

2016

# Transitional Planning and Homelessness of Youths Emancipated From Foster Care

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*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Sharon Sutherland

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Walden University  
2016

Abstract

Transitional Planning and Homelessness of Youths Emancipated From Foster

Care

by

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M.S.W., Widener University, 2005

B.S. W., Temple University, 2003

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human Services with a Concentration in Clinical Social Work

Walden University

October 2016

## Abstract

Previous research has indicated that approximately 25% of the 30,000 youths emancipated from foster care each year experience negative outcomes including poor education attainment, limited employment opportunities, homelessness, lack of access to healthcare, and poor social networks. Despite the existence of federal legislation that requires foster care agencies to assist foster youths to make the transition to independent living, research has revealed that the current transitional planning process is not effective. There is a gap in the current literature regarding qualitative research on youths' shared experiences of the transitional planning process as they transit out of foster care. This study examined youths' experiences with the transitional planning process and the degree to which the plan mitigated homelessness after emancipation. The study employed a descriptive phenomenological approach. Participants were 10 youths age 18 to 21 who emancipated from the Department of Human Services, Children and Youth in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, foster care system within the past 3 years. Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants and semistructured interviews were used collect the data. Social capital theory was used to guide the study. Data were inductively analyzed with management assistance from NVivo software. Results indicated that participants experienced challenges during transition in housing, education attainment, employment, physical or mental health, and finding mentors and continuing support. Participants offered suggestions for improving the transition planning process. Findings from this study can be used to enhance social change initiatives by providing insight into what youths need to better prepare them for independent living.

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## Dedication

To the youths who have emancipated from the Child Welfare System, (foster care and group homes). My passion for this population has driven me to conduct this research to understand your pre and post emancipation experiences.

Your voices have given me the opportunity to advocate for you through my research. It is my hope that changes will be made through the findings of this research that will facilitate an improved transition to adulthood.

## Acknowledgments

First and foremost, to God be the glory, great things He hath done. I would like to use this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the many individuals who have supported me over the years in this endeavor. My tutor Hui, who eventually became my friend, Hui, thanks for your support, eagerness to assist and for always being there.

My mother Phyllis and aunt Enis who believed in me, my children Yarrisa and Kenisha who made sure I remained sane and human, my partner Veronica who gave me space and time on this journey, Patricia Yard, one of my former supervisors who always and still believes in me, and my twin god children Theresa and Allison who have shown me what it is to relax, breathe, rejuvenate and become a child again.

Thanks to Dr. Harris, my Chair for her un-relenting support, sound judgment, expertise and wisdom throughout my dissertation journey. Dr. Jorissen, Dr. Hickman whose listening ears and question “Says who?” will always remain with me. My circle of friends and extended children, I thank you all for your support.

This journey has been humbling and taught me to depend on others. It has also made me stronger, more tolerant and appreciative of life.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction of the Study

### **Introduction**

This study examined the impact of the transitional plan concept on homelessness among youths who age out of the foster care system. About 30,000 youths are emancipated from the foster care annually nationwide, and many of those youths have no connection to family or next of kin (Juvenile Law Center, 2013). According to the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH; 2010) one quarter of emancipated youths experience homelessness within four years of exiting foster care. Emancipated youths also face challenges in obtaining an adequate education (Courtney, 2009; Day, 2011; Day, Riebschleger, Dworsky, Damashek, & Fogarty, 2012) and finding employment (Osgood, Foster, & Courtney, 2010). Researchers have also shown that emancipated youths are at higher risk for physical illness (Woods, Farineau, & McWey, 2013), mental disorders (Edidin, Ganim, Hunter, & Karnik, 2012; Toro, Dworsky, & Fowler, 2007), and involvement with the criminal justice system (Lee, Courtney, & Tajima, 2014).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine youths' perceptions of the transitional plan concept, their experiences with a transitional plan, and the degree to which the plan mitigated homelessness after emancipation. The data collected from this study was used to gain a better understanding of how the transition plan concept provides youths with the resources and tools they need to age out of foster care to independent living. The findings could be used to advocate for improving the effectiveness of the transitional plan concept and help more youths to achieve independent living after they age out of foster care.

This introductory chapter begins by describing the background for the research. The research problem and purpose of the study are then presented. The chapter further provides a discussion of the theoretical foundation of the study, the rationale for the study, and the gap in current research that was addressed by the study. I also cover the nature of the study, the definitions of key terms, the assumptions associated with the research, and the scope of the study. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the research and the significance of the study.

