

#### 3.2. Sustainable impacts

Co-production interventions seek to strengthen the informal, non-market economy of family, neighborhoods, voluntary associations and civil society. Co-production theorists note that when the informal economy fails, trained and credentialed specialists are often brought in to either “fix” the family and neighborhood or repair its broken connections with the market economy of work (Boyle, 2004; Cahn, 2004). These theorists propose that service strategies have not focused on ameliorating these conditions in a sustainable way. For example, according to co-production theorists, providers have not invested sufficient energy and resources into helping families create new peer relations that can provide the necessary social capital needed to improve their life trajectories. According to Cahn, social capital is “as essential as roads, bridges and utility lines” (Cahn, 2004, p. 24).

Within the co-production framework, it is hypothesized that exchanges between youth and community members or other youth providing mutual aid or peer support and between youth and organizations that they are involved with can yield long term sustainable gains (Ryan-Collins et al., 2008). This occurs as clients come to value their impact in assisting other clients or community members and seeing the value of their collective impact on organizations and their community (Trevino & Trevino, 2004). In a study of two sites in New York State, high need youth who were identified in negative ways by family members, social workers and employers become valued members of society as they were associated with positive community service projects (Marks, 2009). As youth increasingly become viewed as “contributors”, social capital opportunities can be enhanced through access to social connections, relations and networks.

#### 4. Previous research on time banking

Studies of time banking have been predominately exploratory and descriptive, befitting a relatively new area of study. Cross sectional data collected predominated. Case study approaches using multiple sources of data were most common. Only two studies employed quasi-experimental pre/post or comparison group designs.

Highlights of the research on the two major types of time banking are reviewed below. A third category, research of youth-focused time banking, is addressed in more detail.

##### 4.1. Neighbor-to-neighbor time banking

The most comprehensive evaluation of neighbor-to-neighbor time banking to date has been the initial National Study of Time Banking in the United Kingdom (Seyfang, 2001b; Seyfang, 2002; Seyfang & Smith, 2002). The research took several forms and occurred in stages. The first stage included a survey of time bank coordinators in the UK. Subsequent stages utilized a multi-method, community-based, action research approach. This approach involved the use of participant surveys, case studies, semi-structured interviews and focus groups to assess the impact of time banking. Key findings included the predominance of excluded populations as active members of time banks; the importance of the time bank “broker” in facilitating exchanges between members and ensuring that there is a sufficient mix of services in the time bank so that members get what they need (North, 2010; Seyfang & Smith, 2002).

Work by Collom (2005, 2007, 2008) at the University of South Maine found additional support for the social integration benefits of time banking. In his study of the Portland, Maine time bank, the largest neighbor-to-neighbor time bank in the United States, Collom (2005) found that each defined group of participants (female non-senior, female senior, male senior, and organizations) tended to statistically “under-transact” within their group. The other work by Collom (2007) focused on the motivation of members to become engaged in time banking. Findings confirmed the work by Seyfang (2003) in revealing participants to be motivated by “social movement values” that went beyond the benefits of day to day exchanges.

A major contribution of early work on time banking was the development of a wide range of objectives and indicators that sought to measure progress in fostering social inclusion via the building of social capital networks. For example, Seyfang (2004) proposed social, economic and political citizenship indicators to measure time bank impacts. Also, consistent with co-production theory, identified impacts were not limited to individual gains but also occurred at the organizational, community and policy levels (Boyle, Clark, & Burns, 2006).

Both the initial and subsequent UK National Studies identified a number of “lessons learned” in start-up and implementation. For example, the need for time banks to adapt to local conditions was noted. In addition, facilitating social events was often essential in building group cohesiveness and to stimulate member exchanges. Findings also revealed that members were more apt to provide services for other members than to ask for services. Community time banks struggled with finding new ways to encourage members to use the accumulated hours to address their needs and wants and to allow for other members to have the opportunity to “give-back” (Seyfang & Smith, 2002).

Finally, staff morale emerged as an important variable linked to co-production success (Boyle et al., 2006). The perceived threat of time banking to professional status was identified as a core issue needing open discussion. Required staff competencies, such as group facilitation skills, were viewed as important so that staff is prepared for incorporating time banking into service operations. Incentives to staff involvement in time banking were also initiated. For example, in a time bank in Scotland, staff was allowed four hours of work time per month to participate in time bank activities. In exchange, staff members were asked to help the organization in

marketing and promoting the time bank in the community (Callison, 2003).

