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Resources Needed by Transitional Participants for Independent Living

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Odell Cole

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

Resources Needed by Transitional Participants for Independent Living

by

Odell Cole

Professional Administrative Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Public Administration

Walden University

[July] 2020

Abstract

A lack of resources for youth making the transition from foster care into independent living is a significant issue in the United States. However, this lack of resources may be overcome through successful career pathway programs. The purpose of this case study was to explore which career pathway strategies are useful for an organization attempting to help young people make a transition into independence. During the developmental planning stage of the program, plans were put in place for a program to help young people find guidance in a career field as they learn to live on their own and become responsible for themselves. The targeted population for this research consisted of eight professionals in government in California attempting to successfully implement strategies to sustain a career pathway program. The new public administration theory along with Maslow's hierarchy of needs were the theoretical framework that served as the organizing principles for the study. Data were collected from interviews and a review of publicly available data as well as organizational resources. Data were analyzed using the principles of the content analysis method, which included identifying codes and themes. The themes were (a) program operations (b) community engagement, (c) program planning, (d) successful program promotion, (e) implementation strategies, (f) program impact, (g) partnerships, and (h) social change. The implications of this study for positive social change include the potential for key characteristics of programs to assist career pathway programs for citizens in California who need to find employment as they are transitioning from foster care into independent living.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to my wife, Sheri, and children, Tatiana and Natalia.

Thank you for your support through this process. I would also like to dedicate this study to my mother. Mom, thank you for your support and prayers; I needed every one of them.

God deserves all the praise for the fulfillment of Jeremiah 29:11.

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Table of Contents

<u>Section 1: Foundation of the Study</u>	1
<u>Introduction</u>	1
<u>Background of Problem</u>	3
<u>Problem Statement</u>	8
<u>Purpose Statement</u>	10
<u>Research Question</u>	13
<u>Theoretical Framework</u>	13
<u>Nature of Study</u>	16
<u>Research Method</u>	18
<u>Research Design</u>	18
<u>Population and Sampling</u>	20
<u>Ethical Research</u>	20
<u>Data Collection Instruments</u>	21
<u>Data Collection Technique</u>	22
<u>Data Analysis</u>	23
<u>Reliability and Validity</u>	24
<u>Assumptions</u>	25
<u>Limitations</u>	25
<u>Significance of this Study</u>	26
<u>Implications for Social Change</u>	27

<u>Summary</u>	27
<u>Literature Review</u>	30
<u>Introduction</u>	30
<u>Literature Search Strategy</u>	31
<u>Need for Transition Planning</u>	31
<u>Outcomes Associated with Transitioning from Foster Care</u>	33
<u>Homelessness</u>	34
<u>Inadequate Education</u>	35
<u>Unemployment</u>	36
<u>Lack of Life Skills</u>	37
<u>Variables Related to Successful Independent Living for Transitioning Youths</u>	38
<u>Absence of Social Support</u>	39
<u>Need for Mentoring</u>	41
<u>Essential for Transitional Success</u>	42
<u>Need for Career Pathways</u>	44
<u>Outlook for Disconnected Youth</u>	46
<u>Summary</u>	49
<u>Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change</u>	51
<u>Introduction</u>	51
<u>Presentation of the Findings</u>	52
<u>Descriptive Data of Participants</u>	52

<u>Applications to Professional Practice</u>	68
<u>Implications for Social Change</u>	70
<u>Recommendations for Action</u>	71
<u>Recommendations for Partnering Agency</u>	72
<u>Recommendations for Further Research</u>	74
<u>Reflections</u>	75
<u>Conclusion</u>	76
<u>References</u>	78
<u>Appendix A: Interview Questions for the Workforce Specialist</u>	99
<u>Appendix B: Interview Protocol</u>	101
<u>Appendix C: Internal/External Stakeholder Analysis</u>	102

Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Introduction

Housing instability, educational deficits, and poor employability skills are some of the dismal outcomes the transitioning population faces after leaving foster care. According to the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (2018), as of January 2018, California had an estimated 12,396 emancipated youths who were unaccompanied young adults (aged 18-24) who experienced homelessness after exiting foster care.

This professional administrative study was an examination of whether the implementation of a career pathways program that includes short term career training, life skills classes, high school equivalency classes, and temporary transitional housing can lead to self-sufficiency for transitioning young adults ages 18 to 24. This project provides objective data and related information to the partnering agency to make an educated decision on the implementation of a program that assists transitional youth in becoming prepared for independent living.

I examined the development stage of a career pathway program in California. This program is attempting to help the local government combat the homelessness issue surrounding former foster care youth in the area. The issue of poor results amongst aged-out foster youth continues to be a growing problem in the United States as a whole. Approximately 30,000 youths are emancipated from the foster care annually nationwide, and many of those youths have no connection to family or next of kin (Juvenile Law Center, 2013).

Transitioning youths deal with challenges in obtaining an adequate education (Courtney, 2009; Day, 2011; Day, Riebschleger, Dworsky, Damashek, & Fogarty, 2012) and finding employment (Osgood, Foster, & Courtney, 2010). Other research has shown that aged out youths are at greater risk for physical illness (Woods, Farineau, & McWey, 2013), mental disorders (Edidin, Ganim, Hunter, & Karnik, 2012; Toro, Dworsky, & Fowler, 2007), and involvement with the criminal justice system (Lee, Courtney, & Tajima, 2014).

Many transitional young people experience high rates of homelessness and imprisonment from illegal activity, higher unemployment rates, and more of a reliance on public assistance than other young people within their age groups who come from more traditional home situations. These aged out adults also experience limited educational attainment, and poor mental and physical health. Many do not receive any transitional support, and age-out not being equipped with the necessary tools to live a self-sufficient life, which often leads them down a path that results in poor decision-making and negative outcomes.

In Section 1, I describe the background of this issue for the research, followed by the research problem and purpose of the study. I continue by providing a discussion of the theoretical foundation of the investigation and the rationale for the investigation. I also review the nature of the study, define key terms, and cover assumptions associated with the research. In addition, I review the scope of the study and conclude the chapter with a discussion of the limitations of the research and the significance of the study.

Background of Problem

A lack of life skills is a persistent social stigma and dilemma for youths after they have aged out of the child welfare system. When children cannot return home to their families, child welfare systems must move quickly to find them alternative homes. As time goes by, the prospects for landing in safe, loving, permanent homes grow dimmer for foster youth, and many will simply age out of the system when they turn 18, without a family and without the skills to make it on their own (Children's Rights, 2017). A 2016 study by Columbia Law School indicated that one out of every four aged-out young adults in New York City end up in a homeless shelter within 3 years. Youth who have aged out have not found permanency with an adoptive family or have not been reunified with their birth families.

The age at which these youth are required to transition out of social services varies from state to state. It is characteristically 18-years of age when the aging out process happens, but some states have extended services beyond 18 because so many young adults are not ready to be on their own at such a young age. Some foster youth want to be done with the system and voluntarily move on, leading to many cases of homelessness and joblessness. In fact, after reaching the age of 18, 20% of the children who were in foster care will become instantly homeless (NFYI, 2017).

Without financial support, family support, or other types of supportive networks, these youths are confronted with difficulties in making the transition from foster care to adulthood (Courtney, Dworsky, Lee, & Raap, 2010). According to Squires (2017), by age 26, only 3 to 4% of youth who aged out of foster care earn a college degree. Squires also found that one in five of these youth will become homeless after

turning 18. Only half will obtain employment by 24. Over 70% of female foster youth will become pregnant by 21, and one in four former foster youth will experience PTSD (Squires, 2017).

The problems that come along with youth aging out of foster care also affect the many communities in which they live. In 2013, the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative completed a report that showed, on average, for every young person who ages out of foster care, taxpayers and communities pay \$300,000 in social costs like public assistance, incarceration, and lost wages to a community over that person's lifetime. The researchers estimated the cost that this problem incurs is almost \$8 billion to the United States every year (2013). Transitional plans need to be in place for youths transitioning to independent living before they leave the foster care system. For those who are already on their own, there should be programs in place to assist them as well.

According to research by the National Foster Youth Institute (2017), there is less than a 3% chance for anyone who ages out of foster care to earn a college degree at any time in their life. For the few youths who leave foster care and make it to college, considerable difficulties await them. They often cannot afford needed textbooks and find the college system problematic to navigate (NFYI, 2017). According to Squires (2017), The California State University system provides holistic services to youth who have left foster care and have entered college. The services help current or former foster youth with admissions, financial aid, housing, orientation, advisement, counseling, life skills, employment, and career planning to ensure their success through graduation. When foster youth turn 18— or, in some states, 21—they lose access to the financial, educational, and

social supports provided through the child welfare system. These youth fare poorly compared to their peers across young adult domains, including mental health problems, substance abuse, and underemployment (Courtney, Lee, & Perez, 2011; Fowler, Toro, & Miles, 2009).

In a representative sample of foster youth in California, over one-third of aged-out 19-year-olds experience homelessness (Courtney et al., 2016). To prepare foster youth for the transition to adulthood, federal policy focuses on programs that train independent living skills. According to the Fostering Connections Act of 2008 (P. L. 110-351), a transition plan is a personalized plan developed by the child welfare agency to assist the youth to transit out of foster care during the 90-day period before a youth turns 18 or is scheduled to leave foster care. The plan must address specific options related to housing, education, employment, health insurance, mentoring, and support services (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013). Regardless of the accessibility of the transitional plan, some young adults who age out of foster care still have the same issues, especially pertaining to homelessness.

Due to the involvedness and long-term nature of the transition from foster care to adulthood and the astronomical challenges these youth wind up encountering, there is a need for additional research on what is currently being done for these aged out youth and what can be done in the future to create a better transition to independent living for youths being released from foster care. The homelessness among aged out youths has an opposing impact on society that creates issues for local and federal governments.

Research consistently has shown that youth who age out of foster care do not receive the same type of support and assistance as many of their peers and therefore may

be at higher risk of experiencing homelessness (Brown & Wilderson, 2010; Dworsky, Dillman, Dion, Coffee-Borden, & Rosenau, 2012; Osgood, Foster, & Courtney, 2010. Dworsky, Napolitano, & Courtney (2013) found that between 31% and 46% of youth who aged out of foster care experienced at least one episode of homelessness by the age of 26 as defined by sleeping in a place where people are not meant to sleep, sleeping in a homeless shelter, or not having a regular residence to sleep.

Jones (2011b) conducted a quantitative study comprising of 3 years' worth of data that included 106 foster care youths and found that the issues that were considered chronic among transitioning foster care youths included lack of housing, lack of employment, insufficient education, inadequate support systems, and poor money management skills. Jones also found that these youths were expected to be independent at a much earlier age than those youths who had not been in the foster care system.

Transitioning foster care youth face many obstacles after being released from foster care. One of the largest challenges they face is unemployment. Mortimer, Kim, and Staff (2016) determined that youth unemployment reduces the capacity to achieve diverse markers of adulthood, potentially undermining the young adult's sense of confidence and independence. According to one study, 47% of former foster care youth are unemployed (Children's Rights, 2018). Out of those who managed to find employment after aging out of the system, 71% have an annual income of less than \$25,000 (Children's Rights, 2018) and struggle to support themselves without the help of a stable family. Newman (2018) found that nonfoster care youth receive approximately \$38,000 in financial assistance from their parents between the ages of 18 and 34. Transitioning youth are forced to fend

for themselves in most cases, whereas nonfoster care youth have their families to fall back on when in need.

Youth who had a job or income before they aged out of foster care were more likely to be employed after exiting the system (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008). This is why vocational training is needed for these youth as they begin their transitional stage. This training will give them the opportunity to learn skills that are marketable and can provide steady employment now and in the future.

According to a report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2018), less than a quarter of young people who received a federally funded transition service received services for employment, education or housing. All states receive federal funds to help young people transition from foster care to adulthood. Young adults require healthy and permanent relationships with caring adults, dependable resources, and available opportunities that will certify their well-being and success. The challenges are clear: There is a need for better support, better practices, and the development of better policies so that transitioning youth can get the support they need to transition to adulthood and thrive.

