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The Lived Experiences of Homelessness of Former Foster Youth Navigating Their Way into Adulthood

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Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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Debra Hampton

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Walden University
2023

Abstract

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into Adulthood

by

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MA, Keller Graduate School of Management, 2006

BS, California State University, Dominguez Hills, 2004

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human Services

Walden University

August 2023

Abstract

Youth exiting the U.S. foster care system can experience a complicated process as well as lack of support and resources to help in their transition. Also, despite federal policies in place, these youth can face socioeconomic challenges that lead to homelessness. The purpose of this qualitative, hermeneutic, phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of homelessness of adults who age out of the foster care system without continued support when they turn 18. Social capital theory provided a theoretical foundation for the study. Participants were 10 individuals 18 years of age and over who exited out of foster care and experienced homelessness. Semistructured interviews were used to collect data. The themes that were derived from analysis of the interview data include (a) experiences of aging out, (b) differing quality of transition plan, (c) experiences of homelessness, (d) social support, (e) effect on mental health, and (f) education and employment outcomes. The findings reinforce that having connections to mental health support and other support systems that provide education, employment, and housing opportunities are important building blocks for youth aging out of foster care. Most importantly social change for this group is being able to connect and build trusting relationships all of which is highlighted by the concept of social capital theory. These efforts will not only provide assistance these youth exiting from foster care but provide a network of resources that may give them a chance to build their foundation to move forward in becoming self-sufficient.

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Dedication

I dedicate my study to my beloved mother, Bettye Jean Hampton, who passed away before she could bear witness to my success.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge my children who rooted for me from day one. I have faced many challenges along the way, and I cannot thank them enough for their love and support. Shareika, Shawnte, Jason, Javon, and Jayla, I love and appreciate all of you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In this study, I explored the lived experiences of homelessness of former foster youth who aged out of the foster care system without continued support. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS, 2018a), approximately 20,000 youths age out of the U.S. foster care system annually. These individuals may face challenges due to a lack of meaningful social support during their transition into adulthood. Therefore, caseworkers should consider social, economic, and environmental factors when developing a transition plan (Shah et al., 2017). Researchers have suggested that attributes of the social support system, including emotional and financial well-being, can predict the outcomes of former foster youth (Guan & Fuligni, 2015). However, there is a lack of policies and protocols in place that can mitigate or prevent the risks that foster youth face in the transition to adulthood (Fowler, & Marcal, et al., 2017).

Former foster youth face barriers related to their history and background in the child welfare system, making it difficult for this population to maintain housing, education, and job security (Curry & Abrams, 2015). The data collected in this study will provide a new perspective on, and understanding of, the lived experiences of former foster youth. The results of this study informed the reestablishment of policy protocols within the foster care system to provide emancipated youth with the tools and resources needed to succeed in adulthood. I provide an overview of the study in this chapter, which includes information on the background of the study topic, the problem and purpose of the study, the research question I sought to answer, and the theoretical foundation and nature of the study. The chapter also includes definitions of key terms and discussion of

the assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and potential significance of the study.

Background

Homelessness is a key issue for foster youth as they age out of the foster care system. Former foster youth encounter housing problems and concurrent concerns for well-being; however, the nature and scope of youth homelessness remain misunderstood (Braciszewski et al., 2016; Curry et al., 2017). Homelessness encompasses the lack of pertinent resources for, and the presence of barriers to, gaining stable housing among vulnerable adults; barriers include the misrepresentation of available services and lack of knowledge of preventive measures (Fowler, Marcal et al., 2019). Transitioning into adulthood is difficult for former foster youth who do not adequately understand the risks of homelessness (Braciszewski et al., 2016).

The most difficult time for many foster youths occurs shortly after emancipation (Greeson et al., 2015). Youth who have aged out of the foster care system have homelessness rates as high as those for individuals who were never in the foster-care system, despite having the system to guide them (Fowler, Marcal, et al., 2017b). Formal and informal social networks are essential for a successful transition out of foster care (Blakeslee, 2015). Housing and social support for post emancipated youth helped establish a successful transition (Curry & Abrams, 2015), and multiple attributes of social support systems, including emotions, finances, and well-being, can influence the outcomes that affect the lives of former foster youth (Guan & Fuligni, 2015). Supportive relationships are beneficial to the former foster youth, and coaching has positive effects

that leads to self-sufficiency (Lee & Goldstein, 2016; Rosenberg, 2019). The benefits of social support are evident throughout the lifespan, but are especially evident during periods of social change, such as transitions to adulthood (Lee & Goldstein, 2016).

Problem Statement

More than 20,000 youth aged out of foster care through emancipation in 2017 (HHS, 2018). They often leave the child welfare system before they can find stable housing, cultivate family relationships, and achieve job security, which increases their chances of homelessness (Bender et al., 2015; Fowler, Farrell, et al., 2017). In the early stages of transition from foster care, former foster youth face housing instability and lack of meaningful social support (Crawford et al., 2015). The experience of social support is fragile for some who are in transition whereas others receive support from family and friends (Greeson et al., 2015). Furthermore, for foster youths with diverse needs and lack of stability, the expected level of social support may decline once they exit from the foster care network (Zinn et al., 2017).

Social, economic, and environmental factors affect foster youth's transition into adulthood (Shah et al., 2015, 2017). As they transition from the foster care system, an ever-growing number of young adults face several difficulties during the initial stages of transition (Greeson et al., 2015). Researchers have suggested that aspects of the social support system, including emotional and financial well-being, can predict the outcomes of former foster youth (Guan & Fuligni, 2015). Policies and procedures can effectively mitigate or prevent the risks that foster youth face in the transition to adulthood (Fowler, Hovmand, Marcal, et al., 2017).

Although the research regarding emancipated youth illuminates important findings of homelessness among former foster youth, I found no research on former foster youth's views on their experiences of homelessness. Therefore, it was pertinent to conduct further research to examine the views of former foster youth on the experience of homelessness and address the issue of undocumented housing, which continues to be an issue for former foster youth (Fowler, Marcal et al., 2017).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of youth who have aged out of foster care as they navigate the transition into adulthood without family support. This group of youths faces unique barriers related to their history and background in the child welfare system, making it difficult to maintain housing, education, and job security (Curry & Abrams, 2015). Raymond-Flesch et al. (2017) posited that once foster children reach the age of emancipation, their sense of stability ceases, leaving them without the safety net of the child welfare system and the support of parents and other adults. In addition, social networks decrease over time, leaving them at a disadvantage without permanent connections to professional help (Singer & Berzin, 2015). Raymond-Flesch et al. (2017) pointed out that this group needs assistance from family and from informal social networks, such as community agencies, to support their success in society.

Research Question

What are the lived experiences of homelessness from the perspective of youth who aged out of the foster care system without continued support?

Theoretical Foundation

I used social capital theory as a lens to connect the research data and describe meaningful social connections for the study population. Social networks and the connections of bonding, trust, and reciprocity are important to the development of individuals (Bourdieu, 1986). Social networks are built through bonding and bridging, while reciprocity is built by exchanging knowledge and trust, building bonds, fostering collaboration, and achieving success that would otherwise be unattainable for those without social networks (Coffe & Geys, 2007; Coleman, 1988). Supports received through different relationships are primarily through the principles of bonding and bridging capital. Individuals can accumulate advantages due to their participation in specific social networks, marking the presence of social capital (Lin, 1999).

Individuals build social capital through social structure, including the system of connections they have with others, including relatives, ideally, parent who contribute time to their children, preparing and teaching them as they pass on their resources and with networks that encourage reciprocity inside the structure (Coleman, 1988). Youth who attain access to an extensive social network of family or outside resources tend to adhere to behavior that discourages delinquency (Dufur et al., 2015). These social connections are necessary for youth to successfully transition into adulthood, research shows (Dufur et al., 2016).

Nature of the Study

I used a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of homelessness of former foster youth, focusing on how this group experienced their

transition to adulthood to find housing. I conducted a phenomenological study as an approach to research the essence of a phenomenon by examining it from the perspective of those who have experienced it (Neubauer et al., 2019). The way to achieve a deeper understanding of such experiences is to align the specific research question with the researcher's philosophical foundations (Neubauer et al., 2019).

I considered there were two types of phenomenological approaches: Edmund Husserl's *transcendental descriptive* approach, which focuses on the world and what people think, and Martin Heidegger's *hermeneutic interpretive* approach, which focuses on the individual's perceived experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019). I opted to use the hermeneutic interpretive approach to investigate the complex phenomenon of former foster youth experiences after aging out of care (see Neubauer et al., 2019). Consistent with this approach, I used open-ended questions to allow the participating former foster youth to express their lived experiences. Open-ended questions were appropriate to gain an objective perspective of the participants' lived experiences (see Butina, 2015).

I recruited a purposeful sample of 10 former foster youths. The criteria for participation were that an individual be 18 years old and older and emancipated from, or aged out of, foster care in California; have experienced homelessness and lack of social support; and had a transition plan at the time of emancipation. Although face-to-face interviews are preferable for their contextual data, the use of video technology is becoming widespread in the field of qualitative research as face-to-face interviewing becomes less viable because of COVID related restrictions on public gathers and/or other factors (De Villiers et al., 2021). Phone interviews took place only if the participants did

not have access to a video technology application. The semistructured interview consisted of open-ended questions and probing questions to gain irreflective insights on the lived experiences from the former foster youth participants. Participants were encouraged to provide answers regarding their lives, social constructs, and experiences of being homeless.

The World Health Organization terminated face-to-face interviews indefinitely following the outbreak of the novel coronavirus causing COVID-19 (Sheposh, 2021). Due to COVID-19, I conducted the interview process via the telephone and the videoconferencing applications Zoom and Skype as the alternative method. I primarily used the telephone for interviewing because this allowed the participant to be in a place of their choosing (Seitz, 2016). Because they provide free audio and video communication tools, they are frequently used by qualitative researchers (Lo lacono et al., 2016). Before the interview, each participant received, read, and signed a consent form. All semistructured interview questions were executed using the same interview protocol and included six open-ended questions. I encouraged participants to provide answers about their own lives, social constructs, and experiences of being homeless.

I asked participants to allow 30 to 60 min for their interview with the understanding that the interview might be shorter than expected. After each interview, I entered the interview data into a Microsoft Word document to upload into NVivo software to analyze and encode data. I conducted thematic analysis based on the broad scope of the research question. This type of analysis is helpful as a primary technique because it allows for understanding of specific phenomena, settings, and experiences

(Clarke & Braun, 2017). Coding helped distinguish the data analyzed (Vealé, 2018). I followed Clarke and Braun's (2017) six-step process to thematic analysis of data. In step 1, To identify and organize my data, I devised each data set, making sure they aligned with my research question. I organized and identified the data based on my research question. In addition, it allowed for the identification of phases of thematic analysis corresponding to different types of data by transcription. Step 2 was to correctly encode my data into groups relevant to my research question. Step 3 involved searching for themes and patterns that matched the coded information. Step 4 included reviewing the codes and themes to identify similarities in participants' answers (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Step 5 involved the evaluation of themes and codes and naming of every theme by asking what story is revealed. According to this qualitative study, context relies on details, transparency, and trustworthiness (Amankwaa, 2016). Self-transparency allows different analysts to test and examine the data, enabling the readers and partners to understand the research process, methods, limitations, and qualities (Shufutinsky, 2020). In addition, readers should be able to understand the work done by the researcher in the analysis process to draw conclusions, be able to replicate and consider the measures taken, and find any differences in the execution of the research (Shufutinsky, 2020).

Reflecting on my data and interpretations, I reexamined my beliefs, value system, and references as carefully as possible to establish what is vital and inconsistent with my research work (Lemon, 2017; Shufutinsky, 2020). To achieve data reliability, I used an audit log; the research notes were outlined and witnessed by another researcher, discussed during peer debriefings about measures taken to verify the data, and compared

to assure accuracy and lack of bias (see Leung, 2015). To ensure that the opinions and identities of respondents remained confidential, I replaced the participants' names with identification numbers to maintain confidentiality.

I stored the interview recordings in a password-protected folder on the researchers' computer. To validate the data, I pursued triangulation by comparing data from personal interviews of former foster youth and from literature (see Creswell & Poth, 2016). The use of semistructured interviewing questions provided flexible opportunities to ask critical questions (see Heyman et al., 2020). It allowed me to modify questions to collect large amounts of data (see Heyman et al., 2020). I reviewed and compared the data results to other researchers' previously discovered data, following the guidance of Merriam and Tisdell (2016).

Definitions

Connections: Networks that can supply resources ranging from guidance to employment and education to improve one's life (Zinn et al., 2017).

Emancipation: A term that refers to when youth in the foster care system reach the age of 18, at which point they are considered adults and are no longer served by the foster care system (HHS, 2018a). This term is interchangeable with the term *aging out*.

Family reunification: A term that refers to when a child returns to live with, or have relationships with, their family or origin.

Former foster youth: Young adults who have left the foster care system (Crawford et al., 2018).

Homelessness: A lack of a secured place to dwell (Christian, 2021).

Social support: The relationships that persons have with one another that offer a sense of connection and resources (Toro, 2015).

Assumptions

I had four primary assumptions in conducting this phenomenological study. I assumed that the participants would be willing to participate and disclose their past experiences in detail. I assumed that their responses would provide honest and unrehearsed responses. I assumed that their experiences of homelessness affected their lives. Last, I assumed that I would be able to gather enough data to satisfy this study.

Scope and Delimitations

I sought to examine former foster youth over 18 years old. This research study did not include participants who were not involved in the foster care system. The participants had access to audio devices such as a home phone or cell phone, Zoom, Skype, or other forms of communication. Social control theory was considered for this study; however, social control theory discusses the effects of power and control on human behavior (Cunningham, 2021). If power or control are issues of interest, a researcher should ask who controls whom or who wields the power. Power is exerted bluntly or subtly, through deceit or honestly (Cunningham, 2021). After considering social control theory, I found that it did not align with my research question. I opted instead to use social capital theory because this theory aligned more with the need for former foster youth to have social connections and resources that increase positive social bonding and bridge connections that aid in self-sufficiency (Hornig, 2020).

Limitations

There are a few limitations to this study. I interviewed former foster youth about their lived experiences to investigate what factors contributed to their success after leaving care. The inclusion of participants living in one specific area in one state may not offer a comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon (Hedenstrom, 2021). In addition, the participants may not have disclosed whole truths about their experiences because they may have felt uncomfortable disclosing personal experiences to someone of a different societal background or ethnicity (see Schenk et al., 2018). Commonality among homeless youth who are not involved in the foster care system are challenging to measure and evaluate (Yoshioka-Maxwell, 2017). Finally, the standard interview process used in the study may have led to unreliable results that does not have any truth to the response also, recall errors that may have caused source bias meaning the researchers owns views or referring to their own sources for data (Zinn et al., 2017).

Significance

Former foster youth are susceptible to transitioning into adulthood without the proper support systems they need to avoid homelessness. As some researchers have noted, social networks for young people leaving foster care decrease or do not exist once they leave care (Singer & Berzin, 2015). The potential significance of this study lies in its focus on former foster youth and their lived experiences navigating into adulthood. My decision to address these issues was warranted because of the disproportionate and growing adverse impacts faced by foster youth when they exit from care. Barriers faced by these youth include poor educational outcomes, unemployment, housing instability,

poor health, and lack of social connections (Crawford et al., 2015). Crawford et al. (2018) also affirmed that the high risk of criminal behaviors of those lacking support increases. This study can potentially help researchers, state and federal officials, school leaders, and members of organizations that assist this population by increasing their understanding of former foster youth's experiences regarding aging out of the system and access to available programs.

Summary

In Chapter 1, I provided an overview of this research on former foster youth and their lived experiences transitioning into adulthood. This chapter substantiated the need to further investigate the gap related to former foster youth and their lack of social support after exiting foster care. Curry and Abrams (2015) agreed that former foster youth remain at high risk for homelessness after aging out of the system. These young adults also may face difficulties in achieving education and lack support from family, friends, outside adults, and agencies, which can lead them to engage in criminal behavior. In Chapter 2, I describe the gap in qualitative literature on the problems of homelessness and limited social support that continue to be an issue for former foster youth as they navigate into adulthood (see Guan & Fuligni, 2015). I also further discuss the study's theoretical foundation of social capital theory, which emphasizes social networking, trust, and reciprocity (Putnam, 2000).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Social support is a problematic issue for youths as they age out of foster care. Social support includes social connections and ties to friends, neighbors, coworkers, family members, or other community members who can provide emotional, informational, instrumental, or spiritual support (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2018). Research shows that social support reduces mental health problems (Wang et al., 2018), improves cognitive function (Kelly et al., 2017), increases life satisfaction (LaBrenz et al., 2021b), and improves psychosocial functioning (Long et al., 2018). An increasing body of evidence demonstrates that social support can help to mitigate or prevent depression (Horan & Widom, 2015). Throughout the growth period of adulthood, the standard level of social support available to former foster youths may decline because they face diversified needs after adulthood and lack a sense of stability (Zinn et al., 2017b). These youth may be disrupted again as they transition out of foster care when they go off to college, reunite with their families of origin, or otherwise move away from their foster care placement (Blakeslee & Best, 2019) as the social support they developed during their stay might be disrupted once again. Yet, few researchers to date have explored support among former foster youth as they transition to adulthood (LaBrenz et al., 2022).