##### 4.2. Individual-organizational time banking

The majority of research on time banking addressed the impact of time banking on public and non-profit organizations and their clients. The second national study in the UK focused on how organizations used time banking to support and enable their clients to play an active role in improving their lives and those of their neighbors. The authors identified the importance of cultivating staff understanding and acceptance to co-production's key tenets and that failure to identify and address staff concerns resonating from moving forward with client empowerment strategies can impede successful implementation of co-production related strategies and interventions (Boyle et al., 2006).

Studies in the US have focused primarily on time bank programs associated with large health care organizations. These studies have mostly focused on specific client outcomes tied to organizational goals. For example, Kyriacou and Blech (2003) used a quasi-experimental design to analyze the differences in health-related quality of life and other social outcomes between time bank enrollees in the Elderplan Time Dollar project at Brooklyn's Metropolitan Jewish Health System and those who were not enrolled. Findings suggested that participation in the member time dollar program may provide a “protective” effect for time dollar participants against both declining mental health status, increased levels of loneliness and declining health over time (Kyriacou & Blech, 2003).

A study conducted by researchers and students at Lehigh University on the Allentown (PA) Community Exchange program (Lasker et al., 2006) is especially relevant. Researchers used newly created and established scales of quality of life, social support, self-efficacy, community attachment and collective self-esteem to gain an understanding of the impact on members participating in the Time Bank. A retrospective survey approach was used to compare before and after time bank involvement. Findings from this Lehigh study indicated that more members offered services than received services. Transportation was the most popular service offered and household services were the most popular service received. In addition, females, older, retirees and people with lower incomes reported higher attachment to the *time bank*. Findings suggested that the *community exchange* helps build social networks, provides a system of social support and supports gains in physical and mental health. For example, an association was found between frequency of exchanges, attachment and identification with the *exchange* and gains in health and mental health. The authors concluded that the *time bank* may not only provide general social support and health related activities but also may create “a normative environment for promoting healthy behaviors” (Lasker et al., 2006, p. 38).

##### 4.3. Youth-focused time banks

Only five studies to date have focused on youth as members of time banks. Three of the studies were US based and two were UK based. The US studies addressed the impact of time banking on youth in the juvenile justice or child welfare system. These are reviewed below.

First, a longitudinal study was completed on recidivism rates for first-time non-violent juvenile offenders who were referred to the Washington, DC Youth Court. The Youth Court uses peers as jury members and incorporates this feature as part of their sanction. For their service, jurors can earn time hours which can be “cashed in” to purchase computers. Data from police arrest records were compiled for youth who were referred from January 1, 2003 through September 30, 2003. Results showed that one-year recidivism rates were 18% for participating youth. These results were compared with recidivism rates in the 30% range for comparable groups of youth who were

either dismissed or processed through the traditional juvenile justice system (Time Dollar Institute, 2003).

Flowers (2010) also studied the DC Youth Court. A mixed method evaluation design was used to assess the relationship of Youth Court participation to intermediate outcome measures such as self-efficacy improvements, life skill gains and enhanced civic engagement. Very strong associations were found in the life skills area of goal setting and achievement, problem solving, decision making and academics and learning while strong relationships were found between peer juror experience and community involvement such as gaining new friends and mentoring someone.

Marks (2009) used a descriptive, exploratory case study approach to ground an intervention framework for co-production and time banking developed to assist practitioners in implementing time banking projects for involuntary youth involved in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. Findings revealed that, for some youth, participation in co-production activities followed a developmental progression. Specifically, these youths' participation began as involuntary, but it changed to semi-voluntary participation with indicators of emotional and cognitive engagement. In addition, in both sites, empowerment practices employed by staff, with an emphasis on autonomy-supportive and relatedness-building strategies, served as a driver of staff/youth collaboration and enhanced levels of youth engagement. Common youth outcomes identified in both sites included social skill development, self esteem improvements, and positive identity gains. Data also revealed beneficial staff outcomes, suggesting a reciprocal relationship between gains made by youth and enhanced staff efficacy, empowerment and engagement.

## 5. Implications of time banking for policy and practice for youth in transition

Research on time banking, while informative and interesting, is limited with only a few studies employing rigorous research designs focused on studying the impact of time bank involvement on participants. These limitations are especially apparent in studies of youth-focused time banks. Nonetheless, progress has been made in developing an edifice that allows for more rigorous study of time banking. The potential impact of time banking on two areas of policy and practice associated with youth in transition that are ripe for future development and exploration are explored below.