### **Background**

Homelessness is a pervasive societal phenomenon for youths after they become emancipated out of the child welfare system (Atkinson, 2008). Emancipation, also called “aging out,” is defined as when the formal relationship of the state to the child under guardianship is ended at a specific age of the child, age 18 in most states (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services [USDHHS], 2011). Emancipation represents a definitive end to a child’s time in care and the end of services (Berzin, Singer, & Hokanson, 2014). McCoy-Ruth, DeVooght, and Fletcher (2011) indicated that the average number of youths who age out of the Philadelphia Child Welfare system is about 1,000 per year. That means approximately 3,000 youths emancipated of foster care over three years period who are at risk of becoming homeless if not appropriately prepared for emancipation.

Children and youths enter foster care placement for various reasons, and foster care serves as one intervention option for placement when needed (Atkinson, 2008). Without financial support, family support, or other type of supportive network, these

youths are confronted with difficulties in making the transition from foster care to adulthood (Courtney, Dworsky, Lee, & Raap, 2010). Aging out of the child welfare system without adequate transitional assistance predisposes the youths to potential harm if they are not properly prepared to make the transition (Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 2013). The transitional plan concept was implemented to prepare youths for independent living before they age out of the foster care system (Naccarato, Brophy, & Hernandez, 2008).

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act became Public Law 110-351 on October 7th, 2008 (USDHHA, 2013). This law made provisions for individual states to offer each child in placement services through the foster care transitional plan, which was designed to prepare youths for emancipation (Naccarato et al., 2008). The transitional plan precedes emancipation and offers personalized services (Naccarato et al., 2008). The authors also noted that some of these services include collaborative planning and decision making on housing, obtaining appropriate medical coverage, assistance with reconnecting with family, and networking. The transitional plan concept also requires agencies to provide youths with academic support for employment assistance and help gaining community support (Naccarato et al., 2008). According to the Fostering Connections Act of 2008 (P. L. 110-351), a transition plan is a personalized plan developed by the child welfare agency to assist the youth to transit out of foster care during the 90-day period before a youth turns 18 or is scheduled to leave foster care. The plan must address specific options related to housing, education, employment, health insurance, mentoring, and support services (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013).

Despite the availability of the transitional plan, some youths who age out of foster care are confronted with the same issues, such as homelessness, that brought them into care (National Health Care for the Homeless Council, 2011).

Emancipated youths should not be expected to automatically become responsible adults the day they are discharged from care by the court system or when they emancipate themselves from care if they have not developed a concrete and smooth plan for transition (Naccarato et al., 2008). Cunningham and Diversi (2013) found that foster care youths in the United States face significant barriers in a transition to independence that is markedly abrupt compared to the “emerging adulthood” that is expected of most young adults. Furthermore, a number of researchers (e.g., Berzin, Rhodes, & Curtis, 2011; Courtney & Dworsky, 2009; Hook & Courtney, 2011) showed that youth who age out of foster care face significant challenges and experience many poor outcomes including homelessness, unemployment, unplanned pregnancy, low educational attainment, criminal system involvement, and substance abuse.

Mason et al. (2003) found that if agencies work as a team to implement individual transition plans, the experiences of youths transitioning from foster care placement to adulthood would be more positive. Mason et al. (2003) further showed that with collaborative and concerted efforts amongst agencies and through use of a sound transitional plan, the trajectory for the youths emancipated from the child welfare system to adulthood can be smooth and effective. Transitional plans provide continuity of care by providing youths with educational opportunities, employment assistance, and other programs designed to promote independent living (Berzin et al., 2014). The proper



implementation and use of the transitional plan could be used to mitigate the housing issue among youths who emancipate from foster care (Naccarato et al., 2008). Studies have found that the homelessness faced by this populace was exacerbated by accompanying issues such as inadequate education (Day et al., 2012) and unemployment (Osgood, Foster, & Courtney, 2010). Collins and Ward (2011) looked at the outcomes and perspectives of youths regarding the transitional plan and found that many of these youths were not aware of the transition plan.