In Chapter 2, I discuss evidence showing how the adulthood transition may be difficult for foster youth. The specific aspects discussed in this study include mental and physical well-being, education, substance abuse, economic and employment self-

sufficiency, homelessness and housing, family formations, and the involvement of familial relations. These outcomes are crucial indicators of the well-being of former foster youth transitioning to adulthood because any issues arising within these aspects make success in other domains less likely.

Researchers have explored possible solutions to eliminate the challenges and risks for former foster youth as they age out of the system (Bender et al., 2015; Fryar et al., 2017; Gypen et al., 2017; Okpych & Courtney, 2020). Some of the issues scholars have explored as possible countermeasures include offering expanded foster care and enacting foster care policies (Guan & Fuligni, 2015; Lee & Morgan, 2017; Newell et al., 2015; Scannapieco et al., 2016). Scholars have also investigated how offering postsecondary education and employment can help former foster youth earn an education and income to become self-sustaining (Min et al., 2015; Narendorf et al., 2019; Rebbe et al., 2017; Swartz & O'Brien, 2016; Thompson et al., 2016; Zinn, 2017). The literature also includes scholarly works on the provision of safe and stable housing, mental health care, and social support (e.g., Bender et al., 2015; Braciszewski et al., 2016; Curry et al., 2017; Gypen et al., 2017; Horan & Widom, 2015; Munson et al., 2015; Ruttman & Hubberstey, 2016; Scannapieco et al., 2016). As I discuss, social capital theory was relevant in this study because it provided a framework for understanding the provision of social support to homeless former foster youth who are transitioning to adulthood. This perspective reinforces the need to consider diverse solutions to improve the quality of life for foster youths. I also review the literature search strategy in this chapter.

Literature Search Strategy

I searched for peer-reviewed articles in the following databases and search engines: Psychiatry Research, AFCARS report, and Google Scholar. I also reviewed the websites of the following journals: *Children and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, *Journal of Family Issues*, and *Journal of Youth Studies*. I also searched for older articles that were relevant to my study and which indicated the persistence of the research phenomenon. In line with my research question, my search words were *homelessness*, *former foster youth*, *transitional plans*, *independent living*, *mental health*, *social support*, *education*, *unemployment*, *substance abuse*, *lived experiences*, and *social capital*. I found articles that explained the lived experiences of foster youth, social support, and housing. I reviewed articles by reading the abstract and summaries. I then constructed the literature review using the articles on the subject.

Theoretical Foundation

I grounded this research study in Social Capital Theory (Bourdieu, 1986), which discusses trust, rules, and norms related to social behavior, types of social interactions between individuals, and network resources (McKean et al., 2017). Social capital theory was an appropriate framework to explore social support efforts for homeless former foster youth transitioning into adulthood, specifically because bonding and bridging offer reliable support systems giving the ability to accumulate reciprocity through social networks (see Lin, 1999). The theory applies to many contexts, including individuals (Bourdieu, 1986), families (Coleman, 1988), and communities (Putnam, 2000).

Bourdieu's (1986) definition of social capital emphasizes the importance and potential of social networks.

Numerous studies have been conducted on the influence of social capital on adolescent health behaviors (Raymond-Flesch et al., 2017). Social capital may operate differently in different communities, so determining its specific form and effects on other youth is important for culturally informed interventions. A lower level of household social capital (parental support) and social cohesion at school raises adolescents' risk of externalizing behavior (Cepeda, 2016). These studies demonstrate the relevance of social capital as a potential intervention target. In addition, few studies have studied how social capital influences youths living in nonurban areas (Raymond-Flesch et al., 2017).

Types of Social Capital

There are two kinds of social capital, bonding and bridging (Bourdieu, 1985; Claridge, 2018 Putnam, 2000). Social networks and relationships create opportunities for social relationships, including social capital, norms, and reciprocity which are all aspects of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). This includes relationships among individuals, social networks, reciprocity, and trustworthiness resulting from these connections (Putnam, 2000). Parts of the social structure, including network connections between individuals, encourage bridge building and bonding (Coleman, 1988).

Bonding Capital

An example of bonding social capital is a connection within a group or community that is characterized by high levels of similarity across demographic characteristics, attitudes, and available information and resources (Claridge, 2018). A

bonding social capital exists among "people like us" who are perceived as being "in it together" and who typically have strong close personal ties. Typical examples include family, friends, and neighbors. Connecting social capital can serve a useful social function by providing a vital source of support to people suffering from poverty or poor health (Claridge, 2018).

Bridging Social Capital

According to social capital theory, the reciprocity between social networks and their resources produces desirable outcomes, which can then be fed back into influencing networks (Xu et al., 2019). Bridging social capital is primarily social networks and organizations that provide resources. Most of the youths believe that others must be similar to them to understand them, but also indicate a need for additional support from close friends and family members (Schenk., et al 2018). Even though friends tend to bond people, they are also able to bridge distances as they can connect people from different social strata (Claridge, 2018). Creating bridges across social capital has numerous benefits, including enhanced ability to gather information, access to power, or a better placement within the network, or the ability to recognize new opportunities (Claridge, 2018).

***Connections Between Bonding and Bridging Social Capital ***

Bonding or bridging social capital describes the nature of a social relationships. Bonding occurs when relationships move in similar social circles. In a relationship with someone who does not move in the same circles, it is referred to as bridging social capital (Claridge, 2018). The concepts of bonding and bridging social capital are interrelated and

can complement each other, but little is known about how they impact social connections in communities (i.e., creating social capital; Saheli et al., 2019). As a result of the binary nature of bonding and bridging risks, analysis is simplified and reduced. The assumption that these two concepts are mutually exclusive poses a significant problem for scholars and policy makers (Claridge, 2018).

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts.

U.S. Foster Care System

Approximately 400,000 children are placed in the child welfare system every year, living away from their families, extended kin support, and siblings (AFCARS 2016). More than half (56%) were reunified reunification with parent(s) or primary caregiver(s) and 27,020 (27%) adopted. This means that 17% were not going to have a permanent family placement by the time they left the foster care system. A significant number of young people who are not reunified or adopted leave foster care before any plans for permanent housing can be accomplished, which may make them more likely to experience homelessness (Bender et al., 2015). Lack of stable families to lean on for housing support is a major cause of homelessness during the transition to adulthood for youth who leave the foster care system (Fowler, Marcal, et al., 2017).

The Process of Exiting the Foster Care System

The process of leaving foster care can be unplanned and unfocused, with little support from care providers, birth families, or institutions (Haggman-Laitila et al., 2019). Youth who transition out of foster care differ considerably in their ability to navigate aspects of things like education, employment, residence and avoiding things like

substance abuse and criminal activity (Fowler, Marcal, Zhang, et al., 2017; Shpiegel & Ocasio, 2015).

Transition Planning

The Fostering Connections Act requires youth transitioning to have a transition plan by 90 days prior to their 18th birthday or emancipation from the foster care system (Rosenberg, 2019). The Fostering Connections Act allows youth to remain in foster care until they are 21 years old if enrolled in a high school or postsecondary school, are employed, or have disabilities. (Rosenberg, 2019). Youth transitioning out of foster care face difficulty finding and maintaining jobs and finding stable housing, even with extended support (Gypen et al., 2017). Having multiple transition plan options create better outcomes during this transition period (Armstrong-Heimsoth et al., 2021). These include plans surrounding education, employment, residency, developing and maintaining social supports. Many youths, however, opt-out of the opportunities to engage in transition planning or abandon the plan when they leave foster care, stating they choose independence at the time of emancipation (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

It is imperative that youth in care set goals and begin developing a life plan before leaving care, as they are more at risk for poor transitional outcomes than peers their age (Lockwood et al. 2015). About half of the youth transitioning from foster care received some type of independent living support (ILS), and the likelihood of service receipt was influenced by gender, race, state residence, and residential area (Okpych, 2015).

Utilization of ILS services related to education, employment, and mentoring have been found to be related to decreased homelessness (Kim et al., 2019).

Fewer ILS received by youth between ages 19 and 21 was found to be associated with less favorable education and employment outcomes and a higher risk of homelessness and incarceration (Wyatt & Kim, 2019). Adolescents who received postsecondary education financial assistance and postsecondary education support at 19 were more likely to work or attend school and less likely to be homeless or incarcerated (Lee & Ballew, 2018). It is important examine youth perspectives on aging out and their capacity to express these views to direct practice and policy development (Augsberger et al., 2019). The perspectives of youth are crucial in creating services youth will want to use and will perceive as helpful (Collins, 2019).

Aging Out of Foster Care

In 2017, 19,945 (8%) were discharged because they reached the age of emancipation (also known as *aging out*) from the foster care system (HHS, 2018). Rosenberg and Kim (2018) defined aging out as the period of transitioning from a youth to an adult as when one starts to have an adult identity. Transitioning youth often have had little experience of living independently (Häggman-Laitila et al., 2018). As a result, they had to become independent earlier than their peers. There are concerns about the life outcomes of individuals who were in foster care, particularly those who aged out (Yi & Wildeman, 2018). This included claims that those who were in foster care were more likely to go to prison than to college. This is why the federal, state, and local governments stress the importance of permanency and family reunification.

Approximately half of children in foster care reunite with their families (HHS, 2018). Youth who do not reunite with their family, or are adopted, automatically age out of foster care once they reach the age of majority (often 18). However, many states have now implemented provisions that allow older juveniles to remain in foster care until some specified age (often until the age of 24; HHS, 2018). As youth approach the age of leaving foster care, they are supposed to receive support in preparing for independent living to help them with this transition (Font et al., 2021).

Youth who have aged out of foster care cannot rely on their biological parents for emotional, social, practical, or financial support (Paulsen & Berg, 2016; Rutman & Hubberstey 2016). Self-determination is important for youth transitioning out of foster care as the relationships that young people can access and keep are not often controlled or chosen by them (Pryce et al., 2017). Many youth exit foster homes without being encouraged to maintain contact and without assistance to cope with these relationship losses. This lack of social support can result in fear of the unknown among older youth starting to transition from foster care (Mitchell et al., 2015). Often, young adults' challenges during the transition to independent living are result in a lack of academic qualifications, housing problems, employment instability, difficulty with assimilation to cultural norms, and limited health care access (Häggman-Laitila et al., 2018). This results in additional future disadvantages, including low educational attainment, low employment outcomes, low housing, low financial stability, and low life skills (Chor et al., 2018; Chun, 2020).

Homelessness

Homelessness is a significant public health issue, and individuals who suffer from homelessness, particularly young people, homelessness impacts their physical, emotional, and spiritual health (Sznajder-Murray et al., 2015). While definitions of homelessness determine access to resources, the lack of empirically sound assessments limits progress toward promoting stable housing for vulnerable emerging adults (Fowler, Marcal, Zhang, Day, et al., 2019). In the transition to adulthood, a lack of stable, supportive families poses a significant risk of homelessness (Fowler, Hovmand, et al., 2017). Among these vulnerable emerging adults, however, the scope of housing problems and definitions for eligibility lead to an improper alignment of housing services with needs (Chor et al. 2018).

In January 2016, a count estimated 41,662 young people aged 18 and over spent the night in shelters or on the streets. Over 20,000 youth received street outreach services in 2014, over 30,000 youth received emergency shelter services, and 3,000 youth received transitional living services through the Runaway and Youth Homeless Program (HSS 2016a, 2016b, 2017). Individuals experiencing homelessness had to make choices on the limited options they have and can develop substance abuse, mental illnesses, and other issues (Glaeser & Gyourko, 2018).

There are several factors that are related to the increased number of homeless and high cost of housing in the United States is one of the leading factors (The Council of Economic Advisers, 2019). Overregulation in the housing market has caused a shift in the available supply of homes, leading to increased prices and homelessness for low-income

earners (Council of Economic Advisors, 2019; Tsai & Rosenheck, 2015). The ratio of housing prices to housing production costs can predict housing production which can then result in a shortage of affordable housing (Glaeser & Gyourko, 2018). Some oppose efforts to alleviate homelessness, arguing that an individual is the primary cause and those experiencing homelessness should be responsible for their housing situation (Bailey & Stigl, 2019).

Homelessness Among Youth

In the United States, more than 3 million young people aged 18 and over experience homelessness or housing insecurity every year (Morton et al., 2018; Morton et al., 2017). Poor health outcomes correlate with youth homelessness (Morton et al., 2018) and challenges with learning, cognition, socialization, and emotion regulation are related to experiencing homelessness (Kessler et al., 2018). An individual experiencing homelessness as a youth is at greater risk of becoming homeless as an adult (Braciszewick et al, 2016).

In the United States, it is a serious challenge to provide housing for youth experiencing homelessness (Morton et al., 2018). In research studies of young people experiencing homelessness, there is an emphasis on the role of parental abuse, neglect, and rejection in pushing or forcing these young people out of the home (Bender et al., 2015). This is not a problem that is limited to only specific areas of the country. In Oklahoma, 26% of youth had experienced homelessness after aging out of the state foster care system (Crawford et al., 2015). By age 21, 25% of foster care youth in California experience homelessness (Courtney et al., 2016). In 2014 the Runaway and Youth

Homeless Program in Los Angeles provided outreach services to 20,000 youth, provided 30,000 youth emergency shelters, and provided 3,000 transitional living services (HHS, 2016a, 2016b, 2017).

HHS (2017) reported, that in 2016, 41,662 youth aged 18 and over were homeless in any given night. Youths are commonly faced with the problem of mental health disorders, risk of sexual victimization, and lack of access to health care when they experience homelessness (Curry et al., 2017). It has become important to address the youth as one of the most vulnerable groups through improved policies that address the underlying causes of the problem and effectively serve some of the most vulnerable in society (Glaeser & Gyourko, 2018).

Housing program eligibility definitions could result in an incorrect alignment of services with the needs of youth experiencing homelessness (Chor et al., 2019). Including issues within the continuum of federal housing support eligibility criteria (Fowler, Marcal, Zhang, Day, Landsverk, et al., 2019). Youth may not be able to receive housing support services until they have spent an extended time homeless. They are not considered to be experiencing homelessness after a single emergency shelter stay but after repeated exposures to precarious housing situations and lack of support to cope with the situation (Fowler, Marcal, Zhang, Day, Landsverk, et al., 2019). They meet a severity threshold to qualify for intervention, while youth experiencing less severe problems remain ineligible. However, there have not been any empirical studies that have determined if these thresholds are appropriate indicators of housing needs (Fowler, Marcal, Zhang, Day, Landsverk, et al., 2019). This can be even more problematic for

those who do not have a support system as they may not be able to navigate the requirements to get housing support.

Homelessness Among Youth Exiting Foster Care

Youth leaving foster care are more likely to experience homelessness and residential instability (Citrin et al., 2018; Lockwood et al., 2015). Housing is one of the common challenges young people face aging out of the foster care system (Fowler, Marcal, Zhang, et al., 2017). Between the years of July 2010 and June 2012 25% to 50% of these youth experience inadequate housing, and 11% to 37% experience homelessness at least once in the years leaving foster care (Shah et al., 2017). Of those youth who exited foster care, 29% had experienced homelessness by the age of 21 (Kelly, 2020). The federal government recognizes housing instability and homelessness among youth formerly in foster care as significant problems (HHS, 2017). More focus has been placed on developing programs reducing homelessness among this population (HHS, 2018).

Factors Related to the Homelessness of Youth Who Aged Out of Foster Care

Social Support and Networks

A lack of social support and safety-net-like connections is one of the main challenges for youths transitioning to adulthood from child welfare services (Paulsen, 2016a). As former foster youth transition into adulthood, social support becomes crucial (Munson et al., 2015). This can be started by encouraging youth leaving foster placements to stay in touch with the families they have been with (Zinn et al., 2017a). Important social support relationships should be encouraged with relatives, friends, support groups, independent living programs, and mentoring programs (Blakeslee, 2015;

Curry & Abrams, 2015; Mccauley et al., 2017; Thompson et al., 2016). Courtney et al. (2016) established Support from peers and friends plays a role in addressing the issue of homelessness among the youth aging out of foster care (Courtney et al., 2016). However, some youth may find challenges in maintaining family relationships due to histories of maltreatment by caregivers, unstable living arrangements, and difficulties in establishing attachments (Thompson, Wojclak et al., 2016). Social support may also be related to the outcomes of maltreatment on other factors that can impact homelessness including psychological and emotional functioning, self-esteem, and resilience (Horan & Widom, 2015).