According to surveys and administrative data from the 2018 California Profile on Transition-Age Youth in Foster Care conducted by Annie E. Casey Foundation (2018), young people with foster care experience are falling behind their peers who have not experienced foster care. These truths emphasize the importance of ensuring that all young people, including those from foster care, have chances for postsecondary education, stable employment, and secure housing. Transitioning youth who do not have family to rely upon need additional support as they enter adulthood. In California,

Assembly Bill 12 extended foster care offerings to young people who are still in the foster system at age 18. The bill can provide for housing, funding and support services for 3 more years, as long as the participants attend school, have a job, participate in a job-readiness program, or can show they have a medical condition that prevents them from meeting these requirements.

By extending their time in foster care, these young people are simply continuing to be reliant on a system and are not learning to be independent. Many of these youth want to live independently and not be on a system of any kind. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2015), only about one-quarter of 18-year-olds remain in foster care until their 19th birthdays. This is also partly the result of states maintaining policies that do not encourage young adults to prolong the time they spend in care. By the time many of these young people reach the age of 21, they have considerably worse rates of high school completion and employment than young people in the general population.

Problem Statement

The problem that needs to be addressed is a lack of understanding about resources necessary for a successful careers pathways program. The program is a career pathway programs designed to provide foster youth the needed employment and educational opportunities as they transition from foster care to self-sufficient living. They must have a program that can assist them in completing their education, finding employment and learning life skills. There must be methods put in place that will lower the number of aged-out foster care participants who are not fully equipped and ready to

become self-sufficient once they leave the foster system and go out in the world on their own. One of the ways this can be done is through effective career pathway programs.

These individuals should be given resources and have some form of mentoring to assist them with any questions or problems they may incur as they are making the transition from being in foster care to being on their own. The Report to Congress on Promising Strategies to End Youth Homelessness (2007) included in these trends alcohol and drug abuse, poverty/economic instability, and mental health disorders. These are severe difficulties that must be addressed by an agency with the resources to help these people.

In this case study, I examined whether a career pathway program could assist an organization develop a program for aged-out foster care recipients who need assistance with life skills, housing, education, and jobs. The research project served the purpose of monitoring and reporting the results on the development of a program to help transitional foster care participants with gaining valuable employment, obtaining their high school diploma or the equivalency of them, gaining housing, and learning life skills. This project includes plans for the creation of a sector-focused career pathway program in the State of California. The goal of this career pathway program, if it is implemented, is to train transitioning adults ages 18 to 24 and prepare them for careers in manufacturing and customer service, mainly within the hospitality industry.

The California based partnering agency was developing plans for a program that would provide resources for transitional youth. This was done by providing a career pathway program whose intent is to assist transitional participants obtain a high school diploma or equivalency if needed. Likewise, the agency provides short term training for

the youth to become marketable in one of the career trainings offered by their organization. Youth in foster care face the typical developmental changes and new experiences common to their age, such as pursuing higher education or training, looking for jobs, and managing tight budgets. They also confront the dramatic adjustment to being on their own rather than under the State's care (Childwelfare.gov, 2018).

A report that was completed by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (2014), concluded that there is a small but growing body of research that points to high rates of homelessness among youth who have aged out of the foster care system. The Alliance for Children's Rights (2016) reported that in Los Angeles County, approximately 50% of youth who have aged out of foster care end up homeless or incarcerated. A report from the Los Angeles County Child Welfare Initiative (2013) reported that over 1,100 youth age out of their foster care system annually. These aged out youths also often experience health and mental health problems, have drug and alcohol dependence, have encounters with the criminal justice system, earn less money, have a greater chance of becoming unemployed, and do not have a high school or postsecondary degree (Institute of Medicine & National Research Council, 2014).

Purpose Statement

This study's purpose was to assess a transitional youth career pathway implementation process and outcomes assessment. I evaluated the degree to which the program can alleviate homelessness after emancipation, create employment opportunities, assist with high school completion, and teach life skills. The topic of poor results amongst aging-out foster youth continues to be an ongoing problem in the United States.

Existing research has revealed that the housing, educational, and employment outcomes of youth aging out of foster care are not adequate.

The research performed is intended to assist the community stakeholders and management of the partnering organization to gain an understanding of the effects a career pathway program could have on the rates of homelessness, imprisonment, unemployment, and overall welfare of these young adults in their community. Due to their limited education and poor mental and physical health, many are unable to make any strides toward successful independent living. Without the aid of transitional support, many of these former foster youth are not equipped with the essential tools to live an independent life. Due to their lack of knowledge of what is expected and where to turn for help, many of these former participants make poor decisions, which result in adverse outcomes.

The Fostering Connections Act provides states with the option to continue providing Title IV-E reimbursable foster care, adoption, or guardianship assistance payments to children up to the age of 19, 20, or 21 if the youth is ·completing secondary education or a program leading to an equivalent credential; enrolled in an institution that provides postsecondary or vocational education;·participating in a program or activity designed to promote, or remove barriers to, employment;·employed for at least 80 hours per month; or· incapable of doing any of the above due to a medical condition. It should be noted that while 25 states currently extend foster care through the Fostering Connections Act, a majority of states do allow for state-funded extended foster care or extended services to youth beyond the age of 18, such as transitional living services, housing, and educational assistance (Ncsl.org, 2017).

In this study, I provide strategies for the implantation of a career pathway program to assist transitioning youth. The goal is to provide suggestions for employment, educational assistance, and housing that can be used for a career pathway program which in return can lead to transitioning individuals to have an opportunity to become self-sufficient and capable of successfully living independently. There is a need for the foster care system to establish a variety of resources to provide active transitional involvements to reduce the rate of unfortunate outcomes amongst aging-out foster youth. When these youth do not receive the needed interim support, they are not equipped with the necessary tools to live an independent life.

The need for life skills training and transitional housing is essential to the wellbeing of these former foster care youth. This research can assist the agency in its efforts to focus on these previous recipients as a whole and show how individual attention can make a massive difference in the success of these young peoples' lives. The agency plans to implement this program to help transitioning youth in California build economic self-sufficiency through gainful employment. These young people are seeking stable employment, better opportunities for continuing their education, and a safe place to live.

Youth aging out of foster care have more difficulties in emerging adulthood compared with youth in the general population, including lower employment rates and earnings than other youth (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006; Courtney et al., 2011). They continually struggle with housing issues related to housing stability. Research has shown that a large number of these youth who age out of the foster care system do not have permanent personal connections or needed social and emotional support (Howard & Berzin, 2011).

In this study, I give a full assessment of what it will take (such as money, human resources, program staffing, and ongoing costs) to create a career pathway program that includes assistance with housing and education for youths after they age out of foster care. In addition, this research gives insight that can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the transitional career pathway plan concept.

Research Question

In this study, I examined the implementation stage for a career pathway program being created to help transitional youth with resources for temporary transitional housing and high school equivalency and life skills classes as well as training for careers in manufacturing and hospitality. The following research question was addressed: What are the resources required for the partnering agency's career pathways program to be successful?

Theoretical Framework

The theory that served as the foundation of my project was the new public administration theory (see Waldo, 1968). At its foundation, the theory assumes that mankind has the potential to become perfect. That is, humans are not unchanging aspects of production. According to Robinson (2015), the public sector reform efforts in developing countries need to embrace these changes selectively and draw on a range of public management models that are appropriate to different contexts while putting the needs and interests of citizens at the heart of reform efforts consistent with the new public service approach.

This is a theory to use in response to the issues that foster care transitioning creates due to the new public administrations theory's belief in ever changing needs of

the public and how institutions and administrations go about solving them. According to Nayar (2017), this theory stresses the central role of personal and organizational values or ethics. There is an essential relationship between the structures and processes of administrative efforts and their ends and goals. Social equity should be the guiding factor for public administration. Social equity means that public administrators should become champions of the underprivileged sections of the society. They must become active agents of economic and social change. Nayar also stated that the new public administration advocates a client-centered approach. It wants administrators to provide the people a major voice in how and when and what is to be provided.

Along with the new public administration theory, I used Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory for my Professional Administrative Study. In this theory, it is stated that people are motivated to achieve certain needs and that some needs take precedence over others (Maslow, 1943). The most basic need is for physical survival, and this will be the first thing that motivates behavior. Once that level is fulfilled, the next level up is what motivates us, and so on (Maslow, 1943). I employed the theory in my interviews and used the respondents' feedback to determine whether their responses were classified as a basic or higher order of need.

Therefore, it is so important to help these young adults have their basic needs met. These transitional participants are so preoccupied with securing housing and meals that they are unable to find employment or remain in school. The theory also states that a human must have these needs met before transitioning up the pyramid of needs from basic needs such as safety and self-esteem. Youth who age out of the foster care system often experience a difficult transition to adulthood in several important domains,

including housing (Curry & Abrams, 2014). Once these areas are met, a person can experience meeting aesthetic needs and the needs to know and understand.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) is a motivational concept that is comprised of a five-tier model of human needs, often depicted as different levels within a pyramid. The needs that appear lower on the hierarchy must be satisfied first in theory before individuals can attend to needs higher on the pyramid. During the examining of the bottom of the hierarchy upwards, the needs are in this order of importance: physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943).

Maslow (1943) initially believed that people must fulfill lower level deficit needs before continuing on to meet higher level needs. However, he later explained that fulfillment of a need is not an “all-or-none” phenomenon, acknowledging that his earlier statements may have given “the false impression that a need must be satisfied 100 percent before the next need emerges” (McLeod, 2020).

Maslow (1943) explained that physiological needs are requirements for human survival, for example, air, food, water, shelter, clothing, and sleep. If these needs are not gratified, the human body cannot function properly. Maslow considered physiological needs the most significant of all the other needs. The other needs are unimportant until these needs are met.

For many of these transitional youth, homelessness becomes a major issue that keeps them from pursuing other activities such as employment and education. Their need for food, water, shelter, and clothing trump those of finding staple employment or completing an educational program. Typical problems homeless children experience include, but are not limited to, hunger, dirty and damaged clothes, poor hygiene, lack of

quality sleep, and lack of resources to purchase basic supplies (National Coalition for Homeless, 2014). People who are homeless face a number of obstacles that prevent achievement. These factors can be comprised of undeveloped physiological needs as well as a host of social emotional barriers.

The second level of need is for safety (Maslow, 1970). An inconsistent number of homeless youth experience substantial traumas as compared with their nonhomeless colleagues. For these homeless young adults, their sense of security and safety is continuously endangered, and, because of this, they are constantly stressed. This makes it difficult to find employment or concentrate on completing their education.

Nature of Study

This Professional Administrative Study provides useful information for leaders of the participating organization to employ in evaluating the risk and rewards for implementing a new career pathway program. In doing so, they can better assist transitional foster youth in becoming prepared for independent living. This study offers insight into how the program can be effectively implemented and how the program can use the findings of this research. This research could lead to the participating agency and other institutions in the industry with similar aspirations implementing these practices.

Thinking broadly, this research could impact the career development industry by providing information and procedures that are not currently readily available or known to many practitioners within the industry. The suggestions that are provided in this report are to assist the agency with their desire to help transitional youth with their basic needs. These youth are in need of information on employment training and how to find jobs and

assistance with transitional housing, education, and other basic needs to be sure that the youth are equipped to be self-reliant.

Currently, many youths are released from the foster care system without receiving any support for their evolution into self-sufficient living. These efforts aim to ensure access to and more comfortable navigation of a more abundant and better-coordinated array of services for transitional youth. Once these young people are released from the foster care system, it is expected that they will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to be self-sufficient and able to provide for themselves and their dependents.