The needs of the youth in foster care were recognized in the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (P.L. 106-169; National Foster Care Awareness Project [NFCAP], 2000). Since the implementation of the act, there have been many efforts at federal and state levels to address the unique needs of these youth in transition via transitional plans. However, these problems are likely to continue to rise (Dworsky, Napolitano, & Courtney, 2013). Given the complexity and long-term nature of the transition to adulthood and the great challenges the youth are facing, there is still a large need for further research on what is being done and what can be done to better facilitate the transition to independent living of youths in foster care. The phenomenon of homelessness among emancipated youths has an adverse impact on a number of social systems. These systems include but are not limited to judicial systems, learning institutions, places of employment, medical and mental health centers (Barth, 2002). There are ongoing efforts at the federal, state, and local level to share best practices and promising strategies for working with foster care youths transitioning to adulthood (Avery, 2010; White House Council for Community Solutions, 2012), however many of

those changes need to occur incrementally. Results from this study could be used to promote and advocate on the local, state, and national levels for the need to implement a transition plans that effectively prepare youths for independent living.

Both quantitative and qualitative research designs have been used to gain an understanding of the problem of homelessness among emancipated foster care youths (Fowler, Toro, & Miles, 2009, Jones, 2011b). Fowler et al., (2009) conducted a quantitative study to examine the nature of housing problems among adolescents who emancipated from foster care. They showed that approximately 20% of former foster youths experience chronic homelessness and housing instability and that homelessness among the youths was associated with emotional and behavioral problems, physical and sexual victimization, criminal conviction, and high school dropout status. Jones (2011b) conducted a quantitative study using three years of data from 106 foster care youths and found that the following common issues existed amongst emancipated foster care youths: lack of housing, lack of employment, inadequate education, poor support systems, and poor money management skills. Jones also found that foster care youths are expected to be independent at an earlier age than youths who have not been in foster care. Shin (2009) conducted a qualitative study of foster care youths to determine their readiness for emancipation using face-to-face interviews with 152 randomly selected foster adolescents. They found that a majority of adolescents who remained in care until late adolescence had a number of issues including severe emotional or behavioral problems, poor reading skills, and limited job opportunities. These researchers have provided valuable insights into the transitional plan concept and homelessness; however, there is

still a gap in knowledge regarding the shared experiences of youths and the degree to which the transition plan concept prepared them for independent living.

### **Problem Statement**

Aging out foster care can be a very distressing time when youths are unprepared for the hard realities of adulthood (Atkinson, 2008). Too many of adolescents face immediate challenges upon leaving foster care such as becoming homeless (Berzin et al., 2011). An individual is considered homeless if they do not have permanent housing available to him or her as defined by Section 330 of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C., 254b; National Health Care for the Homeless Council, 2011). According to Section 330 of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C., 254b), this includes individuals whose principal dwellings at night are publically or privately owned facilities that afford provisional dwelling spaces, as well as those individuals who reside in transitional housing (National Health Care for the Homeless Council, 2011). Youths who are emancipated from foster care are predisposed to becoming homeless if they have no connecting or re-connecting sources such as family, next of kin, or any ties to the community (Atkinson, 2008). The challenges that these youths face after aging out of foster care are quite disheartening and very disturbing (Atkinson, 2008). Numerous researchers have shown that these youths are often without safe or stable housing, they have limited employment skills or educational attainment, they lack social support from family and peers, many have psychological or medical issues, they are more likely to have substance abuse problems, and they are more likely to be involved in the criminal

justice system than the general population (Ahren, Katon, McCarty, Richardson, & Courtney, 2012; Courtney et al., 2010; Day, 2011).

The transition plan precedes emancipation and should begin at least 90 days before a youth is discharged from foster care due to reaching the age of emancipation (Naccarato, Brophy & Hernandez, 2008). The transition plan should include personalized services such as collaborative planning and decision making on issues such as housing needs, continuing medical coverage, advice on pursuing academic studies, finding employment, locating community support, and re-connecting with family (if the youth desires to do so). Despite the existence of the transition plan concept, many of these youths leave care only to find themselves confronted with the very same issues of homelessness that brought them into care in the very beginning (Fowler et al., 2009).