The social support of individuals with maltreatment or insecure attachment styles is often lower than that of other individuals (Sirois et al., 2016). Foster youth who have aged out of the system have reported that receiving financial, emotional, and other support from their mentors and foster families has improved their housing stability outcomes (Thompson, Wojclak et al., 2016). The importance of social support for protection against adversity is important throughout one's lifetime and is especially crucial during evolving stages of family life and the transition to adulthood (Lee & Goldstein, 2016; Paulsen, 2016a). Researchers have just begun to explore the role and meaning of social support in the lives of youth leaving the foster care system without traditional supports (Curry & Abrams, 2015; Lee & Goldstein, 2016).

The transition to adulthood for youth who leave foster care is often fraught with difficulties without the support of an adult, a resource that is increasingly crucial since youth rely more on their families into young adulthood (Swartz & O'Brien, 2016). With

structural changes in education, employment, economics, and social policy, young adults now rely more on their parents and extended family for financial assistance, housing resources, as well as emotional and social support to bridge the transition to adulthood (Swartz & O'Brien, 2016). However, because most youth enter foster care due to neglect, parental drug use, parents' inability to provide for the youth's needs, physical abuse, inadequate housing, and severe behavioral problems (Children's Bureau, 2018). As youth leave the foster care system, they may live with their family of origin, an adoptive family, or live in an alternative setting such as a group home (Brandon-Friedman & Fortenberry, 2019; Children's Bureau, 2018).

Peer relationships play a key role in the foster youths' identity development, self-esteem, and behavior. Peer connections are protective in terms of child well-being, while poor peer relationships negatively affect adjustment to family life (Gypen et al., 2017; Thompson et al., 2016). In recent years, there has been a growing body of research and conceptual work exploring natural mentoring relationships and their potential benefits for youth emancipating from foster care (Thompson et al., 2016). Unlike structured mentoring relationships, natural mentoring depends on the youth's social-emotional competencies and social environments. Youth who have aged out of foster care who had a close relationship with college-experienced adults were more likely to enroll in college (Okpych & Courtney, 2017). Informal mentoring seems to benefit youth in obtaining a higher education (Huang et al., 2018; Raposa et al., 2019).

In addition, when youth who have aged out of foster care engage in higher education, they may have more opportunities to develop formal and informal mentor

relationships which can then support them through other life aspects (Zinn, 2017). Higher education experiences can cultivate meaningful relationships and provides support in various forms, such as emotional and informational support (Narendorf et al., 2019). Natural mentoring has numerous benefits, including improvements in transitioning to adulthood and psychosocial outcomes for young people (Thompson et al., 2016).

Education and Employment

The challenges these youth faces are significant developmental, interpersonal, educational, and career standpoints and that often develop from academic deficits (Morton, 2015). The number of placements necessitates frequent changes in schools, they frequently repeat grades during their school years, and they frequently do not do well academically because of behavioral problems (Clemens et al., 2016; Morton, 2015). Transitioning youth who have left foster care have difficulty finding employment and coping with financial hardship as they age out due to limited academic achievement. As a result, their income is below the poverty level since they often hold low-wage, unskilled jobs.

Researchers found that youth with a strong educational foundation are more successful in their transition into adulthood (Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2016) . Youth who have been in the foster care system experience difficulties in achieving academic success (Piel et al., 2018). Lack of education can contribute to difficulty establishing stable housing and housing instability can contribute to lowered academic success and attainment (Piel et al., 2018).

Young people who have lived in the foster care system may have poor educational standards and performance compared to their counterparts who were under the care of their parents (Geiger & Beltran, 2017). Fowler, Marcal, Zhang, Day, Landsverk, et al. (2017) found that only 8% of former foster youths between the ages of 25 to 26 years old received postsecondary degrees compared to 46% of the young adults from the general population. Other researchers have also Geiger and Beltran (2017a) found that foster youth have lower college completion rates than their peers (Geiger & Beltran, 2017a). Low educational outcomes have been contributed to many factors, including the lingering effects of maltreatment, secondary school mobility, inadequate college readiness, and financial hardships.

Extended foster care (EFC) has been found to be critical for supporting youth who have been in foster care while they are in college (Okpych & Courtney, 2020). However, only about half of the states have enacted laws extending the emancipation age limit (Juvenile Law Center, 2018). Foster youth receiving extended care remain in contact with case managers, receive training in independent living skills, and are directed to community resources. Youth in extended care can reside with kin, nonrelative foster families, or special living arrangements tailored to older youth. Youth who are considered ready for independent living, for instance, can live in an apartment and receive a monthly subsidy to cover the costs of rent, utilities, and food (Okpych & Courtney, 2017).

By eliminating barriers and creating opportunities, the EFC assists many young people in transitioning from secondary to postsecondary education (Okpych & Courtney, 2017). Resources in these programs also include housing, tutoring, mental health

services, college grants, and opportunities to set realistic goals. With proper coordination, young people in foster care could even get scholarships because they can also consider adopting the best educational plan to shape their careers (Fryar et al., 2017).

Nearly 25% of youth who have aged out of foster care do not have a high school diploma which can make it difficult for them to find employment that will afford them appropriate and stable housing (Zinn & Courtney, 2017). By the age of 26, only 46% of youth who left foster care held jobs, while 80% of the 26-year-olds in the general population were employed (Thompson et al., 2016). Those who were not in the foster care system were found to have an average annual income of \$32,312 while those who had been in foster care had an average annual income of \$13,989 (Gypen et al., 2017). These youth do not have enough income to pay their rent and utility bills and hence face economic hardships which can lead to continued homelessness as well as the potential to engage in risky behavior such as criminal activities (Gypen et al., 2017).

Coping and Decision-Making Skills

Youth who have aged out of foster care have been found to use active, support-seeking, and cognitive coping strategies in their transition activities (Grey et al., 2015). These individuals will exhibit varying levels of resilience during this transition (Rebbe et al., 2017; Shpiegel & Osasio, 2015). For example, while one group may show few adverse and many positive outcomes, others display similar adverse outcomes and less positive ones.

Newell et al. (2015) argued that it is complicated to understand how and why people make their decisions, and the insights gained from studying it require intrapsychic

and interpersonal constructs. It is less known what the experiences of youth aging out of care are and whether they can make competent decisions. Stress generally adversely impacts a child's or adolescent's brain development (Romeo, 2017; Sciaraffa et al., 2018). Because foster care youth may have experienced more traumatic events during their childhood and may be under more chronic stress, they may be less able to make good decisions (Lee & Morgan, 2017). Those without foster care experience fewer adverse childhood experiences and have greater access to resources and social support; therefore, they may have better decision-making skills than those aged out of the foster care system (Scannapieco et al., 2016).

Mental Health Issues

Lack of social support and social capital is linked to mental health (Tortelli et al., 2017). An estimated 1.3 million homeless youth live in shelters, in temporary housing, and on the streets in the United States (Morton et al., 2018). Instability can place youth in situations that may harm them emotionally or physically, such as experiencing social injustice, sexism, homophobia, or living in a place where violence frequently occurs (Heerde et al., 2015). Those who experience mental illness might need greater emotional, educational, and financial support from their families while also striving for independence in these areas (Skehan & Davis, 2017). Youth may lack the necessary skills to manage their mental health care independently because they have never done so (Chan et al., 2019).

Social anxiety can be triggered by several factors when young adults go through a difficult transition period (Larson & Luna, 2018). Youth who left foster care were found

to be adversely affected by housing, finances, food security, education, career goals, and personal connections including the development of social anxiety (Greeson et al., 2020).

Researchers have identified late adolescence and young adulthood as two of the prime times of loneliness in individuals' lives (Qualter et al., 2015). Separation from friends and family may result in the termination of close relationships, and the discord between the levels of social contact desired and achieved (Arnett, 2015). In order to adapt to this new environment, the development of new social relationships, especially intimacy and friendship, are essential. Loneliness, burdensomeness, and hopelessness (Kleiman et al., 2017; Ribeiro et al., 2018), can lead to affective disorders (Gili et al., 2019; Opakunle et al., 2019), psychosis (Huang et al., 2018), and substance use disorder (Darvishi et al., 2015; Igundunasse & Medubi, 2019).

Those we have relationships with contribute time, energy, and financial resources to young adults' continuous development and provide 'bailout' effort to young adults vulnerable to poor decisions (Goldsmith, 2018). The presence of a friend or loved one during difficult times can offer comfort and support (Adamczyk et al., 2016). Support of family and friends' positively affects the psychological health of emerging adults such as increased self-esteem (Szkody & McKinney, 2019) while lower levels of family and friend support predicted greater levels of loneliness in this life stage (Lee & Goldstein, 2015). A lower level of social support at this stage could result in greater loneliness, depression, and potentially suicidal ideation (Bell et al., 2017; Lee & Goldstein, 2016).

Risky Behavior

Researchers have found that substance abuse, anxiety, depression, unplanned pregnancies, and teen pregnancies correlate with foster care experience (Bronsard et al., 2016; Kääriälä & Hiilamo, 2017). Furthermore, they tend to experience chronic homelessness, higher rates of mental illness, unwanted pregnancies, and substance abuse (Gypen et al., 2017; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016; Scannapieco et al., 2016).

Substance use has the potential to lead to unstable housing and homelessness can be a risk factor in developing substance abuse (Crawford et al., 2018; Gypen et al., 2017). There is already an increased risk of youth who have been in foster care of developing issues related to substance use due to having traumatic childhood experiences (Wolff & Baglivio, 2017). There is a benefit of having the support of past foster parents through the transition period as it can help alleviate the chances of substance abuse and other vices (Miller et al., 2017).

Engaging in criminal behavior after aging out of foster care are associated with cumulative disadvantage, which puts those youth at particularly high risk for poor life outcomes (Crawford et al., 2018). It is vital to look at the risk and protective factors associated with youth aged out of foster care who are denied fundamental rights and privileges because of their criminal history (Goodkind et al., 2020). Wolff and Baglivio (2017) posited that it is increasingly evident that traumatic childhood experiences and child maltreatment are strongly associated with juvenile delinquency, which contributed to juvenile youth recidivism, and found that traumatic childhood experiences contributed to recidivism.

Summary and Conclusions

Regarding the challenges homeless former foster youth face in the transition to adulthood, the results of various studies are significant. Homeless former foster youth represent a high-risk group with multiple needs (Bender et al., 2015). Former foster youth experience housing instability and homelessness upon leaving the foster care setting. Some former foster youth remain at risk despite receiving assistance from family (Fowler, Farrell, et al., 2017). The lack of connections and pressure for self-sufficiency may prevent aged-out foster youth from securing and maintaining stable housing. Thus, the lack of social support may contribute to housing instability and homelessness among emancipated foster youth. However, after leaving foster care, little is known about the impact of social support on housing stability for former foster youth. This population has significant barriers to employment and tends to remain in poverty during the transition to adulthood.

The literature review focused on former foster youth, aging out, homelessness, health, social support, mental health, criminal justice involvement, education, and employment. The literature review showed that various studies regarding the challenges that homeless former foster youth face while transitioning to adulthood are significant. Homeless former foster youth represent a high-risk group with many needs (Braciszewski et al., 2016; Fowler, Hovmand, et al., 2019).

During their transition to adulthood, the youths bring little human capital, which they can use to support themselves economically (Curry & Abrams, 2015; Raymond-Flesch et al. (2017). The youth's employment history is poor, where very few individuals

manage to do away with poverty while transitioning (Zinn & Courtney, 2017). Many former foster youths experienced housing instability and homelessness upon leaving the foster care setting (Glaeser & Gyourko, 2018). The literature demonstrates how social capital theory is an appropriate lens for researching homelessness among former foster youth. Social capital theory is a valuable framework for a growing social support network for foster youth moving into adulthood since bonding and bridging systems provide reliable support networks that build reciprocity over time (Lin, 1999). Chapter 3 demonstrates the research design rationale, and methodology relevant to this study. It provides the justification of the design, data collection, and data analysis of this study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

Transitioning youth may be at risk for housing insecurity and other problems because of the disruptions of services and a lack of family support (Fowler, Marcal, et al., 2017). Former foster youth may enter adulthood with the feeling of uncertainty concerning their future (Arnett, 2015a). The transition to adulthood for young people with foster care experience may be difficult and occur earlier than they are ready, increasing their risk of homelessness (Rosenberg, 2019). Social support affects multiple components of young adulthood, such as physical, emotional, and psychological well-being; college adjustment; and socioeconomic well-being (Guan & Fuligni, 2015). Support changes and well-being were influenced not only by individual characteristics, but also by family factors (Guan & Fuligni, 2015). As youth transition into adulthood, they undergo a multidimensional process that is influenced by their past experiences of vulnerability, their strengths, their levels of support, their possible problematic outcomes, and their challenges to become self-sufficient (Häggman-Laitila, et al., 2019).

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of homelessness from the perspective of former foster youth who aged out of the foster care system without continued support. In this chapter, I discussed the research design, my role as the researcher, and the rationale behind my approach. I discussed data collection, the recruitment of the participants, the ethical procedures, and how I ensured trustworthiness within this study.

Research Design and Rationale

I sought to answer the following research question: What are the lived experiences of homelessness from the perspective of youth who aged out of the foster care system without continued support? In this qualitative study, I followed the phenomenological tradition in which the researcher aims to describe a phenomenon by interpreting it through analysis of individuals' lived experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019; Ungvarsky, 2020). Hermeneutic phenomenology is based on the tenet that individual experiences already have meaning before being recognized by others (Spence, 2016). This approach aligns with a constructivist epistemology where knowledge is created through the interpretations of multiple individuals and a relativist ontology, which states that truth is subjective (Neubauer et al., 2019). Contrary to transcendental phenomenology, hermeneutics recognizes that individual commonalities and distinctions are as essential to understanding a phenomenon as shared experiences and that the researcher is an active part of the world, as is the participant (Webb & Welsh, 2019). Heidegger (1953/1996) referred to these additional levels of data as added dimensions to the experience. This expansion offers a deeper understanding and a broader meaning of the phenomenon. Qutshi (2018). Hermeneutic phenomenology was appropriate for this study because I sought to understand the lived experiences of former foster youth by eliciting their pre-reflective experiences (see Neubauer et al., 2019; Smith, 2018). A hermeneutic (interpretive) phenomenological interpretation involves more than just analyzing and interpreting data. Furthermore, hermeneutic conceptualizations of lived experience emphasize the relevance of meaning attributed to

that experience. It is incomplete to describe a lived experience without understanding its meaning for the individual (Frechette et al., 2020).

Role of the Researcher

My role as the qualitative researcher included gathering data. As the main instrument of the study, I was both the observer and interviewer during data collection (see Shufutinsky, 2020). It is important as the researcher to reflect on every detail collected. The key to reflexivity is for the researcher to make explicit their relationship with, and influence on, and participants; this requires reflecting on their values and recognizing, examining, and understanding how their social background, location, and assumptions affect their research practice (Palaganas et al., 2017). When developing the interview questions, my role was to mitigate bias through wording; I also needed to observe participants' body language throughout the interviews (Shufutinsky, 2020).

Nevertheless, it is important not to forget that participants' and researchers' bias and worldview are present in all social research, intentionally and unintentionally (Fusch & Ness, 2015). My efforts as the researcher were critical to the validity and reliability of this research study (see Shufutinsky, 2020). The researcher cannot tell whether the findings make sense or represent the ruminations of another's mind so this means that the interpretation of the collected data will be colored through the lens of the researcher's experiences and knowledge (Florczak, 2022). As such, they must be aware of their influences on participants' responses during the interview process (Florczak, 2022). The researcher must be present in the moment to allow participants to tell their stories; to allow for this, I took field notes to document any thoughts that I had during the interview

about what was being said. I read these field notes when reviewing the transcripts to be conscious about any potential biases I had.

The qualitative researcher must balance appearing indifferent and being too involved with the participant because either will influence what is said (Florczak, 2022). I ensured that I did not have any other professional or personal relationships with the participants. I did so to ensure that participants would feel comfortable sharing information with me.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

In the United States, 397,000 children live in foster care every day (HHS, 2019); over 200,000 of these children are between 12 and 20 years of age. Every year, approximately 20,000 foster children become emancipated at the age of 18, a state that is known as emancipation. Most foster youth turn 18 and are expected to live and function independently as adult (HHS, 2019).

I used purposeful and snowball sampling to select participants. Purposive sampling serves the purpose of matching the sample to the aims and objectives of the study, thus improving the quality of the study and the validity of the data (Campbell et al., 2020). There are four aspects of validity: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirm ability (Campbell et al., 2020). Snowballing sampling allows those who see the recruitment materials or participate in the study to tell others who may qualify about the study (Ungvarsky, 2020). This is a helpful sampling strategy where the desired participants may be difficult to identify or reach (Ungvarsky, 2020). I included a

statement on the recruitment materials (see Appendix A) that indicated that those who saw the recruitment materials could share information about the study with others. To participate in this study, the following inclusion criteria needed to be met:

- age 18 and over
- have aged out of foster care (regular foster care or extended foster care)
- have experienced homelessness after aging out of foster care
- are currently housed
- had a transition plan at time of aging out of foster care
- had a lack of support after aging out of foster care
- can speak and understand English

Those who did not meet all the inclusion criteria above were excluded from participation in the study (see Appendix B).

