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Foster Parents Assisting Transitioning Foster Care Youth in Maintaining Stable Housing

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Cecilann Morrison

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Walden University
2024

Abstract

Foster Parents Assisting Transitioning Foster Care Youth in Maintaining Stable Housing

by

Cecilann Morrison

MA, National University, 2013

BS, Fresno Pacific University, 2011

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Foster care youth may struggle to find and maintain stable housing after aging out of the

foster care system, often leading to poor outcomes for those leaving foster care. Using

Maslow's hierarchy of needs as a conceptual framework, the purpose of this basic

qualitative study was to explore the strategies that foster parents used to provide tools and

skills to their foster care youth aging out of their foster homes to find and maintain stable

housing. Using purposeful sampling to obtain participants, data were collected from eight

current and former foster parents who helped at least one child transition from foster care

to a stable home within the previous 5 years. Data were collected via semistructured

interviews conducted in Zoom. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Five

themes emerged from the data: (a) embracing the meaning of being a foster parent, (b)

providing guidance to function independently in the community, (c) providing financial

support and assisting in achieving financial stability, (d) providing continuing emotional

support, and (e) using services to help foster care youths' transition. The study results

may lead to positive social change providing foster care youth leaving the foster care

system with strategies to reduce homelessness, which may improve outcomes for foster

care youth after transition. The results of this study align with the social determinants of

health because it provides information from foster parents on how best to support youth

as they seek stable housing after aging out of the foster system.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my son, Chandler Hamilton Edward Morrison, and my daughter, Payton Alexis Eleana Morrison. I want them to know that if their mother could obtain her doctoral degree, the sky is no limit to what they can accomplish if they are confident and have unwavering faith. To my dad, Thomas J. Gilbert, who always believes in me. To my friends who were available whenever I needed to get away, vent, or ask questions.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Some foster care youth who have aged out of the foster care system may find themselves homeless after exiting the foster care home. Over 20,000 foster care youth in the United States are aging out of the foster care system without the guidance and support they need to lead them to a successful life living on their own (Klodnick & Samuels, 2020). Foster care youth are at a greater risk of becoming homeless, unemployed, welfare dependent, being involved in sex trafficking, and having a mental illness than nonfoster care youth (Kelly, 2020). According to Kelly (2020), a substantial proportion of foster care youth experience homelessness within 6 months after transitioning from foster care because they need interventions that will help guide them to success. They are more likely to engage in risky behavior and experience hardships, such as homelessness, unemployment, unwanted pregnancies, sex trafficking, and substance abuse.

Even though the problem of homelessness among former foster care youth has been investigated, there is limited information concerning the transitional process and outcome foster parents have when working with their foster care youth as they transition out of their homes to find and maintain stable housing. In this basic qualitative study, I explored the strategies that foster parents used with their foster care youth to help their former foster care youth find and maintain stable housing as they transitioned out of their homes to emerge into adulthood, living on their own successfully. I aimed to bring more awareness that foster care youth require support and guidance before leaving foster care homes. These strategies can improve the transitional process, resulting in positive social change among foster care youth, their community, and society.

This chapter includes the background history of foster care youth exiting the foster care system without adequate support, the problem, and the gap. The chapter further includes the research question, nature of the study, theoretical framework, and purpose. Finally, the chapter presents information about the study's definitions, assumptions, scope, delimitations, limitations, and significance.

Background

Former foster care youth are a vulnerable population that needs support and guidance. They experience numerous challenges as they transition out of the foster care system. Former foster care youth are at a higher risk of becoming homeless than nonfoster care youth. According to Prince et al. (2019) and Fowler (2019), when foster care youth age out of the system, which is usually 19 to 21 years of age, depending on the circumstances of each case, they usually have no permanent residence. These foster care youth are at a higher risk of several adverse outcomes, which can include unstable housing, criminal activities, pregnancies, health issues, sexually transmitted diseases, and substance abuse (Jones, 2019). Greeno et al. (2019) indicated that substance abuse and homelessness were greater among former foster care youth than among nonfoster care youth. Preparation and life skills should be taught to former foster care youth before they age out of the foster care system to prevent them from becoming homeless.

Researchers have found that it is important that programs and services are in place for former foster care youth to access once they exit the foster care system. Even though there have been programs in effect for many years for foster care youth transitioning out of the foster care system, there are not enough programs, resources, or strategies given to

this population to find and maintain stable housing (Doucet et al., 2022). According to Huang et al. (2022), programs in effect for foster care youth are not always effective. Foster care youth should stay in the foster care system and continue to receive government funding past 17 years of age so they can receive the maximum training, skills, and risk prevention that will help them from becoming homeless once they exit the foster care system (Shpiegel et al., 2022). Most government-funded programs are discontinued once foster care youth exit the system. According to Prince et al. (2019), because these government programs are not permanent, former foster individuals must have caring relationships with adults who can provide resources and tools to prevent them from experiencing homelessness. Programs, services, and caring adults must be in place for former foster care youth when they exit the foster care system so they can find and maintain permanent housing just as nonfoster care youth.

Although researchers have investigated this issue, scholars have not identified the strategies foster parents can use when their foster care youth transition from home to obtain and maintain stable housing (Klodnick & Samuels, 2020). I addressed how foster parents could assist their foster care youth with strategies to find and maintain stable housing. This support system may create a positive social change for foster care youth, their community, and society as a whole.

Problem Statement

Foster care youth aging out of foster care may lack the skills to live independently on their own successfully. Often, these youths are unprepared for the transition process, which creates increased barriers to well-being when compared to youth who do not have

to transition from foster care (Leathers, Vande Voort, et al., 2019). Former foster care youth aging out of foster care experience different challenges than nonfoster care youth because of a lack of adequate support and guidance (Klodnick & Samuels, 2020). According to Klodnick and Samuels (2020), some foster care youths have left the foster care home with no strategies that will help them find and maintain stable housing. There is a high rate of homelessness among foster care youth transitioning from foster care to emerging adult life (Narendorf et al., 2020). Leathers, Vande Voort, et al. (2019) explained that foster care youth lack strategies to live independently once released. Leather et al. also suggested that adulthood could be smoother if foster care youth transitioned to independent living with adult involvement. For former foster care youth to find and maintain stable housing, they need individuals who will support them and help them find and maintain stable housing.

Scholars have pointed out the struggles and challenges that former foster care youth have when trying to make the transition from being awarded by the court to living on their own. According to Hedenstrom (2021), most of this population faces risks and poor outcomes after aging out of the foster care system. These risks include homelessness, which can lead to criminal activities, sex trafficking, unwanted pregnancies, and substance abuse. These negative outcomes affect not only the individuals but also society (Hedenstrom, 2021). According to Scholarworks and Lee Barthlett (n.d.), when it is time for foster care youth to leave the foster care system, they are abruptly forced to leave the foster care home without a stable housing environment. Even though scholars have studied the issues that former foster care youth face when they

exit the foster care system, few studies have been completed on how foster parents can assist former foster care youth in finding stable housing. According to Packard and Benuto (2020), even though some foster care youth received some support when transitioning out of foster care, they need continued support in maintaining stable housing, completing their education, and finding stable employment due to disconnections of supportive services and family support.

Purpose

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the strategies that foster parents use to provide tools and skills to their foster care youth aging out of their foster homes to find and maintain stable housing.

Research Question

What strategies do foster parents use to provide tools and skills to their foster care youth who are transitioning out of their foster homes to find and maintain stable housing?

Conceptual Framework

The theory that supported my study was Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. According to Maslow, all human beings have deficiency and growth needs. Deficiency needs arise due to deprivation. Once deficiency needs are met, individuals can satisfy their growth needs. The essential needs consist of needing basic food and water, feeling safe, feeling loved and connected to others, having esteem, and experiencing self-actualization. These needs are vital to gaining and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Maslow described the importance of focusing on meeting the deficiency needs of human beings, starting in childhood, which are basic food, water, sleep and warmth, security,

and shelter to reach growth needs (self-awareness and fulfilling their potentials). Maslow explained that individuals cannot obtain growth needs if their deficiency needs are unmet. In this study, I focused on Maslow's hierarchy Level 2 deficiency need of shelter. I used Maslow's theory in my study because biological and psychological needs must be met in all human beings. I chose this theory because it demonstrates the importance of foster care youth obtaining and maintaining stable housing.

Nature of the Study

In this study, I used a basic qualitative study. Qualitative researchers interpret and describe the participants' perceptions and beliefs of their personal experiences as they see them (Novak et al., 2021). According to Kahlke (2018), a basic qualitative approach allows the researcher to be more flexible and offer more creativity in their design. A researcher may use a basic qualitative design to acquire data about the participants by motivating them to speak on their experiences about a practical problem and how they see it (Novak et al., 2021). According to Powell and Thomas (2021), the basic qualitative design is used when the researcher wishes to understand participants' opinions and perceptions.

Therefore, I chose the basic qualitative design because this design allowed me to explore participants' perspectives. I conducted this study using a qualitative generic method because the generic qualitative method is used to explore individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and experiences. I focused on foster parents' strategies and personal stories of how they helped their former foster care youth find and maintain stable housing once they exited their homes. This method provided a rich, unobstructed view of participants'

experiences that might lead to a better understanding of the impact that former foster care youth experienced when trying to find and maintain stable housing.

Definitions

Aging out: Aging out it the termination of authority given by the court, releasing all responsibilities by the state from the foster parents. Youths are no longer awarded funds or services set by the courts. Former youth are responsible for supporting themselves. (Greeson et al., 2020).

Emerging adulthood: This period occurs in a youth's life when they become an adult and take on the responsibility of caring for themselves. This period usually takes place on their 18th birthday and includes changing from one stage of life to another (Packard & Benuto, 2020).

Foster care: Foster care is a temporary living environment that provides youth with safe and stable living arrangements, especially if children have been abused or neglected by their biological parents (Greeson et al., 2020).

Foster parents: These individuals or couples open their homes to care for foster children (Greeson et al., 2020).

Homelessness: An individual without stable housing has nowhere to call home. They have nowhere to prepare meals or take showers (Greeson et al., 2020).

Nonfoster care youth: This youth has not been awarded to the state because of neglect, abuse, or abandonment from their biological parents (Prince et al., 2019).

Role model: A role model guides a person to positive outcomes (Klodnick & Samuels, 2020).

Success: Success is the accomplishment of goals or plans (Yoshioka-Maxwell & Rice, 2020).

Stability: Stability is a place that makes a person feel secure (Packard & Benuto, 2020).

Temporary housing: Temporary housing is living somewhere for a short term (Verulava et al., 2020).

Transitioned: Transitioned refers to a person transferring from one stage of life to another (Jones, 2019).

Youth: Youth refers to people at the time of their lives when they are young, with age ranges between 18 and 25 (Hoffman-Cooper, 2021).

Assumptions

Qualitative assumptions are ideas brought into the study that the researcher thought to be true rather than socially constructed knowledge (Levitt, 2021; Mitchell et al., 2021). Assumptions can influence or shape the research (Levitt, 2021; Mitchell et al., 2021). In the study, I assumed that all foster parents were willing to answer all semistructured questions to the best of their ability. I also assumed that the participants wanted to see former foster care youth succeed independently, so they were willing to share their strategies for finding and maintaining stable housing for their youth. I assumed that all participants knew about providing strategies to their youth to find and maintain stable housing. I assumed that all participants were honest and provided me with their true perceptions and evidence-based strategies they used to find and maintain stable

housing for their former foster care youth. I also assumed that all participants understood my questions as I intended, so rich and in-depth information was gathered.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of the study is the limits of which a researcher will use to conduct the study (Novak et al., 2021). Delimitations are the factors that will not be included in a particular study (Novak et al., 2021). The scope and delimitations are essential in a study so that the study can be effective and efficient (Novak et al., 2021). The scope of this study included foster parents who cared for foster care youth in their homes. Foster parents must have been foster parents for at least 1 year and have cared for foster care youth. The scope of this study did not include foster care youth who had not transitioned from the foster care system. The scope of this study did not include kin or relatives who took over care of children from their relatives. Lastly, I did not include adoptive parents. The focus was on strategies foster parents use to find and maintain stable housing for their former foster care youth.

Other theories I considered for my framework were critical race theory and social cognitive theory. According to Crewe (2021), critical race theory can contextualize how race plays a societal role. Critical race theory includes a framework researchers can use to understand, identify, and examine the power dynamics that sustain institutional racism (Crewe, 2021). Numerous foster care youth identify as LGBTQ and experience biases and discrimination in the foster care system more than foster care youth who are White and heterosexual (Griffiths et al., 2021). I did not choose this theory as my framework because the purpose of this study was not to explore racism among foster care youth who

have face discrimination. Social cognitive theory provides a framework for understanding the relationship between caregivers and foster care youth. According to social cognitive theory, changes in the foster care youth environment increase social support for the individual, which will lead to the foster care youth having a more positive outcome while living independently (Hattie et al., 2020). Social cognitive theory was not chosen for this study because this study was about foster parents using strategies to find and maintain stable housing for their youth.

Limitations

The limitations of this study included potential researcher bias based on my previous experiences personally and professionally. I was a former foster care youth. I also worked professionally with foster care youth. I remain aware of their struggles trying to find and maintain stable housing. While conducting this research, I mitigated my bias by outlining my preconceived ideas about the topic in my journal. According to Academy (2021), biases in qualitative research can be eliminated if the researcher reduces their biases through awareness and practice. Consequently, I reduced my bias by being aware of my topic assumptions and using reflexive journaling.

Another limitation of this study was that the participants might not have been completely honest in their responses about their strategies, experiences, and perceptions working with their foster care youth to find and maintain stable housing. I reminded the participants that their information and answers would remain confidential to mitigate this bias throughout the interviewing process (see Newman et al., 2021). Another limitation of this study was using telephone or online interviews because of COVID-19 instead of

direct face-to-face interviews, which were the foundations of qualitative interviewing. When an interview is conducted over the phone or through Zoom, a researcher cannot quickly identify if the participant is in distress because of the questions being asked of them or determine if the participant feels rapport with the researcher (Krouwel et al., 2019; Novak et al., 2021). I attempted to mitigate this bias by establishing a rapport with the participants, so they felt comfortable enough to share if they had felt uncomfortable with my questions.

Significance

This study is significant in that it addresses the gap in the literature on how foster parents can support their former foster care youth in finding and maintaining stable housing (Klodnick & Samuels, 2020). These results can be used to address the gap in how to decrease homelessness among foster care youth by giving them strategies on how to find and maintain stable housing before they leave the foster care home. The results of this study may provide human service professionals with tools to decrease homelessness among former and current foster care youth by identifying strategies that can assist former and present foster care youth in finding and maintaining stable housing. Finding and maintaining stable housing is crucial for former foster care youth's success as they transition into adulthood. My research may lead to positive social change by providing foster care youth leaving the foster care system with strategies to reduce homelessness among them.