Despite the existence of the transition plan concept as a tool for facilitation the transitioning of youth in foster care to independent living after emancipation, the pervasiveness of homelessness among emancipated youths reveals that the transition plan concept does not work fully as intended and this phenomenon needs to be explored in depth. Researchers have revealed that many youths become homeless after emancipation from foster care (Fowler et al., 2009, Dworsky & Courtney, 2009), yet I could not locate research information that addressed the topic from the perspectives of the emancipated youths. I also did not locate any researchers who investigated the phenomenon using a qualitative design. The lack of research on the youths' perspective limits the understanding of the topic from the lived and personal experiences of emancipated foster care youths. Therefore, this study explored the efficacy of transition planning for

mitigating homelessness after youths are emancipated from foster care. By listening to the voice of youths who have become homeless after emancipating from the child welfare system, policy makers and child welfare agencies will gain information of what works in the current process and what may need to be changed to improve the transition plan.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine youths' perceptions of the transitional plan concept, their experiences with the transitional planning process, and the degree to which the plan mitigates homelessness after emancipation. Prior research has shown that passage from placement to adulthood in itself is a distinctive progression that is specific to each youth, their strengths and weakness, family resources, and situational issues (Maluccio, Krieger, & Pine, 1990). Youth transitioning out of foster care face more difficulties in emerging adulthood compared with youth in the general population, including lower employment rates and earnings than other youth (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006; Courtney et al., 2011), struggling with housing issues related to both homelessness and housing stability (Berzin et al., 2011; Courtney et al., 2011), and more substance abuse and legal involvement (Courtney et al., 2011, Shook et al., 2011). Researchers have also shown that a large number of youth who age out of the foster care system each year do not have permanent interpersonal connections and social and emotional support (Howard & Berzin, 2011). The phenomenon this study aimed to understand is the transitional plan process and the degree to which it mitigates homelessness among emancipated youths after they age out of foster care. In addition, results from the study provided empirical evidence regarding the extent to which the transitional plan helps

youths to succeed in gaining an education, obtaining employment, and ultimately making the transition to successful independent living. The insight gained from this study was used to evaluate effectiveness of the transition plan concept. The results can also be used to advocate and suggest improvements to the current format and implementation of the transitional plane process in order to properly prepare youths for independent living after they leave foster care.

### **Research Questions**

This study examined the shared experiences of youths who have age out of foster care and became homeless after aging out. The following research questions were addressed:

RQ1: What are the youths' perception of the transitional plan?

RQ2: What are their experiences, if any, with the transitional planning process?

RQ3: How well the transition plan mitigates homelessness of youths after they are emancipated from foster care?

### **Theoretical Foundation**

This research utilized SCT to examine the connection between utilization of the transitional plan and homelessness among youths who age out of foster care. SCT implies that social relationships among people can be productive resources (Coleman, 1990). Social capital is defined as “the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit” (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998, p. 243). Furthermore, individuals' behavior is a product of their social network. Through close social interactions,

individuals are able to increase the depth, breadth, and efficiency of mutual knowledge exchange (Lane & Lubatkin, 1998). According to Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), social capital has three distinct dimensions: structural (the overall pattern of connections between actors), relational (the kind of personal relationships people have developed with each other through a history of interactions), and cognitive (those resources providing shared representation, interpretations, and systems of meaning among parties).

Social capital plays a critical role in guiding and supporting youth during their transition to adulthood, and the deleterious consequences for them when this support is absent support this claim. In the context of this research, several studies show that successful youth development is inextricably linked to relationships with the family of origin that influence developmental trajectories and life changes in adulthood (Arnett & Tanner, 2006; Cooney & Kurz, 1996). Adolescents on the path to early adulthood rely upon their families for myriad forms of support. This support is critically important in the process of identity development, and may be manifested in multiple forms, such as instrumental, emotional, or informational support (Collins, Paris & Ward, 2008). Putnam (2000) argued that social capital is an interpersonal resource upon which individuals can draw to enhance their opportunities in life. It includes obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness embodied in social structures, the potential for information in social relations, and norms and effective sanctions. It is formed as a result of relationships between parents and children, and is enhanced when the family is embedded in social relationships with other families and community institutions. Without social networks there is no possibility for the exchange of information or the enforcement of norms that

facilitate collective goals (Goddard, 2003). Since the family unit is the central provider of lifelong relationships for children (Collins et al., 2008), foster youth without families do not have the comfort and security that belonging to a family network brings, and they lack models for creating resilient families, successful work lives, and strong cultural and ethnic identities. Unfortunately, most youth who age out of foster care experience social capital deficits, as they often do not have close relationships with their birth parents and extended family (Freundlich, 2009). Even worse, many of them had physical, mental health, and development issues and experienced child abuse and neglect in childhood. The absence of strong social network among foster youth aging out has resulted in many negative outcomes.