I aimed at the final sample size of 10 individuals based on similar qualitative studies with the same population (Ellis, 2020). A sample size of five to 10 is recommended for a hermeneutic phenomenological study (Miller et al., 2018). However, I needed to ensure that I could reach saturation in the data collection. IRB gave me the approval to proceed to interview 10-20 participants if needed. Data saturation occurs when enough information is available to replicate the study and no additions to the data are needed (Fusch & Ness, 2015). A sample of 10 allowed me to achieve saturation (see Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Instrumentation

I asked several demographic questions during the interviews to obtain a description of the sample (see Table 1).

Table 1

Demographic Questions and Prompts

Question no.	Question	Prompt
1	What is your age?	Age in years
2	What is your gender?	Male, female, other, prefer not to answer
3	What age did you “age out” from foster care?	Actual age in years
4	What is the highest degree you have completed?	No high school diploma, High School diploma/General equivalency diploma, Certificate, associate degree, bachelor’s degree, master’s degree, doctoral degree
5	What is your race?	White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Native, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, two or more, prefer not to answer
6	Do you get support (emotional or financial) from your birth family?	Yes, no, prefer not to answer
7	Do you currently have permanent housing such as an apartment, house, or room where you “live”?	Yes, no, prefer not to answer

Note. HS = high school; GED = general equivalency diploma.

Semi structured interviews were a valuable technique which allows the researcher to gather in-depth accounts of the experiences of individuals (Evans & Lewis, 2018). The interview questions aligned with the research question and theoretical framework. The

interview questions highlighted the experiences after exiting foster care, focusing on their housing stability and support (see Table 2).

Table 2*Interview Questions and Prompts*

Question no.	Question	Prompt
1	Tell me about before you were emancipated and how you prepared yourself for that transition?	Tell me more about your experiences and how it made you feel.
2	Tell me about your experience of being emancipated from foster care?	Tell me more of what was going on in your mind.
3	What type of relationships did you manage to keep after leaving foster care?	Tell me about the difficulties you had keeping in contact.
4	What were some of the difficulties you faced after leaving foster care?	Tell me more about your difficulties you faced.
5	What were your successes after leaving foster care?	Tell me more about your successes.
6	What changes could have been in your transition plan to better help in finding housing?	Tell me more about what the focus in your transition was.
7	How did you form relationships after leaving foster care?	Please explain.
8	What experience did you have in achieving education?	Tell me what that experience was like.
9	Were you able to make contact to obtain housing assistance?	Tell me what that experience was like.
10	Were you able to get employment after leaving foster care?	Tell me what your experience was like.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I contacted a representative from a Facebook social media group, the Youth Emerging Stronger group in Los Angeles to inquire about interviewing some of their youth followers. I also contacted representatives of the LinkedIn youth-based groups Volunteers of America and HOPICS in Los Angeles to inform them of my intent to post a

flyer on their site. Once I received approval from the IRB, I will begin the recruitment of participants by posting flyers containing information about my research topic, purpose, eligibility criteria, and contact information (see Appendix A). Deviations from this recruitment plan are discussed in Chapter 4.

Participants contacted me using the contact information provided on the recruitment materials. Once they contacted me, I emailed them the inclusion questions (see Appendix B) or asked them on the phone depending on how they contacted me. I also attached a copy of the informed consent form for their review. I informed them that if they answer all the questions “yes” to review the attached informant consent form. If they consented to participate, they should email me answers to all the inclusion items (if all yes) and the words “I consent” in that reply if they consented to participate. If they contacted me via phone, I asked them the inclusion items and if they answer all of them “yes” I read them the informed consent and asked if they consent by responding “I consent” (for those who consent via phone I reviewed the informed consent during the recorded interview before asking any study questions). I provided them a list of dates/times to choose from to schedule the interview. I scheduled the interview based on their availability. I conducted individual interviews using their choice of Zoom or a phone interview. Although face-to-face interviews were preferable for their contextual data, the use of other technology is becoming widespread in the field of qualitative research as face-to-face interviewing becomes less viable (De Villiers et al., 2021).

Individuals who agreed to participate in the study was provided an informed consent form to sign. At the time of the interview, I began by introducing myself to my

participants. and asking if they had any questions about the study or interview process. I asked them if is ok to start the recording. If they answered “yes”, I started the recording and then began asking the prepared questions. If they answered “no”, I thanked them for their time and ended the interview. At the end of the interview, I asked them if they had an email address or if they have a physical mailing address where I could send the transcript to for review. They had 7 days (by email) or 14 days (by mail) to review the transcript and let me know if there were any issues. If I did not hear from them after that time, I assumed that the transcript was accurate. I also let them know that I sent their \$15 Visa gift card to their email or postal mail address, depending on their preference. I will send a summary of the study results using that same contact information when the dissertation is completed and I have received final approval for the study from Walden University. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. After transcription, I listened to the recording of the interview while reading the transcript to ensure that the transcription is accurate. I made edits as necessary based on the information in the recording.

Data Analysis Plan

Once the transcripts were completed, I listened to the recording of the interview and compared the transcription to ensure that Thematic Analysis (TA), a commonly used method that provides an overview of data and themes to consider how those segments are interconnected, forming a cohesive whole (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). I followed the following steps as part of this process:

1. I transcribed the data, identifying any personal thoughts and values I am experiencing (Clarke & Braun, 2017).
2. I encoded my data into specific groups relevant to my research question.
3. I searched for themes and patterns that match the coded information. While searching for themes, I remained aware of my personal bias by keeping a reflexive journal (Nowell, 2017).
4. I reviewed the codes and themes to reflect similarities between youth experiences to understand whether qualitative analysis software should form more themes for better analysis (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).
5. I evaluated the themes and codes by naming every theme and revealing a story.
6. I developed a narrative to answer the research question based on the themes, similarities, differences, and overarching story.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are prerequisites for ensured that the results of a qualitative study are accurate and generalizable (Armankwaa, 2016). To strengthen trustworthiness, I thoroughly recorded the details of my study, the data, the process of analysis, and details pertinent to the research (Nowell et al., 2017). Creditability refers to the accuracy of the data and interpretation of lived experiences (Cypress, 2018) I established credibility by member checking during the interview process by asking each participant each question again for clarity and accuracy in their responses. I also established credibility by using the triangulation method conducting the interview

responses from a few participants (Noble & Heale, 2019). I used member check by revisiting participants to review the data for accuracy by repeating the questions (Birt et al., 2016). I used self-reflection through journaling my finding, my strategy of approach, to better understand my topic, and any bias I had (Knapp et al., 2017).

I ensured transferability by providing thick descriptions of the research participants (Nowell et al., 2017). Maintaining an audit trail of logs and debriefing colleagues with each other are important procedures for maintaining dependability. A process log is a record of all events that take place during a study and decisions regarding aspects of the study, such as who to interview and what to observe and not uncommon for a qualitative study of a phenomenon experienced by individuals to be very similar (Connelly, 2016)

Confirmability is the confirmation that extends the researchers' awareness of biases, monitoring, and ensuring they do not influence the process or results of research (Urban, 2018). I conducted member check by revisiting participants to review the data for accuracy by repeating the questions (Birt et al., 2016). I used self-reflection through journaling my finding, my strategy of approach, to better understand my topic, and to identify bias (Knapp et al., 2017). Peer debriefing requires the researcher to share detailed notes with another trained researcher to gain their thought and response to my research findings (Francois et al 2018).

Ethical Procedures

I followed the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) mandates. IRB reviewed and approved my procedures ensure the participants' rights were protected

(HHS, 2018; Tsan & Nguyen, 2015). Also, I completed the human subjects training offered by the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (see Appendix C). The ethical consideration is to be mindful using tactful and innovative methods that will encourage a full spectrum of participation throughout the process to gain information (Tremblay et al., 2018). As the primary instrument, it is the researcher's responsibility to manage the ethical considerations of the study. These considerations include the voluntary nature of the study, informed consent, privacy, confidentiality, risks, benefits, and data storage.

Participants in this study were age 18 and over so they could provide informed consent for themselves. I did not specifically recruit individuals who are considered a member of a vulnerable population (pregnant, currently experiencing homelessness, have mental illness, etc.), although I cannot guarantee that participants did not belong to one of these groups. I ensured that the questions asked, and interview process are at a level that are not more onerous than required by the scope of the study.

Confidentiality was maintained by assigning participants pseudonyms when referring to them and using quotes from their interviews (Kawar et al., 2016). The only individuals who may know the identity of the participants would be myself, my committee members, and members of the IRB if they request to review my data (recording, transcripts, data being coded). Informed consent was provided to participants via the procedures for participation outlined above. The participants had the right to change their minds about participating in the study at any time as participation was voluntary.

An incentive was given to those who volunteered to participate and met with the researcher (even if they withdraw their participation during the interview or after). A \$15 Visa gift card so that they can use it anywhere they wish. All data will be stored in a locked safe in an external, password-protected USB drive for 5 years after receiving final approval of the study from Walden University. At that point the USB drive information will be deleted.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I discussed the description of the research design. This section began with the research question based on a phenomenological design comprising the researcher's role, methodology, data collections, and analysis. Ethical considerations and the value of this study were brought to light concerning former foster youth. The significance of this study lies in its potential to increase readers' awareness that there is a huge problem of homelessness for former foster youth exiting from foster care and the need for child welfare policy changes. In Chapter 4, I will present the results of my investigation.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of youth who have aged out of foster care as they navigate transitioning into adulthood. These youth face unique barriers related to their history and background in the child welfare system, making it difficult to maintain housing, education, and job security (Curry & Abrams, 2015). Raymond-Flesch et al. (2017) posited that once foster children reach the age of emancipation, their sense of stability ceases, leaving them without the safety net of the child welfare system and the support of parents and other adults. In addition, social networks decrease over time, leaving them at a disadvantage without permanent connections to professional help (Singer & Berzin, 2015). Raymond-Flesch et al. pointed out that this group needs the support of the family and the social support of the informal social network within the society, such as community agencies that support their success in society. The research question for this study was, what are the lived experiences of homelessness from the perspective of youth who aged out of the foster care system without continued support? In this chapter, I discuss the setting, participant demographics, and data analysis. I also provide evidence of trustworthiness and present the study results before concluding with a summary of the chapter.

Setting

I obtained IRB approval for this study (no. 09-21-2023-0230098) on September 21, 2022. The study participants were recruited starting on December 5, 2022.

Participants were recruited and interviewed following the process described in Chapter 3

although I had difficulty finding organizations that were willing to allow me to post recruitment materials through their organization. The original plan was to contact Youth Emerging Stronger via Facebook, but I was unable make any contact with this agency. After several attempts, I contacted Volunteers of America, which declined to participate due to their confidentiality policies. HOPICS agency also declined to participate for confidentiality reasons. I then contacted Grace Resources and the Mental Health of America Los Angeles agency, and both accepted my recruitment flyer for posting on their social media sites and their facilities.

Demographics

In Chapter 3, I discussed my plan to recruit 10 participants who were 18 years and over. Recruiting proved challenging due to the confidentiality policies in place at the organizations mentioned in Chapter 3. After continuing my efforts, I was able to recruit a total of 10 participants who met the inclusion criteria (see Appendix B). The age range of the sample was between 19 and 42 years old. Six of the 10 participants identified as Hispanic. Table 3 shows the demographic information for each participant.

Table 3

Participant Demographics

<i>Participant no.</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Support</i>	<i>Housing</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Current employment</i>
1	19	Male	White	Yes	Yes	High school	No
2	23	Female	Hispanic	No	Yes	High school	No
3	32	Male	Hispanic	No	Yes	High school	Yes
4	37	Female	Hispanic	Yes	Yes	Some college	Yes

5	40	Female	Hispanic	No	Yes	Associate degree	No
6	40	Female	Black	Yes	Yes	High school	Yes
7	29	Female	Hispanic	No	Yes	Certificate	Yes
8	36	Female	Hispanic	No	Yes	Some college	Yes
9	32	Female	Black	No	Yes	No	Yes
10	42	Female	Mixed	No	Yes	Bachelor's degree	Yes

Data Collection

Grace Resources and Mental Health of America Los Angeles agencies accepted the recruitment flyer (see Appendix A) to post. The flyer disclosed information about the research study, including the benefits and duration. I posed 10 questions to the 10 participants, with follow-up questions directed at three participants. Each interview began with verification that each participant met the study criteria (see Appendix B). I also ensured that I obtained signed consent. Appointments for each interview were scheduled for a time convenient for participants via telephone. I reiterated that the place should be in a safe private location that is secured where no distractions could occur and no one else could hear. I also informed the participants that I would be recording the interview. Each interview took 90 min or less depending on the time it took the participant to respond to the questions. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. After transcription, I listened to the recording of the interview while reading the transcript to ensure that the transcription was accurate. I made edits as necessary based on the information in the recording.

Data Analysis

I decided to manually code the data instead of using software because this gave me the opportunity to analyze my data to a deeper extent by incorporating the hermeneutic approach. I analysis my data in six steps. In the first step I created a table of three columns. The first column identified the participant and the interview question. The second column listed the narrative from the interview data (see Appendix D). The third column listed the initial words and phrases from the narrative. This process continued until every question was asked and words and phrases noted. In the fourth step I reread the data and initial codes and phrases. Next, I recorded and placed the data into categories. In the fifth step I was able to see the relationship between my research question and social capital theory, which applies to many contexts, including individuals (Bourdieu, 1986), families (Coleman, 1988), and communities (Putnam, 2000).

In the final step, Step 6, I narrowed down the coded words and phrases. The final coded words were derived after coding and recoding of the data. The codes led to the identification of eight themes. Theme 1 was aging out; Theme 2, differing quality of transition plan; Theme 3, experiences of homelessness; Theme 4, social support; Theme 5, effect on mental health; and Theme 6, education, and employment outcomes. Figure 1 illustrates the codes associated with each theme.

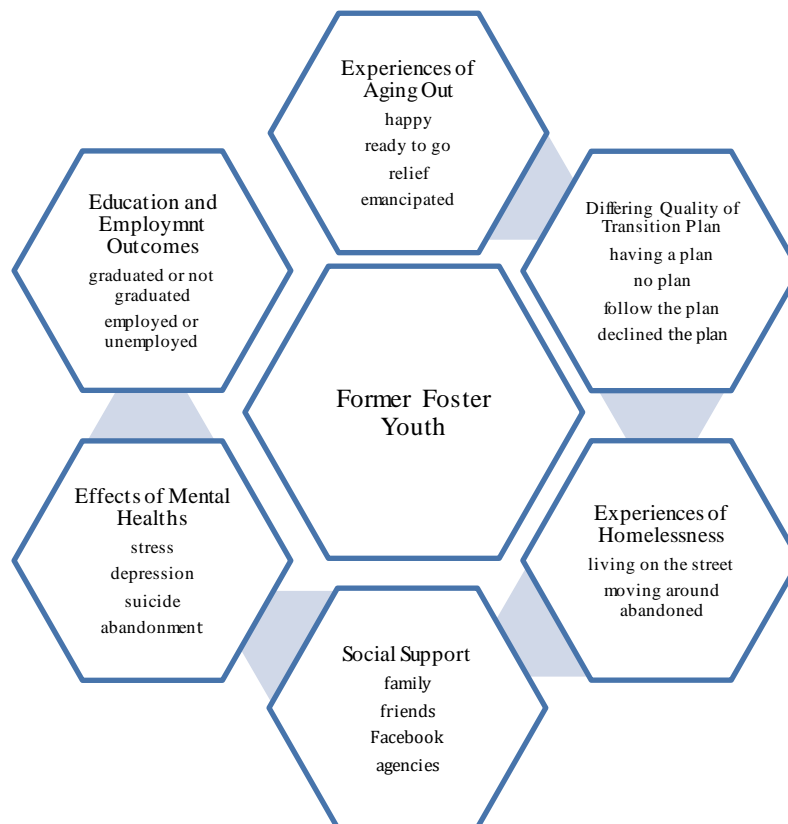
Figure 1*Illustration of Themes and Codes*

Table 4 shows which themes were present in each participant's responses. The table illustrates the prevalence of the themes among participants.

Table 4*Themes Present in Participant Responses*

Theme	Participant no.									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Experiences of aging out	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
2. Differing quality of transition plan	X	X				X		X		
3. Experiences of homelessness		X	X	X			X	X	X	
4. Social support	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X
5. Effect on mental health			X	X	X			X	X	X

6. Education and employment outcomes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
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Note. An "X" in a table cell indicates that the participant's response was congruent with the theme in that row.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was a crucial part of integrity that is the results of a qualitative study that is accurate and generalizable (Armankwaa, 2016). Trustworthiness was the result of thoroughly recording the details of a study, the data, the process of analysis, and details pertinent to the research (Nowell et al., 2017).