Summary

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the strategies that foster parents used to provide tools and skills to their foster care youth aging out of their foster homes to find and maintain stable housing. The problem addressed in the study was foster care youth leaving the foster care home with no strategies that would help them find and maintain stable housing. Chapter 1 included the framework used in this study and definitions of the terms used. I also described the purpose, nature of the study, research question, assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations of this study. Chapter 2 includes a more detailed discussion of the current literature related to the problem.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In this study, I addressed the lack of knowledge of what strategies foster parents use to help youth after the transition from foster care. Foster care youth need more skills and knowledge to successfully transition from the foster care system into adulthood and avoid homelessness (Bauer & Thomas, 2019). Some foster parents lack the necessary skills and expertise to help their foster child overcome the barriers and challenges associated with aging out of the foster care system and, as a result, many young adults may face homelessness after leaving their foster homes (Kelly, 2020; Prince et al., 2019). Continued support for these ex-foster care young adults is needed to maintain stable housing, complete education, and find regular employment. There is a disconnection between supportive services and family support for this population during this transition.

Former foster care youth face many challenges when trying to transition to independence away from the foster care system. As foster care youth age out of the foster care system, the youth become responsible for becoming independent adults requiring shelter, food, and employment. However, research showed that a significant percentage of these newly transitioned adults needed more skills or education to help them be successful in adapting to independent living (Klodnick & Samuels, 2020; Leathers, Vande Voort, et al., 2019; Narendorf et al., 2020). For example, many youths who aged out of the foster care system faced unemployment and increased risks for substance abuse and criminal activity (Hedenstrom, 2021; Prince et al., 2019; Yoshioka-Maxwell & Rice,

2020). By acquiring these skills and knowledge, foster care youth may be more likely to avoid adverse long-term outcomes like homelessness.

Aging out of the foster care program can increase the likelihood of homelessness. According to Farmer et al. (2021) and Kelly (2020), homelessness as an adult after aging out of foster care is not uncommon. Farmer et al. noted that homelessness was more probable if the youth in foster care had more than two placements and if there was a history of juvenile delinquency. In addition, Farmer et al. revealed that youth tended to fall into one of three groups: youth with histories in the juvenile justice system, youth with a history of running away from placement, and youth with a history of homelessness. All three groups faced significant levels of homelessness after aging out of the foster care system.

Homelessness is more common among youth aging out of the foster care system; however, protective factors have been identified that can reduce this outcome. Protective factors include having a good relationship with foster parents or other adults and having properly trained foster parents (Kelly, 2020; Nuñez et al., 2022). Although being properly trained may help foster parents reduce the likelihood of homelessness, Tonheim and Iversen (2019) stated that many foster parents do not receive instruction on the management of foster children's challenging behaviors and how to best support the aging out process. In addition, the training modules lack formal training requirements for foster care parents, and such training has yet to materialize with available training services (Tonheim & Iversen, 2019). Therefore, many foster parents may be underprepared to support foster care youth aging out of the foster care system.

Although past researchers have investigated foster parents' support and youth homelessness, the strategies and resources to help transitioning youth remain understudied. Scholars have not identified the strategies foster parents can use when their foster care youth transition from their homes to obtain and maintain stable housing (Klodnick & Samuels, 2020). Therefore, the purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the strategies that foster parents used to provide tools and skills to their foster care youth aging out of their foster homes to find and maintain stable housing.

Chapter 2, the literature review, contains previously published literature on this topic. Several sections are established in this chapter. First, an explanation of the search strategy used to find and select the appropriate research for synthesis is shared. Then, I discuss the conceptual framework guiding the study. Next, the literature synthesized for review related to the study's key variables and components is presented by topic, starting with an overview of foster care in the United States, followed by homelessness among foster care youth. These topics are followed by a discussion on U.S. foster parent statistics and demographics, with a section on foster parents' issues relating to foster care youth. The last topic pertains to the strategies used to reduce homelessness for foster care youth during and after their transitional process from the foster care system.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature reviewed in this chapter was located by searching Walden Library's databases, including Dimensions, Directory of Open Access Journals, Google Scholar, PsycINFO, PubMed, ScienceOpen, Scopus, and Web of Science. Each database was searched using keywords and phrases that included the following: *aging out of foster*

care, foster care, foster care program, foster parents' stress, foster care child aging out of foster care, foster child homelessness, foster care children transition to adulthood, foster care parent issues with foster children, foster parents assisting foster care youth who have aged out of their foster home, foster parents meeting needs of foster children during aging out process, homelessness among foster care youth, impact from trauma as a foster child and becoming an adult, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, resiliency in foster care children after leaving foster care, resiliency in foster care children finding housing as adults, strategies to help foster care children after aging out of foster care, strategies to reduce homelessness in transitioning foster care youth, strengths of foster care children during transition to adulthood, support for foster care children during the aging out process, support network enhancement strategies for transition-age foster care youth moving into adulthood, support network functionality among transition-age foster care youth, support programs for foster care youth transitioning out of foster care, transition-age foster care children, transition services for foster care children after age 18, unstable foster care environment impact on foster care child becoming an adult, and *use of tools and skills to find and maintain stable housing for foster care youths.*

To establish studies for the final selection of this review, I first discarded studies that did not provide empirical research results. However, the remaining resources numbered hundreds of thousands, necessitating narrowing the search parameters using inclusion criteria selection. This selection included only those studies directly associated with this study's topic and that met the following criteria: (a) all research selected was scholarly and peer-reviewed, (b) 85% of the research selected was published between

2019 and 2023, (c) all research selected was related to the topic of this study, and (d) all

research selected was written or translated in English. Next, the inclusion criteria were

applied to the resource's titles, the abstracts of these resources, and then the full articles.

Conceptual Framework

The use of a conceptual model in research represents the logical development of

existing literature in a manner that shares a gap or needs for further research. The

conceptual model represents how characteristics within research can provide a means to

map out the methods sought in fulfilling a research project's purpose (Jaakkola, 2020).

The conceptual framework includes a theoretical foundation used to exhibit the

relationship between ideas of the concept and how they relate within the current study.

The theory used as the study's support for the conceptual framework is Maslow's (1943)

hierarchy of needs.

The hierarchy of needs was introduced as a theory parallel to the modern

conception of developmental psychology. First posed by Abraham Maslow in 1943, the

theory constructed a basic set of human needs focused on each stage of development

within an individual's lifetime. Maslow (1943) claimed that needs were prioritized based

on the stages of human life where development was part of learning as an individual

grows. These stages functioned as a hierarchical ladder set in the shape of a pyramid,

with each level representing needs contingent on human existence and for developmental

and cognitive growth.

The hierarchy of needs theory is a classification system reflective of deficiency

needs and growth needs. Maslow (1943) presented the deficiency needs as basic needs a

human requires for survival. As an individual meets their needs on each level of the pyramid, the types of needs change. From basic needs, a human develops psychological needs, and self-fulfillment needs are developed (Maslow & Lewis, 1987). These needs are fundamental for human existence; when they are not met, the consequences can be detrimental to human life.

The physiological needs are the first level or foundation of the pyramid. Maslow (1943) noted that psychological needs must be met before an individual can develop growth. Growth needs are those psychological needs that may be contained within specific social structures of a culture or society (Maslow & Lewis, 1987). Maslow (1943) called the movement up the pyramid's levels meta-motivation. Meta-motivation is the motivation for an individual first to meet their basic needs and then move beyond those needs that continually allow for personal betterment. This hierarchy of needs is a theoretical construct used to depict levels within the human needs for survival in a pyramid shape (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Pyramid
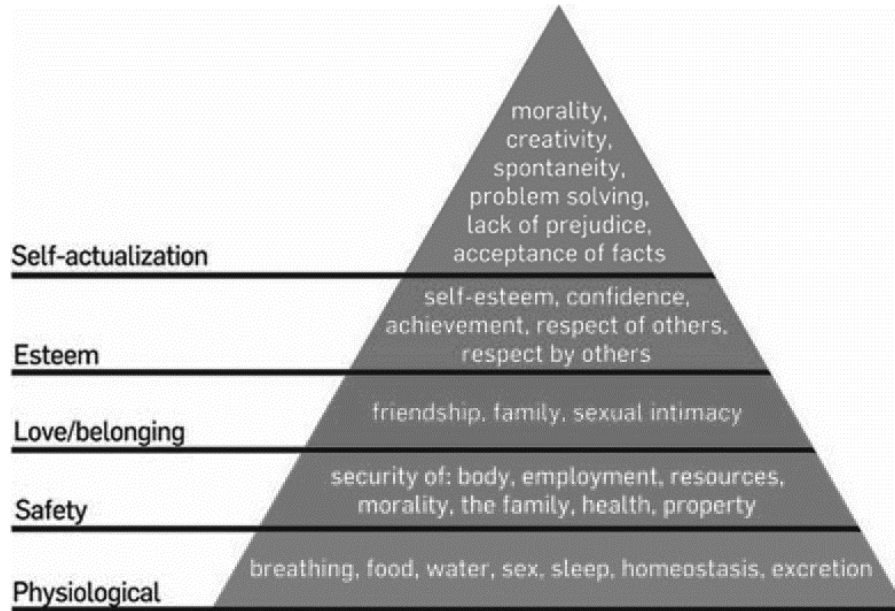
Note. "Replacing Maslow's Needs Hierarchy With an Account Based on Stage and Value," by W. J. Harrigan and M. L. Commons, 2015, *Behavioral Development Bulletin*, *20*(1), p. 30 (https://doi.org/10.1037/h0101036).

The pyramid developed for the hierarchy of needs is formed from five levels. Each level is formed from needs that exemplify how an individual partakes in behavioral motivation (Maslow & Lewis, 1987). However, Maslow (1943) noted that levels will overlap another, particularly when an individual moves from one level and into another. The five levels of the pyramid consist of physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Maslow established the basis of human needs at the bottom or foundation of the pyramid, claiming that physiological needs are significantly most relevant to an individual's survival. Physiological needs include air, water, shelter, sleep, and reproduction (Maslow & Lewis, 1987). These needs are considered

deficiencies because they are a physical requirement for a human's life. These most basic needs must be met before the individual will be motivated to move on to the next level of development.

The next level of Maslow's (1943, 1954) hierarchy concerns safety. Specifically, these safety and security needs pertain to an individual's health, property, social abilities, and employment. Such safety needs, therefore, include emotional, financial, and personal security (Maslow & Lewis, 1987). The safety level of needs encompasses predictability, order, and control that an individual considers valuable. The next level consists of love, belongingness, and other emotional needs connected to the socialization of the human relationship (Maslow, 1943). The love/belongingness level is a social need and consists of the requirements for establishing a society (Maslow, 1954). The needs within the love/belongingness level are often met through intimacy and personal relationships such as with family, friends, spouses, or partners. Further, belonging and love are often contingent upon intimacy, trust, and acceptance. The need for belonging may overcome physiological and security needs, depending on the strength of peer pressure.

The following level of the pyramid includes esteem needs, which are those individual needs encompassing self-efficacy, respect for others, uniqueness of the individual, and self-achievement (Maslow, 1954; Maslow & Lewis, 1987). In addition, the esteem level establishes those psychological needs for such facets as prestige and feelings of accomplishment (Maslow, 1954). Individuals feel more fulfilled with life when they have a positive sense of self or high self-esteem.

The pyramid's peak consists of the need for self-fulfillment, which requires achieving an individual's full potential or self-actualization (Maslow, 1954; Maslow & Lewis, 1987). Maslow and Lewis (1987) claimed that an individual's desire to be accomplished is established through a personal desire for success. Such self-fulfillment or actualization needs may include parenting; pursuing goals; establishing independence; and using abilities, skills, and past learning (Maslow, 1954). The overriding goal within this level is to achieve personal objectives based on individual self-value. The hierarchy of needs pyramid has also been considered relevant in many research models that exhibited human needs.

Applicability in Previous Research

Maslow's (1954; Maslow & Lewis, 1987) hierarchy of needs has been used extensively in previous research. For example, researchers have applied Maslow's hierarchy of needs concerning such disciplines as education, business, sociology, and psychology (Abbas, 2020; Bowen, 2021; Fergeus et al., 2019; Ghatak & Singh, 2019; Montag et al., 2020; Shi & Lin, 2020). Maslow's (1943) hierarchy is relevant to individuals' roles within the foster care system.

Previous researchers have recognized how Maslow's hierarchy of needs pyramid was helpful in many facets associated with foster care youth and foster parents and their roles within the foster care system (Bucchio et al., 2021; Fergeus et al., 2019; Randle et al., 2017). For example, Fergeus et al. (2019) used Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs to determine what unmet needs were found in a sample of foster parents and how these unmet needs impacted their role as a caregivers within the foster care system. According

to Fergeus et al. (2019), the foster parents perceived that their own needs often go unmet in their caring roles. The correlation found between poor care, well-being, and poorer outcomes for foster children suggests that foster parents focus on the needs of themselves and their foster children. In addition, Bucchio et al. (2021) used Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs to inform policy and practice for foster care youth agencies and foster parents regarding safe placements for LBGTQ+ foster care youth, as they have unique needs compared to other foster care youth. These findings imply that the foster parents are concerned with the needs of themselves and their foster children, the more likely their parenting skills will produce positive results with their children.

A final correlation between Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs and the study focused on motivating factors associated with reaching the level of need for self-actualization. Although the immediate concern for many foster care youths transitioning to adulthood after aging out of foster care is a focus on the primary and physiological needs consistent with employment, food, and shelter, there is still a concern that many of these young adults are challenged with positive motivation for reaching self-actualization (Noltemeyer et al., 2020; Shi & Lin, 2020). Shi and Lin (2020) claimed that the needs of Maslow's (1943) pyramid were organized hierarchically. This organization makes each level prepotent to the next level, creating the notion that each level governs the next. Shi and Lin (2020) examined if and how self-actualization was instrumental in governing the other human needs on the pyramid. The authors questioned if self-actualization needs prompted motivating factors that guided, motivated, and satisfied other human needs in

adults. The use of motivating factors provided new foster parents with ideas on how to provide positive parenting interactions with their foster children.

The young adult struggling to self-actualize their independence when living independently may find themselves less motivated to accomplish the transition, which may include paying rent, keeping employment, and living responsibly within a specific budget. Noltemeyer et al. (2020) examined the relationship between deficient or base needs and their role in influencing higher-level needs that promote personal growth and independence. The researchers applied Maslow's (1943) theory of hierarchical needs to determine when deficient needs were overcome by the need for independence and growth as an adult (Noltemeyer et al., 2020). Noltemeyer et al. (2020) found that deficient needs (e.g., finding permanent placement and impairment within their scholastic learning) may promote growth and independence. Thus, young adults find their independence grows out of their deficient needs.