This career pathway program can develop a plan that includes employment opportunities and training, educational assistance, and assistance with other issues as they may arise. The organization and their partners can use the gathered data in their efforts and partnership to help these transitional youth to move up Maslow's hierarchy by giving them more than just security and safety but also a sense of belonging. The life skills training that can be included in the program will add value to the program as well. The support provided by staff can help these young adults gain their confidence and gain their self-sufficiency in the process.

The data collected for this research included some data from the partnering organization. This investigation also included information from government entities, nonprofit organizations, and other researchers. Interviewing employees from within the partnering organization gave a prospective into the overall strategy of the project. These agency employees provided a strong understanding of the organization's goals and described what they feel are the strong and weak points of the resources and systems that need to be in place.

Research Method

I conducted interviews with four workforce development specialists from the partnering agency to determine what the key components should be for the career pathway program to meet its intended outcomes. Please see Appendix A for initial interview questions with these interview participants. I also conducted four interviews with external participants, which included three case managers responsible for dealing with the former foster care participants and assisting them with a transitional plan. In addition, I interviewed a manager from a nonprofit organization who provides resources to the city for use in assisting these youth in their transition to self-sufficient living. The data were recorded and transcribed for my use.

The participating organization asked that these participants be interviewed because their responsibilities aligned with the principal study research question, and they were the participants who were able to provide rich data from their experiences. These interview participants also met the participant inclusion criteria, which included having experience working with transitional foster care youth. I sent an email invitation to the participants requesting their voluntary participation in my study research. Please see Appendix C for the internal and external stakeholder analysis.

Research Design

I used semistructured interviewing techniques to explore successful career pathways program creation strategies that the administrators of the program can use to prepare for the operations of the program. Yin (2017) further noted that case study research design is considered the study questions, the propositions, the data analysis, linking the data to the proposals, and the criteria for interpreting the findings of the study.

By using a case study design, I was able to explore strategic management areas via interview questions. According to Leung (2015), the essence of qualitative research is to make sense of and recognize patterns among words in order to build up a meaningful picture without compromising its richness and dimensionality. Like quantitative research, qualitative research aims to seek answers for questions of how, where, when, who, and why with a perspective to build a theory or refute an existing theory.

The participating agency wanted data collected from stakeholders who had experience with career pathway program development. They chose this particular group due to the extensive information these specialists would collectively be able to generate for the report. The organization wanted to hear what these individuals thought was needed and if these resources were available before they decided to move forward with the plans for the program. Hearing from many specialists and gathering their opinions the outcomes are more trustworthy than if the results came from only one source.

Case study design researchers collect data from various sources to ensure credibility (Yin, 2017). Researchers use the data collected from two or more sources or data triangulation, including interviews, peer debriefing, and member checking to enhance the dependability and transparency of the research (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Fletcher, Massis, A. D., & Nordqvist, M. (2016) clarified that each data source contributes to the researcher's understanding of the whole phenomenon. To ensure my data collection was saturated for my study, I collected data until there was no added information needed for the data collection process. I also used member checking by summarizing information that was given by the participant and then questioned the

participant to determine the accuracy of this information. This was performed to provide findings that were authentic, original, and reliable.

Population and Sampling

Fusch and Ness (2015) stated that a researcher's selection of participants for a case study must be in alignment with the appropriateness of the participant to answer the research question and the conceptual framework. The participants for this case study were workforce development specialists from the participating agency, management from a contributing nonprofit organization and case workers from an external agency who have strategies and information about the resources needed to assist the organization in putting the career pathways program in motion.

Ethical Research

To ensure my research was ethical, I followed the processes and methods to ensure the ethical operation of this study. Greenwood (2016) proclaimed that the researcher has a reasonable duty to protect the research participants. I followed the requirements of the institutional review board (IRB) for minimal ethical risks. Cugini (2015) stated that the IRB of any institution handles the determination, review, approval, modifications, or disapproval of all research activities involving study participants. I sent the participants meeting the study criteria an email to explain the details and intent of the study. I then emailed a copy of the Informed Consent Form for review and approval by the selected interview participants. I confirmed that the consent form observed the IRB requirements and included the voluntary nature of the study, the purpose of the study, agreement to the interview structure, agreement to audio recording during the interview,

and consent of how I planned to use the data collected during the meeting. Finally, I included my contact information.

Adeleke (2019) stated that the informed consent form provides information about the research, the details of the study questions and data collection methods, and the participant's voluntary choice whether to take part in the study. Consequently, Adeleke, also found that informed consent is a means of protecting the rights and welfare of participants while they contribute to the advancement of knowledge. Grady et al. (2017) further recommended the consent form include information that the potential study participants can pull out from the study for any reason. The participants could have withdrawn either by email, through telephone or other technology. There were no incentives in exchange for study participation being offered to the participants.

Data Collection Instruments

The researcher is the primary data collection instrument in qualitative research (Clark & Vealé, 2018). For my Professional Administrative Study, I was the prime data collection instrument and could not detach myself from the study. As the sole investigator, I was functioning in the world of studying participants as well as in the world of my perception of the study. Thus, I was a dynamic participant in the research process. I collected data via in-depth semistructured interviews. The interview is the most effective method of data collection for qualitative studies (Yin, 2017). Yin (2017) also determined that a good interviewer should know the areas of technical and interaction competence. In qualitative research, the researcher uses structured but open-ended

interview questions as the primary source of data for an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Parsa, Rest, Smith, Parsa, & Bujisic 2015).

Data Collection Technique

For my case study, I used open-ended semistructured questions in the interview process as the primary source of data for an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, as suggested by Parsa et al. (2015). The interview included 11 open-ended questions aligned with the research question. (See Appendix A). I completed one-on-one interviews that lasted no longer than 30 minutes at times and locations convenient to each participant, recorded each participant's interview using Audacity, and then I download the audio file.

After completing the interview, I followed the recommendations of Silverman (2017) and transcribed each audio recording to ensure I captured each participant's complete interview. To increase the reliability and validity of my investigation data, I used NVivo12 to organize, validate, and code the data to identify the subthemes and themes. Zamawe (2015) stated that NVivo12's features includes character-based and thematic coding and rich text capabilities that are crucial for qualitative data management and is compatible with multiple research designs.

Data Analysis

My interview questions were enough to answer the essential question of the research. Additionally, case study researchers use methodological triangulation for the merging of multiple methods to reach a single conclusion that better supports that conclusion than using one of those methods (Heesen, Bright, & Zucker, 2016). The researcher's use of triangulation of data sources strengthens the research study because it serves as an indication to the reader that the research is credible (Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2015). An advantage of using a triangulation approach is that using multiple sources of data enhances the validity of the research (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

In this qualitative study, I gathered data that included the use of interviews, documents, and public records from internet sources. Graue (2015) stated that the researcher needs to be able to interpret and explain or analyze the data. Data analysis is one of the crucial steps in the qualitative research process (Mayer, 2015). The process of data analysis involves the categorizing, coding, analysis of the collected data, and the identification of significant themes (Yin, 2017).

Once my interviews were completed, responses were coded to protect the privacy of participants. NVivo was used to assist in identifying recurring words, phrases, subthemes, and universal themes. Çayir and Saritas (2017) opined that the use of computer software in data analysis allows researchers to disseminate research result in a more explicable manner. Furthermore, Yin (2017) proposed that researchers use data analysis to organize and categorize data into thematic codes.

Reliability and Validity

As a qualitative researcher, I strived to ensure the security and validity of the research. This means I must ensure that my research's reliability and validity in this case study research reduces the subjectivity in the interpretation of the results. Noble and Smith (2015) expressed that two of the steps to achieving reliability in qualitative research includes the researcher taking measures to ensure the appropriateness of the research methods and the credibility of the findings.

Some methods must be in place to assist in the research validity and reliability. These steps included creating an audit trail, explaining the purpose of the study, participant selection, data collection, data analysis, research findings, and study conclusion. To additionally guarantee the trustworthiness in this study, I have provided the alignment between the purpose of the proposed research and the central research question. For validity in qualitative research, researchers seek to ensure results are credible, transferable, and achieve confirmability in the research design and implementation (Morse, 2015).

Confirmability in a qualitative study confirms that the research data is the participant's narrative and is free from the researcher's personal bias (Hussein, 2015). Validity in qualitative research as a critical component refers to the researcher's appropriateness of the data, the application of research methods, and the precise nature of the research findings (Abbaszadeh & Abbaszadeh, 2016; Noble & Smith, 2015). Additionally, to enhance a study's credibility, the researcher must ensure the research question, the research method, and research design all align with the desired outcome (Leung, 2015).

Assumptions

I assumed the partner agency would provide adequate resources to the youth entering the career pathway program, which may have included housing assistance, educational assistance, and job preparedness and training. It was assumed that these were areas that will eventually assist these individuals in becoming self-sufficient and able-bodied participants in the society they live in. I also assumed that the partnering agency would have an efficient way of dealing with the individuals who are sent to their program for assistance. My assumptions were met, and this PAS can be used to help the partnering agency understand how important agencies are in the process of assisting young individuals in becoming self-sufficient. It may also be a way of showing referring agencies how important their referrals can be in the process of helping these young individuals.

Limitations

The limitations of this report includes the fact this study was based on an organization that is located and works with individuals in the Southern California area. This can limit generalizability to all former foster youth from a nationwide standpoint. Another limitation was the that I could not interview everyone who could have possibly given relevant information for the creation of this type of program. There are other specialists who have information and suggestions for this type of program who did not participant in the research. This PAS is also limited because the suggestions given by these individuals are forward looking, and their suggestions are their own opinions that may or may not work for every career development program.

Significance of this Study

This PAS and its findings may be significant for the partnering agency's leaders to help them in making informed decisions in regard to the implementation of a career pathway program intended to assist former foster care transitional youth. It also offers suggestions for how the agency's clients may be provided resources for significant challenges in meeting their needs for education, employment, and housing support. According to the Los Angeles Business Counsel (2018), markets across the state, including Southern California, are grappling with an affordable and workforce housing crisis. Los Angeles County is in a housing crisis, and adding to the problem by releasing transitional recipients into the housing difficulty is not the best possible situation for the agency, its clients, or the County of Los Angeles.

This study's contribution to the body of knowledge consisting of the new public administration theory by evaluating and testing its theoretical supposition covers the overall economic, political, societal, and community social contexts of this issue about transitional youths within Southern California. These findings and suggestions were shared with the partnering agency and can be applied to help transitioning youth function and live self-sufficiently. This study also adds to the concept of positive youth development. These results and suggestions may play a key role for many exiting foster youths to make a successful transition to self-sufficiency by analyzing the autonomy of youth transitioning into adulthood. I have attempted to help the partnering agency, along with other agencies throughout Southern California, increase their understanding of how

a career pathway program can assist with youth development, which is critical for these youth's self-sufficiency to take place.

Implications for Social Change

The possible social change benefits from the study include sustained employment for transitioning youth in jobs that need trained employees in California. These jobs can improve the feeling of self-worth and human dignity for these individuals. Government agencies as well as nonprofit organizations that work with transitioning youth and employment services may find this study helpful in their quest to help transitioning youth become hireable in California. Furthermore, the increase in employment by these types of individuals may result in more tax revenues for communities, which can help local citizens.

Summary

In this study, I investigated the usefulness of a career pathways program for foster care transitional young adults with an emphasis on the developmental stage of the program. I focused on providing insight into how the career pathways program can work as part of a transition plan to better support youth during their period of transition. The research project also adds to existing literature in-depth information on the transitional plan and its relationship with helping to keep these young people from becoming homeless after their transition out of foster care.

Current literature has emphasized the negative results of former foster care youth transitioning into adulthood, while I have focused on how to improve the resources through planned programs such as the career pathways program being studied in this project. This study has also provided information on critical factors for implementing the

career pathway program that has been shared with the partner agency to assist them in the plan to implement such a program. I developed and provided suggestions to better facilitate interaction and develop relationships among agencies, community members, and young adults making the transition out of foster care.