This study reviewed the specific hierarchy, legislative body, child welfare system, human service organization, extended organizations, family systems, and finally the youths who emancipated from foster care and aimed to understand the relationship between the legislative policies, child welfare agencies, private agencies, service components and their delivery, and the youths who are affected by the aforementioned aspects of their care in the system before transitioning to independence. SCT directly addresses the role of connection and interpersonal relationships for emancipated youths in order for them to make a successful transition to adulthood. Therefore, SCT serves as the theoretical foundation for this study.

### **Nature of the Study**

The nature of the study was qualitative using the phenomenological methodological approach. Phenomenology is a philosophic attitude and research



approach that argues that the most basic human truths are accessible only through inner subjectivity, and that the person is integral to the environment (Flood, 2010).

Phenomenology begins with an experience or condition and through the narration of participants of either a shared single incident or shared condition, investigates the effects and individual perceptions of that experience (Bound, 2011). There are three main types of phenomenology: realist phenomenology, transcendental phenomenology (or constitutive phenomenology) and existential phenomenology (Creswell, 2013). This study used the transcendental phenomenological or constitutive phenomenological approach, which takes the intuitive experience of a phenomenon as its starting point and tries to extract from it the generalized essential features of experiences and the essence of what people experience (Creswell, 2013).

Creswell (2013) stressed that the type of problem best suited for phenomenological research is one in which it is important to understand several individuals' common or shared experiences of a phenomenon. In this study, the shared experiences of these foster care youths are important as they are the receiver of the transitioning plan and fundamental drivers of successful independent living after they age out of the foster care system. Therefore, the use of a qualitative, phenomenological research approach is appropriate for achieving the purpose and aims of this study.

This study involved 10 youths between the ages of 18 through 21 who emancipated from the Department of Human Services, Children and Youth in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, foster care system within the past three years. Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants. Semistructured interviews were conducted to

collect information from participants regarding their shared experiences with the transitional plan concept and the degree to which the plan was related to their homelessness after emancipation. Interviews were audiotaped upon consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim. The data were analyzed with the assistance of NVivo software, which were used to generate codes. The codes were subsequently used to identify and categorize themes.

### **Definitions**

*Emancipation:* Emancipation from foster care occurs when young people have "emancipated" (turned 18) of out-of-home care, and they leave the foster care system (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016).

*Foster care:* The 24-hour substitute care for children who are placed away from their parents or guardians and for whom a state agency has placement and care responsibility. This type of placement includes, but is not limited to, placements in the following settings: foster family homes, foster homes of relatives, group homes, emergency shelters, residential facilities, child care institutions, and pre-adoptive homes (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016).

*Foster youth:* A child will be identified as a foster youth if the child has been subject to one of the following:

1. Removed from his/her home pursuant to Welfare and Institutions Code 309 (investigation and release of a child);
2. Is the subject of a petition filed under Welfare and Institutions Code 300 (jurisdiction of juvenile court) or 602 (minor supportive court, violating law);

3. Removed from his/her home and subject of a petition filed under Welfare and Institutions Code 300 or 602 (CSBA, 2011).

*Homelessness:* Homelessness is a temporary condition into which people fall when they cannot afford to pay for a place to live, or when their current home is unsafe or unstable. The following definition is used by the USDHHS:

A homeless individual is defined in section 330(h)(5)(A) as “an individual who lacks housing (without regard to whether the individual is a member of a family), including an individual whose primary residence during the night is a supervised public or private facility (e.g., shelters) that provides temporary living accommodations, and an individual who is a resident in transitional housing.” A homeless person is an individual without permanent housing who may live on the streets; stay in a shelter, mission, single room occupancy facilities, abandoned building or vehicle; or in any other unstable or non-permanent situation. [Section 330 of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C., 254b)] (National Health Care for the Homeless Council, 2015).

*The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999:* The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (Pub.L. 106–169, 113 Stat. 1882) was designed to assist youth aging out of foster care in the United States in obtaining and maintaining independent living skills. This program required child welfare agencies to provide transitional programs and services to foster youth in the areas of education, housing, employment, counseling, life skills, and decision making.