I used the method of semistructured interviewing that allowed me to gather more in-depth data to their experiences (Cypress, 2018) to ensure that my research findings were credible. The interview questions aligned with the research question and theoretical framework. The interview questions highlighted the experiences after exiting foster care, focusing on their housing stability and support. I incorporated direct quotes from participants to support my findings. I also used peer debriefing as a way to gain thoughts of other trained researchers (Francois et al 2018).

I ensured transferability by providing thick descriptions of the research participants (Nowell et al., 2017). A sample size of 10 was used to interpret this hermeneutic phenomenological study (Miller et al., 2018). This approach aligned with a constructivist epistemology where knowledge is created through the interpretations of multiple individuals and a relativist ontology which states that truth is subjective (Neubauer et al., 2019). This chapter was revealed as the research design, my role as the researcher, and the rationale behind my approach. I discussed data collection, the

recruitment of the participants, the ethical standards, and how I used trustworthiness within this study.

Dependability was confirmed by using the interview questions approved by IRB. I maintained a process log of the interviews that took place during such as who I interviewed and what I found after I interviewed each participant. I maintained an audit trail of logs and debriefing colleagues with each other are important procedures for maintaining dependability. (Connelly, 2016).

Confirmability was the confirmation that extended the researchers' awareness of biases, monitoring, and ensuring they do not influence the process or results of research (Urban, 2018). My data was recorded and transcribed manually which gave me the opportunity to analyze my data on a deeper extent by incorporating the hermeneutic approach. Further use of transcribing manual I defined my themes and revised my codes and refined my themes until I was satisfied with my analysis leaving out any bias thoughts. I member checked by revisiting participants to review the data for accuracy by repeating the questions (Birt et al., 2016). I self-reflected on my data through journaling my finding, my strategy of approach, to better understand my topic, and dismiss bias (Knapp et al., 2017). I shared my detailed notes researcher to share detailed notes with another trained researcher to gain their thought and response to my research findings (Francois et al 2018).

Results

The research question for the study was, what are the lived experiences of homelessness from the perspective of youth who aged out of the foster care system

without continued support? The themes that were derived from the interview data that answered the research question include (a) experiences of aging out, (b) differing quality of transition plan, (c) experiences of homelessness, (d) social support, (e) effect on mental health, and (f) education and employment outcomes.

Theme 1: Experiences of Aging Out

All 10 participants expressed their experiences of transitioning out of the foster care system. Rosenberg and Kim (2018) defined aging out as the period of transitioning from youth to an adult as when one starts to have an adult identity. Transitioning youth often have had little experience of living independently (Häggman-Laitila et al., 2018). As a result, they had to become independent earlier than their peers. There are concerns about the life outcomes of individuals who were in foster care, particularly those who aged out (Yi & Wildeman, 2018).

Some of the participants were excited about leaving the foster care system. Participant 1 expressed “I felt happy and ready to move forward and it was of getting out of the system instead of waiting longer than that I am ready to return to my family (dad). I was sad to exit out and leave my little brother behind. A transition plan was offered but I declined it because I wanted to go back to my family and receive the support from him.”

Other participants indicated that aging out of foster care put them in a position of uncertainty. Participant 2 expressed “I was ready to exit and move forward without being under the eye of something, having some freedom. I started having ILP meeting with my social worker a year before emancipating out but during that time I ended up pregnant and afraid of losing my child to the system. Things changed and I went to live with a

foster parent that that I really like but it shut down right before I turned 18 and my daughter was born. I became homeless for a while and went to live with biological parents but that only lasted a few months. I just kind of transitioned from one place to another: no stability.

Others indicated that they really were not prepared for the aging out process. Participant 5 expressed “Well honestly; I was at um Saina uh Saint Anne’s Group home with my daughter because I was a un um I was a teenage pregnant mom. I mean they give you barely anything that can help you. So, I had to emancipate myself to be able to take care of my daughter, to be able to get on the county? and to be able to do that. So, once I got in that foster home, I emancipated like right after that.

’This theme highlighted the issues that former foster youth faced when they age out of foster care. While some youth who are aging out of foster care are happy about going through the transition, researchers have indicated that thousands of youths are aging out of care unprepared and without support (Paulsen & Berg, 2016; Rutman & Hubberstey 2016).

Theme 2: Differing Quality of Transition Plan

Having a transition plan was identified as an important factor in a successful transition for former foster youth. Researchers indicated that having transition plan in place before youth transition out of foster care create better outcomes during this transition period (Armstrong-Heimsoth et al., 2021). These include plans surrounding education, employment, residency, developing and maintaining social support. Many youth, however, opt-out of the opportunities to engage in transition planning or abandon

the plan when they leave foster care, stating they choose independence at the time of emancipation (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Some youth may not understand the need for a quality transition plan or how it can help with the move from foster care to adulthood. Participant 2 expressed “I was connected to an ILP coordinator that kind of helped me out, but it wasn't the same thing, um just not knowing basically the unknown um scared me? At the time when I emancipated out, once you turned 18 that was it, there was really no additional resources provided um like there are now, so there was no ability to stay in the system and get money. It was just you turned 18 and you figure it out on your own, that's pretty much what it came down to.”

Other participants expressed that they did not even know that they had a transition plan which caused them to have to find other support after aging out of foster care. Participant 5 expressed “Honestly, I did not know I had a transition plan. I had financial difficulties, so my sister told me about Mental Health of America Los Angeles which helped me become self-sufficient. To this day, I still have a good relationship with MHALA. Honestly, I tried going back to school but my mindset, I get distracted. Even with the medications I get distracted. I never went back to get my diploma. I got help in finding employment and I still have a job”

Youth may also not know that they have a voice in the transition plan process. Participant 6 expressed “I just followed what my social worker had in place.”

Theme 3: Experiences of Homelessness

Youth leaving foster care were more likely to experience homelessness and residential instability (Citrin et al., 2018; Lockwood et al., 2015). Housing was one of the common challenges young people face aging out of the foster care system (Fowler, Marcal et al., 2017). Twenty-five percent to 50% of these youth experienced inadequate housing and 11% to 37% experience homelessness at least once in the years leaving foster care (Shah et al., 2017). There were a few participants that expressed their experiences of homelessness. Each experience was different from others.

Participant 6 expressed “It was different. I mean, that's all I can say it was it was different. Um Yeah, I went homeless for 3 years.” Participant 3 expressed “Okay at that time because of the stuff I was going through. “I ended up homeless in the street. Um I was also very, very depressed. Uh? So, I was suicidal.”

Participant 2 expressed “I was homeless for a while. Um I did go back to my parents, but that only lasted for like six months and then I left again.” “I just kind of just transitioned from place to place. There was no stability. Um I did go to school but because of the instability, I really didn't um do well? in school and I kept on failing. Um So it's just a lot of instability. “Participant 4 expressed “I was homeless for less than six months. Having someone translate for me because of my hearing impairment.”

This theme related to the continuous problem of homelessness face as youth age out of foster care. In the United States, it is a serious challenge to provide housing for youth experiencing homelessness (Morton et al., 2018). HHS (2017) reported that, in 2016, 41,662 U.S. youth aged 18 and over were homeless on any given night. Youths

commonly experience mental health disorders, the risk of sexual victimization, and lack of access to health care when they experience homelessness (Curry et al., 2017). It is important to address the youth as one of the most vulnerable groups through improved policies that address the underlying causes of the problem and effectively serve some of the most vulnerable in society (Glaeser & Gyourko, 2018).

Theme 4: Social Support

The transition to adulthood for youth who leave foster care was often fraught with difficulties without the support of an adult and other social networks (Swartz & O'Brien, 2016). The importance of social support for protection against adversity was important throughout one's lifetime and is especially crucial during evolving stages of family life and the transition to adulthood (Lee & Goldstein, 2016; Paulsen, 2016a). It is often difficult for youth who have aged out of foster care to keep their sources of support. Participant 3 expressed “I felt everyone brushed me off as a troublemaker and even my social worker did not listen to my cry for help. I suffered from depression because of I felt abandoned, and I had feelings worthlessness being and unwanted. I was rebellious and in trouble with the law a lot.”

Youth may also experience feeling of not understanding those who are in positions to support them which may leave them unsupported. Participant 4 expressed “I had some tough time because I am hearing impaired and had difficulties understanding my social worker. I had feelings of stress.” They also may be experiencing things that their previous support systems may not understand or wish to support which can lead to abandonment by those supports. Participant 5 expressed “I was a teenage mom and was

sent to St. Anne's for pregnant girls. At 18 they pretty much kicked me out and I had to go back to a foster home which was horrible. It was most definitely the financial aspects of it, trying to find somewhere to go, trying to find somewhere to live. They did not help with allowance, barely anything so I had to emancipate myself to take care of my daughter.”

For others, they may suddenly lose their support system but may be lucky enough to find new sources of support. Participant 4 expressed “I was finally on my own and realized that I had to figure things out on my own. I managed to stay connected with other hearing-impaired friends through Facebook.”

This theme coincided with the challenges these youth faced leaving foster care without a support system. A lack of social support and safety-net-like connections was one of the main challenges for youths transitioning to adulthood from child welfare services (Paulsen, 2016a). Furthermore, it was argued that a connection continues to grow as they venture out on their own,

Two participants expressed how they formed and kept their relationships intact. A couple of the participants felt their relationships dissolved after aging out foster care, while some expressed maintaining long term relationships. Participant 2 expressed “I formed them I think pretty well. um I think being in foster care um strengthen my communication skills as well at some point. Um So I feel that it definitely has helped.”

Participant 5 expressed “So, I'm like, I'm trying to think like, like even like XXX from MHALA that's the relationship I built because even though I haven't talked to her in a couple of years. I was a part of that program when I was 19 and I am 33 now. So, I've

known her for 12 years so, that's building a relationship. I have one friend that We were we were like 13 or 15 running away together but it's not a relationship now we're just Facebook friends, we don't talk and all the time or how you are doing.

This theme was an example of the importance of having a nurturing relationship with friends, family, and other mentorships while transitioning from foster care. Peer relationships played a key role in fostering youths' identity of development, self-esteem, and behavior. Peer connections were protective measures in terms of child well-being, while poor peer relationships negatively affect adjustment to family life (Gypen et al., 2017; Thompson et al., 2016).

Theme 5: Effect on Mental Health

Youth who have aged out of foster care can experience negative emotional and physical experiences including acts of social injustice, sexism, homophobia, and/or living in a place where violence frequently occurs (Heerde et al., 2015). These youth need additional emotional, educational, and financial support while striving for independence (Skehan & Davis, 2017). Some participants indicated that they experienced negative effects on their mental health when they aged out of foster care. Participant 4 expressed "I had feelings of stress because it was hard to understand. I felt I had no support." Participant 3 expressed "Um I was also very, very depressed. Uh? So, I was suicidal." Luckily, some youth who age out of foster care are able to get support for their mental health needs. Participant 2 expressed "Hmm? I would say, I did get connected to a really good mental health agency, that that was one of my main goals was to finish school. So, I received the support through that agency."

This theme identified with some of the participants as having a lack of social support and social capital is linked to mental health (Tortelli et al., 2017). This was also brought awareness argued by researchers as social anxiety can be triggered by several factors when young adults go through a difficult transition period (Larson & Luna, 2018). Youth who left foster care were found to be adversely affected by housing, finances, food security, education, career goals, and personal connections including the development of social anxiety (Greeson et al., 2020).

Theme 6: Education and Employment Outcomes

Education and employment were prominent factors in the transition after foster care for some of the participants. However, it was shared that it was more difficult to obtain these things after aging out of foster care. Participant 5 expressed “Honestly, No, I mean I try to go back to school um it's just my mindset is just so, I'm just so distracted, you know what I mean? Even though I have my medications and stuff, I'm just honestly distracted. So, I never went back to school, and I never got my diploma.”

Participant 7 expressed “Um I have had a hard time, a really tough time achieving that on my own”. Participant 4 expressed “I went back to school when I was 26 and got my degree in accounting.”

A few of the participants expressed their difficulties finding work due to the lack of support for family, friends, and outside agencies. They also struggled some in getting employment. Nearly 25% of youth who have aged out of foster care do not have a high school diploma which can make it difficult for them to find employment that will afford them appropriate and stable housing (Zinn & Courtney, 2017). By the age of 26, only

46% of youth who left foster care held jobs, while 80% of the 26-year-olds in the general population were employed (Thompson et al., 2016).

Participant 2 expressed “Hm? I was already connected to some type of like summer program where I worked at six flags.” “Um and had that for a while.” “But then didn't have employment for like 4 or 5 years after emancipating out. And it wasn't until that Mental health agency helped me find a job.”

Participant 4 expressed “I was in an employment program that helped me get a job.”

Participant 5 expressed “MHALA e also help with employment, I got into their employment services and um with them I was able to get a job.” “Um I still have a job now.”

Researchers argued that the challenges these youth faces are significant developmental, interpersonal, educational, and career standpoints and that often develop from academic deficits (Morton, 2015). The number of placements necessitates frequent changes in schools, they frequently repeat grades during their school years, and they frequently do not do well academically because of behavioral problems (Clemens et al., 2016; Morton, 2015). As a result, other researchers found that youth with a strong educational foundation are more successful in their transition into adulthood (Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2016). Youth who have been in the foster care system experience difficulties in achieving academic success (Piel et al., 2018). Lack of education can contribute to difficulty establishing stable housing and housing instability can contribute to lowered academic success and attainment (Piel et al., 2018). This theme showed that

some of the participants had a difficult time focusing on continuing their education due to their mental health struggles. While others managed to go back to school. It also shows that not having a support system to encourage them played a significant part in their ability to better their education.

Summary

Chapter 4 included a report of the study findings. I conducted interviews with the 10 participants to answer the following research question: What are the lived experiences of homelessness from the perspective of youth who aged out of the foster care system without continued support? This chapter also included an overview of the demographics and data collection process with details of the interview process, coding process, and themes administered during this study. This study included matters of social capital theory and how this theory is incorporated to identify the connections of social disparities among former foster youth. I also utilized the hermeneutical approach which offers a deeper understanding and a broader meaning of the phenomenon Qutoshi (2018). The hermeneutic approach also aimed to understand the lived experiences of former foster youth through eliciting their pre-reflective experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019; Smith, 2018). The objective of this study was to examine former foster youth and their experiences after leaving foster care.

The themes that were discovered as results were experiences aging out of foster care, transition plan, social/financial support, homelessness, mental health issues, relationships, education, and employment. All the participants aged out of foster care

range at the ages of 18 and 42. Chapter 5 includes discussion of the findings of the study and recommendations to conclude this study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

I undertook this study to examine the lived experiences of former foster youth after aging out from foster care. For the theoretical foundation, I used social capital theory, which expounds on the issues of trust, rules, and norms related to social behavior, and types of social interactions between individuals (Bourdieu, 1986). The hermeneutic interpretive approach was used to investigate the complex phenomenon of former foster youth experiences after aging out of care (see Johnson & Bradbury, 2015; Neubauer et al., 2019). Consistent with this approach, I conducted semistructured interviews to allow the participants to express their lived experiences.

The research question for the study was, what are the lived experiences of homelessness from the perspective of youth who aged out of the foster care system without continued support? The themes that were derived from analysis of the interview data include (a) experiences of aging out, (b) differing quality of transition plan, (c) experiences of homelessness, (d) social support, (e) effect on mental health, and (f) education and employment outcomes. In this chapter, I interpret the findings, discuss the limitations and implications of the study, offer recommendations, and provide a conclusion to the study.

Interpretation of the Findings

I used phenomenological hermeneutic approach and a theoretical framework consisting of social capital theory to examine the lived experiences of former foster youth by using the theoretical framework of social capital theory and answer my research

question. I interpret the findings of this study based on the research questions and the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The research question asked, What are the lived experiences of homelessness from the perspective of youth who aged out of the foster care system without continued support? This question revealed several responses from all participants on their experiences of aging out from foster care. The interpretations revealed that some former foster youth remain at risk despite receiving assistance from family (Fowler, Marcal, et al., 2017). I also found that the lack of connections and pressure for self-sufficiency may have prevented aged-out foster youth from securing and maintaining stable housing. The transition from foster care to independent living is often abrupt for youth out of it; this increases the risk of negative outcomes such as underemployment, low educational attainment, homelessness, early parenthood, involvement with the justice system, and mental health issues (Harwick et al., 2017).