Foster care youth who recognize the effectiveness of transitioning into adulthood and out of the foster care system work toward becoming independent adults. James (2022) observed the experiences foster care children experienced before and after transitions. The researcher asked a sample of former care youth to assess what assistance with their transition into independent living was available after leaving a foster care system. The sample provided three related themes noted as being absent from help after aging out of foster care. These included mental health, life skills, and unmet needs. Newly transitioned adults would need assistance with these needs, among many others,

such as employment and interview practice, budgeting money, and other facets of independent living.

Applicability to Present Research

I selected Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs to underpin this research. The needs reflected in Maslow's hierarchy of needs correlate to the needs experienced by foster care youth when they age out of the foster care system. For example, foster care youth experience the need to satisfy physiological needs, safety needs, love, belonging, and self-actualization. With few resources and programs available, alternative sources of support are needed.

Caring adults can aid in a transition process from young adults to independent adults. A stable and caring relationship significantly reduces the probability of homelessness for youth transitioning out of the foster care system. Although these young adults are required to leave the security of their foster home and become independent adults with the responsibilities of employment, rent, and provisions for living, such as buying food and paying bills, many cannot achieve these basic physiological needs. These relationships can be meaningful as adults can provide guidance, mentorship, monies, and other resources to aid the youth during the transition, help satisfy the needs described in Maslow's (1943) hierarchy, and help them avoid homelessness.

Maslow (1943) argued that there was a district prioritization of needs based on the stages of human life that grow with the individual. These needs include basic physiological needs, safety needs, love, belonging, and self-actualization. If these needs are unmet, individuals cannot develop fully or concern themselves with next-level needs

(Maslow, 1954). For example, if physiological needs are not met, a person cannot focus on meeting the needs of self-esteem or self-actualization.

Each of these needs relates to the foster parents and youth as they age out of the system. Specifically, foster care youth will be faced with situations in which they become responsible for meeting their physiological and safety needs, and they must navigate these issues before changes to self-esteem, love, or self-actualization can be attained (see Maslow, 1943, for more information). Therefore, Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs was a suitable framework for this research.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts

Foster Care in the United States

The number of children involved in the foster care system is high. The U.S. Census Bureau (2022) reported that in 2021, there were over 300,000 youth in foster care. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families Administration on Children, Youth, and Families Children's Bureau (2021) also claimed that nearly 100,000 foster children were waiting for placement in a permanent home. Furthermore, less than 35% of this number were permanently placed with relatives (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families Administration on Children, Youth, and Families Children's Bureau, 2021). Conversely, most foster children find themselves in and out of different foster homes, with an average stay in the same house from 9 months to 1 year (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families Administration on Children, Youth, and Families Children's Bureau, 2021). The

transition for these children moving from one household to another is challenging, especially when the youth are placed with foster parents new to the foster system.

The demography for both foster children and foster parents is varied. Additionally, foster care youth come from many diverse backgrounds. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families Administration on Children, Youth, and Families Children's Bureau (2021) reported that more males (52%) than females (48%) are being placed in the foster care system. In addition, over 40% of these children in foster care in the United States identify as European American. In comparison, African American and Hispanic American children comprise 22% of the total children in the foster care system (Duffin, 2022). The most common age of children entering the foster care system is between 1 and 2 years of age, as more than 28,000 children under 1 year were placed in foster care in 2021 (Duffin, 2022). Furthermore, in 2021, over 20,000 children aged 17 were living in foster care nationwide (Duffin, 2022). At 18, foster care youths will age out and leave the foster care system.

Foster care parents come from many different backgrounds and have many reasons for becoming foster parents. In 2021, there were 214,000 foster homes in the United States (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families Administration on Children, Youth, and Families Children's Bureau, 2021). Concerning demography, most foster parents (75%) are European American. In comparison, 20% are African American or Hispanic American (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families

Administration on Children, Youth, and Families Children's Bureau, 2021). Further, most foster parents have a college education (Roehrkasse, 2021). In addition, most foster parents indicate a Protestant religious preference (Roehrkasse, 2021). Foster parents in the United States are required to attend 50 hours of training and must have CPR certification for licensure; they are also required to pass a fire and health inspection, have no criminal history or history of abusing a child, be a U.S. citizen, and have a strong desire to care for a child and provide a healthy environment for the child (Day et al., 2022; Friedman, 2019). However, even though such training and certification are offered free to foster parents, there continues to be a shortage of foster parents.

Shortage of Foster Parents

One significant issue within the foster care system is the retention of foster parents. Foster parents were noted to have a short length of service, with many leaving before their first year of service is complete (Kaasbøll et al., 2019; Koh et al., 2024). The availability of foster homes requires parents to attain and maintain legal licensure from the state where they reside. However, between 2019 and 2020, the number of licensed foster care homes declined by 2%, with more than 4,500 homes losing their licenses (Kelly, 2020). Whereas some researchers related that this decline was because of the COVID-19 pandemic (Baker, 2017; DeGarmo, 2022; Whitt-Woosley et al., 2022), others considered this decreased number of homes was more likely because of changes throughout the United States regarding regulations (Font & Gershoff, 2020; Yi & Wildeman, 2018).

Previous researchers have examined why there continues to be a shortage of foster parents. For example, Gross and Baron (2022) and Mancinelli et al. (2021) showed that parents exited foster care because of life situation changes, problems with foster agencies' foster children, and that fostering was not what they expected. In addition, foster parents' choice to cease participation may be related to demography. For example, researchers have found that demographic factors of gender, race, sexual orientation, employment status, health status, and financial status directly and indirectly impacted the decision to discontinue fostering (Leathers, Spielfogel, et al., 2019; Miller, Cooley, et al., 2019). Often, parents are unable or not trained to deal with the unique challenges of caring for foster children.

Lack of agency support may also be related to the shortage of foster parents. Previous research examining foster parent's strengths and weaknesses found that many parents perceived a lack of support from the assigned foster care agency, especially when dealing with discipline and boundary setting (Font & Gershoff, 2020; Kaasbøll et al., 2019). The foster care system and foster care parents have often been investigated due to multiple complaints from foster children or even extended family members. Previous research indicated that parents' poor parenting practices were a significant issue within the foster system (Lopez et al., 2023; Schoemaker et al., 2020). Schoemaker et al. (2020) recommended that for parents to maintain consistency in disciplining foster children without being overly aggressive, building knowledge on the method of discipline for parenting foster children would be advantageous. In this way, foster parents would learn

the skills to be better suited for respective roles, and they may improve outcomes for foster care youth.

For the foster care system to care for foster children successfully, more child welfare professionals are needed. Researchers found a lack of agency support due to a lack of retaining professional workers within the social service and foster care systems (Blakeslee & Best, 2019; Schofield et al., 2019). Researchers claimed that to retain foster parents, child welfare professionals need training to understand the issues and stressors that foster parents face and need help to overcome (Kaasbøll et al., 2019). Such situational stressors that foster parents are often challenged by with their foster children include secondary traumatic stress and burnout, which often require specialized training (Newquist et al., 2020). Additionally, the retention of foster parents is associated with the retention of child welfare professionals, as without these professionals, foster parents have no one to reach out to for support (Katz et al., 2022; Park & Pierce, 2020). Foster care services require an educated and well-trained professional to assist with training and supporting parents as they face the many challenges of being a foster parent.

In addition to more agency training, foster parents require increased training on addressing issues and problems they may face with their foster children. The need for extensive training for foster parents has been a continued suggestion for improving the foster care system (Schofield et al., 2019; Tonheim & Iversen, 2019). Suggestions for training and related improvements included increasing peer support, informal mentoring, and the technology needed to provide inexpensive social support for foster parents (Schofield et al., 2019; Tonheim & Iversen, 2019). In this way, foster parents would

receive comprehensive and targeted support instead of relying on existing support systems to navigate the foster system.

Foster parents may often feel overwhelmed. Therefore, foster parents need increased training and support not just when they first become foster parents but throughout their entire experience (Fergeus et al., 2019; Tonheim & Iversen, 2019). This training can offer methods for addressing their foster child's discipline problems or drastic issues such as sexual and mental abuse. Researchers also noted that by targeting and providing increased training and support, foster parents might feel more comfortable in their roles and continue being foster parents (Murray et al., 2019; Tonheim & Iversen, 2019). Additionally, the outcome of such increased training would include improving the well-being and permanency of children in foster care.

Lack of training and support has significantly impacted placement, particularly with teenagers (Murray et al., 2019; Tonheim & Iversen, 2019). With training and education, foster parents of teenagers receive much-needed additional training. Harmon-Darrow et al. (2020) and Day et al. (2022) suggested that training should incorporate dealing with aggression, issues regarding drug use, how to advocate for teens, proper hygiene skills, encouraging education aspirations, and building relationships. Additionally, foster parent and youth training should be offered to teach independent living skills, particularly when the child is nearing the age of when they have aged out from foster care services (Day et al., 2022). Such training can help a teen prepare for independent living with education related to employment, housing, and other adult responsibilities they will soon face as they age out of the foster care system.

Homelessness Among Foster Care Youth

Many adults face homelessness after a catastrophic event such as a significant illness or extended unemployment (Fowler, 2019; Narendorf et al., 2020). In the United States, more than 500,000 individuals are currently considered homeless; 30% of this population faces chronic patterns of homelessness (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2023). Being able to pay rent or house payments is most likely contingent upon being employed, and having no means to afford essentials such as food and shelter is often the major contributor to homelessness (Farmer et al., 2021; Kelly, 2020). A young adult trying to maintain independence after leaving the foster care system needs to understand the importance of responsibilities, like paying rent and staying employed.

Within the homeless population are young adults who have aged out of the foster care system and have problems finding and maintaining secure housing. Over 20% of youths aging out of the foster care system are instantly homeless (National Foster Youth Institute, 2022). Multiple factors contribute to homelessness for these youth aging out of foster care. The critical factors for foster care youth not becoming homeless were having a connection to an adult, remaining in foster care until age 21, having a high school education and being ready to enroll in college, and having full-time or part-time employment (Kim et al., 2019; Verulava et al., 2020). In addition, researchers reported a significant increase in homelessness among foster care youth transitioning from foster care, as they have no experience or training to accommodate housing needs (Jones, 2019; Kelly, 2020). Further, Jones (2019) claimed that there is a need for continued support for

former foster care youth to achieve positive outcomes as they attempt to live productive lives independently. With such continued support, aging out of foster care can initiate a successful transition into independent adulthood.

Foster care youth lack strategies for living independently after leaving foster care housing that allow them to transition into adulthood successfully. Previous research indicated that foster care youth would benefit from programs and resources if the information were available before they left foster care, including how to find and maintain adequate housing, employment, and education (Armstrong-Heimsoth et al., 2021; Leathers, Vande Voort, et al., 2019). Researchers also found that the transition to independent adulthood was smoother if foster care youth were provided with other supportive adult involvement (e.g., Armstrong-Heimsoth et al., 2021; Nuñez et al., 2022). These adults can include foster parents, older siblings, educators, or mentors.

Foster care youth would also benefit from connecting with a positive adult role model as they enter adulthood independently. Foster care workers can provide these services and offer ideas to connect with supportive adult parental figures even after aging out of the foster care system (Ogbonna, 2021; Packard & Benuto, 2020). Such mentor-like support can assist youth in developing the necessary skills for adulthood and independent living (Ogbonna, 2021). Connecting with foster care workers and developing these skills can improve outcomes for both foster care youth. Additionally, foster care workers may be able to incorporate improvements for service delivery and harm reduction services.

Social Supports for Foster Care Youth

Youth aging out of foster care requires extra support to transition effectively from foster care to independent living. Researchers posited that social support was critical for emerging adults transitioning out of foster care because these young adults often struggle to find the support needed, including tangible support for education assistance, employment, housing, transportation, and health care (Blakeslee & Best, 2019; Packard & Benuto, 2020). Nevertheless, the lack of support and social services for youth was a challenge for those youths who were passing into adulthood. Packard and Benuto (2020) found that young adults who have transitioned out of foster care wish and will accept valuable resources and increase their opportunities to thrive and succeed as young adults. These adults recognize the need for such support services but are less likely to receive or find them (Packard & Benuto, 2020). Future practices must incorporate comprehensive services focusing on intangible supports and encompass more available emotional supports.

As a foster child nears the age of adulthood, they are expected to leave their foster home and become independent adults. Social services and foster care professionals maintain that it is essential for foster care youth to have additional support as they emerge into adulthood (Gabrielli et al., 2020; Häggman-Laitila et al., 2019). Researchers have described foster care youth as being eager to live independently without supervision and restrictions, but they may lack the support to prevent themselves from becoming homeless after they leave their foster care home (Gabrielli et al., 2020; Klodnick & Samuels, 2020). Klodnick and Samuels (2020) explained that thousands of foster care

youths exited the foster care system annually but did not have permanent residency they could call home. In addition, the stress level left many newly independent adults with mental health conditions as they tried to figure out where to live (Gabrielli et al., 2020). As these young adults transition into independent adulthood, new challenges become apparent, which may impact the potential for homelessness.

The risk of homelessness is highest for foster care youth when they transition out of foster care. Researchers stated that homelessness is a challenge as foster care youth leave the foster care system without concrete plans for their future, which can cause them to experience homelessness (Farmer et al., 2021; Kelly, 2020). Additionally, foster care youth face challenges they are unprepared to address, including homelessness, mental health issues, and criminal behaviors. Brisson et al. (2020) and Verulava et al. (2020) studied the various causes of homelessness and the challenges these youths faced as they left the foster care system. Brisson et al. (2020) and Verulava et al. (2020) recognized that youth from foster care often undergo adverse experiences during their childhood that lead to harmful outcomes later in life, including socioeconomic challenges, such as homelessness and psychological and criminal behaviors. Those youth leaving foster care were unprepared for their challenges and struggles while emerging into adulthood. As a result, they needed assistance and support to make a successful and sustainable transition (Brisson et al., 2020; Verulava et al., 2020). Strategies are needed to prepare and promote healthy and productive independent living for foster care individuals so they can face and overcome such challenges and move into successful independent living as adults.

Transitioning out of foster care but not achieving permanent and stable housing has short- and long-term consequences, which may exacerbate the likelihood of homelessness. For example, youth who age out of foster care were found to engage in risky behaviors and were significantly more likely to experience low education attainment, unemployment, early pregnancy and parenthood, and substance use (Brisson et al., 2020; Harmon-Darrow et al., 2020; Jones, 2019). Youth who age out of the foster care system may also face criminal activities, arrest, and homelessness (Jones, 2019; Rome & Raskin, 2019). As with homelessness, additional support could assist these young adults in living and eating healthier, avoiding drug or alcohol use, and preparing for higher education for future employment.