*Transition plan:* During the 90-day period before a youth turns 18 or is scheduled to leave foster care, Federal law requires that the child welfare agency assist the youth in developing a personalized transition plan. The plan must address specific options related to housing, education, employment, health insurance, mentoring, and support services. To develop the plan, the youth's caseworker will meet with the youth as well as other trusted adults of the youth's choosing, which may include a foster parent (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016).

*Permanency:* Permanency is defined as when children have stability in their living situations, when the continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2009).

### **Assumptions**

This qualitative, phenomenological research utilized in-depth interviews to collect data on the phenomenon of interest. Qualitative research assumes that there is a reality but the reality cannot be measured directly (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). The research subject is only perceived by the participants, each of whom views reality through the lens of his or her prior experience, knowledge, and expectations (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). That lens affects what people see and how they interpret what they find. The phenomenological perspective assumes that what we know, then, is not objective; that knowledge and experiences are filtered through people and reality is a subjective experience (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

A basic assumption that a qualitative researcher makes is that the phenomenon of interest can't be measured directly; rather, the phenomenon can only be addressed

through the lived experiences of the participants in a study. A major assumption of this study is that the effectiveness of a transition plan on homelessness cannot be measured simply by quantitative measures; rather, it is a complex matter that is affected by the perception and experiences of youths aging out. In addition, it is assumed that the participants were honest about their experience regarding the transition plan and were able to articulate their experiences.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

This study aimed to gain a perspective of the transition plan concept: how well it prepared or failed to prepare youths for the transition to independent living. The perceptions of social workers, child welfare agencies, or their family members were not included in the study. These youths' perspectives were chosen because of the dearth of research related to the recipients' views of the transition plan concept. This study only included youths between the ages of 18 to 21 who had been emancipated from the Department of Human Services, Children, and Youth in Philadelphia during the past three years. Finally, this study explored the shared experiences of youths with the transitional plan concept and its impact on youths' experiences of homelessness. There might be other elements that impacted the youth's ability to achieve independent living. However, this study only focused on factors linked to the transitional plan. The rationale for including participants from a particular region is that there are different policies and different services provided in different states. It would be difficult to control the effects that regional policy and service provisions may have on the shared experiences of the youths.

### **Limitations**

Certain limitations were inherent in this study. First, the study employed a qualitative design using face-to-face interview. This particular design could be threatening to participants of a study particularly if they are not able to articulate their feelings and thoughts (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, I conducted each interview in a location and at a time that was convenient to each youth. I also kept the length of the interviews flexible to encourage participants to express their thoughts freely and thoroughly. I used a couple of warm-up questions to help the youths feel comfortable before talking about their experiences, such as "Would you like to introduce yourself?" I also ended each interview with asking participants whether they have anything else to add. A second limitation of the study was that it only targeted youths who live a particular region and in a particular time frame. Therefore, results may not be transferable to other populations or settings.

### **Significance of this Study**

Youth who are emancipated from foster care face a myriad of issues. Previous studies have shown that these youth are often without safe or stable housing, have limited employment skills or educational attainment, lack of social support from family and peers, often with psychological or medical issues, and are more likely to have substance abuse problems and be involved in the criminal justice system than the general population (Berzin et al., 2011; Courtney & Dworsky, 2009; Hook & Courtney, 2011, Shook et al., 2011). These outcomes have also impacted our society negatively. There are significant costs to various systems including judicial, academic learning, occupational,

medical, mental health, and shelter (Barth, 1990, Courtney et al., 2005). According to the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative (2013), on average, for every young person who ages out of foster care, taxpayers and communities pay \$300,000 in social costs such as public assistance, incarceration, and lost wages to a community over that person's lifetime. This means that the problem results in almost \$8 billion in social costs to the United States every year by a conservative estimate. In the past decade, over 300,000 youth have left foster care without the supports needed to successfully transition from adolescence to adulthood. It is estimated that the cost of their less-than-average outcomes in academic achievement, too-early pregnancy, and involvement in the criminal justice system is at \$226 billion or just under a quarter of a trillion dollars (Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative 2013). Furthermore, failure to prepare youths for leaving the system has the propensity for continued effect on society in negative ways including significant expense to the government (Barth, Chung, Wildfire, & Guo, 2006). Findings from this study contributed to the literature in the following ways:

1. They provided empirical evidence of the inefficacy of the transitional plan by the social workers and youth in foster care. This study investigated the effectiveness of the transition plan and identified areas needing improvement. This in turn provided insight into how the transition plan could be reframed to better support youth during this period of transition.
2. They added to existing literature in-depth information on shared experiences of these youth on the transitional plan and their correlation to homelessness after foster care. Current literature focuses on the negative outcomes of youth

aging out. Few studies have investigated foster care youth on their perspectives on the transition process and how this may have been impacted by their transition plan. This study provided rich information on the shared experience of foster care youth during this important period of their lives.