My finding is consistent with other research in highlighting that the process of leaving foster care can be unplanned and unfocused, with little support from care providers, birth families, or institutions (see Haggman-Laitila et al., 2018). Each participant expressed their experiences of aging out differently. They expressed that they had to become independent earlier than their peers. Some researchers have noted concerns about the life outcomes of individuals who were in foster care, particularly those who aged out (Yi & Wildeman, 2018). Analysis of the findings of this study revealed that having multiple transition plan options created better outcomes during this transition period, a finding that is consistent with the literature (see Armstrong-Heimsoth et al., 2021). These included plans surrounding education, employment, residency, and

development and maintenance of social support. Many youths, however, opt out of opportunities to engage in transition planning or abandoned the plan when they leave foster care because of a desire for independence at the time of emancipation (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Researchers showed that homelessness is a significant public health issue and that individuals who suffer from homelessness, particularly young people, experience physical, emotional, and spiritual health impacts (Sznajder-Murray et al., 2015). These impacts increase their chances of having mental health issues that become a barrier for a successful transition into adulthood. Those who experience mental illness might need greater emotional, educational, and financial support from their families while also striving for independence in these areas (Skehan & Davis, 2017). Another indicator of challenges is their ability to cope, which may have also triggered social anxiety when young adults go through a difficult transition period (Larson & Luna, 2018). Youth who leave foster care have been found to be adversely affected by housing, finances, food security, education, career goals, and personal connections, and are at risk for the development of social anxiety (Greeson et al., 2020). The lack of empirically sound assessments and the definition of homelessness has limited progress toward promoting stable housing for vulnerable emerging adults (Fowler, Marcal, Zhang, et al., 2019). In the transition to adulthood, a lack of stable, supportive families increases former youth risk for homelessness (Fowler, Hovmand, et al., 2017). The scope of housing problems and unclear definitions for eligibility can lead to a lack of adequate housing services for these vulnerable emerging adults (Chor et al. 2018).

Another factor identified through research as crucial in former foster youth's development is the need for social support (Munson et al., 2015). A lack of social support and safety-net-like connections is one of the main challenges for youths transitioning to adulthood from child welfare services (Paulsen, 2016a). Studies also show that having a social relationship with their foster families is beneficial (Zinn et al., 2017a) and increases youth's relationships with support groups, independent living programs, and mentoring programs (Blakeslee, 2015; Curry & Abrams, 2015; Mccauley et al., 2017).

I found education and employment to be key concerns of youth leaving care. Researchers have found that youth with a strong educational foundation were more successful in their transition into adulthood (Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2016). Youth who have been in the foster care system experience difficulties in achieving academic success, however (Piel et al., 2018). Lack of education contributes to difficulty establishing stable housing, and housing instability can contribute to lowered academic success and attainment (Piel et al., 2018). Some of the participants expressed their difficulties in finding employment later in life. This finding is consistent with the literature, which shows that nearly 25% of youth who have aged out of foster care did not have a high school diploma, which can make it difficult for them to find employment that will afford them appropriate and stable housing (Zinn & Courtney, 2017). According to a Midwest study youth who age out of foster care earn (\$14,148 a year) roughly half that of matched youth (\$28,105) (Rosenberg, 2018).

Limitations of the Study

I examined the lived experiences of homelessness from the perspective of youth who aged out of the foster care system without continued support. The study participants lived in Los Angeles County in California, so the results of this study are limited in their generalizability (see Hedenstrom, 2021). In addition, the participants may not have disclosed whole truths about their experiences because they felt uncomfortable disclosing personal experiences to someone with a different societal background or ethnicity (see Schenk et al., 2018). Commonality among homeless youth who were not involved in the foster care system are challenging to measure and evaluate (Yoshioka-Maxwell, 2017). Finally, the method of collecting data from youth, interviews, may not have yielded reliable results, which may have led to recall errors and unreliable source (Zinn et al., 2017).

Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, I recommended a closer look be taken to better understand the disconnection in policies for youth in secure housing, education, employment, before they age out of foster care. I found that the transition plan process was inconsistent in relation to the quality of those plans and that some youth did not even know that there was a plan in place. Perhaps the social workers should minimize their workloads to dedicate more time to understanding and involving the youth to develop a transition plan that suits their individual needs. It is important for youth to be involved in that planning and to understand the support systems that are available to them once they leave the foster care system.

There were far too many youths transitioning without linkage to transitional housing opportunities. There is also shown a need for youth to have accessible linkage to mental health services because participants indicated that the aging out of foster care process is stressful and there are mental health challenges associated with that process. It is recommended that case workers reach out to the disconnections of families to encourage possible reunification. I also recommend that each youth should be treated as an individual as their wants and needs are different.

Implications

There are implications revealed in this study that some youths are aging out of the foster care system without a prepared transition plan that highlights their goals to obtain housing, education, and employment. There are various policies that could be revised to improve the outcomes of this group and decrease certain risks. There are implications that show limited transitional housing availability which may lead to homelessness. The umbrella of support that was once provided while in foster care is abruptly stopped, risking their involvement in unhealthy situations. These situations may lead to pregnancy, drugs, or criminal involvement.

Mental health is another implicating factor that showed an increase in emotional instabilities. It is implied that after exiting the foster care system former foster youth are not supplied with resources to increase their opportunities to build a significant network that allows them to have a chance at success after aging out of the foster care system. Social change implies making a difference in the lives of people who do not have the right resources to make their lives better. Social change is about having equal

opportunities to make life better. Social change that I foresee for former foster youth is envisioned with the concept of social capital where this group can receive the same opportunity as others in building their foundations to move forward in becoming self-sufficient. Having connections to mental health support and other support systems directing to education, employment and housing opportunities are important building blocks for youth aging out of foster care.

Conclusion

I used a phenomenological hermeneutic approach to investigate the study topic and answer the research question, which was the following: What are the lived experiences of homelessness from the perspective of youth who aged out of the foster care system without continued support? This study highlighted the gap in social support available to the sample and addressed the issue of homelessness and mental health. The results indicated that aging out was a difficult process and that having a place to live was the most important matter. The support that was once offered to them was abruptly stopped. Many youth who age out of foster care are unprepared and without direction. Having a transitional plan was important to participants' outcome. Despite the efforts of the foster care system, some youths are unsuccessful after aging out of foster care. As this study shows, there is a need for this group to have normalcy after aging out of foster care to bond and connect with others. With this knowledge, stakeholders may have greater awareness of the target population's needs and may be able to take appropriate action.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

Volunteers wanted for Research Study**Former Foster Youth Navigating Their Way into Adulthood**

Do you meet these criteria? If so, please consider assisting me with my PhD dissertation study.

- Age 18 and over
- Have aged out of foster care (regular foster care or extended foster care).
- Have experienced homelessness after aging out of foster care.
- Are currently housed
- Had a transition plan at time of aging out of foster care.
- Had a lack of support after aging out of foster care.
- Can speak and understand English.

This research is part of the doctoral research study for Debra Hampton, PhD student at Walden University.

I am conducting a research study on former foster youth and their transition into adulthood. I would like to know your experience and perception of that experience.

You are invited to participate in an interview via telephone. The interviews will consist of questions focused on your transitioning experience from the foster care system and will take a couple of hours or less.

Your participation is likely to help find out more about how the foster care system helped transitioning youth and improve the foster care transitioning experiences in the future. A \$15 gift card will be given to each participant.

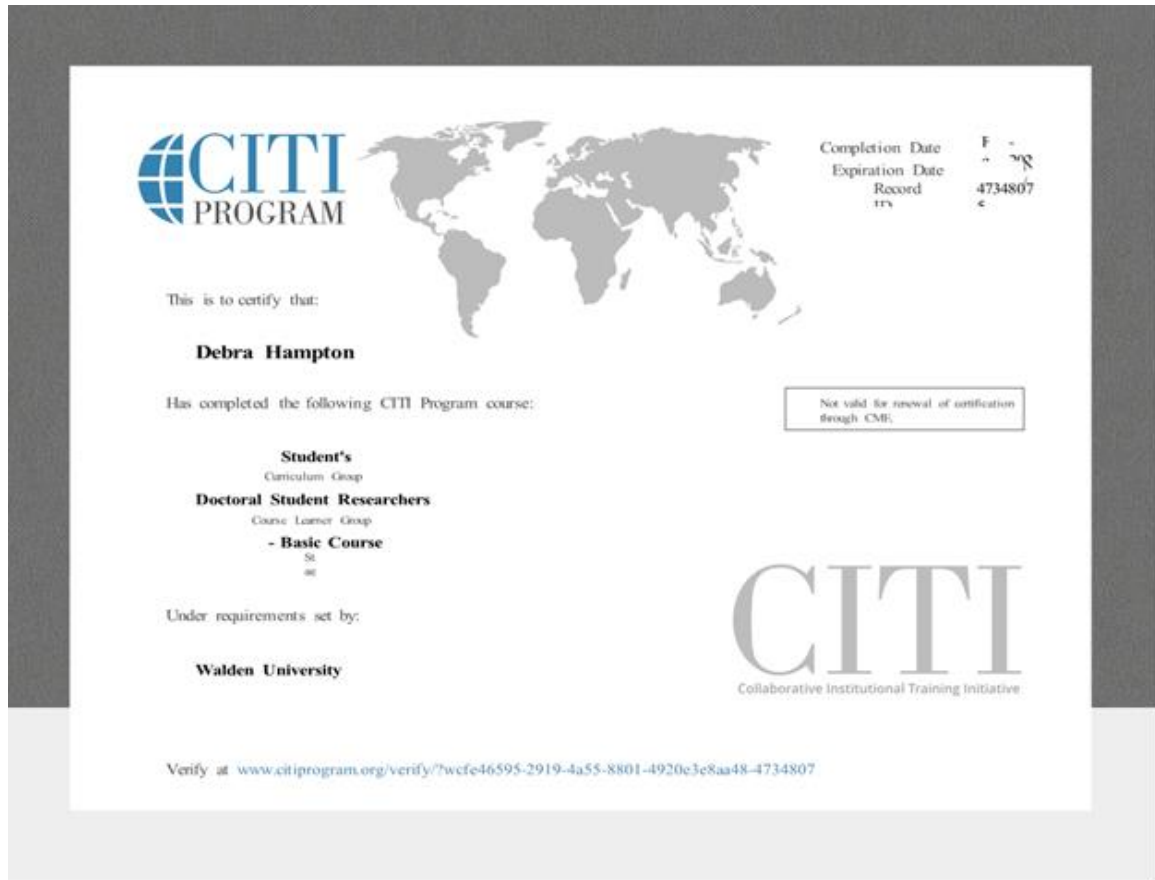
Please contact Debra Hampton [telephone number redacted] if you are interested in participation in this study.

If you know anyone who may qualify to participate in this study, please forward this information to them!!

Appendix B: Inclusion Questions

1. Are you 18 or older? (yes/no)
2. Have you aged out of foster care (regular foster care or extended foster care)?
(yes/no)
3. Have you experienced any homelessness after aging out of foster care? (yes/no)
4. Are you currently housed? (yes/no)
5. Did you have a transition plan at time of aging out of foster care? (yes/no)
6. Have you experienced a lack of support after aging out of foster care? (yes/no)
7. Can you speak and understand English? (yes/no)

Appendix C: Certificate of Completion for Human Subjects Training



Appendix D: Interview Data

Introduction of the researcher
Introduction of Participant 1

Question 1-Tell me about before you were emancipated and how you prepared yourself for that transition?

“Um, it was very uh, I guess it wasn’t that bad, it’s one way of getting out of the system instead of waiting. I was ready to leave and move back home.”

Prompt question 1-Tell me more about your experiences and how it made you feel?
“I was happy to be leaving and be with my dad.”

Question 2- Tell me about your experience of being emancipated from foster care?

“Um, aging out of the foster care system uh, I really didn’t have to stay in the foster care system when I get to be with my dad and stuff like that.”

Prompt question 2-Tell me more of what was going on in your mind?

“I was thinking that it was gonna be great that they um that I guess I aged out at that time since like there was no, doesn’t really happen at the moment? besides aging out, it was pretty great, I guess.”

Question 3- What type of relationships did you manage to keep after leaving foster care?

“My relationship with my dad and my little brother.”

Prompt question 3- Tell me about the difficulties you had keeping in contact.

“I had difficulties keeping in contact with my little because I left foster care before him.”

Question 4 What were some of the difficulties you faced after leaving foster care?

“Uh leaving my brother behind in not be able to see him until they’re uh you only get the visit when he gets a visit.”

Prompt question 4- Tell me more about your difficulties you faced.

“I felt sad about leaving my little brother behind. I really didn’t want to feel that way.”

Question 5- What were your successes after leaving foster care?

“I got to finish high school.”

Prompt question 5- Tell me more about your successes.

“I was able to see my brother during visit and stuff like that.”

Question 6-What changes could have been in your transition plan to better help in finding housing?

“Um None because I didn't really want any transition plan because I just wanted to just go home to my uh my dad.”

Prompt question 6- Tell me more about what the focus in your transition was.

“I know they were trying to help me, but I was focused on going home.”

Question 7- How did you form relationships after leaving foster care?

“Um Just talking to people basically, the relationship stopped after a while.”

Prompt question 7-Please explain.

“I only kept relationship with my dad and little brother.”

Question 8- What experience did you have in achieving education?

“I got my high school diploma.”

Prompt question 8- Tell me what that experience was like

“I was able to finish after I left foster care. My dad helped me because my foster parents wasn't willing to help me.”

Question 9- Were you able to make contact to obtain housing assistance?

“I didn't make contact because I didn't, I wasn't um at the time really thinking about that.”

Prompt question 9-Tell me what that experience was like.

“They wanted to help but I declined to. I said no because I wanted to go home to my family.”

Question 10- Were you able to get employment after leaving foster care?

“I did. And then I got out of it for a bit since uh it was temporary.”

Prompt question 10- Tell me what your experience was like.

“I am basically in the process of looking for a more stable job.”

Introduction of the researcher

Introduction of Participant 2

Question 1-Tell me about before you were emancipated and how you prepared yourself for that transition?

“Um I remember when I was emancipating, I was having um independent living meetings that kind of discuss what my future was going to look like. Probably started like a year before I emancipated out. Um but during that time I ended up pregnant, so that kind of just changed things and I think my main thing to help me out was just kind of looking what were my options because I hadn't graduated high school. Um So I worked with my social worker to try to see where I was actually going to go.”

Prompt question 1-Tell me more about your experiences and how it made you feel?

“Um aging out of the system obviously, I was looking forward to no longer having to um be under the eye of something all the time. I mean I recall being in the system, not even being able to hang out with friends, they had to be fingerprinted and things like that. So just having finally some freedom and not having to be told what I had to do with something I was definitely looking forward to. Um but at the same time I also had fears because I was pregnant um I had just had my newborn and I was more afraid that they were gonna take her away from me. So, I felt like? it was more stress on me just to make sure that I didn't lose her back to the system um was my main concern at the time, so it's just a lot of fears. Um like I said just having it, by that time I had I was about to have my newborn, so I just was really afraid that I was that they were gonna take her and it seemed as though that's where the department was going.”

Question 2- Tell me about your experience of being emancipated from foster care?

“Oh yeah, definitely, definitely. I mean it was different in the sense that I didn't know, you know what was turning 18, all support was also gonna go away. Um I was connected to an ILP coordinator that kind of helped me out, but it wasn't the same thing? um just not knowing basically the unknown um scared me? At the time when I emancipated out, once you turned 18 that was it, there was really no additional resources provided um like there are now, so there was no ability to stay in the system and get money. It was just you turned 18 and you figure it out on your own, that's pretty much what it came down to.”

Prompt question 2-Tell me more of what was going on in your mind?

“I was more worried about losing my kid at that time”

Question 3- What type of relationships did you manage to keep after leaving foster care?

“Mm I would say I kept in contact with my only my coordinator for a while, but any other um relationships really went away, like I need to talk to my foster mom after I emancipated out.” “Um, I didn’t stay in contact with my social worker after I was out. Um so I really didn’t keep the relationships um, unfortunately right about a year or two before I emancipated out, I was in a foster home that I really liked, but the foster home was been shut down and it seemed like I got taken away from another family.”

Prompt question 3- Tell me about the difficulties you had keeping in contact.

“I actually had to do like monitored visitations with my foster mom and you know the literally three weeks before turning it before um my daughter was born, I was told that the county had placed a restraining order against my foster mom and I was no longer allowed to have contact with her”.

Question 4 What were some of the difficulties you faced after leaving foster care?

“I was homeless for a while. Um I did go back to my parents, but that only lasted for like six months and then I left again.”

Prompt question 4- Tell me more about your difficulties you faced.

“I just kind of just trans transition from place to place. There was no stability. Um I did go to school but because of the instability, I really didn’t um do well? in school and I kept on failing.” “Um So it’s just a lot of instability.”

Question 5- What were your successes after leaving foster care?

“I think my successes came in my 20’s, when I finally um when I had another, when I had had another kid and um have decided to really work on my recovery and when I was about 23, I started working as a case manager.”

Prompt question 5- Tell me more about your successes.

“Mm I’ve been able to keep my children. I did get my GED and my driver’s license.”

Question 6-What changes could have been in your transition plan to better help in finding housing?

“I would think being connected to some type of homeless resource agency.