Programs and services should be established to help foster care youth transition out of foster care into successful independent living. Researchers suggested that although such programs helped decrease the homeless population of foster care youth, they were not often available or known by older foster care youth (Häggman-Laitila et al., 2019; Klodnick & Samuels, 2020). Several of these programs showed methods for success with foster care youth aging out of the foster care system through support and training. This support and training can be related to education, employment, and housing. In addition, services and training may be related to mental health and relationship maintenance for foster care youth (Greeson et al., 2020). However, programs offering to assist foster care youth during the aging out process were not necessarily the most effective or successful, thus demanding future research and practices on more successful supports for future foster care youth's transition into adulthood.

Research on facilitating the transition of foster care leavers to adulthood has been lacking. Researchers suggested that when foster care youth are provided with support for enrolling in postsecondary education, there is a correlating increase in these same young men and women gaining employment (Hedenstrom, 2021; Jones, 2019; Nuñez et al., 2022). However, the need for additional support programs for foster care leavers continues, and feedback from foster care leavers provides practical suggestions for developing the programs (Jones, 2019). Leavers responded by claiming such support helped them overcome challenges with their transition and how to move forward with their independent lives (Hedenstrom, 2021). The effectiveness of supporting programs can provide means for housing, employment, and furthering the education of former foster care youths.

The emotional support that foster care youths need as they age out of the foster care system can require mental resources necessary for success as a newly independent young adult. Researchers examined how emotional support was required for foster care youths and explored if these young adults needed continued emotional support once they left the foster care system (Armstrong-Heimsoth et al., 2021; Packard & Benuto, 2020). Even though this population may have received some support when transitioning out of foster care, they continued to struggle with maintaining stable housing, completing their education, and finding stable employment due to disconnections of supportive services and family support (Armstrong-Heimsoth et al., 2021; Packard & Benuto, 2020). The need for unconditional support for these foster care youths as they transition into adulthood can be the difference in their successful or failed transition.

Issues That Foster Parents Face Relating to Youth

The association between well-known parenting styles, such as authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and directive parenting, are various indicators of a child's emotional and social intelligence. These parenting styles were also vital in a young foster child's life, establishing training for the child to become an independent adult based on the foster parents' lessons. Such lessons were often based on the parenting style within the home and the foster parents (Jackson et al., 2019). Researchers examined strategies to help parents adjust to child issues that could produce negative incidents (Blakeslee & Best, 2019; Jackson et al., 2019). Implementing training to overcome challenges with foster child issues produced positive outcomes (Blakeslee & Best, 2019; Segrin & Flora, 2019). Segrin and Flora (2019) suggested an association between overparenting and problems with emotional regulation in emerging adults. Parents were found to be better at balancing provisions of support when all parties understood clear expectations for appropriate child behavior (Jackson et al., 2019).

Negative emotional experiences in the child become teachable moments, guided by the parent's validation and assistance (Jackson et al., 2019; Segrin & Flora, 2019). Segrin and Flora concluded that effective parenting practices for raising emotionally and socially intelligent children are found when parental directiveness with child autonomy is appropriate for the child's developmental state. These parenting practices require a near-constant adjustment to a child's emotional and social development, illustrating both a refined skill and the art of effective parenting. According to Segrin and Flora, parenting practices such as inductive discipline and parental availability also appear to cultivate

emotional and social intelligence in children. Overparenting promotes traits antithetical to emotional and social intelligence during emerging adulthood.

Another significant issue within the foster care system related to the success of foster-child integration is discipline. Past researchers have found that supports specifically relating to understanding and managing behavioral issues in foster children were helpful, especially the provision of information about how to manage and respond to mental health difficulties and how and why particular behaviors originate, along with training in behavior management (Cooley et al., 2019; Kaasbøll et al., 2019). Foster parents desired accurate information about children's behavior, good quality relationships with professionals, and in-home support delivered by knowledgeable people who were accurate and up to date about the child's behavior before the commencement of fostering (Cooley et al., 2019; Harding et al., 2020; Kaasbøll et al., 2019). Such shared information offers support for foster care parents from foster care professionals.

Foster Parent Stress

A considerable concern for foster parents is the impact stress has on parental behaviors. Child-related stress was the primary source of foster-parenting stress (Lopez et al., 2023; Mancinelli et al., 2021; Miller, Green, et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2020). Foster parent stress is a consistent concern among foster parents and foster care professionals. Suggestions to alleviate such stress were considered by some experts who need to implement a self-care regimen (Miller, Green, et al., 2019; Sharda, 2022). Researchers suggested that increased self-care can result in resilient and flexible foster care parents who can effectively manage parenting demands (Miller, Green, et al., 2019; Sharda,

2022). Further, experts noted a need for support in developing practical and consistent self-care strategies to maintain foster parents' health and well-being, including coparenting (J. J. Miller, Green, et al., 2019). Using coparenting in the foster care system may require observing the moderating influence of foster caregiver support related to coparenting relationships.

Coparenting in foster care is when a foster parent and the birth parent work with the child's care worker in the child's best interest. However, researchers recognized how foster parents' parenting stress was negatively associated with foster coparenting relationship quality (Richardson & Futris, 2019; Winkelman Richardson et al., 2022). Researchers further examined the relationship between parenting stress and the coparenting relationship, noting that such challenges increased foster caregivers' parenting stress, impacting their parenting behaviors, the parent-child relationship, and their retention as foster caregivers (Harding et al., 2020; Kaasbøll et al., 2019). Overall, the use of coparenting with foster care was not in the best interest of the child.

The pandemic caused multiple stress-related problems for many individuals. COVID-19 impacted stress in foster parents as well. Studies observed increased stress for foster parents during the pandemic (Lopez et al., 2023; Miller et al., 2020). Specifically, previous research has found that parenting-related stress increased during the COVID-19 pandemic for foster care parents (Lopez et al., 2023; Miller et al., 2020). Group-based differences in parental stress were experienced during COVID-19, even after controlling for pre-pandemic stress levels. Researchers found that stress in foster parents was exacerbated during the pandemic due to marital status, with married foster parents

reporting having less stress post-Covid than single foster parents (Hanlon et al., 2022; Miller et al., 2020). The foster parent's current financial status before and after the pandemic was another trigger for stress, with financial insecurity instrumental after the pandemic when many foster parents also lost their jobs and incomes (Hanlon et al., 2022; Lopez et al., 2023). The stress felt by foster parents during the pandemic and financial insecurity also impacted foster children.

Foster parents' mental health status was also problematic post-pandemic. Factors like isolation, financial concern, and adverse environmental supports disintegrating during the pandemic impacted foster parent stress levels (Beal et al., 2022). For example, baseline stress levels for foster parents have increased since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (Hanlon et al., 2022). Themes extracted from the data collected included that pre-pandemic foster parenting was less challenging than the impact of COVID-19 on foster parents, children in care, and their ability to understand the broader importance of their caregiving (Hanlon et al., 2022). Ultimately, better support was needed to be provided to foster parents, in general, and during public health crises.

Foster Parent Support

The type of support foster parents may require should come from those persons nearest to them, such as relatives and friends. However, researchers found that although many foster parents identified support from friends, their family doctor, and other foster caregivers as their most helpful support systems, support should come from those other foster care parents who have experienced successful foster care (Kaasbøll et al., 2019; Tonheim & Iversen, 2019). In addition, foster parenting stress was challenging as support

was not necessarily a shared resource (Tonheim & Iversen, 2019). Therefore, foster parenting support for foster caregiver couples should be sought and provided by foster care professionals.

It is necessary to provide support and training measures to teach foster parents how adaptive and maladaptive behaviors are influenced by stress and how to avoid negative parenting behaviors. Maladaptive parenting behaviors based on age, years fostered, and several children fostered are not significantly associated with parental stress (Lopez et al., 2023; Mancinelli et al., 2021). Adaptive parenting behaviors based on age, years fostered, and number of children fostered were not significantly correlated with parental stress (Lopez et al., 2023). It was noted that continuing support or training for foster parents should be provided by governmental agencies related to foster care (Lopez et al., 2023; Sharda, 2022). Researchers examined how parental stress was associated with parenting behaviors (Lopez et al., 2023; Miller, Green, et al., 2019). Findings showed that the importance of training foster parents in positive parenting strategies influenced the parents' behaviors when working with their foster child (Lopez et al., 2023). Lopez et al. (2023) claimed that adaptive parenting behaviors, including positive and involved parenting skills, influenced parental involvement with their foster child. Conversely, parents who were more likely to use corporal punishment or were inconsistent in parenting behaviors were more likely to report elevated levels of stress (Lopez et al., 2023; Miller, Green, et al., 2019). Foster parents provide emotional support to their foster child and assist with helping a foster child feel that they are part of the family.

Training for foster care parents can influence parenting attitudes and personal dedication when preservice training is emphasized. Strickler et al. (2018) noted that participants receiving an enhanced preservice training experience recognized the changes in understanding the needs they must meet with their role as foster parents. Such changes were based on their expectations of children and attitudes toward parent–child family roles (Strickler et al., 2018; Tonheim & Iversen, 2019). Preservice training changes foster parents' parenting attitudes, and preservice training changes foster parents' readiness to provide foster care (Day et al., 2022). Strickler et al. (2018) outlined how enhanced preservice training participants were significantly more likely to become licensed as foster parents than basic preservice training participants. This enhanced preservice training may affect some parenting attitudes and licensing status as a foster parent.

The foster care system should provide parents and youth with training for aging out. Studies showed that future practices for foster care professionals should include implementing a one-to-one mentoring system to assess the issues and successes these young adults may face during and after the transition (Weiler et al., 2022). In addition, practitioners should review the perspectives of these young adults regarding challenges in their life situations and learn what kind of changes in their lives are more meaningful and advantageous (Beal et al., 2022; Tobolowsky et al., 2019). Finally, Refaeli et al. (2019) suggested that peer support and support from residential staff contribute to care leavers' subjective well-being and indicated that a combination of personal and social resources contributes to life satisfaction among care leavers, supporting the ecological perspective

in research and interventions among care leavers. With parental training on how to help their foster child age out, the chances of these young adults becoming homeless lessen.

Strategies to Reduce Homelessness for Youth

Globally, foster care youth who age out are forced to transition and face challenges related to social policy, legislation, and services that support the transition to adulthood. Strahl et al. (2021) illustrated a lack of child-protective legislative as young people transition from foster care to adulthood due to such policies failing to provide protections after a child ages out. Other studies showed a significant lack of programs where young people can rely on support after leaving foster care (Armstrong-Heimsoth et al., 2021; Jones, 2019). Researchers also noted that many countries' current legislation lacks effective assisting regulations (Courtney et al., 2019; Strahl et al., 2021). Therefore, transitioning provides an ideal time to interact with foster care young adults and assist them in becoming self-sufficient and successful adults.

Foster parents recognize that their well-being impacts how they influence foster children. Blakeslee and Best (2019), Delgado et al. (2020), and Refaeli et al. (2019) noted that personal resources contributed to care leavers' subjective well-being and emphasized self-efficacy increases also prompted their ability to prepare youths for aging out of the system. Findings from studies concluded that the level of and changes in life satisfaction should be examined regarding care leavers' life events, such as transitions and new challenges, as well as how these impact foster children as adults (Blakeslee & Best, 2019; Delgado et al., 2020; Refaeli et al., 2019). In addition, peer and parental support, family

members, romantic partners, residential facility staff, and staff of other services contributed to successful life satisfaction after the transition.

Housing instability is a potential problem for youth who age out of foster care. One in four young adults who age out of foster care will experience homelessness with 20% of this population becoming instantly homeless (Balistreri, 2023). This instability may come from a lack of skills necessary to function as an independent adult for these transitioning young adults, so foster parents must recognize the need to help teach their foster children about independent living (Verulava et al., 2020). This population of youth who transitioned out of foster care need access to opportunities that will assist and help them successfully live independently (Delgado et al., 2020; Verulava et al., 2020). Preparing these young adults before the transition process occurs can provide them with the means to avoid homelessness in the future.

There are multiple reasons for homelessness among former foster care youths as they transition out of foster care. One concerning issue often ignored by child welfare professionals is the consideration of the young adults' social, economic, and environmental factors, which can increase their risk of homelessness (Armstrong-Heimsoth et al., 2021; Mountz & Capous-Desyllas, 2020). Studies showed that young adults identifying as LGBTQ and are a minority were in greater jeopardy of homelessness and housing insecurity than other young adults transitioning from foster care (Mountz & Capous-Desyllas, 2020; Schofield et al., 2019). Because aged-out young adults experience challenges they cannot overcome, such as maintaining employment or even budgeting for rent payments, the likelihood of homelessness increases (Armstrong-

Heimsoth et al., 2021). Therefore, three facets should be considered to help with the transition process. These facets include addressing basic needs, increasing social support, and parenting techniques.

Summary

The existing research associated with the current study focused on foster care parents' challenges and related the need for foster parent training and commenting on the implications of foster care parent shortages throughout the United States (Kaasbøll et al., 2019; Koh et al., 2024; Schofield et al., 2019). In addition, researchers have focused on the perspectives of foster parents regarding how foster care youth need skills and knowledge to transition from the foster care system into adulthood successfully (Huang et al., 2022; Konijn et al., 2019). However, past researchers have not examined the perspectives of foster care youths in transition themselves (Huang et al., 2022; Konijn et al., 2019). Recent scholars have further shown how foster care youths face homelessness after leaving their foster homes. Nevertheless, little has been accomplished in attempts to mitigate the problem of homelessness among former foster care youths (Prince et al., 2019).

Information on foster care youths transitioning into adulthood impressed upon how many require more education, training, and skills to establish successful independence as an adult (Huang et al., 2022). Past researchers have also agreed that continued support was needed in maintaining stable housing, completing education, and finding regular employment as there is a disconnection of supportive services and family support for this population related to this transition (Doucet et al., 2022; Skobba et al.,

2022). Much of the existing literature on what is known about foster parents supporting foster care youth aging out of foster care to avoid homelessness was limited.

In Chapter 3, I introduce the study's methodology and research design, discussing the processes necessary for data collection and analysis. I will describe the population from which the participants are recruited and how I recruit these individuals. The chapter also includes the instrumentation used for data collection and the trustworthiness of these data collection measures. The final section of Chapter 3 consists of the ethical considerations necessary to establish this research project and how I abide by the regulations for such ethical practices.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the strategies that foster parents used to provide tools and skills to their foster care youth aging out of their foster homes to find and maintain stable housing. In Chapter 3, the research methods by which the study is conducted are discussed. The chapter begins with a justification of the research methodology and design. Then, the role of the researcher is detailed, after which the population and sample are discussed. Subsequently, a section of the instruments for data collection shows data collection and analysis. Finally, issues of trustworthiness and ethical research practices are presented.