### 5.1. Augmenting community service and restitution sanction alternatives

Theorists in the field of restorative justice (see Bazemore & Karp, 2004; Bazemore, Karp, McLoed, Vaniman, & Weibust, 2003) have conceptualized community service and restitution sanctions in terms of interventions designed to provide positive youth development benefits to juveniles involved. To assist practitioners in designing sanctions as interventions, propositions and practice principles have been articulated (Bazemore & Karp, 2004). Marks (2009) built on this work, utilizing co-production and time banking principles and theory to develop an intervention template to help structure restorative community service and restitution programming. An edifice has been established to help guide practitioners to incorporate time banking within restorative justice practices.

For example, youth mandated to provide community service can be encouraged to join local time banks, where they will meet adults and other young people engaged in giving back to their community. Negotiations with victims or surrogate victims (e.g., non-profit organizations representing the interests of victims) can lead to service activities designed to repair the damage cause by the juvenile. A drug seller might be asked to restore an abandoned crack house with a representative from a housing agency being asked to serve on a community-sentencing panel that determines the most appropriate sanction for that person (Bazemore & Maloney, 1994). Participants (individuals and

organizations) could be encouraged to join the local time bank, as providers and receivers of service.

Juvenile participants could be further engaged if policies allow the authorities (e.g., judges and probation officers) to count all or part of their service hours as time bank hours (see Marks, 2009). With time bank hours, youth would be allowed to “cash-in” service hours earned while performing restorative work to meet service needs for themselves and family members. Direct and indirect benefits of time bank involvement can be tied into the key goals of a balanced restorative approach (Maloney, Romig, & Armstrong, 1996). For example, as time bank members, youth would be rewarded for using their skills and expertise in improving their community. They would be more apt to be viewed as contributors, improving their self and public image. Youth would also be able to earn back public trust, meet new positive adult and peer role models, while building new skills in the process.

Finally, with time bank membership, incentives would be in place for youth to remain involved civically post service mandates. Research shows that many involved juveniles benefit from providing service, with some choosing to voluntarily remain involved with community organizations where they have been placed (see Doob & MacFarlane, 1984; Forgays & DeMilio, 2005; McInvor, 1992). Involvement with time banks can augment the promise of restorative programming as a “gateway” intervention (Bazemore & Terry, 1997, p. 696), providing a vehicle for offenders to be rewarded for continued service work and incentives to continue to take steps towards positive change and community reintegration.

### 5.2. Building new social support and social capital resources

Involving vulnerable youth and families in community or organizational time banks can help cultivate engaged and sustainable family teams that build social capital. For example, Marks (2009) found the presence of enhanced positive “bonding” social capital (see Bailey, 2005; Schneider, 2004) for involuntary youth participants that participated in time banking and other related co-production interventions. These interventions often involved group activities designed to improve local communities, including building capacities of local non-profit programs. For these youth, intimate social groups formed, comprised of a combination of peers, trusted staff, family members of youth and select community members, often friends or colleagues of staff members. This social group provided youth with a sense of safety and a trusting environment in which to experiment with newly identified interests and assets. Some group members stayed connected to the youth post discharge from the child welfare and juvenile justice system.

The enhancement of social capital resulting from time bank participation is especially salient for youth and young adults returning to communities from foster care, detention and prisons or aging out of the foster care system (Avery, 2010). Studies have indicated that youth are leaving care without proper supports or competencies (e.g., Collins, 2001; Courtney, Piliavin, Grogan-Kaylor, & Nesmith, 2001; Mallon, 1998; McMillen & Tucker, 1999; Scannapieco, Schagrin, & Scannapieco, 1995). There is a growing recognition that fortifying a youth's support network both before and after emancipation is important to long term outcomes (Avery, 2010; Smith & Carlson, 1997). Involvement in community time banking systems of mutual exchange for emancipated youth may fill this void.

For example, to support emancipated youth, foster youth boards have been organized. These boards, comprised of current and former foster children, provide mutual aid and support for youth who are set to age out of the system. Concrete services (e.g., luggage to help a youth carry their possessions to their new home) as well as informational and emotional support are provided. Through collective action, youth involved in these boards are influencing public policy, calling for new resources such as free tuition for former foster youth (Eckholm, 2007).