Prompt question 6- Tell me more about what the focus in your transition was.

“Um, mainly finding resources that I needed.”

Question 7- How did you form relationships after leaving foster care?

"I think that's something I still struggle with now um if it's not like coworkers or family, I just I still have like three people that I met in foster care that I still have communication with."

Prompt question 7-Please explain.

"And throughout the years I have like re-met with one of my foster moms and my foster sister. We still keep in touch."

Question 8- What experience did you have in achieving education?

"Hmm? I would say, I did get connected to a really good mental health agency, that that was one of my main goals was to finish school. So, I received the support through that agency."

Prompt question 8- Tell me what that experience was like

"I did go to college, but I didn't finish it."

Question 9- Were you able to make contact to obtain housing assistance?

"Mm? I don't think so that I can recall back then. No."

Prompt question 9-Tell me what that experience was like.

"I think what I ended up doing is I ended up getting an apartment with my sister and going half on the rent with her."

Question 10- Were you able to get employment after leaving foster care?

"Hm? I was already connected to some type of like summer program where I worked at six flags." "Um and had that for a while."

Prompt question 10- Tell me what your experience was like.

But then didn't have employment for like four or five years after emancipating out. And it wasn't until that Mental health agency helped me find a job.

Additional comment from participant 2

"I would say that the time that I emancipated out, there wasn't really additional support, there was some support through like independent living programs and I attended those. Um I mean my coordinator um retired and after she retired, it was like I never heard

from anybody again.” “Um, also I think in the beginning it was strong but it was only because of the individual working with me, not because I would say the program's really reached out to me, it was just that specific case manager, um that would really work with me and kind of like helped me out a little bit more, I mean they had their typical every six months meeting, but that's all it felt like a typical meeting. It wasn't like I really felt that they were, you know, there to support me.”

“I would say as working with youth, I have seen that the emancipation process is a little bit smoother. I would say now um than it was when I when I aged out, I aged out in like 2000 and? four, So it definitely has changed dramatically. But I would say back then there wasn't really that additional support that I see now um when I work with my homeless youth, I see there's a lot more support than there was then.”

Introduction of the researcher

Introduction of Participant 3

Question 1-Tell me about before you were emancipated and how you prepared yourself for that transition?

“I was at several foster homes for a while and before aging out. I aged out of a foster home in Palmdale, Ca.”

Prompt question 1-Tell me more about your experiences and how it made you feel?

“Uh I have trust issues, abandonment issues. Um I mean uh I learned a lot of everything I did out of cause like the only emotions I knew were anger and hate. Um I was also very, very depressed. Uh So, I was suicidal.”

Question 2- Tell me about your experience of being emancipated from foster care?

“I ended up homeless in the street. Um I was also very, very depressed. Uh? So, I was suicidal.”

Prompt question 2-Tell me more of what was going on in your mind?

“Uh first I was a little bit relieved because I had a roof over my head and then all the things that I've gone through uh you know what I mean.”

Question 3- What type of relationships did you manage to keep after leaving foster care?

“I managed to keep one relationship which is my current girlfriend.”

Prompt question 3- Tell me about the difficulties you had keeping in contact.

“I had feelings worthlessness being and unwanted.”

Question 4 What were some of the difficulties you faced after leaving foster care?

“Okay at that time because of the stuff I was going through. I ended up homeless.”

Prompt question 4- Tell me more about your difficulties you faced.

“Like nobody wanted me, that's how I seen it. So, I felt abandoned again.”

Question 5- What were your successes after leaving foster care?

“Um Actually yeah. Uh I ended up getting sober for a while. I end up getting a job.”

Prompt question 5- Tell me more about your successes.

“Um I finally started believing myself and I got jobs, so I was able to hold down jobs and then now enrolling in college.”

Question 6-What changes could have been in your transition plan to better help in finding housing?

Prompt question 6- Tell me more about what the focus in your transition was.

“Uh I would say I probably had one but because of okay uh like my stay in the foster care system was not a good stay. I was probably in over 30 something foster homes and group homes. Um I think what would help if they would actually listen, I felt everyone brush me off as a troublemaker and even my social worker did not listen to my cry for help.”

Question 7- How did you form relationships after leaving foster care?

“I managed to keep only one relationship.”

Prompt question 7-Please explain.

“Only with my current girlfriend.”

Question 8- What experience did you have in achieving education?

“I got my diploma, my G. E. D. And even now considering my circumstance I'm actually completed two college classes and I'm enrolled for another one.”

Prompt question 8- Tell me what that experience was like

“I got through it. Yeah, it does. I finally started believing myself and I got jobs, so I was able to hold down jobs and then now enrolling in college.”

Question 9- Were you able to make contact to obtain housing assistance?

Prompt question 9-Tell me what that experience was like.

“Oh, when I was out there this last time. Yes. Uh I went to this place called Valley Oasis; I think it's called Valley Oasis.”

Question 10- Were you able to get employment after leaving foster care?

“Uh No actually uh I did it the old-fashioned way because I finally got out of my own way and started believing that I was worth something.”

Prompt question 10- Tell me what your experience was like.

“So, I literally hit the payment for about six months straight? asking for jobs from this one place and they finally gave me an opportunity to get my first job.”

Introduction of the researcher

Introduction of Participant 4

Question 1-Tell me about before you were emancipated and how you prepared yourself for that transition?

“I had to figure things out myself had some tough time because I am hearing impaired and had difficulties understanding my social worker.”

Prompt question 1-Tell me more about your experiences and how it made you feel?

“I had feelings of stress because it was hard to understand. I felt I had no support.”

Question 2- Tell me about your experience of being emancipated from foster care?

“I was finally on my own and realized that I had to figure things out on my own.”

Prompt question 2-Tell me more of what was going on in your mind?

“I had to figure things out on my own.”

Question 3- What type of relationships did you manage to keep after leaving foster care?

“I managed to stay connected with other hearing-impaired friends through Facebook.”

Prompt question 3- Tell me about the difficulties you had keeping in contact.

“It was hard for a while but I my foster mom found me on Facebook, and I have kept contact with her and visiting her.”

Question 4 What were some of the difficulties you faced after leaving foster care?

“I had difficulties getting help preparing and budgeting my money.”

Prompt question 4- Tell me more about your difficulties you faced.

“I was homeless for less than six months. Having someone translate for me because of my hearing impairment.”

Question 5- What were your successes after leaving foster care?

“I was able to get my own place and have a job.”

Prompt question 5- Tell me more about your successes.

“Being on my own and being independent.”

Question 6-What changes could have been in your transition plan to better help in finding housing?

“A social worker who can communicate with me better. An interpreter to help me understand better.”

Prompt question 6- Tell me more about what the focus in your transition was.

“I wish someone helped me prepare and get a budget to pay rent and bills.”

Question 7- How did you form relationships after leaving foster care?

“Not really, Oh! My foster mom for five years I was able to build and keep the relationship.”

Prompt question 7-Please explain.

“I managed to stay connected with other hearing-impaired friends through Facebook.”

Question 8- What experience did you have in achieving education?

“I went back to school when I was 26 and got my degree in accounting.”

Prompt question 8- Tell me what that experience was like

“I was working a lot at age 20 and didn’t go back to school until I was 26.”

Question 9- Were you able to make contact to obtain housing assistance?

“I was referred to a ILP transitional housing program.”

Prompt question 9-Tell me what that experience was like.

“Within the program I went to an agency for help with apartment and moving cost.”

Question 10- Were you able to get employment after leaving foster care?

“I was in an employment program that helped me get a job.”

Prompt question 10- Tell me what your experience was like.

“It was a struggle but I got through.”

Introduction of the researcher

Introduction of Participant 5

Question 1-Tell me about before you were emancipated and how you prepared yourself for that transition?

“Um Well honestly, I was at um uh Saint Anne's Group home with my daughter because I was a un um I was a teenage pregnant mom.”

Prompt question 1-Tell me more about your experiences and how it made you feel?

“I was 18 years old. And well, I actually got they pretty much kicked out when you're 18 so then I had to go to a foster home um with my which was horrible because you know, they don't give, you know, you know, allowance, I mean they give you barely anything that can help you. So, I had to emancipate myself to be able to take care of my daughter, to be able to get on the county? and to be able to do that. So, once I got in that foster home, I emancipated like right after that.”

Question 2- Tell me about your experience of being emancipated from foster care?

“It was most definitely the financial aspects of it, trying to find somewhere to go, trying to find somewhere to live.”

Prompt question 2-Tell me more of what was going on in your mind?

“I never knew about the county, and I learned about the county. So, I got in the county for me and my daughter because like I said I was only 18 years old.”

Question 3- What type of relationships did you manage to keep after leaving foster care?

“I couldn't ask for anything better than MHALA like I said when I first I don't know what I was going to do but they told me they could help me with housing and everything I would need for me and my daughter being so young at 18, I really I have been so sheltered being in the foster care system that I didn't know about a lot of things, I didn't know about a lot of um you know uh agencies and a lot of things that can help you out there. So, me going there, my sister is the one that first involved me with MHALA because she was involved with them first, she's the one that brought to them and cause ...”

Prompt question 3- Tell me about the difficulties you had keeping in contact.

Question 4 What were some of the difficulties you faced after leaving foster care?

“Um But I had uh enrolled in um mental health America, so they helped me and my sister get an apartment and start like you know they were helping us um try to be independence. Uh, I never knew about the county, and I learned about the county. So, I got in the county for me and my daughter because like I said I was only 18 years old.”

Prompt question 4- Tell me more about your difficulties you faced.

“I was trying to secure I place for me and my daughter. If was to get county help, which was food stamps, which was, you know what I mean? The foster parents honestly to me are all about the money I've been there since I was two years old. Um They barely even wanna give your allowance so it really sucks. But if you also have a child with you and you're underaged mother, it's even harder.”

Question 5- What were your successes after leaving foster care?

“Well once I left it was way better for me because I went to mental health America and they helped me getting uh housing me with an apartment, me and my sister uh we had a two bedroom apartment and they helped us um they pretty much like I said they want to make you independent, so I had my daughter and then my sister got pregnant so they were able to help us with housing and? getting everything like furniture, everything we needed and mental support too and everything that we needed to know about living by ourselves.”

Prompt question 5- Tell me more about your successes.

“They had a big honestly, to me they had a big big big help in that like with like I said with furniture with clothing, with a lot of things that they used to do back in the day. But um that was truly a blessing for me and my sister at the end of the day cause uh fall secure didn't do anything.”

Question 6-What changes could have been in your transition plan to better help in finding housing. *“MHALA, they actually help me with the housing, and I learned about the county which was to get extra money and um food stamps to provide for me and my kids.”*

Prompt question 6- Tell me more about what the focus in your transition was.

“Honestly No, because when I was at M. H. A. I didn't even know that they were going to like I didn't even know that had a plan.”

Question 7- How did you form relationships after leaving foster care?

“So yeah, I honestly, I'm honestly very thankful for MHALA They honestly have been there pretty much about like since I became an adult at 18 till now. 32.”

Prompt question 7-Please explain.

“I still am involved with MHALA.”

Question 8- What experience did you have in achieving education?

“Honestly, No, I mean I try to go back to school um it's just my mindset is just so? I'm just so distracted, you know what I mean? Even though I have my medications and stuff, I'm just honestly distracted. So, I never went back to school, and I never got my diploma.”

Prompt question 8- Tell me what that experience was like

“I still have gotten jobs and still living, you know what I mean I'm still living and paying my bills and doing the things I need to do even though I haven't got it, but I did try to go back to school but like I said my mindset is just so? I just get very distraught and very um I get lost so much thinking in my head.”

Question 9- Were you able to make contact to obtain housing assistance?

“MHALA, they actually help me with the housing, my psych meds, and my therapy since I became 18 years old.”

Prompt question 9-Tell me what that experience was like.

“So, me getting into M. H. A. They actually help me with the housing and I learned about the county which was to get extra money and um food stamps to provide for me and my kids. So yeah, I honestly, I'm honestly very thankful for M. H. A. They honestly have been

there pretty much about like since I became an adult at 18 till now. 32 I still am involved with M. H. A."

Question 10- Were you able to get employment after leaving foster care?

"They've also help with employment, I got into their employment services and um with them I was able to get a job."

Prompt question 10- Tell me what your experience was like.

"Um I still have a job now."

Introduction of the researcher

Introduction of Participant 6

Question 1-Tell me about before you were emancipated and how you prepared yourself for that transition?

"I was. wait I was. 16, I think. uh 16 or 15, no 16 or 17, went to a group home at the age of 16. I left on my 18th birthday from the group home."

Prompt question 1-Tell me more about your experiences and how it made you feel?
It was different. I mean. that's all I can say it was it was different. I moved. uh back to Lancaster with stepmom when I turned 18.

Question 2- Tell me about your experience of being emancipated from foster care?

Yea, there a lot of adjustments you had to I mean. I still had chores, I still had homework and I, well, eventually when I got into school.

Prompt question 2-Tell me more of what was going on in your mind?

Um, about the same kind of a little different.

Question 3- What type of relationships did you manage to keep after leaving foster care?

"No, my foster mom really. I kept contact with foster mom. still have a relationship with her now. Yes, I still call her. and talk to her, see how she's doing. because she did try and help me a lot. and she loves me."

Prompt question 3- Tell me about the difficulties you had keeping in contact.

"My stepmom, yeah, it wasn't that long because I didn't really like her."

Question 4 What were some of the difficulties you faced after leaving foster care?

"Um Yeah, I went homeless for three years."

Prompt question 4- Tell me more about your difficulties you faced.

“After being homeless for a while I got with Mental Health LA and they helped me in the process of getting housing.”

Question 5- What were your successes after leaving foster care?

“I have grown a lot. I learned a lot too by understanding more and. being able to, well like for. example I was able, well it was different.”

Prompt question 5- Tell me more about your successes.

No additional answer

Question 6-What changes could have been in your transition plan to better help in finding housing?

“I don't know I think so I just followed what my social worker had.”

Prompt question 6- Tell me more about what the focus in your transition was.

No additional response

Question 7- How did you form relationships after leaving foster care?

“I have formed a relationship with my worker from MHALA.”

Prompt question 7-Please explain.

No response from participant

Question 8- What experience did you have in achieving education?

“No, I wanna go back to school though. My worker says I should wait. until I get my housing “settled. Like, well. she said I could start it actually by now.”

Prompt question 8- Tell me what that experience was like

“But I still don't know how to do that, so...”

Question 9- Were you able to make contact to obtain housing assistance?

“After being homeless for a while I got with Mental Health LA and they helped me in the process of getting housing.”

Prompt question 9-Tell me what that experience was like?

"I got with Mental Health LA and they helped me in the process of getting housing."

Question 10- Were you able to get employment after leaving foster care?

"Oh no, no, not yet."

Prompt question 10- Tell me what your experience was like.

"Not looking yet."

Introduction of the researcher

Introduction of Participant 7

Question 1-Tell me about before you were emancipated and how you prepared yourself for that transition?

"Um unfortunately I really didn't prepare myself quite frankly for the transition. Um Just due to the fact that I did run away a lot from the foster care system, due to that when I aged out."

Prompt question 1-Tell me more about your experiences and how it made you feel?

"My experience um I wasn't quite emancipated I just aged out. Um but in regards to that, I mean it was a relief."

Question 2- Tell me about your experience of being emancipated from foster care?

"I was legally aged out through my arrest from my warrant of being a runaway."

Prompt question 2-Tell me more of what was going on in your mind?

"Um finally I felt free."

Question 3- What type of relationships did you manage to keep after leaving foster care?

"I managed to keep relationships with some of my group home staff members, we currently still communicate with each other. Um when I'm having a tough time, I can rely on them to go to in regard to um pointing me in the right direction, or just being a shoulder for me to lean on."

Prompt question 3- Tell me about the difficulties you had keeping in contact.

"I had difficulties staying in contact while I was homeless."

Question 4 What were some of the difficulties you faced after leaving foster care?

“Having a tough time being homeless and on the streets.”

Prompt question 4- Tell me more about your difficulties you faced.

“It was hard going through those avenues with no direction or guidance.”

Question 5- What were your successes after leaving foster care?

“I became self-reliant. Um I learned how to time manage but manage my time a lot better. Um I did? seek out a lot of um how do I say resources on my own.”

Prompt question 5- Tell me more about your successes.

“So just becoming independent and having to grow up. So those are some good and bad skills. I feel that foster care did because I didn't choose to leave every home I was in and to be placed in a different one. So due to those experiences that they put me through.”

Question 6-What changes could have been in your transition plan to better help in finding housing?

“I honestly feel that a lot of my goals in education would have surpassed where I'm at. Now. If I've had the proper support while I was in foster care and transitioning out of foster care.”

Prompt question 6- Tell me more about what the focus in your transition was. “

“I did not um they didn't offer me one due to the fact that I was a runaway. Um after being 17 and I ran away. Um they didn't offer me any plans at all. Um nothing, no programs, nothing.”