Research Design and Rationale

The research methodology for the study was qualitative. The qualitative research paradigm is descriptive and exploratory (Mey, 2022). A qualitative researcher guides their research with open-ended questions about a broad central research phenomenon (Chivanga & Monyai, 2021). The open-ended nature of qualitative research allows for a deeper explanation of a phenomenon than quantitative methods (Mey, 2022). This open-endedness allows the researcher to fully explore the central research phenomenon because the questions are often used to collect narrative data, including participants' perspectives and opinions, compared to numerical and replicative data associated with quantitative research (Chivanga & Monyai, 2021). This focus makes qualitative research ideal for exploring subjective issues.

A qualitative methodology was appropriate for the study for several reasons. First, the study was exploratory. Similarly, the study addressed a broad central phenomenon,

namely the strategies that foster parents use to assist foster youth who are transitioning out of their homes to find and maintain a stable home. This topic and phenomenon also required a descriptive approach. It was necessary to seek the participants' firsthand descriptions of those strategies to discover the strategies that foster parents used, as there was no comprehensive existing set of such strategies to use. Additionally, the research topic was subjective, given the personal and subjective nature of the strategies used by foster parents and the results they achieved when using those strategies.

The alternative design would be quantitative research. Quantitative research is relationship focused (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2021). In a quantitative study, a researcher seeks to test hypotheses developed based on existing theory (Baker, 2017). These hypotheses are formulated using narrowly defined variables, with the hypotheses about the potential relationships between those variables (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2021). Quantitative research is also closed ended. Because the variables in quantitative research are narrow and specific, they can be assessed using closed-ended data collection (Baker, 2017). However, the closed-ended nature of quantitative data means that such data are impersonal (Baker, 2017). Therefore, quantitative data are not ideal when a researcher is concerned about capturing participants' perspectives or opinions.

A quantitative methodology was a poor fit for the study. As discussed, the study pertained to a broad central phenomenon, not narrowly defined variables based on preexisting theory. Moreover, it was not currently evident what variables would be appropriate to measure if trying to examine the topic of this study from a quantitative perspective, which misaligned with the relationship-focused nature of quantitative

research. This study was also exploratory; thus, closed-ended quantitative data could not have been used to explore new ideas. Therefore, the study was incompatible with the main aspects of quantitative research.

Within the qualitative paradigm of research, the research design was a generic qualitative design. A generic qualitative design, also referred to as interpretive description, is a broad qualitative design that aligns with the overall nature of qualitative research rather than limiting participants' descriptions to only one facet of a phenomenon (Kostere & Kostere, 2021; Percy et al., 2015). A generic design is most appropriate when a researcher intends to describe and interpret the central phenomenon broadly without focusing on the underlying issues of why a phenomenon occurs (Kostere & Kostere, 2021; Thorne, 2016). A generic qualitative design is also methodologically flexible, allowing a researcher to draw on aspects of other designs as needed during the research process (Percy et al., 2015). A generic qualitative design is most appropriate when no other specific design is well aligned.

An interpretive description or generic design was appropriate to the study for several reasons. First, the study was primarily descriptive. I intended to explore the strategies that foster parents used to assist foster youth transitioning out of their homes to find and maintain stable homes, a purpose for which describing those strategies was paramount. Moreover, I intended only to explore the strategies, not to dive more deeply into why those specific strategies were used. In addition, as per the prior section, the study was aligned with the overall nature of qualitative research. The study was also, as

detailed below, not well aligned with other qualitative designs. Hence, a generic qualitative design was ideal.

Other qualitative designs were considered, but none were deemed appropriate. The first design considered was a narrative inquiry. A narrative inquiry approach focuses on participants' stories or narratives (Call-Cummings & Dazzo, 2023). Although the fuller narratives surrounding the strategies that foster parents used to assist foster youth transitioning out of their homes to find and maintain stable homes could be interesting and offer insight, those narratives were more than was necessary to understand the strategies themselves. The next design considered was a case study design. In a case study design, the focus is contextual, using one or more cases to determine how context shapes the phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Mey, 2022). In this study, however, the focus was more general, and no specific cases of interest were identified. Grounded theory was also considered for use within this study. In grounded theory, a researcher uses the data from the study to develop an entirely new theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). The purpose of this study was not to create a theory from study results. Therefore, grounded theory was not selected.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in a qualitative study is to be the instrument of data collection and analysis. According to Holmes (2020), within qualitative research, a researcher's positionality encompasses how the researcher conducts research, including their unique approach and the way life experiences shape their world view. Therefore, positionality can influence multiple aspects of a study, including sampling, data

collection, and data analysis (Davis, 2020; Holmes, 2020; Mey, 2022). Researcher

positionality also influences reflexivity (Holmes, 2020). Within this context, reflexivity

refers to the intersection of researcher and participants (Dodgson, 2019). Within

qualitative research, the role of the researcher entails engaging with participants

throughout the research process (Dodgson, 2019; Holmes, 2020). In this regard, I was the

primary point of contact for study participants. I recruited, interviewed, and was available

to them should they wish to discuss aspects of the study, withdraw from it, or

communicate any needs. This role required cultivating a positive and professional

relationship with each study participant.

  I also acted as an impartial observer when collecting data. Maintaining

impartiality is required by using reflexive practice throughout the study (see Davis, 2020;

Holmes, 2020, for more information). Initially, I sought to document my biases,

expectations, and preconceptions. To mitigate researcher bias, I followed the

recommendations of Meyer and Willis (2019), who suggested that researchers keep a

reflexive journal. By being aware of these biased factors from the outset, I worked toward

suppressing and minimizing their impact on the research process. I made this reflexive

practice and documentation an ongoing part of the research process by keeping a

comprehensive research journal throughout the process and continuing to document any

occurrences of biases or preconceptions within the research process, as well as my

feelings on the research process.

Methodology

The methodology for the study pertains to the functional conducting of the study. This section addresses the participation, participant selection, and the instrumentation. It also lays out how the data are collected and how those data are analyzed once obtained.

Participant Selection Logic

Within this present study, a sample was drawn from an overall population. The overall population in a study refers to the broader group of individuals who are of interest in the research (Banerjee & Chaudhury, 2010). In this study, the overall population was current and former foster parents. Per FosterVA (2023), over 200,000 foster parents are in the United States. The target population is a subset of the overall population, the subset from which the researcher recruits the participants (Banerjee & Chaudhury, 2010). For this study, the target population was current or former foster parents who helped at least one foster child transition from foster care to a stable home. This population was more difficult to estimate regarding size but was likely substantial given the overall number of foster families. The inclusion criteria were current or former foster parents who helped at least one child transition from foster care to a stable home within the previous 5 years to ensure that participants' experiences were relevant and timely.

The sampling strategy was purposive sampling with inclusion criteria. Purposive sampling refers to recruiting participants with the proper knowledge or experiences to address the research questions (Campbell et al., 2020; Etikan et al., 2016). Qualitative sample sizes cannot be determined *a priori* but must instead be determined based on the point of saturation, where recruiting more participants offers no new data (Hennink &

Kaiser, 2021). Preliminarily, a sample size of roughly seven to 10 participants was proposed. Participants were recruited via social media, specifically the platforms of Facebook and Twitter. However, if purposive sampling failed to yield seven to 10 participants, snowball sampling was used. Snowball sampling is when recruited participants connect the researcher with other individuals suited for the study (Parker et al., 2019). In this way, already recruited participants helped me locate additional suitable participants if needed.

Instrumentation

The study involved data from a single source: semistructured interviews with current and former foster parents. Interviews are the most widely used method of collecting qualitative data because they afford relatively easy access to participants' opinions, perceptions, and experiences (Kallio et al., 2016). The semistructured interview affords a valuable balance of structure and flexibility, making it the most versatile type of interview (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Specifically, I used a semistructured approach to ask participants the same questions, allowing participants to answer how they wished.

The semi-structured interview was structured using the interview guide. The interview guide, also called an interview protocol, is a set of key topics and preliminary questions that guide the interview (Kallio et al., 2016). In this study, the interview guide is in Appendix A. I used the interview guide to ensure I collected relevant and robust data to address the research questions fully. I asked a panel of experts to review it to validate the interview guide.

These experts were recruited from PhD holders within the university. One of the experts suggested no changes, so none were made. The other two experts suggested changes to some words to make the interview questions seem more casual or easier for participants to understand. In addition, one participant suggested rearranging questions for better flow and cohesion. All of these changes were incorporated into the final iteration of the interview protocol before the final approval of the proposal.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Data collection for the study proceeded as follows. First, I obtained site authorization from Facebook and Twitter social media platforms (see Appendix B). These authorizations ensured that the social media sampling strategy was workable. Second, I sought approval from the university's institutional research board (IRB). Any changes requested by the IRB were made. No data were collected until IRB approval was secure.

Once IRB approval was secured, data collection began. As a first step, I posted my recruitment post. This post included a brief description of the study, what participation would involve, and the researcher's contact information. The post was posted in relevant social media groups that pertain to foster care or foster parents. Where necessary, I asked for further approval/site authorizations from the moderators of these groups.

Interested participants used the information in the post to contact me. Participants were asked to verify that they met the inclusion criteria in their initial emails to streamline the process. After answering the prospective participant's questions, I provided

them with a link to the study's informed consent form. The informed consent was hosted online on DocuSign, an easy-to-use electronic signature site. Once participants esigned the informed consent, an interview was scheduled.

Interviews were scheduled at a time that was convenient for the participant. Each interview for the study lasted 30 to 60 minutes. Interviews were conducted virtually using the Zoom teleconferencing platform. Interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed using the built-in transcription feature. I then edited the transcripts for coherency. Next, I emailed the participants their transcripts for member checking. Participants had 2 weeks to review and correct their transcript and return it to me using email. If participants wished to withdraw from the study, they contacted me before publication. However, participants who completed the interview and member checking received a US$15 virtual target gift card.

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis for the study was qualitative thematic analysis, as informed by Clarke et al. (2015). NVivo or similar qualitative data analysis software was used to support and facilitate the analysis. Per Clarke et al., there are six steps to the qualitative thematic analysis process. These steps are discussed in this section.

The first step was building a strong familiarity with the overall dataset. In this step, a researcher must lay the foundations for the overall analysis (Clarke et al., 2015). To this end, each transcript was reviewed twice or more to establish baseline familiarity. This step served to ground the analysis in the data.

Then, Step 2 was the open coding of the data (Clarke et al., 2015). Open coding entailed identifying units of meaning or ideas in the data and assigning them labels. These labels were called codes and reflected the occurrence of the same idea across two or more responses. The coding was conducted with the assistance of an initial codebook of expected codes developed based on the literature, but new, emergent codes were also added.

The third step was to identify the themes. Themes were more significant and more complete ideas or units of meaning (Clarke et al., 2015). Each theme was developed by examining the incidence of the codes. Where two or more codes appeared in a similar pattern across two or more responses, a theme was developed. Each theme must address the central research question of the study. In this study, the expected themes were the strategies themselves.

Then, the fourth step was the verification of the themes (Clarke et al., 2015). In this step, each theme was compared back against the data. Each theme needed to be demonstratable and derived from the actual data; to this end, a table provided quotes from the data supporting each theme. If any response directly contradicted a theme, that response was noted for use in the discussion.

Step 5 was naming themes. First, the themes were compared and assessed for completeness and uniqueness (Clarke et al., 2015). Any themes determined to be incomplete or nonunique were merged with other themes. The remaining themes were then assigned descriptive names that conveyed their essential ideas.

Finally, the last step was to compile and report the themes (Clarke et al., 2015). This step required summarizing the findings into a final chapter. Therefore, this step entailed the presentation of themes in Chapter 4.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is similar to validity but for qualitative studies. Hence, ensuring trustworthiness is key. There are four aspects of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These aspects are discussed in this section.

Credibility

Credibility is the aspect of trustworthiness that is most like internal validity. Credibility refers to how internally consistent the study is (Mey, 2022; Patton, 2015). Specifically, credibility refers to how well the data collected reflects accuracy and participants' experiences (Patton, 2015). The main strategy for developing credibility was keeping a reflexive journal, in which I took notes regarding my biases and preconceived ideas, per the recommendations of Meyer and Willis (2019). Specifically, I could use this process to reflect on my biases and ensure they did not influence the results. In addition, participant member checking was used to ensure that the data used in the analysis aligned with participants' actual opinions, perceptions, and experiences.

Transferability

Transferability is the aspect of trustworthiness that is most like external validity. Transferability means ensuring that a reader can determine the circumstances under which the results were reached (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Patton, 2015). Hence, the main

strategy for achieving transferability was to create in-depth notes regarding sampling, data collection, and data analysis. With these methodology descriptions, future researchers may better determine what circumstances may be similar or different to this study's. Additionally, the presentation of the demographics in Chapter 4 contributed to ensuring transferability. By providing an in-depth account of the composition of the participants, future researchers can determine how close their samples may be and how those samples may influence future transferability to other settings and populations.

Dependability

Dependability is the aspect of trustworthiness that is most like reliability. Dependability reflects the replicable research process (Mey, 2022; Stahl & King, 2020). To this end, I provided an in-depth discussion of the methodology, including all procedures related to sampling, data collection, and data analysis. In this way, future researchers can replicate this study if needed. In addition, the final codebook was included in the study to demonstrate the work done when I analyzed the data for this study. The analysis process was also described in detail to build dependability.

Confirmability

Finally, confirmability is the aspect of trustworthiness that is most like objectivity. Hence, confirmability reflects the reader's confidence in the researcher's impartiality (Stahl & King, 2020). To bolster confirmability, I built a table of direct quotes from the data supporting each theme and acknowledging any responses that conflicted with or contradicted the theme. Therefore, I identified that the emergent themes properly reflected the meaning within the data and were not influenced, to the

extent possible, by my personal opinions or beliefs. Engaging in and documenting reflexivity throughout the process helped develop confirmability.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical research practices were followed. All data collection for the study were confidential. All participants were assigned codenames to protect their identities. Only I had access to participants' identities. Any identifying information in the data was redacted before the analysis. Participation in the study was fully voluntary. Any participants wishing to withdraw their data could have chosen to do so by contacting me up until the point of publication. The study did not target an at-risk population or access a sensitive issue, meaning it should be of minimal risk to participants. Additionally, there were no conflicts of interest, as I did not know any of the participants personally or have any vested interest in the findings.

IRB approval and site authorizations were obtained before any data were collected. Each participant reviewed and accepted informed consent documentation via DocuSign to participate. Once collected, I secured and stored all data. As the data were virtual, I stored all data on an encrypted external drive when not in use. The drive and all files will be kept in a locked file cabinet. I will save all data for 5 years after the study's publication, which will then be destroyed by shredding and pulverization.