This study potentially could be used to inform the legislature, federal and local government, as well as private and public child welfare agencies about the levels of disconnect between the objectives of the transitional plan notion and the actual homelessness, unemployment, and lack of education and life skills among newly emancipated youth. I have attempted to provide an example of a plan for a structured program that can be used to better support youth as they make their transition to adulthood. These types of career pathway programs can also be used to provide these transitional youth with the resources and supports they require most through assessing the shared familiarities of young adults as they transition from the government's care. This chapter provided an overview and summary for the overall project.

In this section, I introduced the topic, problem statement, background of the problem being studied, rationale and significance of the study, as well as the assumptions and limitations of the study. I provided a description of the background and perspective for the research question and an explanation of my interest in this study. Other researchers have reported that transitional youths face substantial obstacles, and many of them have poor outcomes, including homelessness, unemployment, unplanned pregnancy, low educational attainment, criminal system involvement, and substance abuse compared to their peers (Berzin, Rhodes, & Curtis 2011; Courtney & Dworsky, 2010; Hook & Courtney, 2011).

I identified a research gap that there are still few qualitative research studies that have been aimed at programs that can help with the transitional period as well as assisting these young people in preparedness for self-sufficiency. This research was conducted to help fill this gap and offer in-depth data that can be used for improvement in transitional career pathway planning. In addition, this chapter provided the theoretical groundwork of the study. Specifically, I used the new public administration theory along with Maslow's hierarchy of needs to examine the connection between the transitional plan, homelessness, unemployment, and lack of education among youths who are in the transitional stage of their lives.

The data collected during this research have addressed questions to provide support for answering the research question. The data were collected directly from the organization and its stakeholders who are responsible for the career pathway program. The stakeholders' information is vital for the understanding of the demand for the program and the expectation that the organization has for the outcome of the career pathway program in general. Once this study was completed, I provided the gathered information from my findings to the participating organization.

Section 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to offer an examination of past literature that relates to this study. Booth, Sutton, and Papaioannou (2016) and Maggio, Sewell, and Artino (2016) suggested that the purpose of a literature review is to provide, analyze, critically examine, and synthesize contributions of earlier researchers. Thakurta, Müller, Ahlemann, and Hoffmann (2017) explained that in conducting a literature review, a researcher might also identify bias, scholarly gaps, and develop newer insights.

Life within the foster care system can be complicated. Things that most children learn how to do can be a struggle for most foster youth. This is especially true about learning the skills and obtaining the knowledge needed to prepare these young people to live an independent life. This struggle becomes greater for foster youth aging out of the foster care system with little to no skills or knowledge about how to support themselves in living an independent life. Former foster youth particularly struggle with homelessness and housing stability (Dworsky et al., 2013; Fowler et al., 2009; Reilly, 2003), education completion (Blome, 1997; Courtney et al., 2011), employment and financial stability (Goerge et al., 2002; Needell et al., 2002), and mental health concerns (Pecora, White, Jackson, & Wiggins, 2009) during this period in the life course.

Over the past few decades, studies have shown that young people who aged out of foster care struggle to meet their needs and keep up with their nonfoster care peers in areas of housing, education, employment, and physical and mental health (Anderson,

2003; Courtney et al., 2010; Osgood, Foster, Flanagan, & Ruth, 2005; Stott, 2013; Unrau, Font & Rawls, 2012).

Literature Search Strategy

This literature review includes studies that were conducted in the United States and other countries to highlight the commonalities and global pervasiveness of this problem (see Akister, Owens, & Goodyer, 2010; Anghel, 2011; Berlin, Vinnerljung, & Hjern, 2011; Dima & Skehill, 2011). This literature review also includes current research and seminal research that is older than 5 years. The primary purpose of adding the articles that are older than 5 years is to bring continued awareness to long-standing issues that influence emancipated foster care youths. These issues include homelessness, unemployment, lack of adequate education, and other related problems that prevent them from achieving successful, self-sufficient living.

To recover relevant and associated sources on this research topic, I concentrated on significant notions such as transition plans and young adults aging out of foster care. I also completed searches using numerous common keywords such as *foster care youth, aging out, youth employment programs, career pathways programs, self-sufficient living*, and specific keywords, including *education, employment, social support*, as well as *life skills*.

Need for Transition Planning

Sutherland (2016) stated that transitioning from foster care to independent adulthood is not only a challenging process, it can also be life changing. Without the appropriate life skills and training, life after transitioning can be damaging to these youths. Foster care youths usually leave the system with no type of gainful employment

(Osgood et al., 2010; Stewart et al., 2014) due to lack of appropriate education or educational attainment (Courtney, 2009; Day, 2011; Day et al., 2012). When they do find employment, employment is usually in low skilled and minimum wage jobs (Jones, 2011a). Youth in the care of this system many times become very dependent on others to provide for them, so once it is expected for them to provide for themselves, it is nearly impossible for them to do so without proper guidance.

This disparity between youth's needs and the decisions frequently made for them is critical to understand. It may be one of the reasons we continue to circle the same issues with minimal change. Many times, they do not feel they have gained adequate knowledge when it comes to independent living skills training that would assist them in finding employment, housing, and educational opportunities.

Many aged-out participants leave the system feeling as though they have not been adequately prepared to live on their own after aging out of the foster care system. Thus, foster youth who are not sufficiently prepared for this transition often end up becoming homeless, on welfare, and without continued education. Rebbe, Nurius, Ahrens, and Courtney (2017) presented that youth who age out, or emancipate, from foster care face deleterious outcomes across a variety of domains in early adulthood. According to Rebbe, Nurius, Ahrens, and Courtney (2017), these youth are frequently exposed to significant first adversity experiences and, perhaps, resultant from these experiences, struggle in several areas during the transition to adulthood. Because these youths are not sufficiently prepared to live self-reliant once they exit the system, there is an intensified likelihood that they will experience homelessness, unemployment, and criminal activity after their release.

Outcomes Associated With Transitioning From Foster Care

Young adults who make the transition from foster care to independent living usually face the typical developing trials others in their age group face when it comes to advancing to adulthood. The significant difference is that they also face obstacles that are unique to youths who are transitioning to adulthood after being in the foster care system of the state for many years (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016). Because so many of these aged-out foster care youth are not sufficiently equipped to live on their own once they leave the foster care system, many of them become unemployed, become homeless, turn to crime, or become dependent on drugs to survive. They also go from one system to another where they were once dependent on the foster care system for their livelihood, they then turn to welfare to subsist next (Youth.gov, 2020)

These challenges also include being without adequate family members, having lived in multiple homes, and not having a sense of stability while growing up. Other issues that can stem from their placement in foster care are psychological issues, multiple school placements, and the insufficient/loss of school credits (Goodkind, Schelbe,& Shook., 2011). Jones (2011b) completed research in which the outcomes of 106 youths who were removed from foster care were examined. Some of the more common issues that existed amongst the emancipated young people were homelessness, inadequate education, unemployment, lack of support systems, and lack of financial support (Sutherland, 2016).

Homelessness

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2018), approximately 19,810 youth were aged out of foster care in the United States during 2017. The commonness of homeless among transitioning adults varies contingent on the data collection methods and the sample size from which the information is collected. In their research, for instance, Kaplan et al. (2009) gave a range of homelessness in this group from between 14% to 58%. Fowler et al. (2009) then reported 20% of former foster youths experienced some form of chronic homelessness. Finally, Courtney et al. (2010) assessed that 37% of former foster youth had experienced some homeless at some point after their transition.

What is known is that with the cost of housing being incredibly high in most cases for these young people, finding safe and affordable housing is nearly impossible for them to do on their own (HUD, 2012). Furthermore, there are minimal transitional living programs offered to support these youth, which increases the chance that they will not become contributing members of society. Many of these young adults lack the education required to acquire suitable employment, which in turn places them at a greater danger to be involved in a life of crime, substance abuse, or pregnancy (HUD,2012).

Other HUD researchers have examined and reported on the high rates of homelessness among transitional youth. Research has been limited but revealed how these young people revolve around the housing and living arrangements in the years after emancipation. There has been little research completed that has focused on the relationship between support programs and housing stability for these young adults.

There is a central argument that can be raised that the county's goal of self-sufficiency for these young people and the county's need to have these youth continue to get some support from the system to help them eventually be ready to live on their own are combating one another (HUD. 2012).

Cunningham, Gillespie, & Anderson, (2015) have recommended that programs for transitioning youth that could benefit from more policies that give attention to how transitional assistance programs should play a significant role in alleviating the housing crisis for these youth. Many researchers have found policymakers to favor the advancement of self-sufficiency for aged-out youth over the development of a support network that could be used to assist these youth with areas such as education, employment training, and life skills. These forms of effective systems might play critical roles for future research, policy, and practice regarding transitional foster youth and the housing crisis.

Inadequate Education

Education is the key to independence, self-sufficiency, and success for youths aging out of foster care (Dworsky & Perez, 2010). According to the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (2019), having a college degree is associated with better health, more meaningful employment, and higher socioeconomic status. Unfortunately, many transitioning youths often miss out on educational opportunities. There are many reasons for this insufficient academic preparation, homelessness, financial complications, and simply not understanding the various educational options that are available to them.

There are many obstacles that have contributed to the low graduation rate among transitional youth such as not being adequately prepared for higher education, not being informed about options for financial aid for those who are eligible to attend college, and the fact that youth from foster care tend to live in high-poverty areas with low-performing high schools (Dworsky & Perez, 2010). It is essential for organizations to attempt to have systems implemented that include transition plans to encourage and support the educational aspirations of these youths. Although many of these young people are far behind their peers in terms of educational accomplishment, there are foster youths who have and can achieve academic success. Hass, Allen & Amoah (2014) researched how educationally successful youth in foster care thrived once given second chances in their lives and how these second chances help to contribute to their academic success.

Hass et al. (2014) interviewed 19 transitioning adults. The researchers discovered that these young adults had a sense of social support, and access to mentors who interacted with them to help enable the positive turn around in the participants' lives. It must be noted that this examination was conducted on a small group from a specific program, but it does show that if these young adults are given adequate opportunities with the right guidance, they can accomplish the same goals as their non- transitional peers.

Unemployment

Research has shown that unemployment or underemployment is a significant problem among former foster youth (Osgood, Foster, & Courtney, 2010). Even when they are employed, foster youths tend to earn substantially less than the general

population of youth and youth from low-income families (Stewart et al., 2014). Stewart et al. (2014) studied the long-term outcome of emancipation on employment conclusions for transitional youths.

The researchers connected the effects of child welfare, wage, and public assistance administrative data from three states (California, Minnesota, and North Carolina). They wanted to know whether or not youths who had made the transition to independent living continued to experience less employment and lower earnings compared to adults who had not been in any public assistance program up to the age of 30. What they found was that there were more moderate rates of employment and earnings potential for transitional youths compared to non- transitional low-income youths from 49 samples done nationally. These statistics also presented evidence that work experience before age 18 improved employment results for transitional youths. The significant suggestion of the research was that the transitioning youth did continue to struggle in their quest for employment equality up to the age of 30.

Lack of Life Skills

Another area that these young people lack knowledge in that many of their peers gain understanding during these years is simple life skills. These skills can include budgeting and money management skills, excellent social skills and manners, work skills and primary responsibility, goal-setting skills, and emotion regulation skills. One of the most significant of these skills these young people can learn is how to handle money. Unfortunately, many of these transitioning youths have no idea how to create a budget or how to balance a checkbook. Many of them get themselves into debt in no time. They can benefit from a program that teaches necessary money management skills.

Another area that is important for them to have some training in is emotion regulation. This area is important because if these young people can't control their tempers, they won't handle situations well. They also can't cope with anxiety and may never be able to step outside their comfort zone. They can be taught how to deal with uncomfortable emotions healthily. Over time, they'll gain confidence in their ability to do hard things. If they learn these skills early on, it could make a big difference in their quality of life.