Question7- How did you form relationships after leaving foster care?

“I formed them I think pretty well. um I think being in foster care um strengthen my communication skills as well at some point. Um So I feel that it definitely has helped.”

Prompt question 7-Please explain.

“It helped some relationships on being open minded and yeah just being able to communicate with people of all different backgrounds and levels that um advantage of building relationships with people from different countries, different languages, different backgrounds,”.

Question 8- What experience did you have in achieving education?

“Um I have had a hard time, a really tough time achieving that on my own”.

Prompt question 8- Tell me what that experience was like

“I don't have any drive or motivation too and then seeing the financial means it takes to get that better education I'm currently as we're speaking, studying for my G. E. D.”

Question 9- Were you able to make contact to obtain housing assistance?

“I did try to make contact. Unfortunately, they, they determined that I didn't qualify for any assistance with housing. I didn't qualify for any assistance with housing.”

Question 10- Were you able to get employment after leaving foster care?

“Yes. I was able to um obtain employment at a retail location.”

Prompt question 10- Tell me what your experience was like.

“I am employed”.

Introduction of the researcher

Introduction of Participant 8

Question 1-Tell me about before you were emancipated and how you prepared yourself for that transition?

“Well, um I decided to start looking into colleges and actually try to maybe get into like a college that had dorms and everything but that didn't pretty much work out, so that was about it and that or get a job which I already had a job, so it was just probably saving up money to get my own place.”

Prompt question 1-Tell me more about your experiences and how it made you feel?

“Um, It was very difficult because of my foster parents when I turned 18, they kicked me out, so I really had nowhere to go.”

Question 2- Tell me about your experience of being emancipated from foster care?

“Basically, having no shelter and no guidance on what the basic necessities I would need, or just what I need Uh as far as being an adult.”

Prompt question 2-Tell me more of what was going on in your mind?

"I didn't have a lot of uh help or you know, education about how to do about things. So that's what I had to a lot of struggles with."

Question 3- What type of relationships did you manage to keep after leaving foster care?

"Oh yes, I did stay in contact with one of my foster parents."

Prompt question 3- Tell me about the difficulties you had keeping in contact.

"Maintaining that relationship."

Question 4 What were some of the difficulties you faced after leaving foster care?

"Having no help being an adult like no guidance of having basic necessities, no education is what I struggled with."

Prompt question 4- Tell me more about your difficulties you faced.

"Um I became homeless, so I had to go sleep at the shelters they have and I have to go to work and just basically, you know, support myself and um just save up money and try to get my own place."

Question 5- What were your successes after leaving foster care?

"Uh my successes were when I actually saved up my money from working and um I ended up going and getting my own apartment and I had to do that on my own."

Prompt question 5- Tell me more about your successes.

"So, it was uh kind of a struggle, but it was a triumph because I ended up uh finding myself a place. and so that was one of the biggest triumph's I have uh encountered."

Question 6-What changes could have been in your transition plan to better help in finding housing?

"I would say being aware of the responsibilities? of the whole process of being looking for housing, and just preparing for what you need to do as an adult, as an independent person."

Prompt question 6- Tell me more about what the focus in your transition was.

"That was the thing that I wish I had um I had a little better understanding of this, you know, oh you know, you pay your bills this time or you call this or if anything happens,

you do this, you know, just the basic understanding of what it is to be an adult on your own. There was not much of uh pretty much, there was not anything for us at that time."

Question7- How did you form relationships after leaving foster care?

"I didn't realize have many, I didn't have family, so a lot of friends I met were just casual friends."

Prompt question 7-Please explain.

"I never really had a support system, or anybody close."

Question 8- What experience did you have in achieving education?

"In education, I would say I achieved being a certified nurses assistant, I got that degree, so."

Prompt question 8- Tell me what that experience was like

"Yes, I did do college."

Question 9- Were you able to make contact to obtain housing assistance?

"No, I didn't, there wasn't any uh time so..."

Prompt question 9-Tell me what that experience was like.

"I aged out already."

Question 10- Were you able to get employment after leaving foster care?

"Uh Yes. And I did already employment while in foster care too."

\Prompt question 10- Tell me what your experience was like.

No additional answer

Additional response from participant 8

"Just that it is difficult for a lot of children because they don't have a lot of support system, I wish there was a um more support back then. I know that they're changing a lot of things now for foster youth who age out and they're helping them with so many programs. The only thing is like I wish that they would continue those and just help the future foster youth. um obtain the skills to live on their own, especially those who don't have a support system because it becomes really difficult for them and they may fall in the cracks and I know a lot of people who were used to be in foster care with me and they're no longer here because of drug addictions or overdose or anything like that. So, I just feel like there would have been better a better opportunity if they knew how to survive out there and not just be thrown out there, have some sort of guidance and as well as placement."

Introduction of the researcher

Introduction of Participant 9

Question 1-Tell me about before you were emancipated and how you prepared yourself for that transition?

“I ran away from a lot of group homes, and I went to stay with a family member with my sister and I waited a couple of years and then came back and they emancipated me, so I didn't have a long term foster care system because I was running away in the street homeless. So, I was in like a couple of group homes but not longer than six months? or so. So, I was more of in the streets with friends and just homeless in the streets as a former foster youth. Um I was Awal like they were looking for me because I felt that um I could provide better than some of the group homes I was in um 30 day probationary periods where we didn't have clothes for 30 days, we had to wait for social worker to give us a target gift card, so I had to wait for clothes cause they the program wouldn't buy you anything, they will wait for the social worker to give the program a gift card or a voucher or when the program got paid for us to be there then. So, um I didn't like a couple of things like um we couldn't talk to our family for 30 days or um you know they gave us these chores when we first get there or you know girls used to um punk you for the phone like you know try to force you to get off the phone.”

Prompt question 1-Tell me more about your experiences and how it made you feel?

“We only get 15 minute calls and I didn't want to be programmed um like that so um I knew a couple of people where I could just go from place to place and I was um? in the streets a lot, so um preparing for emancipation with more mean if you're in a foster home for a long period of time and you're and you have goals towards emancipating towards getting your housing or you know um.”

Question 2- Tell me about your experience of being emancipated from foster care?

“At 16 I did get into a program that prepared me to emancipated, but I left that program before I actually did it, like they were giving me independent living classes. Like I was taking independent living skills workshops where they would give us incentive for going to teach you how to live independently and teach you resume skills, driver's education skills and such. So, I did um attend one program that offered independent living skills classes towards emancipation.”

Prompt question 2-Tell me more of what was going on in your mind?

“Well for being emancipated, I was excited to know that when you age out, they still have programs that can support you. I was excited because the first thing I did was enrolled in college and they have their formal foster youth Chafee grant for any formal foster youth that's enrolled in six units or more. They give you a 25 \$100 check every semester so or

every other semester, so there was a lot of services that I took advantage of from being emancipated that was more beneficial than actually being in foster care.”

Question 3- What type of relationships did you manage to keep after leaving foster care?

“Um, I kept the relationship with my sister. Um I kept, I have a relationship with two other girls that were in a group home with me back then that now that we're adults, we're still Facebook friends and we can tell each other some stories, you know about when we were um in placement together and um I still kept in contact with Larry Bolster, a independent living coordinator um maybe to eight years after emancipating. So right now, I don't have a contact because I don't think he works in that field but this agent now I was able to get links to um get my driver's license through independent living program. They paid for me to go to vocational school for professional childcare, through the program, through um independent living program, through um emancipating. So those are the good things that um they provided.”

Prompt question 3- Tell me about the difficulties you had keeping in contact.

“No I exhausted benefits until I aged out.”

Question 4 What were some of the difficulties you faced after leaving foster care?

“Yeah, um finding stable housing stability that just was the main issue um as soon as yeah, I they yeah, just left in um they make sure that I had somewhere to go before they emancipated me, you have to make sure you have somewhere to go, you know, but it didn't work out.”

Prompt question 4- Tell me more about your difficulties you faced.

“So just being unstable and not having family support, not having family support is the was the hardest thing.”

Question 5- What were your successes after leaving foster care?

“Me getting into um M. H. America that was the first step into helping myself is I went into the M H A. Program, mental health America um transitional age youth, I went I came in homeless. So, after um just being resourceful and that's where it all started for me to see a therapist for me to get permanent housing help and um stability. And they linked me to a program called strengthen and young families. And they helped me when um I had a daughter, they gave me everything brand new.”

Prompt question 5- Tell me more about your successes.

“Um they linked me to black infant health um parenting classes for African American women. So that's and I was in college still and getting financial aid and um going to therapy.”

Question 6-What changes could have been in your transition plan to better help in finding housing?

“I think just um advocating for the section eight program, you know like advocating because they they have um a definition of homelessness and they say like if you're sleeping on somebody's couch, you're not homeless, If you're sleeping on the floor, you're not homeless, your house. And then I go to the park and call and you know, tell them, well, I'm at the park now, you know, so I just think they're classification of homelessness, you know or what is defined as homelessness to not get the resources because it's a lot of resources for homelessness or housing us. And? and if we don't know, it's turned down.”

Prompt question 6- Tell me more about what the focus in your transition was.

“I think just um advocating for the section eight program, you know like advocating because they have um a definition of homelessness and they say like if you're sleeping on somebody's couch, you're not homeless, If you're sleeping on the floor, you're not homeless, your house and then I go to the park and call and you know, tell them, well, I'm at the park now, you know, so I just think they're classification of homelessness, or what is defined as homelessness to not get the resources because it's a lot of resources for homelessness or housing us and if we don't know, it's turned down.”

Question 7- How did you form relationships after leaving foster care?

“So, I'm like, I'm trying to think like, like even like Joanna from MHALA that's the relationship I built because even though I haven't talked to her in a couple of years. I was apart of that program when I was 19 and I am 33 now. So, I've known her for 12 years so, that's building a relationship. I have one friend that We were we were like 13 or 15 running away together but it's not a relationship now we're just Facebook friends, we don't talk and all the time or how you are doing.”

Prompt question 7-Please explain.

“So, building a relationship I would say it's more with Joanna because I was there I was homeless. She helped me, she aged me out of the Tay program, put me in an adult program, graduated me out the program. So, like and it was a five program, you know. So, I think um just having those connections um you know, to the mental health program, I'm still connected to them. So that's just the connections of the mental health program that I've kept this long, you know, that that person but it's not a group of people or um any family you know or anybody um that I have that I've carried that long with me from that far back.”

Question 8- What experience did you have in achieving education?

"I just received the um just got into the Independent Living Coordinator. That's where um I got the information that made me want to go to college um through the Independent Living program."

Prompt question 8- Tell me what that experience was like

"It was um hard, I had barriers because I have children and I had no family support or childcare to help me the children um doing homework, it was hard, you know, um finding study time, um transportation was hard even, but the Independent Living program gave me a bus pass. So, they were still, I have resources through um mental health, with the transportation part. Um and then the um you know, so that just the childcare and transportation and then um buying books, you must buy them first and then get reimbursed later. So, I knew that, you know, um I was I was being resourceful? with renting books or getting e-books or them at the library. Just going to the library first come first serve to check out the book, the free book, they will always pay one free book in the library. So just having making time with the children was the hardest thing having children and trying to study and get, you know them their education as well because yeah, they were in kindergarten when I was in school or preschool and something. So taking them to school and then picking my class around their schedule, taking my school schedule around their schedule."

Question 9- Were you able to make contact to obtain housing assistance?

"Yes. Through mental health America? The M. H. A. They helped me get um a mental health housing voucher."

Prompt question 9-Tell me what that experience was like.

"It was exciting to be able to get help to get um my own residence. It was exciting and it was a release because I've been homeless and unstable a lot of my life. So to get a program that can link me to permanent housing. It was a blessing and I was very very um comfortable in my own home and privacy. Just to know that I don't have to worry about where I'm gonna sleep or what I'm what I'm gonna eat or anything like that. It was a big relief and it's made life um very easy for me a lot easier, less stressful."

Question 10- Were you able to get employment after leaving foster care?

"Um it was fun because I I wanted to make money, so I was interested in doing anything that I know? um? would generate income and it was and it was fun because I like helping others. So I got into in home care that I can help the um elderly people in their home. So that gave me a joy um finding enjoying helping other people. So I really liked working. Um it was still a barrier because of the children, you know, but I have to work around their schedule so that's a better job because when in home care, you and the elderly

person? make a schedule, so it's not a schedule that I'm committed to a set schedule or you know, inconveniencing me to pick up my children if I'm still at work and I have to pick them."

Prompt question 10- Tell me what your experience was like.

"It was hard three hours school, you know, preschool and kindergarten, sometimes there's only three hours and it was confined my conflict with my work or school schedule. So having a flexible job, finding flexible upon employment."

Introduction of the researcher Introduction of Participant 10

Question 1-Tell me about before you were emancipated and how you prepared yourself for that transition?

"I didn't really do much preparing myself. I just basically went AWOL and paid rent to my high school sweetheart's dad and worked under the table all over the place."

Prompt question 1-Tell me more about your experiences and how it made you feel?

"Independent, less threatened."

Question 2- Tell me about your experience of being emancipated from foster care?

"Uh I had to force it and it was all the circumstances were screwed up the way the whole system is just set up is just really bad and I saw so many people become homeless because of how badly set up the system is."

Prompt question 2-Tell me more of what was going on in your mind?

"I was scared I was gonna end up on the streets like everybody else because we were also not only screwed up by our families, but we were being screwed up by the system."

Question 3- What type of relationships did you manage to keep after leaving foster care?

"I don't really know anybody from foster care anymore except for um one of my foster parents are foster homes and my brother and my kids. That's my relationships I've kept and then I've got some friends that I've made along the way that I've kept."

Prompt question 3- Tell me about the difficulties you had keeping in contact.

"Well, the system turned around and took my kids based on hearsay, people wanted revenge and use my kids and um yeah like keeping in contact with anybody whenever"

they come out of the system and they're unstable. It's near impossible. I'm, I was unstable myself and it was even hard for me to? keep in contact with my own family, let alone anybody else."

Question 4 What were some of the difficulties you faced after leaving foster care?

"Um maintaining relationships with people being able to stay put because I still had a lot of trauma that process and my trauma form was flight. So, I've done a lot of moving around since North Dakota.

Prompt question 4- Tell me more about your difficulties you faced.

"Getting my education was the other one, I had to figure out how to do that with my issues."

Question 5- What were your successes after leaving foster care?

"Being a college graduate Finally getting stable. Eventually, not completely but to a point."

Prompt question 5- Tell me more about your successes.

"Well, I still haven't exactly been able to get an internship, but I have managed to keep a job for more than a year, for the first time. Usually, I work for a year and then quit and go to another job. And for the first time in a very long time, I am living by myself instead of having a roommate and I'm continuing in school. Oh, and my kids love, which is almost hard to do."

Question 6-What changes could have been in your transition plan to better help in finding housing?

"Um they really should focus more on the mental health aspect of it. Um I feel like they weren't diagnosing any kind of trauma related diagnosis to anybody. And just giving similar diagnosis of other things like bipolar looks a lot like P. T. S. D. And I was diagnosed bipolar instead of P. T. S. D. So how am I supposed to go through a uh a transition program? Whenever I'm terrified out of my mind about being an adult period or life or anything. I was phobic. I mean and this was all based on trauma, so you can't expect successes from somebody who's barely surviving their mind."

Prompt question 6- Tell me more about what the focus in your transition was.

"They really need to focus on the trauma aspect."

Question7- How did you form relationships after leaving foster care?

“Um they were just relationships I had already made while I was in foster care? and any new ones, it was through Facebook and I've never met them, everybody knows.”

Prompt question 7-Please explain.

“Just texted back and forth.”

Question 8- What experience did you have in achieving education?

“Well because of how unstable e I've lived my life. Um I found that uh online education with my, with my life saver and I've done my education wherever I went. I mean I went to Hawaii, I went to Singapore.”

Prompt question 8- Tell me what that experience was like

“I went everywhere but still did my homework? and whenever I graduated, it was just the nearest location I was at to go to my graduation? and I'm really grateful for online education.”

Question 9- Were you able to make contact to obtain housing assistance?

“Yes, but not from foster care.”

Prompt question 9-Tell me what that experience was like.

“Uh I just, I didn't know what I was doing, but I was trying and somehow I made it through it, I didn't have any kind of guidance, but I figured it out because I'm smart enough, you know.”

Question 10- Were you able to get employment after leaving foster care?

“Not for the longest time No.”

Prompt question 10- Tell me what your experience was like.

“Well, it seems like in California, it was damn near impossible to get any kind of employment. But as soon as I left California, I had a job working at a um Factory over in Arkansas, and that was in 2007.?”

Additional thoughts from participant 10

“I think it's I think it's mostly just they need to really work on making sure their mental health diagnosis for trauma first and focus on that to help people be able to function in

society and to make the programs a little bit more streamline for people to? be independent because we have nobody once we're out."