Summary

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the strategies that foster parents used to provide tools and skills to their foster care youth aging out of their foster homes to find and maintain stable housing. Chapter 3 laid out how this purpose was

served. The research methodology for the study was qualitative, with a generic qualitative research design. My role as the researcher in this qualitative study was as the instrument of data collection. I acted as an impartial observer when collecting data.

The overall population was current and former foster parents, and the target population was current or former foster parents who helped at least one foster child transition from foster care to a stable home. The inclusion criteria were current or former foster parents who helped at least one child transition from foster care to a stable home within the previous 5 years to ensure relative recency of experiences. The sampling strategy was convenience sampling with inclusion criteria. Participants were recruited through social media, specifically Facebook and Twitter. Data analysis for the present study included qualitative thematic analysis. NVivo or similar qualitative data analysis software supported and facilitated the analysis. In the next chapter, Chapter 4, the study's results are laid out.

Chapter 4: Results

Youth aged out of the foster care system may lack essential life skills. For example, foster care youth may lack the skills to successfully live on their own, as foster care youth tend to be unprepared to transition to independent living, especially when compared to their peers who did not experience foster care. This lack of life skills and discrepancies in life experiences put foster care youth at risk of homelessness and related negative outcomes such as criminal activities, sex trafficking, unwanted pregnancies, and substance abuse (Hedenstrom, 2021). The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the strategies that foster parents used to provide tools and skills to their foster care youth aging out of their foster homes to find and maintain stable housing. To address this purpose, the research question guiding this study was the following: What strategies do foster parents use to assist foster care youth transitioning out of their homes to find and maintain a stable home?

The results of the study are presented in this chapter. This chapter begins with a description of the setting and demographics of eight foster parents with children who aged out of foster care. Information about the data collection, data analysis, and evidence of trustworthiness is also provided prior to the presentation of the results. Five themes emerged from the analysis. The themes are reported in this chapter.

Setting

The geographical setting of this study was the United States. The United States has a population of over 200,000 foster parents. With a wide geographical area (the United States) and a large target population, this study's recruitment and data collection

processes were conducted online. Recruitment occurred through social media platforms Facebook and X (formerly Twitter). Data collection was conducted through Zoom, an online conferencing platform.

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Demographics

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The sample of this study was eight current or former foster parents in the United States who helped at least one foster child transition out of foster care to a stable home within the previous 5 years. Of the eight participants, five identified as male, and three identified as female. Five participants were current foster parents at the time of the study, while three participants were former foster parents within the past 5 years. Table 1 present the participants' pseudonyms and descriptive information. A brief description of each participant follows.

Table 1

Participants' Descriptive Information

Participant	Gender	Former/current foster parent
1	Male	Current
2	Male	Former
3	Female	Current
4	Female	Current
5	Male	Former
6	Female	Current
7	Male	Current
8	Male	Former

P1 was a current foster parent and had been a foster parent for 10 years. For P1, being a foster parent means being able to help children grow and develop. For P1, a foster child who aged out of the system, he continued to provide support for the child's growth

and development. P1 acted as a provision to help the child live independently. He assisted his child in setting up a savings account, finding employment, and paying for rent until the child could pay independently.

P2 was a former foster parent to a male youth. The youth had been with him for 5 years. P2 attributed being a foster parent as providing for the child's basic and emotional needs. As his child aged out of the foster care system, P2 continued to provide support through maintaining communication and providing guidance. P2 was vocal to his child that, in challenging times, he should know that he could reach out to him.

P3 was a current foster parent to two children. Her first child was preparing to transition out of the foster care system. For P3, being a foster parent means playing the role of a carer and a supporter. P3 believed that being a foster parent does not end when the child transitions out of her care. She planned to continue providing emotional and financial support for her two foster children. She expressed that she loves her foster children as if they were biologically hers.

P4 believed being a foster parent was a way to give back to the community. At the time of this study, she was a foster parent helping her foster children to transition out of the system. P4 sustained herself and her foster children through her job and her parents' support.

P5 was a former foster parent. P5's goal in becoming a foster parent was to provide a place for children with nowhere to go. Under his care, P5 taught his foster child to develop life skills that allowed them to live independently. P5 shared that as his foster child aged out of the system, he continued to provide financial and emotional support. As

a former foster parent, P5 supported other foster parents by being part of an organization

providing training and resource access.

P6 was a current foster parent. Two children were currently in her care. One

former foster child had aged out of the system. The former foster child had been living

independently and graduated from college with a degree in engineering. P6 felt supported

by her parents, friends, and the church community in raising her foster children; however,

she also shared that she sustained most of the expenses through her job. P6 hoped for

better assistance and support services from the government.

P7 was a current foster parent who had a child age out of the system and his care.

While in his care, he made sure to teach the child skills that were relevant to seeking

employment and financial literacy. P7 continues to provide guidance and support for his

former foster child despite aging out of the system.

P8 was a former foster parent who took care of his former child to provide her

safety and stability away from her hostile environment. The child stayed with him for 10

years, and P8 provided for her basic needs, emotional needs, and education until college

graduation. P8 kept in touch with her and continued to provide her assistance and

support.

Data Collection

The data collection method applied to this study was semistructured, individual

interviews. The interview participants were recruited after obtaining the university IRB

approval of the methodology and the Facebook and X site authorization. Using the social

media platforms Facebook and X, posts were made to invite potential participants to the

study. The invitation to the study included a description of myself and the study, as well as my email address. The invitation also contained the following inclusion criteria: current or former foster parents in the United States who helped at least one foster child transition from foster care to a stable home within the previous 5 years. The participants who expressed interest in joining the study were briefly asked the screening question about the inclusion criteria. The foster parents who met the inclusion criteria were informed of the nature, terms, and conditions of participation as written in the informed consent form. I asked the participants to submit a digitally signed copy of the informed consent form before the interview. They were also asked for their preferred interview schedule, conducted over Zoom.

During the interviews, a script was followed. All participants were greeted similarly, and similar questions were asked to keep the conversation aligned with the research purpose. However, there was room for flexibility in the line of questioning and in asking follow-up questions, given the semistructured nature of the interviews. The participants were informed that the interview was recorded. Each interview lasted at least 30 minutes but did not exceed 45 minutes.

At the end of the interviews, the participants were given a $15 online shopping gift card and were informed to expect a digital copy of the interview transcript within 2 weeks. The participants were requested to review the accuracy of their responses and edit the transcripts as needed as part of the member-checking process. Although transcripts were sent to all participants, no participants responded after the 2-week allotted time. Additionally, no responses were provided after a follow-up email. Therefore, no changes

were made to the transcripts after the initial interview. The finalized transcripts were imported to NVivo 14, a qualitative data analysis software, in preparation for analysis.

Data Analysis

The data analysis methods included a six-step thematic analysis framework. Specifically, the data analysis was guided by a six-step thematic analysis framework recommended by Clarke et al. (2015). The six steps were (a) data familiarization, (b) coding, (c) theme identification, (d) theme verification, (e) theme naming, and (f) theme compilation and report (Clarke et al., 2015). The data analysis procedures were conducted using NVivo 14 to store, organize, and manage the data.

Once the transcripts were imported to NVivo, I read each file from start to finish two times to become familiar with the data. During this step, I understood the general patterns of the data as a whole. This step was crucial in grounding the codes to the participants' experiences instead of my interpretation.

The second step was to generate codes. Codes emerged from rereading the transcripts line-by-line to identify chunks of data that were meaningful to the research question. Thus, data about the participants' experiences of being foster parents and providing tools and skills to their foster children to transition to independent living were considered meaningful. The inductive approach to coding meant that the codes were grounded to the chunks of data instead of a predetermined set of codes. Examples of codes with corresponding chunks of data are provided in Table 2.

Table 2

Sample Codes

Codes	Quotes from the data
Initial setbacks	I have some setbacks because I didn't really know the basics.
Providing mental health support	I give him all support he needs when it comes to in dealing with mental health stability.
Keeping in touch	Because we are still in good terms, as of now. We communicate most regularly. even as of this today we have spoken together.
Teaching financial literacy	We have to go somewhere to actually teach him financial and project budgeting, so he can be able to be saving.
Providing basic and other needs	I was able to provide the basic things needed to transition into a stable home.
Better government assistance	I think the government should make should make available grants

The third step was to identify themes. Themes comprised a group of codes that share a relationship (Clarke et al., 2015). For instance, the codes t*eaching how to navigate life*, *teaching financial literacy*, and *covering education expenses* were practices of the participants to equip their foster children with the knowledge and skills to become self-sustaining young adults. The three codes were grouped under the theme *equipping with life skills to be self-reliant*. In NVivo, the themes were represented by a hierarchy of codes, as seen in Figure 2. Table 3 contains the themes with the supporting codes.

Figure 2

Hierarchy of Codes
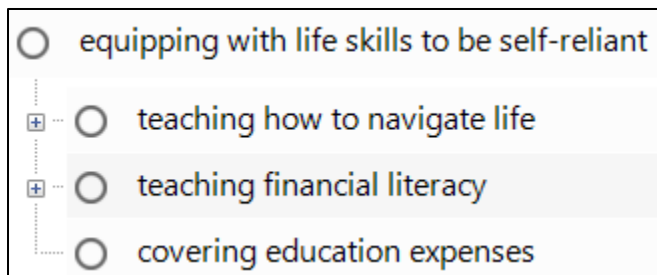
Table 3

Codes to Themes

Codes	Initial themes
Initial setbacks	Challenges
Letting go of child	
Paperwork	
Seeing kid live a stable life	Definition of success
Seeing kid live independently	
Being caring and supportive to a child	Purpose
Helping kids grow and develop	
Provide safety and stability	
Covering education expenses	Equipping with life skills to be self-reliant
Teaching financial literacy	
Teaching how to navigate life	
Guiding to the 'right track'	Providing guidance to make good decisions
Talking about expectations	
Assisting in searching for employment	Helping establish stability
Assisting in setting up savings account	

Codes	Initial themes
Getting health insurance	
Assisting in finding housing	Supporting financially
Providing basic and other needs	
Checking in with youths	Continuing companionship and encouragement
Having open communication	
Keeping in touch	
Loved as biological child	
Providing mental health support	Providing mental health support
Agency for housing needs	Basic and housing needs services
Church and community services to aid with housing needs	
Government assistance for basic needs	
Groups for foster parents	Healthcare support and services
Healthcare professionals for accessing insurance	
Mental health support for parents and children	
Denied enrollment	No programs or services used
Self-sustaining through work	
Support from friends and family	
Better government assistance	Recommendations to improve the support foster care youth
Better housing support for youths	
Better programs for foster parents	
Better support for education	
Training for foster parents	Training for foster parents

The themes were verified in the fourth step. Theme verification entailed

reviewing the themes against the data to find sufficient supporting evidence of the

themes' emergence. Suitable quotes to represent the themes were also identified in this step. The themes' completeness was determined by reviewing how the themes answered the research question. During this step, the themes were further refined. Five final themes were developed from the initial 14 themes. In the fifth step, the final themes were compared and contrasted against each other to determine the distinctness of each theme. The final themes were given names that were recontextualized to answer the research question. The initial themes and final themes are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Initial Themes to Final Themes

Initial themes	Final themes
Challenges	Embracing the meaning of being a foster parent
Definition of success	
Purpose	
Equipping with life skills to be self-reliant	Providing guidance to function independently in the community
Providing guidance to make good decisions	
Helping establish stability	Providing financial support and assisting in achieving financial stability
Supporting financially	
Continuing companionship and encouragement	Providing continuing emotional support
Providing mental health support	
Basic and housing needs services	Using services to help foster care youths' transition
Healthcare support and services	
No programs or services used	
Training for foster parents	
Recommendations to improve the support foster care youth	

The last step was to compile and report the themes. The themes were logically organized to create a complete narrative of the foster parents' perceptions and

experiences in providing tools and skills to their foster children to live independently. The themes are reported in the Results section.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is important in establishing the rigor of the study. Four components were met to establish trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Patton, 2015). The evidence of meeting the trustworthiness criteria is presented in the following subsections.

Credibility

Credibility was achieved through maintaining a journal to record my preconceived ideas that may influence the results. Credibility refers to the extent of internal consistency of the study (Mey, 2022; Patton, 2015). My preconceived ideas were set aside during the analysis to focus and ground the results to the data collected from the participants. The participants were assumed to provide honest and accurate accounts of their experiences as foster parents. I used the purposive sampling technique to select participants with relevant experiences needed for the investigation. At the beginning of the interview, the participants were also reminded to be truthful and detailed in their responses. After the interviews, the participants were requested to review the transcripts as part of the member-checking process.

Transferability

My actions also bolstered transferability. Transferability refers to the extent to which a reader can determine the context of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Patton, 2015). In-depth notes regarding the context of this study were kept throughout the study

procedures. The context of this study, including the participants' demographics, descriptive information, and setting, was described in detail.

Dependability

The dependability of the results was also a concern throughout data collection and analysis. Dependability refers to the extent to which the research process is replicable (Mey, 2022; Stahl & King, 2020). Thick descriptions of the research procedures and materials were provided in this write-up of the study. A reflexivity journal was also used to document the rationale for the decisions made for the study. These reasonings were also included in the study write-up. The materials, such as the interview protocol and the codebook, are provided in the appendices.

Confirmability

Finally, the confirmability of the results was considered. Confirmability refers to the reader's confidence in the researcher's neutrality (Stahl & King, 2020). The data analysis process was grounded as close to the data as possible. I followed the six-step thematic analysis guide and utilized NVivo 14 to maintain organization and uniformity in data handling. In reporting the results, relevant quotes from the transcripts were provided to support how the results were grounded to the data.

<div align="center">

Results

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Five themes emerged from the analysis. The themes were the following: (a) embracing the meaning of being a foster parent, (b) providing guidance to function independently in the community, (c) providing financial support and assisting in achieving financial stability, (d) providing continuing emotional support, and (e) using

services to help foster care youths' transition. The themes are compiled and reported in this section.

Theme 1: Embracing the Meaning of Being a Foster Parent

All eight participants interviewed for this study shared their perceptions of embodying the role of a foster parent as part of their strategies in assisting youth transitioning out of their homes. The participants shared that being a foster parent meant serving a purpose in providing safety and stability, being caring and supportive, and sustaining the growth and development of the foster children. Three participants shared that foster children often did not have a stable and typical family structure, which could impact their future in finding and maintaining a stable home. As the children's foster parent, they aimed to provide them with a place to feel safe and stable. P5 stated, "We want all the children to have a safe and stable." The participants intended to help the children reduce their adverse experiences. P8 shared, "I took the child into my care … it was basically because of the hostility of the parents." P6 explained, "By providing a stable, supportive environment, we [decrease] the emotional challenges or environments of transitioning to adult without traditional family structures." Two participants shared that they were driven to become foster parents because of their genuine care and desire to support foster children. P4 shared,

> Well, actually, becoming a foster care parent, it is a joy taking care of someone under my case. Even giving back to the society. I actually love children a lot. I have passion for children which all actually led me to look out for children that don't have parents or supporters.