The Maine Youth Opportunities Initiative (MYOI), part of a nationwide effort sponsored by the Jim Casey Foundation to ensure successful

transitions for youth aging out of the foster care system, partnered with the Portland (ME) Time Bank to help provide youth with the financial, social and vocational supports necessary to succeed after discharge (Maine Youth Opportunities Initiative, 2006). An AmeriCorps/VISTA volunteer was hired to serve as a liaison between a variety of newly established youth leadership groups and core *time bank* members, to fashion programming within the *time bank* suitable to the needs of soon-to-be former foster youth.

## 6. Discussion

As noted earlier, researchers and practitioners are seeking to understand community interventions and strategies that can produce long term developmental gains for transition age high risk youth (Butts, 2008; Butts et al., 2005; Collins, 2001; Mandel, 2000, Yohalem & Pittman, 2001). Specifically, researchers are calling for exploration that compares types of interventions, intensity and dosage of services and child outcomes within new program settings (Dworkin, Larson, & Hansen, 2003; Forum for Youth Investment, 2002; Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Murray, & Foster, 1998; Zeldin, 2004). Transition aged youth and their involvement in time banking community service exchange systems ought to be included as part of this research agenda.

Youth aging out of care systems and those returning to community from detention, prison or some other form of out of home care are arguably a community's most vulnerable population. Most return to communities with insufficient social support, negligible social capital networks, and few educational and vocational competencies to enable them to thrive. Public policy interest in assisting disadvantaged young people in transition, including youth aging out of the foster care system, has increased, supported by Federal legislation and funding (see Freudlich, 2010).

New initiatives have focused on fostering economic security through individual development accounts (Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 2009), supporting mutual assistance between young people (Eckholm, 2007), providing educational opportunities (see Cutler, 2008) and developing youth as self-advocates and leaders (Cutler, 2008; Eckholm, 2007; Marks, 2009). These initiatives, while able to provide needed transitional supports, are often not structured to address the myriad of challenges that these young people face. Enrolling youth in transition into time bank community systems of exchange may be an innovation worth considering, providing a new venue by which a range of supports and services is available.

The emphases of time banking on accepting and empowering all community members to receive as well as provide services; on civic engagement; on developing individual and community assets and on the formation of enhanced social capital networks for participants, is consistent with the needs and challenges facing transition aged youth. Involving these young persons in community time bank schemes may create the new manufactured environments by which young people can thrive, providing them with access to opportunities, connections and ways to gain and test competencies that they normally would not have access to.

A proposed intervention model for co-production and time banking has been developed. This framework included theoretical assumptions and propositions incorporating proposed inter-relationships between correlates, antecedents, intervention features and pathways to enhanced youth engagement and a range of proximal and distal outcome measures (Marks, 2009). Rigorous mixed-method research studies of priority micro- and meso-level time propositions are needed to add to the stock of knowledge about co-production and time banking, its key constructs and their inter-relationships.

Furthermore, research designs developed to study time banking will need to be flexible and elastic, befitting the complex change that is its focus. Outcomes sought are multi-faceted, often difficult to make operational, and highly contextual, and it may take long periods of time for outcomes and impacts to be realized. Research designs will need to accommodate this complexity. A developmental

approach to studying co-production and time banking interventions may be most useful.

Early research on time banking has found a myriad of challenges in implementation (see Boyle, 2004; Bruns, 2004; Cahn, 2004). Of note is the lack of congruence between services needed and those offered in the time bank (Seyfang, 2004) and working with staff to foster an understanding of time banking as an effective tool to help accomplish agency and client goals (Bruns, 2004; Marks, 2009). Time banks also require an initial financial investment to support staffing needed to protect vulnerable populations while they are engaged in transactions with community members. Cost/benefit studies comparing time banking with alternative social development strategies for youth in transition are an important element of a future research agenda.

Capacity-building research and development in order to get the conditions "right" for co-production and time banking interventions is needed. Research foci include: understanding macro and meso level opportunities, needs and challenges; intra-organizational alignment challenges starting with attaining congruence between front-line staff members and agency leaders with their preferred practice model; inter-organizational and inter-professional challenges, including methods of securing cross-system practice congruence; and studying the commonalities, similarities and important uniqueness of youth involved in voluntary and involuntary service settings. Additional theorization plus well-structured implementation studies of co-production in a range of program settings will be required in order to accomplish this ambitious research agenda.

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