Variables Related to Successful Independent Living for Transitioning Youths

The transitioning from adolescent to adult to independent living can be a challenge for anyone, but this experience is especially difficult for those who are foster care youths. Researchers have acknowledged several variables linked to the advancement of these youth that leads to practical life skills for youths transitioning out of foster care, including social networks (Blakeslee, 2012), social supports (Singer, Berzin, & Hokanson, 2013) and mentoring (Avery, 2011). Equally, these young people lack sources of social networks, support, and mentoring, which are associated with a more problematic transition (Hiles et al., 2013).

Researchers have focused on developing adulthood, resilience, second-chance opportunities, and felt security, which all can add to the notion that one's uniqueness and independence continues to evolve beyond the age of 18. With this idea in mind, transitional living programs for transitional youth have the potential to involve their participants in a progression of growth and constructive relationship building that eventually can become the foundation and formation that will preferably enable the transitioning person to consolidate a more adaptive self-concept.

After the youths are out of the care of the county, these transitioning youths must begin the process of supporting themselves, although in most cases, they have not obtained postsecondary education, and stable housing, and/ or acceptable employment. Additionally, these youth who have aged-out of foster care do not have access to the necessary social and emotional support that most adolescence need to sustain their transition into adulthood.

Transitioning youth are forced into self-sufficiency approximately eight years sooner than those with no history of foster care. This places them at increased risk of criminal involvement, early parenthood, homelessness, dropping out of high school, or lack of employment (Avery, R., & Freundlich, M., 2009). This uncertainty is the cause of why so many of these former foster youth experience long-term effects that impacts their emotional, physical, and mental well-being. This lack of a structured system creates issues that cause these young people to have poor school performance, inadequate advancement of skills, and produces an inability to live a life that is full of opportunities that can lead to becoming prosperous adults.

Absence of Social Support

Several researchers have verified the significance of social support in the transition to adulthood for youth transitioning from the foster care system (Antle et al., 2009; Collins, Spencer, & Ward, 2010; Settersten & Ray, 2010). Singer et al. (2013) led a study to explore how youths utilized their social networks and the overall social support systems when they were offered to them. The researchers completed 20 semi-structured interviews with foster youth aged 18 to 21 years.

The researchers examined the collected data and used a consensual qualitative research method to develop the core themes around the youths shared experiences. The researchers then classified the support from relational network members into four main groups: informational, instrumental, emotional, and appraisal support. These types of aid have often been used and defined in the social support literature (Demaray & Malecki, 2014; Thoits, 2011; Pappas, 2014). In Scannapieco et al.'s (2007) study, these researchers inspected the outlooks of foster youth and their support systems which included foster caregivers and social workers. Also, the youth and their supporters were asked to discuss what additional services would help in their evolution.

According to Scannapieco et al., the philosophy of encouraging youth development entails a supportive environment that offers opportunities for the youth to develop leadership and life skills. These are considered key factors to these young people becoming self-sufficient after leaving foster care. It is also imperative that these transitional young people be involve in the actual planning of their own lives and have some form of direct influence in what the plan for their emancipation will include. Their ability to make informed and vital decisions can help them as they go down the path of experiencing more positive outcomes.

The social support systems that are readily available to these transitional young people can vary greatly. Some of them receive sufficient support while others are wholly unsupported or receive very little in the way of specific types of assistance. Proponents of extended foster care have pointed out the fact that there is a need to progress in the area of foster care when it comes to allowing young adults the opportunity to return to the system if desired, or to remain in care beyond age eighteen. Social working professionals,

foster care parents, and peer groups who offer support to transitioning youths need to be aware of the emotional trials these youths may be facing at the time. Their transitional period is a stressful time for them.

Need for Mentoring

Mentoring plays a vital role in the maturing of young adults. This is especially true of those who are transitioning from foster care. This mentoring process provides these foster care youths with emotional support and helps with learning life skills as they transition out of foster care to self-sufficient living. Mentors can inspire and guide a youth in foster care to pursue a productive future and reach his or her full potential (Munson et al., 2010). Researchers revealed that the occurrence of these young people having a mentor is associated with better outcomes for their transition from foster care.

Some of the outcomes that can occur are fewer depressive symptoms, less stress, better overall health, and higher educational attainment (Munson et al., 2010). Likewise, mentoring programs help youth overcome the challenges of transitioning to adulthood by providing consistent, caring support, and modeling of essential life skills (Ahrens et al., 2011). Unfortunately, not every youth who leaves foster care has access to mentors or mentoring programs. The ideology of mentorship is not new to child welfare, and it has resurged in the last decade (Avery, 2011).

Spencer et al. examined why career mentoring should be an essential part of the transition plan and could help youth become better prepared in their job searching and career development. During this research the researchers examined the experiences of youth-initiated mentoring relationships (YIM) among youth transitioning out of the foster

care system. These YIM are an innovative method where the programs work with youth to identify adults within their existing social networks who can serve as mentors in the formal program.

The study included 13 mentor-youth dyads involved in a pilot trial of YIM in a mid-western city. The youth and their mentors completed a one-time each, in-depth individual interview. The interview data produced the following significant findings: (a) youths overwhelmingly were found to have influential to very strong relationships with their mentors, (b) these relationships offered a number of opportunities for social support to the youth (i.e., appraisal, companionship, emotional, informational, and instrumental), and (c) the mentors were perceived to have positively influenced the youth during the course of the program in numerous ways, including the youth's psychological well-being, how they related with others, and the youths beliefs about and orientation toward the future. The research findings suggest that mentoring is a promising approach for establishing meaningful and impactful connections that can promote interdependence for foster care youth as they make the transition to adulthood.

Essential for Transitional Success

Other researchers have shown that youth who had exposure to employment opportunities and who had obtained some form of education beyond high school were likely to be more ready to live independently and become self-sufficient. The reason for this is that while in care, foster youth are victims of the gaps in the foster care system. They can encounter unqualified adoptive parents, and be continuously moved from one home to another, never having the opportunity to get settled and have a feeling of stability.

They also change caseworkers and schools with regularity. Some of the issues they encounter can include physical, sexual, and emotional abuse from their caregivers and this along with the lack of stability, consistency, and support creates challenges for these youth to obtain social, educational, and vocational opportunities that are not present for many of their non- foster care peers. This uncertainty obstructs their capability to make a successful transition towards independence after leaving care.

There can be many contributing causes for the poor outcomes of aging-out of foster care that can range from the youth's unmet needs while they were a part of the foster care system to a complete absence of support as they emancipate from care. Mendes and Moslehuddin (2006) examined factors that contribute to the depressing outcomes that transitioning youth incur once they leave care. They reviewed previous literature from the USA, U.K., and Australia, and from this review the researchers suggests that the poor outcomes experienced by transitioning youth is a reflection of several factors which include: inadequate support while in care, consistent emotional trauma as a result of abuse and neglect before entering foster care, faster transitions to adulthood than those who are not a part of the foster care system, and the absence of guaranteed ongoing support that could add assistance to the youth while in transition.

Scannapieco et al. 's (2007) study revealed that data was collected from both the Transition Resource Action Center (TRAC) and Children's Protective Services databases. The researchers used this data to determine the results that showed TRAC's Self-Sufficiency Matrix has five domains that need to be covered for the transitional youth to have a chance at being successful in their pursuit of a self- sufficient life: education, employment, employability, financial literacy, and shelter. Without these domains being

achieved, there is a good chance that these youth will not be effective in their transition into adulthood.

Need for Career Pathways

Researchers Clay, Amodeo, and Collins completed research, which included a three-year, national qualitative evaluation of child welfare training projects in 2010. The project involved the use of multiple case studies to show how nine training interventions across the country were making a difference in the lives of transitional youth. The research project included the largest of nine sites, which served a total of 350 youth, ages 14-24, over the three years.

The purpose of the nine training projects was to train youth transitioning from foster care to independent living using youth empowerment methods. The projects included the active participation of youth in their case planning and utilized a strengths-based rather than a deficit-based approach. This research tries to outline the economic development challenges that limit transitional youth in their search for employment. The research project itself was based on the evidence on which programs and policies appear to speed up the transitional process.

The many policymakers around the country many times attempt to have transitional youth move out of their systems as rapidly as possible without having a plan for the youth to use, and without supplying assistance, the youths need to be successful. The researchers concluded that it might be time for a fundamental reexamination of the approaches case managers are using for addressing youth employment and the youth transition in low-income areas. It may be better for policymakers to allow government agencies and non-profit organizations to work together in designing strategies, policies,

and programs to meet the need of these inexperienced youth instead of rushing them into employment with no skills or training.

One of the first things these organizations must do is diagnose the current economy and future employment opportunities in high demand fields of employment. Next, policies can be in place to have these organizations create training programs that will allow for these youth to be well prepared to take advantage of the developing markets for jobs in the areas of high demand that are in need. The examination of youth employment problems from an operative revolution standpoint shows evidence that youth employment interventions provide new kinds of training programs that are more likely to help youth succeed in certain situations. (Fox and Kaul, 2017), in their research determined that support for the development of transferable character skills and social integration among youth through affirmative youth development programs should be tested further for employment and earnings impacts, perhaps along with cash transfers to youth or access to finance.

These career pathways programs are to be designed with helping to bring young people into productive work in crucial labor market first and foremost. In both developing and well-developed countries, and a multitude of labor market involvements have been executed to assist susceptible youths. These findings are essential when looking at career pathways programs that are meant to help to transition youth with skills to assist them in finding employment. This previous information provides vital insights into the design and delivery possibilities of intervention programs. Finally, these results provide practitioners and researchers with enhanced evidence about how crucial certain

design features can be and how these features can contribute to the overall success of youth employment programs.

Outlook for Disconnected Youth

After reviewing data from the 2016 U.S. Census Bureau, I found that over four and a half million young people in the United States were considered disconnected, meaning they were neither enrolled in school during the previous three months and they were not employed. These numbers were lower than those compared to the years of the Great Recession (which officially ended in 2009), as the economy has continued to improve, and the overall unemployment rates have declined. Despite these healthier numbers, there were still roughly 1 in 10 youth ages 16 to 24 who remained disconnected in 2016. These young adults have an uphill battle finding employment, mainly since they are not actively in activities that assist them in building skills or gaining valued work experience.

Many youth employment programs attempt to assist these youth with the support that includes education and work training. Over the years, these plans have been subjected to rigorous assessments. The overall outcomes of these programs have been mixed, and even when these training programs have shown positive effects on the participant's employment projections and earnings potential, these effects have generally been modest.

Bloom, Dan; Miller, Cynthia, 2018 in their research studied three such programs: YouthBuild, Year Up, and New York City's Young Adult Internship Program (YAIP). Their research discovered new findings that are exciting to anyone who is concerned with seeing these types of career pathways programs succeed. Notably,

because the plans involved the use of a variety of approaches that can be utilized by many, if not all, career pathways programs to gain extreme effectiveness for their applications.

One of the programs, Year Up, had considerably significant, positive effects on their participant's earnings. This type of find is rare for employment programs overall and mostly uncommon for programs serving underprivileged youth. Their research study argues that no one program by itself is the complete answer for transitional youth looking for employment. These programs require other services that can be part of a package, but each of these programs serves a particular segment of the population, and each can separately provide a step in the right direction leading to upward mobility. The missing piece to this puzzle very well may be a system or set of programs to assist these young people in navigating through their transition out of care and assistance to move up.

In America today, most people see progress, especially in the workforce, as to how much money a person makes. This type of measurement, which is based on money measures and not much else, can be very discouraging for most people. This measure of America is used to tell people how they are doing, whether they are winning or losing. One of these essential gauges of societal growth and well-being is how well young people are faring in their transition to adulthood. If this measurement of how well they are doing is based only on how much money they are making, then, 4.5 million young people are already falling behind.