Additionally, two participants stated that their roles as foster parents entailed giving the children opportunities to grow and develop into fully functioning young adults. P1 shared, "being a foster parent, I was ready to render parental care … I had to take that first responsibility upon myself to help develop children opportunities to grow and develop into functioning young adults." Thus, with the participants' perceptions of the role of a foster parent, their beliefs about being successful foster parents centered on seeing the children age out and live stable, independent lives.

One description of a successful foster care outcome was seeing the youth have a career the foster parents helped create. P7 shared, "It feels great, knowing that I've been able to impact the life of someone … knowing that I can create a career path for this person to be successful, and it was actually successful, it's something that gives me joy." P4 and P5 shared that they felt successful in helping their foster children live with stability as they helped address their emotional issues. P1 shared that seeing his former foster child start to live on their own was a successful outcome:

> I feel I was successful, because in as much as in as much as III make progress to it. He's transitioning. And the end of the day you see that he, he as well, is responding to those, to those to those progress you made. It's much of a successful feeling to me.

Nonetheless, the participants also shared the challenges they faced and overcame as foster parents.

Love and attachment were also obstacles for some participants. Two participants shared that they genuinely loved and became attached to their foster children and that

they found difficulties in letting them go. P7 expressed, "I was feeling like I'm losing someone. But along the line, I knew it was important for their life … it was stressful. But when you're doing something that is important, you just see it as sacrifice." Two participants shared that they faced obstacles during the beginning of being a foster parent, including challenges in dealing with paperwork and being a new parent. P2 shared, "It was stressful … a lot of documentation requirements … school, institution … a lot of paperwork." P8 described the experience as an initial setback that he was eventually able to resolve as he gained more experience as a foster parent. P8 stated, "I have some setbacks because I didn't really know the basics of parenting." P8 also stated that his love for his foster child and his determination to learn helped him overcome the obstacle. Therefore, both love for the foster child and determination to help in the future guided P8 in the future.

Theme 2: Providing Guidance to Function Independently in the Community

Eight participants shared that as the youth were under their care, they did not simply provide for their needs but also taught them to become responsible. One strategy used by the participants was to guide the youth to gain important life skills and good decision-making skills. The participants equated life skills to competence in navigating life. For the participants, it was important to teach their foster children to learn to support themselves accessing food, having emotional stability, and avoiding undesirable behaviors. P6 described,

I had taught a lot of experiences especially ranging from life skills development, emotional support, employment guidance, healthcare navigation [and] legal

supports during social collection … I taught him not to engage in risky

behaviors … to avoid homelessness, joblessness … and substance abuse.

P2 and P7 added that they also taught their foster children to cook and do their laundry.

They believed that cooking and doing the laundry were important life skills in addition to

navigating careers and healthcare to live independently.

Four participants expressed that education was important to living a stable and

independent life. The participants provided guidance for the children to obtain a high

school and college diploma and supported the children's education by personally

covering their school fees. P4 stated, "I try to cover his educational. I made a way to

support his educational experience." P8 shared, "His education is important. I supported

him with the help of my family and my job. I was able to sponsor him off to the college

level." P6 also supported her foster child's education. Her former foster child graduated

from college and could support themselves through work as an engineer.

Another life skill imparted by the participants to their foster children was financial

literacy. According to the participants, financial literacy means budgeting and saving

money. P1 taught his foster child to set aside money for food and other needs and to save

for future use. P7 elucidated,

> I taught financial literacy which included budgeting, saving understanding bills in
>
> order to promote responsible financial management and also to be able to. You
>
> know, live alive on budget so that they don't have to spend money on what is not
>
> relevant. Because, like I said, we have unlimited needs that helps to manage our

resources because we are able to budget for a particular thing which we feel is

more important.

Therefore, as P7 opined, assisting in financial literacy was one strategy foster care youth

could use to help them in the future.

Guiding the youth to live independently also included teaching them to make

good decisions. While under their care, the participants introduced their foster children to

groups and organizations they thought would be good influences. P8 shared that his foster

child was into sports. He supported his child's interest and took him to play sports instead

of being in the streets. P1 foster child was interested in art. In order to keep them away

from bad influences, P1 took his foster child to social activities to meet other artists. P1

stated, "I take him to live a crime-free life … I take him to social related activities…He

can also get along with artists, you know … he [is] able to associate with others, and get

to learn a lot from there as well." In addition, foster parents talked to them about

expectations. P2 articulated, "I want them to be a better person on them, to be good to

themselves. I want them to have a sense of responsibility for them, so right they will be

able to choose on their own." Thus, this process was another strategy discussed to help

foster children's transition into young adults who make good decisions.

Theme 3: Providing Financial Support and Assisting in Achieving Financial

Stability

All eight participants shared their strategies for providing financial support and

helping their foster children who aged out to achieve financial stability. The participants

shared that financially supporting their former foster children meant providing for their

basic needs, including food and housing. P3 and P4 specified that the money to sustain their children's needs was the money they earned from their jobs. P4 stated, "I earn money from my work. And I use that money to provide the basic needs for my kids and we will have to make sure they transition to an adult." P5 and P8 stated that their financial support continued until a few months after their children transitioned out of their care and secured a job. P5 shared, "After 3 months, they got some jobs and they continued life. Before that, I offered some amount to give to them until they find their jobs." Four participants stated that they helped their former foster children pay for rent and utility bills until they could sustain themselves. P1 stated, "I cleared his rent. I cleared the bill for him for that period." P2 shared that he was prepared to financially support his foster child's transition into living independently by saving a portion of his income over time to be used by the child when they move out. P2 shared,

> Well, what I did was like, I created part of my income I created like a certain amount should go for his housing allowance, like a certain amount from my income so to be used for his housing or rent and the likes, maybe in the housing like. That's what I did. I created a separate account.

P4, P6, and P7 helped their foster children with their housing needs by talking to organizations and agencies that assist in finding affordable housing options.

Apart from giving foster children financial support, the participants shared that they also helped teach them the importance of financial stability. P1 and P5 stated that they assisted their foster children in securing a job. P1 and P5 also taught their children to open a savings account and save a portion of their income. P1 shared, "I also set in place

an employment for him so he could sort out his basic needs. So he could take care of himself. Then I also made sure he has a savings intact." Only P4 discussed the importance of access to health insurance in becoming financially stable. P4 shared, "I got a kind of health insurance that will cover him for some time … There is no worry about where to get the money from if he has any health issues." Thus, for the participants, helping their foster children transition out of their homes and into a stable and independent life included support to help them find a job and save money.

Theme 4: Providing Continuing Emotional Support

Six participants shared that they helped foster care youth transition out of their homes to find and maintain stable homes, including providing emotional support from when they were taken in until now. For the participants, having the youth age out of their care did not mean their relationship had ended. The participants kept in touch with their former foster children. P8 stated, "We communicate most regularly. Even as of this today we have spoken together." The participants shared that they continued to provide companionship and encouragement to support their former foster children emotionally. P2 stated, "What I did then was providing them companionship and emotional support, empathy, understanding, and encouragement." Therefore, emotional support appeared to be a significant facet of strategies concerning maintaining stable housing for foster youth.

Keeping in touch to provide emotional support included having an open line of communication in which the participants let their former foster children know they could talk about anything. P4 described, "We are able to talk to them. If they are having problems, they're able to share to us. So we are able to know what they are going

through." P4 added that she and her husband loved their former foster child like a biological child and treated them like family; thus, they continued their contact and relationship. P4 stated, "We love them as our own. We keep in touch and feel as if they are part of our family." P8 shared that he continued to guide and advise his former foster child to let them know that they are supported. Three participants shared that they provided continuing emotional support to their former foster children by referring them to counselors and therapists in addition to their support and understanding. P1 stated, "I give him all the support he needs when it comes to dealing with mental health stability." P7 shared that he validated his child's emotional challenges, gave them a "supportive and understanding environment," and took them to see a therapist. Therefore, these strategies to help foster care youth transition out of their home included providing prolonged emotional support during and after the transition.

Theme 5: Using Services to Help Foster Care Youths' Transition

The participants felt that they were successful in helping their foster children transition out of their homes to find and maintain a stable home. They attributed the success to their efforts, the support of their family and friends, and some programs and services for foster children. P4, P6, and P8 shared that they primarily financially supported their foster children up to their transition experience through the income they earned from their job. P4 stated, "I mentioned myself because I actually work a lot at my job. And with the help of the money, I was able to provide some support for my kids." Some participants' families also helped with the expenses, but friends and family were also helpful in taking care of the children. P4, P5, P6, and P8 shared that their friends and

parents supported them as foster parents, and they also had a relationship with their foster children. Nonetheless, P2 shared that on top of his job and his family's support, he attempted to enroll in a program for foster care children but was denied. Therefore, P2 underscored that programs and services were not always easily accessed, even though support from family and friends was present.

The programs and services successfully used by the participants to aid their children's transition included housing programs. The participants shared that they contacted agencies, the government, and the church. P1 and P4 reached out to agencies for support and were able to find affordable housing options for their foster children. P4 helped her foster child access subsidized housing. P7 talked to an agency to help his foster child find housing. P7 stated, "One of the services, I contacted the agency for the housing, and then we came to an agreement, and then we secured the apartment for him." The government and the church could only provide minimal assistance with basic needs. P7 stated, "The government helps with the clothing, the food." P6 shared, "The church provided most of a basic need." Therefore, collaborating with agencies and churches assisted foster youth throughout the transition process.

Four participants shared that they utilized healthcare and mental healthcare services for themselves and their foster children. The participants found the services helpful in their children's transition into independent living. P1 explained, "I consulted a therapist so as to help us to gain more knowledge on mental stability." P5 shared that he consulted a family counselor for him and his foster child to alleviate both their stress and to help his foster child feel empowered. P4 shared that a healthcare professional helped

her secure health insurance for her foster child, which they could use until they transition out of their care. This decision to access health insurance for her foster child is one example of the services they used to support foster care youth during the transition.

The participants believed that specific programs and services could be offered to improve foster parents' experience of helping their children transition out of their homes. The participants hoped for better government assistance, especially in having proper funding and providing housing grants and subsidies for foster children aging out of the system. P1 shared, "The government should make grants available to [help foster children] establish themselves." In addition, the participants stated their recommendations for better support services for the foster children's education. P6 suggested that foster children have access to "free education" as she believed basic education was important in building a stable life. P4 and P8 recommended having services to help foster children be educated in leadership skills and sports. Lastly, P1, P2, and P8 suggested better services to support foster parents, so they were better equipped to help foster children. P1 shared, "The community or government should organize programs and social programs and resources to aid foster parents." Thus, this quote underscores the need for better support for foster care parents.

Summary

This chapter contained the presentation of the results of this study. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the strategies that foster parents used to provide tools and skills to their foster care youth aging out of their foster homes to find and maintain stable housing. Eight current and former foster parents with at least one

youth aged out of the system and their care to live independently were selected and interviewed. The participants' insights were analyzed thematically to develop themes representing their strategies in assisting foster care youths' transition out of their homes to find and maintain a stable life. The themes that emerged from the analysis were the following: (a) embracing the meaning of being a foster parent, (b) providing guidance to function independently in the community, (c) providing financial support and assisting in achieving financial stability, (d) providing continuing emotional support, and (e) using services to help foster care youths' transition.

The participants believed that foster children's successful transition into independent living starts from the foster parents' understanding of their roles and goals in supporting the children. For the participants, being a foster parent meant embracing the purposes of providing safety and stability, being caring and supportive, and sustaining the growth and development of the foster children. Achieving these purposes and seeing the children become independent were successful outcomes of foster parenting for the participants. The challenges of foster parenting were often in the beginning when processing the paperwork and when adjusting to their role in providing for the basic and emotional needs of the children, especially when they have no prior parenting experience. Challenges also presented themselves during the transitioning out process when foster parents became emotionally attached to the youths and had difficulties letting go.

While under the participants' care, they also equipped their foster children with the tools and skills that they thought were necessary to successfully live independently.

They taught them skills to navigate life. They provided for their children's education and guided them to make good decisions.

Nonetheless, the participants' love and support for the former foster children did not stop when they aged out of their care. The participants continued providing financial support as their children began establishing their lives. Some participants assisted their children in accessing housing resources, while others paid the rent until they thought their children were stable enough to pay independently. They also provided food and helped set up their children's bank accounts. To help their children become self-sustaining, they supported them in seeking employment and getting health insurance. Apart from financial support, the emotional support also continued as they maintained open communication and were vocal in letting the youth know they could reach out if they needed help. The participants also shared that they took the initiative to check in on the youth and keep in touch with their former foster children.

The foster parents had support when they were raising and helping their children transition out of their care and into a stable home. Most participants found support in their friends and family, who helped with the expenses or cared for the children. Two participants found benefits in attending a training session specifically for foster parents. Some participants utilized government, community, and church services to assist with finding housing when the children age out and are ready to transition into independent living. Other participants accessed healthcare resources for themselves and the children, including mental healthcare. However, the participants shared that foster children's support services and programs could be improved. The participants believed that the

government could improve on providing subsidies for the children's education and their housing once they age out of the system. The participants also suggested the need for better programs for foster parents to address the children's mental health issues and to plan the children's transition as early as possible.

The results described in this chapter are discussed and interpreted in the next chapter. The results are interpreted through the lens of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs and related literature. The conclusions of the study are also presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the strategies that foster parents used to provide tools and skills to their foster care youth aging out of their foster homes to find and maintain stable housing. The interview data were analyzed thematically, generating five themes that answered the following research question: what strategies do foster parents use to provide tools and skills to their foster care youth who are transitioning out of their foster homes to find and maintain stable housing? The themes that emerged from the analysis were the following: (a) embracing the meaning of being a foster parent, (b) providing guidance to function independently in the community, (c) providing financial support and assisting in achieving financial stability, (d) providing continuing emotional support, and (e) using services to help foster care youths' transition. The next section provides an interpretation of these themes and this study's findings.

Interpretation of the Findings

In this section, an interpretation of the findings of this study is given. Further depth is discussed on how the five themes confirm, disconfirm, or extend the related extant literature. These findings are then analyzed within the context of the conceptual framework.

Theme 1: Embracing the Meaning of Being a Foster Parent

No studies were found in the literature reviewed that focused on foster parents' perceptions of embracing the meaning of being a foster parent. No studies explored the interaction between these perceptions and developing strategies to assist their foster care youth with independently transitioning into their own homes. Therefore, this first theme

may extend the extant literature and provide valuable insight into this topic as well. More research is needed to understand better foster parent perceptions of their roles and strategies in helping foster care youth transition out of their homes.

Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs was aligned with this theme. Maslow's hierarchy of needs was applied to the study to understand better the interaction of needs and strategies of foster parents assisting their foster care youth with independently transitioning out of their homes. The participants shared that being a foster parent meant serving a purpose in providing safety and stability, being caring and supportive, and sustaining the growth and development of the foster children. Foster parents need to feel loved and connected, have self-esteem, and participate in self-actualization to interact with foster care youths' need for essential needs care after transitioning. Therefore, this framework aligns with this theme and provides a deeper understanding of what it means to be a foster parent from a hierarchical needs perspective.

Theme 2: Providing Guidance to Function Independently in the Community

Theme 2 also aligns with previous research. Multiple scholars in the literature reviewed explored the importance of support for foster care youth transitioning into independent living. Häggman-Laitila et al. (2019) examined this topic from the perspectives of social services and foster care professionals. The researchers found that these professionals emphasized the need for foster care youth to have additional support as they emerge into adulthood. In a study from the perspectives of foster care youth, Gabrielli et al. (2020) also found that foster care youth were eager to live independently without supervision and restrictions. However, they may lack the support to prevent

themselves from becoming homeless after they leave their foster care home. Moreover, the stress level of transitioning into housing and the community left many of these newly independent adults with mental health conditions as they tried to figure out where to live (Gabrielli et al., 2020). Klodnick and Samuels (2020) concurred with these outcomes by finding that thousands of foster care youths exited the foster care system annually but did not have a permanent residency they could call home. Therefore, the previous consensus was found in the literature review of the importance of support for foster care youth transitioning independently into their communities.

Theme 2 is aligned with the conceptual framework, as the second theme concerns the guidance needed to function independently in the community. Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs emphasized how different types of needs interact and the importance of meeting basic needs before they become deficient so that other growth needs can be met, including psychology and self-fulfillment. This theme pointed to the significance of foster parents supporting their foster care youth as they transitioned independently into the community by assisting them with their basic and growth needs. Therefore, this second theme from the study of guiding to function independently in the community aligns with this conceptual framework.

Theme 3: Providing Financial Support and Assisting in Achieving Financial Stability

Theme 3 is aligned with previous literature. Studies in the literature also explored the significance of financial support for foster care youth in their transition out of the foster care system. Blakeslee and Best (2019) determined that financial support was

critical for emerging adults transitioning out of foster care. These youth often struggled to find tangible support for education assistance, employment, housing, transportation, and health care. Packard and Benuto (2020) also found that youth who transitioned out of foster care wished for and needed financial resources to increase their opportunities to thrive and succeed as young adults. However, a lack of support and social services was further noted as challenging for these youth passing into adulthood (Packard & Benuto, 2020). Although more limited, studies in the literature also found that financial support was needed to facilitate the successful transition of foster care youth into independent adulthood. Therefore, this third theme from the current study of the need to provide financial support and assist foster care youth with achieving financial stability was also present in the literature.

The framework is also aligned with this theme. Financial support and financial stability are directly linked to providing for essential basic needs (Maslow & Lewis, 1987). Teaching life skills that facilitate financial stability may be further construed as providing for growth needs that would become the foundation for independent living. Therefore, this theoretical perspective offers a more in-depth understanding of how foster care parents who financially support their foster care youth who are transitioning independently teach them life skills to facilitate financial stability and empower them to transition into independent adulthood successfully.

Theme 4: Providing Continuing Emotional Support

Theme 4 also aligned with previous research; however, previous research on this topic is sparse. One study was found in the literature reviewed that explored emotional

support for foster care youth. Armstrong-Heimsoth et al. (2021) explored how emotional support was required for foster care youth and if these young adults needed continued emotional support once they left the foster care system. Even though this population may have received some support when transitioning out of foster care, they struggled to maintain stable housing, complete their education, and find stable employment because of disconnections of supportive services and family support (Armstrong-Heimsoth et al., 2021). I found that the emotional support foster care youth needed as they aged out of the foster care system required emotional and mental support necessary for success as a newly independent young adult.

This theme also aligned with the conceptual framework. For example, this theoretical perspective posits that psychological needs interact with basic essential needs and growth needs (Maslow & Lewis, 1987). Foster parents continuing to emotionally support their foster care youth who are transitioning into independent living and stable homes of their own emphasizes the importance of psychological needs being met along with their basic essential needs and growth needs. Therefore, this theoretical perspective offers a more in-depth understanding of how psychological, basic, and growth needs all require help from foster parents.

Theme 5: Using Services to Help Foster Care Youths' Transition

Theme 5 is aligned with previous research. Multiple scholars in the literature reviewed examined using services to assist foster care youth with their transition to independent living. Leathers, Vande Voort, et al. (2019) indicated that foster care youth would benefit from such programs and services if the information were available before

they left foster care, including how to find and maintain adequate housing, employment, and education. Greeson et al. (2020) further suggested that although such programs and services helped decrease the homeless population of foster care youth, they were often unavailable or unknown by older foster care youth. However, several of these programs and services showed methods for success with foster care youth aging out of the foster care system through continued support and training. Jones (2019) explored the perspectives of foster care youth leaving the foster care system and found that participants stated that services and supports helped them overcome challenges with their transition to understand better how to move forward with their independent lives. Jones further revealed a need for additional support programs and services for these youth who could assist in providing means for housing, employment, and furthering their education. These services were important for former foster care youth to facilitate their transition out of foster care into successful independent living.

Other studies focused more on preventing homelessness among foster care youth who were transitioning out of the foster care system. Kim et al. (2019) determined that the factors that prevented foster care youth from becoming homeless were having a connection to an adult, remaining in foster care until age 21, having a high school education, being ready to enroll in college, and having full-time or part-time employment. Both Farmer et al. (2021) and Kelly (2020) concurred that homelessness was a challenge for foster care youth who left the foster care system without concrete plans for their future, which might also include challenges with mental health issues and criminal behaviors. Brisson et al. (2020) explored the various causes of homelessness and

the challenges these youths faced as they left the foster care system and determined that youth from foster care often faced adverse experiences during their childhood that led to harmful outcomes later in life, including socioeconomic challenges such as homelessness and psychological and criminal behaviors. Moreover, youth who left foster care were often unprepared for their challenges and struggles while emerging into adulthood and needed assistance and support to make a successful and sustainable transition (Brisson et al., 2020). Therefore, this theme is congruent with previous literature, as previous scholars indicated that foster care youth may be unprepared to transition into independent living, and more programs and services were needed to inform and assist these youth in their transition process.

This theme aligned with Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. For example, various services, programs, and supports offer opportunities to help provide for all of the needs posited by this theoretical perspective for foster care youth transitioning into independent living. These foster parents described utilizing various such services and support in assisting their foster care youth, including their efforts as support. Therefore, this theoretical perspective also offers a more in-depth understanding of how services, programs, and supports help meet foster care youth's needs as they transition to independent living and into their own homes.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study included potential bias from my previous experiences, personally and professionally. I was a former foster care youth and also

worked with foster care youth professionally. I mitigated this bias by outlining preconceived ideas about the study topic through reflexive journaling.

Another limitation of this study may be the participants not being completely honest in their responses about their strategies, experiences, and perceptions working with their foster care youth to find and maintain stable housing. To mitigate this bias, I reminded the participants that their information and answers would be kept confidential throughout the interviews. These participants were also interviewed online because of COVID-19 instead of direct face-to-face interviews, which are the foundation of qualitative interviewing. When an interview is conducted over the phone or through Zoom, the researcher cannot quickly identify if the participant is in distress due to the questions being asked of them or determine if the participant feels rapport with the researcher (Krouwel et al., 2019; Novak et al., 2021). I attempted to mitigate this bias by establishing enough rapport with the participants to share if they felt uncomfortable.

Recommendations

This study included many strengths with a focus on foster care parents and their strategies for assisting their foster care youth who were aging out of these foster homes to independent living and maintain stable housing, which helped to fill many gaps in the existing literature. However, several limitations to this study were noted that invite further research. Therefore, further studies on this topic are recommended to include other researchers who are not as personally and professionally connected and may offer more objective perspectives.

It is also recommended that further studies be conducted that are not within a pandemic context or necessitate using only online platforms to allow for in-person interviews. Further research could also use quantitative designs and measure variables such as the number of foster parents, foster care youth, and programs and services in particular cities or other geographic regions to analyze overall success rates for these foster care youth independently transitioning into stable housing. These measures may, in turn, point to strategies that are the most and least effective for assisting these youth and where more programs, support, and services may be needed. Mixed-methods approaches could also gather similar quantitative data while including perspectives of foster care parents, foster care youth, program directors, and other community leaders to compare and contrast their perspectives with these quantitative measures. Longitudinal studies of former foster care youth are also recommended to track the progress and life outcomes of these youth after their initial independent transition into stable housing.

Several areas for further research were also recognized from the existing literature reviewed. Much of the existing literature on what is known about foster parents supporting foster care youth aging out of foster care was limited, and no studies were found in the literature reviewed that focused on foster parents' perceptions of embracing the meaning of being a foster parent. No studies were found either that explored the interaction between these perceptions and developing strategies to assist their foster care youth with independently transitioning out of their homes. Therefore, further research is recommended that continues to focus on the perspectives, experiences, and effective strategies of foster parents with their foster care youth, particularly as these youth are

aging out of the foster care system into independent living. Further research is recommended as well to understand better what types of guidance and emotional supports foster care youth may benefit from the most as they age out of the foster care system and transition into independent living that may then inform and become the tangible help of different types of additional services and programs that may further assist them through this process.

Implications

On the individual level, providing insight into the strategies that foster parents have used to effectively assist their foster care youth with transitioning to independent living and stable housing could help other foster parents who follow these same strategies also to become more effective when assisting their foster care youth. In turn, foster parents can become more effective by strengthening their foster family unit. The results may benefit foster parents as more knowledge may make them more effective in helping their foster care youth successfully maintain stable housing. Positive social change could also occur at both the organizational and society/policy levels by providing organizational leaders with additional strategies to decrease homelessness among former and current foster care youth. Policy leaders could create and help to implement additional policies as well to address better the need for more programs and services that focus on improving foster parents' experiences of helping their children transition out of their home that would include more government assistance, particularly with providing housing grants and subsidies for foster children aging out of the system.

Regarding methodological implications, there is a need for further studies that will explore the research topic of this study with researchers who are not as personally and professionally connected to this topic. There is also a need for future studies that will utilize different types of research designs and methodologies to enhance validity and reliability further. Regarding the theoretical implications, this study contributes to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory as it pertains to a better understanding of how different types of needs interact when foster parents assist their foster care youth with transitioning to independent living and maintaining stable housing and how meeting these needs facilitates their strategies as being more effective or less effective throughout this transition process.

Recommendations for practice within the field of human services from the findings of this study show the need for human services professionals to develop additional strategies to decrease homelessness among former and current foster care youth. Human services leaders could advocate for and implement organizational policies for more human services programs and services tailored to improve foster parents' experience of assisting their children transition out of their homes, which may include more housing grants, subsidies, or other financial supports.

Conclusion

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the strategies that foster parents used to provide tools and skills to their foster care youth aging out of their foster homes to find and maintain stable housing. I found that these foster parents used various strategies to assist their foster care youth with finding and maintaining stable housing

inspired by embracing the meaning of being a foster parent. These strategies included guidance in life skills to function independently in the community and providing continuing financial and emotional support. These foster parents also utilized community services to help their foster care youth transition independently. However, these foster parents further shared that more programs and services could be offered to improve their experiences of helping their foster youth independently transition, including additional government funding for housing grants and other financial subsidies. Foster care youth have faced many struggles that make it even more challenging to transition to independent living and successfully maintain stable housing. Foster parents can be important when guiding and supporting these youth through this transition process. Nevertheless, more services and programs are needed to ensure the success of foster parents and foster youth. Former foster youth need to continue to grow and flourish as independent adults in their communities.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Introduction

Hello, [participant]. This is a one-on-one interview for my basic qualitative study. The

purpose of my study is to explore the strategies that foster parents use to help foster

children find and maintain stable housing as they age out of foster care. Your insights as a

current/former foster parent will contribute to possibly mitigating homelessness among

foster children who age out of the system. The duration of this interview is between 30 to

60 minutes.

Before we begin, I would like to repeat the contents of the informed consent form that

you have signed and submitted. First, you willingly volunteer to join this study. Second,

you are free to stop the interview or withdraw your participation at any point. Third, any

information collected from you will be kept confidential. Fourth, your identity will

remain private.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to raise them at any point. Are you

ready to begin?

What made you decide to become a foster parent?

Interview Questions

1. What were your experiences in meeting the needs of your foster child as they

    began getting ready to exit the foster care system?

    a. How did you provide guidance for their basic needs (i.e. food, safety

        needs) before and during transition out of the foster care system?

2. What strategies do you apply to help your foster child become ready for the transition out of the foster care system?

3. Do you feel you were successful in aiding your foster child through the transition out of the foster care system? If so, why? If not, why not.

4. What services did you use to support your foster child in gaining housing during or after transitioning out of the foster care system?

    a. What programs, if any, did you utilize to aid your foster child as they began getting ready to exit the foster care system?

    b. How do you feel these strategies or services may be improved?

5. What strategies or services did you use in supporting your child in maintaining stable housing during and after the transition out of foster care?

6. What are your recommendations or suggestions to improve the support and resources available to foster children as they age out of foster care in obtaining and maintaining stable housing?

Closing question: Do you have anything else to add?

Conclusion

This concludes the interview. The information you shared is highly valuable in potentially creating positive social change by providing foster care youth leaving the foster care system with strategies to reduce homelessness among them. As part of the trustworthiness techniques in qualitative studies, I will be conducting a member checking process. I would like to request your review and validation of the verbatim interview transcript that will be sent to your email within the next 24 hours. You have seven days to modify your

interview responses before they are considered final. If you have any concerns or question, please feel free to reach me. Again, thank you for your participation.

Appendix B: Recruitment Post

There is a new study to the strategies that foster parents used to provide tools and skills to their foster care youth aging out of their foster care home to find and maintain stable housing that could help provide support and prevent homelessness for foster care youth who are aging out of the system. For this study, you are invited to describe your experiences with providing tools and skills to the foster care youth who are aging out or have aged out of your foster care home to find and maintain stable housing.

About the study:
- One 30-60 minute online/Zoom interview that will be audiorecorded
- You would receive a $15 Target gift card as a thank you
- To protect your privacy, the published study would use fake names

Volunteers must meet be a current or former foster care parent who have helped at least one child transition from foster care to a stable home within the previous five years.

This interview is part of the doctoral study for Cecilann Morrison, a Ph.D. student at Walden University. Interviews will take place during (insert information here).

Please message Cecilann Morrison privately or send and email through (xxxx.xxxx@xxxx.edu) to let them know of your interest.