These are the disconnected youth, which are young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 who are neither working nor in school. According to a researcher named Adrian Ma, from the research council Measure of America, which has produced six

national-level reports on youth disconnection, most recently reported in April 2019, there are 4,599,100 disconnected youth in America today, or about one in nine teens and young adults (11.5 percent). These susceptible young people are frequently without a support group of any kind; they are cut off from the people they know, have no connection to institutions, or skills that would otherwise help them develop the knowledge, abilities, maturity, and a sense of purpose that is essential to living satisfying lives as adults. These adverse effects of youth disconnection reflect across the economy, the community sector, the criminal justice system, and the political landscape. These young people's disruption affects America as a whole.

In most cases, these transitioning youth are disconnected from the expected life of other 18- to 24-year old adults only due to an absence of supportive peers and adults in their lives. This is what programs such as career pathways can bring to these young people are a supportive environment that is set up for them to succeed and be a positive reinforcement in their lives. Research data shows that a typical disconnected youth tends to slide down a progressively divergent pathway from their peers.

Some of the more common effects of being socially detached in their teens and early 20s are economic setbacks, and a lack of engagement with education and work ties that eventually create a myriad of other social problems that can include absence of civic engagement and political participation; poorer health and shorter life expectancy; less stable romantic relationships; less sensitive, responsive parenting; and they do not adjust to change well.

Summary

Young adults who age out of foster care face a countless number of issues and problems that their non- transitional peers may never have to encounter. Researchers have found that these young people in many cases are often without safe or stable housing (Betz, 2010, Courtney et al.,2010), have inadequate employment skills (Osgood, Foster, & Courtney, 2010, Stewart et al., 2014) or educational attainment (Courtney, 2009; Day, 2011; Day et al., 2012). They also suffer from a lack of available social networks and social supports (Antle et al., 2009; Collins, Spencer, & Ward, 2010; Settersten & Ray, 2010).

These transitional young adults are also more likely to have substance abuse problems (Narendorf & McMillen, 2010) and be involved with the criminal justice system than the general population within their age group (Lee et al., 2014). There is an agreement among these researchers that policymakers should simply assume that once these youths move from the foster care system that they will inevitably become self-sufficient adults when they age out (e.g., Collins, Spencer, & Ward, 2010, Courtney et al., 2010, Day et al., 2012, Lee et al., 2014).

In particular, transitional plans are required by law to provide the continuity of care through educational opportunities, employment assistance, independent living programs, etc. Unfortunately, many who transition from care leave with a high risk of homelessness and many problems associated with the transition from custody, and it appears that the transitional plans fall short of meeting its objective (Pecora, 2012).

This literature review includes research that explored the theories and models of transitioning out of care. Collecting social capital is the key for youths to successfully transition into adulthood (Pettit et al., 2011). It provided an overview of the essentials needed transitional success. The literature review also provides an in-depth examination factors that impact those individuals who are in the transitional phase and attempting to become self- sufficient including homelessness, education, employment, social support, and life skills (e.g., Betz, 2010, Narendorf and McMillen, 2010, Lee, Courtney, & Tajima, 2014).

The problem of homelessness is one that cannot be solved by one program by itself. There are many factors that cause the rate of homelessness for these youth to continue to rise. Given the complication and long-term nature of the transition process for these youths, the enormous challenges they face in their quest for adulthood can seem overwhelming. There is a need for further research and the continued practice of attempting to create better policies needed to improve the outcomes for youth in transition from foster care to adulthood.

This is truer now than ever due to the number of youth that are aging out each year being on a steady climb. This literature review recognizes at least one research gap where there is still not enough qualitative research being done that is geared toward helping these transitional youth before they are removed from the care system. Thus, this research is being conducted to help fill this gap and provides in-depth data that can be utilized for improvement in transition planning.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate a transitional youth's career pathway program's development process and the degree to which the plan alleviates homelessness after emancipation, creates employment opportunities, assists with high school completion, and teaches life skills. This project's main question of what resources are required for the partnering agency's Career Pathways program to be successful was answered by the participants.

This project also helps in filling the gap in knowledge about transitional career pathway programs being used to assist transitional foster care recipients in their quest for self-sufficiency. I collected data from an organization that is in the development stage of building a program located in California. I developed the interview questions to explore the developing strategies the organization is hopeful will sustain this program for the next few years and possibly beyond.

The collection tools comprised interviews and documents given to me by the organization, including meeting minutes, agendas, emails, class planning notes, and budget printouts. I also used publicly available information from the internet about legislature measurement to create such programs. The findings showed that resources are needed, including plans for program operations, program promotion, and community engagement that the agency can use to sustain their training operations to provide better overall service and increase their customer base.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question of my study was as follows: What are the resources required for the partnering agency's career pathways program to be successful? Based on the methodological triangulation of the data sources collected, eight developing themes were identified from the analysis of data collected through interviews. The interview questions are included in Appendix A.

A response was considered a theme if it was part of the responses of at least five of the participants. In the following subsections, I describe the eight themes and how the data collected assisted in answering the research question. Eight themes emerged from the analysis of data collected through interviews. The agency can successfully sustain its operations if it can offer industry needed training, recruiting and retaining new participants, and making an impact on the community. The findings revealed marketing strategies that the agency can use to promote their program and allow themselves to differentiate from their competitors.

Descriptive Data of Participants

Study subjects consisted of four internal workforce specialists who had experience in job development. They also had experience planning for and implementing career pathway programs for their organization. There were also four external participants consisting of three case management workers and a nonprofit organization manager. All of the external participants had experience working with former foster care individuals and creating plans for them that assist with self-sufficient living, including

career pathway programs. The participants interviewed were from the state of California. All the participants interviewed were from Los Angeles County.

Themes

Through interviews, documents, and other publicly available data, I gained an in-depth understanding of the resources needed for the successful development of a career pathway program. The following is an analysis of the themes.

Theme 1: Program Operations

Data were collected from interviews with four internal workforce development specialists (INT 1-4) and four external case managers (EXT 1-4). All the participants had experience with career pathway programs. During my research, each of these individuals indicated that the specialists overseeing the program operations should have expertise in career development. They also agreed that the specialists should be actively participating in the functioning of the career pathway program. The specialists should be engaged in the decision-making process concerning promotion, curriculum, and recruitment.

The responses of the participants affirmed the assertions that career pathways has spread across the country as a workforce development strategy to help those who are not on a traditional college trajectory develop skills, earn credentials, and find and retain employment in high-demand occupations (Eyster 2018). Program operations statements are presented below. The initial step in a career pathway program provides entry-level, industry-recognized credentials so an individual can obtain a job in their chosen occupation as quickly as possible (Manhattan Strategy Group, 2015).

INT1 stated that the people responsible for career pathway programs should have a general knowledge of workforce development. INT1 shared that they need knowledge of labor markets. INT1 also claimed that these individuals need to have a familiarity with the industry they will be working with and some knowledge of how long the program should take to complete. According to INT1, they must be able to set up the program operations, which includes the program curriculum, and apprentice program or certification that may be needed.

According to INT2, these specialists must have the ability to put together the pieces of the puzzle to decide what the program's needs will be as far as resources. INT2 asserted that they should have some experience in proposals as far as how to write up a proposal and present it to the organization's partners. In addition, INT2 said that they also must be able to work well with the partnering agencies.

INT3 added that the program itself needs to be one that is in demand, according to labor market research. According to INT3, this step will help people get jobs in the end and have industry involvement. INT4 said that there must be someone in place to make sure that the funding and the memorandum of understanding (MOU) are in place. INT4 shared that this MOU helps in figuring out who is responsible for bringing what to the program as far as resources, funding, etc. According to INT4, the specialist must have the experience to know what is being measured as far as the success of the program is concerned.

EXT1 stated that the program should offer up-to-date training to allow the participants to be placed in a job as quickly as possible. In their opinion, the training

should not last longer than 2 months unless it is offering some sort of certification. It should be opened to clients of non-profit and community- based organizations.

EXT3 added that the program should be opened to all types of populations, including underemployed, formerly incarcerated individuals, disconnected youth ages 18 to 24, and anyone in a government-funded program such as Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN). According to INT2, the vetting of participants is a must. INT2 asserted that there must be more students ready to begin the program than are needed because some students will not show up to start the program. INT2 also explained that the program specialist must choose the best candidates for the program and not be forced to allow everyone into the program due to a lack of numbers.

This vetting process is especially crucial during the initial interviews the specialist will be conducting. INT1 added that the vital part of the recruiting effort is to find students who want to be in the program and are going to give their all, which includes doing all the work, showing up on time, and persevering to the finish line. INT1 believed that having a method to remove those students who are not serious without losing the numbers needed for the program to be successful is a must.

Theme 2: Community Engagement

Data collected from the participants indicated that a successful career pathway program must be actively involved in the community. With community involvement and engagement initiatives, those leading these programs can participate in the development of the community in which they are located. These opportunities could be a benefit to the whole community. These good-paying jobs with excellent benefits could multiply the

number of people in the community who would be considered in the middle-class category. Community engagement statements are presented below.

INT1 stated that these types of programs should eventually be available to anyone in the community who wants the opportunity for a career in the industries that are offering the training. According to INT1, these career pathway programs can work well with other programs such as apprenticeship programs. INT1 shared that these pathway programs should be expanded to allow all the people within the community to participate in the training, not just those within the predetermined selected group. Moreover, according to INT1, opening the trainings up to anyone interested would help more people, and these agencies would be able to work together to share the cost of the training so it can be equitable for the whole community. INT2 added that this career pathway program's success is going to be measured by how many of the students were able to get entry-level manufacturing positions with companies within the community.

INT3 stated, we will be counting to see how many of the students continue to certification programs such as welding, some sort of apprenticeship program, or local college certification programs because this program is not a certification program. It is for training to become eligible for entry-level positions. Promotional positions frequently require advanced certification.

INT4 informed that, throughout the nation, the funding from the business community has been key to successful local efforts. According to research performed by (Dept of Ed,2016), by working together, state and community partners can create career pathway systems with on-ramps, bridges, and stackable credentials, to help close the gap between vacancies and the numbers of under- and unemployed youth and adults eager to

get to work. In April 2012, the U.S. Departments of Labor, Education, and Health and Human Services formed a federal partnership. They issued a letter of joint commitment to promote the use of career pathways to assist youth and adults in acquiring valuable skills and industry-recognized credentials through better alignment with employers of education, training and employment, and human and social services (Dept of Ed,2016).

EXT2 stated that efforts should be made in attracting hard to serve women in the community. They are women who maybe haven't worked in years are who have been incarcerated. Many of these women do not take advantage of training programs in traditionally male industries, even though all of these programs are available to all sexes. Having these individuals involved in and successful in these training programs will benefit the whole community.

EXT1 added, programs like this are vital to the success of lower-income communities. Many of the residents in these communities are disadvantaged and do not have access to higher education and training for various reasons. These career programs can provide these transitional adults with the necessary basic skills they need to become self-sufficient. These trainings can also be used to give these individuals information about the labor market values, as many of them simply do not understand how to be successful.

EXT4 stated, this community has many low-income parents, especially single parents who feel the pressures of raising children and trying to make a living, which can sometimes be unbearable. Due to a lack of education and skills, many of these individuals must work multiple jobs to make ends meet. Career pathway programs can help to provide them with the needed tools to help them to be successful. These programs can

provide a way for them to get rid of the financial pressures of breadwinning and raising children by providing good-paying stable employment. This is an all-around winning situation for the community.

Theme 3: Program Planning Process

The participants identified the importance of having in-demand trainings be offered as a vital resource for the success of these types of programs. The program is designed to help students explore career options, develop postsecondary plans, participate in workforce preparation activities, and job skills training.

INT1 answered, the training is tailored to the industry needs, and we don't have control over how many students are enrolled. The goal is always to fill the class with as many students as possible as long as the industry can support the number. Having the companies in the industry get involved helps because they know what is required for the jobs and the type of training that is needed.

INT2 added, we try to tailor the program to what the employers require, and that should help when it is time for the participants to get jobs in the industry that they have had training based on what the companies in the industry are looking for specifically. Our participants do not have experience in the labor market, and they have barriers such as not graduating from high school or not working and gaining skills right after finishing school. By offering these types of programs, we can help them with their education and give them a job that can be a stepping stone to a career and not just a job.

INT3 stated, these types of opportunities can be a way for the students to explore industries in a friendly way with mentoring and preparation that they simply will not

receive on a traditional college campus. Since this program is for younger individuals, we are hoping it leads them to a career path, whether in the manufacturing industry of some other type of work. The overall goal is for them to gain some sense of understanding about careers, and if they find employment, this program will be a success.

EXT 2 added, employer requirements for skilled workers have risen, and with this, so has the pay. The supply of trained workers has not grown as fast as many of these industries require, which is generating incentives for employers and workers to invest in the education and training needed to meet such demand.

EXT4 stated, employers are having trouble finding skilled workers. With so many experienced employees retiring, the search for workers in these sectors is becoming even more challenging. Many industries are expecting worker shortages in jobs that require postsecondary education or training but less than a four-year college degree.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, 2016, partners provide processes, procedures, and materials for the delivery of assessment, instruction, training, and support services. These services should facilitate participants' development of a plan for a career pathway that documents progress toward completion of postsecondary education and training and attainment of high-demand, family-sustaining jobs. Professional development is provided to support staff in delivering education and training services.

Theme 4: Successful Program Promotion

The ability to utilize information technology in marketing is a crucial resource for the success of a career pathway program.

INT4 stated, we are hoping to get younger people into the trades. The labor information shows that the trades are being emptied of baby boomers, and because of this, these industries need younger workers who can step in and fill these vacant positions. We want them to be well trained and get good-paying jobs that don't require a college education.

INT2 answered, this program is for younger adults, social media will be used to promote the program and get information to them. The use of eye-catching flyers will be placed in other agency's buildings for their participants to see. The local government will be asked to get involved in promoting the program and let the community know about the opportunity.

EXT1 stated, one of the ways this type of program can successfully promote itself is to offer what the potential clients are looking for. Most people who consider these types of programs want immediate employment in a high demand field with good pay and benefits. It is an excellent idea to market that it does not take long to get to work. The program can promote itself if the program can provide the training that is needed and do so expeditiously.

EXT2 answered, one possible marketing strategy is enabling students to create a pathway even after they complete the initial program. For instance, there could be training for those who have completed the first stage of the program to acquire a certificate, which could lead to a higher position. Also, there could be necessary academic skills taught to help those who would like to pursue higher education after the training is completed. EXT3 added, there should be partnerships amongst the

stakeholders, which should include secondary schools, employers, and workforce developers, all working to promote the program to the whole community.

Theme 5: Implementation Strategies

Implementation strategies are needed to identify and analyze measures for the program's implementation progress. The following are some of the strategies this particular program is putting in place during their development stage.

INT1 said, the first stage of the implementation plan is putting together the timelines needed by each agency to get the Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) approved. Next is figuring out which agency is going to be responsible for what areas. For example, who is going to cover the insurance that is needed for the participants. How is the funding being covered? How many students will be allowed in, and which programs are they allowed to come from. Then another challenge is once the agencies have an agreement to send a certain number of candidates, actually getting the agencies to send those candidates for the vetting process. Without these students coming and being screened, there becomes a scramble at the end to get enough students to make the funding useful. In our case, we are hoping for at least 20 students once the program begins.

INT4 added, one of the things being done is getting information together in the planning stage that will assist the person running the program, so they have all of the information on the contract, curriculum, what is required for successful completion of the program. Also, a tracking system needs to be in place, so the successes and failures can be collected and analyzed. Without this data, the problems cannot be fixed.

INT2 stated, we must make sure that everything in the mou comes to fruition. Many times one agency will promise something in the initial negotiations then can't deliver when it is time for the launch, or they need to modify the terms that were promised, and the mou has to be adjusted. These negotiations can continue even after the program has started, but that is not ideal. First and foremost, the lines of communication must always be open. We want each agency to feel that they have someone they can come to with any questions or concerns about the program and have someone that can answer their questions right away. Giving constant updates to the agencies involved is vital. They need to know where we are at in each stage of the planning period.

INT3 added, the challenges we are anticipating during the implementation stage are getting the right students for the program. We need a screening process that can eliminate the people who are not serious about completing the program. Some are serious about the program at the beginning and then realize once the program begins that it is not for them, so they quit. We want to have people be willing to work in the industry that they are training for, not just collecting the certification and then moving on to another sector.

INT4 continued, during the program's implementation, we want to have a period of preparation for the participants and give them a real idea of the program's expectations. For example, attendance is a significant factor in this type of program, and they are expected to be there daily. Once they miss a few days, they will be removed from the program. Another example is explaining to them that hard work is the only way to be successful in the program as far as completing homework assignments, for instance. They must complete all their assignments to pass the program.

Theme 6: Program Impact

Career pathways are sequenced education and training programs that allow participants to gain occupational knowledge of in-demand occupations; they allow students to quickly earn an initial credential and build on it with additional related credentials later (Clagett and Uhalde 2012; CLASP 2013; Fein 2012). Career pathways are intended to make participation and completion convenient for low-skilled individuals who need help developing marketable occupational skills.

For most people, a high school diploma or credential is not adequate to prosper in today's economy. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, as of 2017, workers with only a high school diploma earned 44 percent less than workers with some college education or four-year degrees.

INT1 stated, one thing that needs to be done is for us to create a monitoring system, so we know whether the program helped the students find employment. We also will need to know if any of the students find jobs in the industry they are training for or not. INT2 answered, maybe by completing the program, it may get the students interested in working in general and open their minds to other types of work. We are hoping that they will find employment in the industry they are being trained in first and foremost. Both situations can be considered a success with the number one objective being to get the students hired in the industry they are preparing for. There should be placement goals within the contract to help assess whether the program is performing well or not as well.

EXT3 stated, there should be an analysis that estimates the impact of the jobs created by the program on the overall market and within the community. These outcomes

should reflect the principal goal, which should be to improve the educational and employment trajectories of underprepared former foster care adult learners and thereby increase their employment and earnings.

EXT4 answered, one of the ways for the program to know if it is making an impact is by using comparison group data. This information would be a good way for the program to estimate its students are faring compared with non-students within the same demographic. The difference between the outcomes of the program participants and the outcomes of the comparison group can provide an excellent assessment of how much better the program's students are progressing due to their enrollment in the program.

Theme 7: Partnerships

According to Eyster, 2018, effective career pathways leading to good jobs require strong partnerships with employers, proper use of data, and outreach to underserved populations. Of course, these meaningful partnerships with employers are essential to ensure students will be able to earn good wages and advance beyond an entry-level job. It is vital to have conversations with employers on the nature of work and what skills are needed for the jobs they need to fill. Partnerships with employers and community organizations are one of the critical resources needed for the success of a career pathway program.

INT1 answered, in our partnerships with other governmental agencies, non-profit organizations, and employers, we have attempted to get some type of guarantee of an interview once training has been completed. It would be great to have actual job offers to wait for our participants at the end of the program, but for sure, we want interviews. INT4 added, we are attempting to set up contracts for the teachers'

organizations to be on the same page like us to train these individuals and get them prepared to go directly into the industries to get to work and not move on to more education first then work. This strategy could create a conflict between our organization and theirs. They want the participants to continue with education only after the training, and we want them to begin working, and of course, they can always continue their education while they work.

EXT1 answered, a career pathway program's lifeblood is in the partnerships it can generate with employers and community organizations. Without these relationships the program will not be as successful and may not be able to gain students from underrepresented groups that usually are referred to these types of programs rather than seek them on their own.

EXT2 stated, I personally take it upon myself to seek out these types of opportunities for my clients and former clients as well. I keep in touch with former participants in the area, and once I see an opportunity for these individuals, I inform them of it and try to help them in any way I can. We, as caseworkers, play a significant role in the success of these individuals, and we want to see them succeed. It is in our best interest to help these programs to be successful so we can improve our clients to be successful.

EXT4 stated, we, as a non-profit, meet our participants where they are. When they come to us, many of them are not doing well emotionally or economically. We serve an area with high unemployment and low educational attainment rates. We partner with these types of program providers to provide the needs of our underserved populations.

Our partners that can offer training programs in underutilized spaces assist our organization in our quest to serve the community to our best ability.

Theme 8: Social Change

Career pathway programs are making social change by helping low-income individuals increase their skills and gain access to well-paying careers.

INT1 stated, one of the areas I see social change occurring is by there being a move toward vocational training. People will be trained to do specific types of jobs instead of generic training that is mostly offered through colleges and other schooling. The idea of a career ladder can be a motivation for some of these young people. They will be introduced to industries and given a chance to see if they start at an entry-level job and they work hard they can be promoted to the next level and then so on and so forth. It allows them to work in the industry and then make a decision on whether they want to go further in that industry or get out and try something new.

INT2 answered, the big plan is for these jobs to help add to the local economy. This includes assisting the companies in hiring for hard to fill positions and give local transitional youth good-paying jobs which will allow them to contribute to the local economy. Another social change is that we are helping these young people with an opportunity for a good-paying career and not just a job that will hopefully help them in the future to obtain more success than they would have had without the program. We hope that this program will be the first step in the expansion of a social enterprise in the local community.

INT3 added, we feel it is imperative to make sure that we get students who want a career and not end up passing on one of the students for another who is not going to take the opportunity seriously. We want transitional adults who wish to have their education paid for to have the chance to have a career that will help them now and in the future with good pay, benefits, and an overall better way of life.

EXT2 stated, more states are implementing career pathway programs to help transitional adults navigate jobs that pay well in their communities. These programs are in place to help improve the educational and earning opportunities for these low skilled adults by providing training that is tailored to the local job market. These programs can have a substantial social impact on these individual lives and the lives of their families. Many of the people we see get this training are single parents, and the difference it makes in the lives of them and their children is remarkable. We can make a change socially by assisting as many of these former foster care participants to gain skills and knowledge to become as successful as possible.

EXT4 answered, through our overall work and with the assistance of career pathways programs, we can focus on providing opportunities for those in our communities who need training in necessary skills instruction and occupational training. The social change that can be led by this type of program is astronomical. We are leading individuals who had little in terms of a future to credentialed in-demand jobs. These programs represent an opportunity for individuals who are in dire need of having hope and a way to better themselves. We are making and can make an even more significant impact by providing opportunities for high paying jobs to be given through just cause to these individuals that really need them.

Additional Relevant Findings

This career pathway program is being put into motion to address the homelessness issue in the city in California, where the program is being created. Homelessness is a top priority of the Mayor, City Council, and the entire community. This program is being funded to assist with immediate plans that will give lasting results. The Mayor has a Community Homelessness Plan that provides goals and strategies to be put in place to help with the homelessness issue.

This career pathway program is within those plans. There number one goal currently is the prevention of any more homeless individuals. Programs such as this career pathway program can assist with the issue by providing training and education to help these transitional youth find good, stable, well-paying jobs that the community can benefit from as well. The plan is for the city to provide administrative coordination for the project as well as connect students who complete the program with partnering employers for guaranteed job placement.

Applications to Professional Practice

The findings of this study may assist workforce development professionals in determining what the most needed resources for creating successful career pathway programs are. The results of the study could contribute significantly to professional workforce development practice by (a) providing a guide for implementing career pathway programs and (b) evaluating current and future promotional strategies to enhance their competitive advantage. In the study, the Workforce Specialist indicated that their involvement and engagement in the community and the adoption of social media platforms were two crucial attributes of the sustenance of their career pathway program

growing and sustaining the needed customer base, which in this case are the potential students enrolling in the course.

The specialist also identified providing industry influenced curriculum as one of the most essential resources needed for the implementation and success of the program. The findings of this study apply to career pathway programs in several ways, including community engagement, program promotion, partnerships, and front-line program operations. One of the strategies the specialists are using is to promote through the use of social media to reach this younger audience. Social media is a crucial factor in minimizing marketing challenges (Ogbuji & Papazafeiropoulou, 2016).

As the specialists continue to promote the program and use strategies that will involve the surrounding government, non-profit organizations as well as the companies within the community, they are contributing to the belief that active community engagement contributes to the strength of a community (Yuen & Johnson, 2016). By conducting this research study, I add to the existing body of knowledge regarding the implementation of career pathway programs.

Emergent themes of the study included community involvement and industry influenced curriculum. The results of this study contribute to workforce development by providing information to organizations who are considering starting a career pathway program and who want to know what resources and strategies are needed beforehand.

Cotner, Alamprese, and Limardo (2016) stated that Partners provide processes, procedures, and materials for the delivery of assessment, instruction, training, and support services. These services should facilitate participants' development of a plan for a career pathway that documents progress toward completion of postsecondary education

and training and attainment of high-demand, family-sustaining jobs. Professional development is provided to support staff in delivering education and training services.

Implications for Social Change

An astonishing one in every seven Americans, ages 16 to 24, is neither working nor in school—5.8 million young people in all. As their peers lay the foundation for a productive, fulfilling adulthood, these disconnected youth find themselves adrift at society's margins, unmoored from the structures that confer knowledge, skills, identity, and purpose (One in Seven, 2012). The cost is high for these young individuals—and for society as a whole. This lack of school or work during this early stage of life is affecting everything from their earnings and financial independence to their physical and mental health. Therefore, these types of programs are vital, and they can create positive social change.

Positive social change entails committing to participating in ways that give back to society in a substantial and positive manner. In the case of career pathway programs, this positive social change may result in a reduction in the number of transitional youth without employment and a high school education, thus improving these young peoples' feelings of self-worth and dignity. These programs can also contribute to the reduction of the unemployment rates, which can result in building more significant communities through this gainful employment.

The findings of this study identified multiple ways for career pathway programs to contribute to social change in their community by (a) providing industry-focused and influenced training programs in local communities, (b) contributing to new job creation,

and (c) contributing to regional economic growth. By adopting the recommendations for further action, workforce specialists who are planning to create these types of programs may avoid not having the right resources and strategies needed to implement these types of programs. These strategies can assist in preventing failure by using the recommendations as a blueprint for maximizing implementation strategies, increasing their customer base, and enhancing the training programs overall.

Recommendations for Action

Having the needed resources is vital to the accomplishment of career pathway programs. The findings of this study are not only significant for the program that I studied but also can be valuable for potential workforce development professionals who want to begin this type of program for their organizations. Using the resources identified in this study may (a) reduce the challenges these workforce professionals face in the program operations; (b) enhance the professions' ability to maximize the relationships with their partnering agencies, and (c) assist them in offering trainings that are in high demand and industry-specific which may result in a competitive advantage.

The study findings indicate that career pathway program organizers can use a combination of resources and strategies to sustain their programs. I recommend that organizers should engage in their communities, adapt their promotional efforts to fit the audience they are attempting to attract, offer courses that are in demand by the local industries, and when needed incorporate other assistance into the program's guidelines such as high school equivalence offerings, life skills training and housing assistance. According to research conducted by the JFF organization 2019, millions of working Californians are unable to fulfill their families' basic needs. Automation is likely to

eliminate many of their jobs by 2022, and higher-paying jobs that require specialized skills, while plentiful, are beyond their reach.

If required, I can provide the results of this study to interested stakeholders through community presentations, publications in business and academic journals, and consulting opportunities geared to workforce development professionals. The findings of this research should not be limited to workforce specialist, but they should also be distributed to other channels such as academic journals, prominent scholars who deal with transitional youth theories, the Small Business Administration, and local chambers of commerce.

Recommendations for Partnering Agency

Here is a summary of my recommendations for the partnering agency. A full report was completed for the agency separately. One of the first things this organization must do is diagnose the current economy and future employment opportunities that are in high demand fields of employment. Next, they must put policies in place that will help create training programs that allow for transitional foster care youth to be well prepared to take advantage of the developing markets for jobs in the areas of high demand that are in need. The agency should also create a variety of sustainable career pathway programs that are sector- focused on allowing for meaningful career opportunities that fill positions the employers in these sectors need to be filled.

The agency should establish working relationships with local colleges, businesses, nonprofit providers, and workforce agencies to link their training program to. They should consider conducting industry assessments to connect training resources with

business needs. Other ways these programs can be successful and become sustainable is by the organization utilizing social media to promote the programs and to get the successes of the students out to others. This method of promotion will, in turn, will cause other organizations and businesses to want to collaborate with the partnering agency once they see how successful the programs are becoming.

Finally, the agency should attempt to collaborate with community organizations to assist in the education of potential students about the value of a career pathway program. One of the best methods of getting the word out about the programs is to have other agencies assist them by sending their interested students to the partnering agency's programs. It is also recommended that the partnering agency invite community leaders to the facility to gain backing from them. As more community leaders become aware of the programs, they will inform their constituents about the programs, which in turn will promote the programs and help the agency to gain notoriety for the difference they are making in the community.

Recommendations for Further Research

I conducted a qualitative case study to explore what resources would be most needed for the success of the implementation of a career pathway program aimed at transitional foster youth ages 18- 25. I conducted eight interviews each lasting between 30-60 minutes with four workforce development specialists from the partnering agency and four participants from outside agencies. I investigated and uncovered common themes that emerged from the interviews conducted with the four participants. I selected the qualitative research method so I could better explore and understand the thought

processes of my study subjects. The limitations affecting this case study are the choice of an exploratory case study of a partnership between two government agencies and a non-profit organization in California may not yield enough data to answer the research question all of the population of workforce development professionals in the United States or other countries.

The first recommendation for the future study is to see if these programs changed the communities they were in for the better. For example, did the homeless rate drop, and did the local communities benefit from having more youth working in good-paying jobs? Support from the business community has been key to the success of career pathway programs and their local efforts. According to the research conducted by US Dept of Ed, 2016, career pathways demand community engagement to ensure that participants are training for and getting experience in real jobs with real advancement opportunities. By working together, state and community partners can create career pathway systems with on-ramps, bridges, and stackable credentials, to help close the gap between vacancies and the numbers of under- and unemployed youth and adults eager to get to work.

The second recommendation for further study is concentrating on the overall success rate of these programs, and particularly the individual student results. Once started, how many students finished the programs successfully and acquired positions within the industries they prepared for during the training programs. Career advancement is an essential factor of career pathways because career development plans can support economic success, which includes higher-paying, more secure jobs. The initial step in a career pathway program provides entry-level, industry-recognized credentials so an

individual can obtain a job in their chosen occupation as quickly as possible (Manhattan Strategy Group 2015).

The third recommendation for further study is in the area of program success. The research could find out if the programs were successful in training these students to advance in the career they trained in. Once the initial students finish the program, were they able to bring in more students possibly through different partnerships to keep the trainings relevant into the future. According to (Eyster 2018), little is understood about how programs can support career advancement to fulfill the promise of career pathways that lead to jobs that provide stable career and family-sustaining wages.

Most research on career pathways programs and resources focus on the initial steps of a career pathway, which includes the action needed to gain entry-level jobs, but do not focus on the advancement of these jobs once acquired. A study conducted outside of California may determine whether the findings of this study are unique to California only or if the results are transferable to a broader geographical area. Furthermore, researchers should employ a different qualitative research design, such as phenomenology or ethnography, or a quantitative research design such as experimental, to explore further resources for the continued sustenance of career pathway program operations.

Reflections

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the resources that workforce development professionals in California need for the implementation of their career pathway program operations. In conducting this study on career pathway programs, I understood that in this type of environment, the program organizers could use

diverse resources to assist with the implementation and sustainability of the programs' operations. From the study findings, I developed an in-depth understanding of the research problem and observed that these program organizers use a mix of resources for the implementation of their programs.

My reflection of these professions in charge of these career pathway programs includes a deeper appreciation for their resilience and commitment to the success of the programs. My thought on the DPA journey incorporates the understanding of the research process, which includes finding ways to overcome potential personal bias in my research and preparing to turn into a scholar-practitioner. Through the doctoral research study process, I have enhanced my understanding of the mechanisms of conducting academic research while considering the impact of my research on social change.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore what resources career pathway programs in California could use to gain successful implementation of operations for their programs. I conducted interviews with experienced workforce development specialists to collect data to answer the research question. Data were derived from an in-depth analysis of 11 interview questions answered by the workforce development specialists. I used NVivo12™, computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software to organize and analyze data.

Eight themes emerged from the thematic analysis of data to explore the resources the workforce development specialist in California use to gain successful implementation of operations for their programs. The themes were (a) program operations (b) community

engagement, (c) program planning process, (d) successful program promotion, (e) implementation strategies, (f) program impact, (g) partnerships, and (h) social change. The resources and strategies identified in the findings provided protocol and solutions that workforce development professionals and their stakeholders can use to grow and sustain their programs.

One significant finding was the fact that these types of programs are funded and backed by community agencies due to the wide-ranging positive effects they can have on the communities they are provided in by combating such issues as homelessness. The resources and strategies that were found for this study, which involved workforce development specialist, may assist the industry and fill a gap in the literature. The study findings included the importance of community engagement, having a plan for the implementation of the program, successfully promoting the program, and benefits the program can have on social change.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions for the Workforce Specialist

Interview Questions

The interview questions I will ask the professionals of the partnering agency are the following:

1. What are the program overseer's experiences with a transitional career planning process?
2. What are the primary factors for the transitional career pathway program to be sustainable?
3. What have been the key challenges of implementing your strategies during the planning stage of this program?
4. What are the critical challenges you are foreseeing during the initial launch of the pathway program?
5. How have you addressed the key challenges to your strategies during the planning stage of this career pathway program?
6. What are you hoping to accomplish with this type of program?
7. What kind of impact can this type of program have on transitional youth?
8. How are you planning to measure the success of the program?
9. How many students is the program hoping to have during the initial stage of the program?
10. What strategies will be used to promote the program to those who need this type of assistance?

11. What social change, if any, are you anticipating will be accomplished from this program?

12. What additional information can you provide regarding strategies for the successful implementation of the career pathway program?

Appendix B: Interview Protocol Introduction to the Interview

My name is Odell Cole, a student at Walden University pursuing a doctoral degree in Public Administration. Thank you for accepting to participate in this study. I am conducting a qualitative case study to explore developmental strategies of career pathway programs in California. The length of this interview should be about 30 minutes. The interview format is open-ended questions. Please feel free to seek clarity on questions and add more detailed explanations and personal views as you see appropriate.

Things to remember

- Switch the mobile phone to silent mode
- Collect the signed consent form
- Get approval to record the interview
- Assure participant all responses will be confidential
- Start interview and audio recording simultaneously and take notes
- Observe the participant for non-verbal body language and gestures
- Collect detailed responses to the interview questions
- Not to interrupt the participants and to carefully listen to what they are saying (active listening)
- Ask follow-up probing questions to get more in-depth information

Appendix C: Internal/External Stakeholder Analysis

Highest Level of Interest and Influence

The partnering agency has the highest level of interest and influence for this project. They are the agency who will be creating, designing, and overseeing the operations of the program.

High level of interest/ High level of influence

Local government is a high level of interest and low level of influence stakeholder for this project. This project is of high priority for them. The local government is providing funding and marketing for the program.

High level of interest/ Low level of influence

This category is for the local employers who want to help this program be successful by

giving ideas of what training is needed for the jobs their companies need to fill. These companies do not have a say in the design of the training or how the program is going to be taught they can only give ideas of what topics should be included.

Low level of interest/ Low level of influence

This group is the local community. Overall, the local community has a low level of interest and influence since this career pathway program is not being created for most of the public. They have no say in the design or curriculum being used for the program.