3. Through asking the youths questions on the support they received, this study provided implications to better facilitate interaction and develop relationships among agencies, community members, and youths transitioning out of foster care. Through this study, participants could lend their voice to the transitioning issue through sharing their stories, and they felt empowered and encouraged when they knew their voices could be heard through research.
4. This study potentially informed the legislature, federal and local government, and private and public child welfare agencies on the disconnect between the goals of the transitional plan concept and homelessness among newly emancipated youth. The study yielded practical implications for child welfare system to better support youth as they make their transition to adulthood, and to provide them with resources and supports they need most through evaluating the shared experiences of youth as they are aging out.

Findings from this research can potentially affect social change in several ways.

The first contribution was the dissemination of new and updated information on the social issue on youths transitioning out of foster care through publication of the research from the dissertation. The key findings of the research were summarized in a 1-2 page document and shared with participants. The results will be also presented to community



stakeholders via oral or poster presentation in a conference or event of related topics. The second contribution is that the results can be used to inform policy makers as to the relative effectiveness of the transition plan in preparing the youth participants for emancipation. A fourth contribution is that data from the study could be used to make recommendations for strategies to improve the transition planning process. The fifth contribution could be using the data to advocate for more collaborative partnerships with other organization that continue working with these youths by presenting empirical data on the effectiveness or lack of effectiveness of the transition plan for mitigating homelessness amongst emancipated youths in the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania area.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided an introduction and overview for the study. It provided an explanation of the background and context for the research question and a description of the researcher's interest in this study. Researchers have suggested that youths aging out of foster care face significant challenges and experience many poor outcomes including homelessness, unemployment, unplanned pregnancy, low educational attainment, criminal system involvement, and substance abuse compared to their peers (Berzin et al., 2011; Courtney & Dworsky, 2009; Hook & Courtney, 2011). It identified a research gap that there are still few qualitative research studies that aimed to hear the youth voice and study in depth their shared experiences before and after they transit out of foster care. Thus, the present research was conducted to fill this gap and provide in depth data that could be used for improvement in transition planning. In addition, this chapter provided a rationale for the purpose of the study, research questions related to youths' perceptions

and experiences regarding to transitional plan, and a discussion of how well the plan assists in mitigating homelessness of youths before they are emancipated from foster care.

This chapter laid out the theoretical foundation of the study. Specifically, it utilized SCT to examine the connection between the transitional plan and homelessness among youths who age out of foster care. This chapter also discussed the assumptions of the study. A major assumption of this study was that the effectiveness of a transition plan on homelessness cannot be measured simply by quantitative measures. Furthermore, the definition of important concepts, and an overview of the research methodology was provided. The study utilized the descriptive phenomenological approach to understand youths' perceptions of the transitional planning process and the degree to which the transition plan mitigates homelessness among emancipated youth after they age out of foster care.

This chapter discussed the limitations of the study. The main limitation was that the study employed a qualitative design using face-to-face interviews. I then discussed the recommendations for how these limitations could be overcome in future research. Finally, this chapter highlighted the significance of the study both in academic and practical settings. It provided empirical evidence on shared experiences of youths on the transitional plan and yielded practical implications for child welfare systems to better support youth as they make their transition to adulthood.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature relevant to the transition plan and the issue of homelessness that confronts foster care youths after they emancipate from the

child welfare system. It includes key studies on the theories and models of transitioning out of foster care to independence, examines of welfare benefits and polices along with numerous empirical studies on care leaver outcomes or factors impacting these outcomes. Chapter 3 presents the methodology, research design, instrumentation, and data analysis that were used in this research. It discusses the role of researcher and issues of trustworthiness. Finally, ethical considerations are thoroughly laid out.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

Researchers have shown that youths who are emancipated from the child welfare system without adequate transitional assistance are at risk of experiencing homelessness (Dworsky & Courtney, 2010; Dworsky, Napolitano, & Courtney, 2013; Fowler, Toro, & Miles, 2009). Approximately 30,000 youths are emancipated from the foster care annually nationwide, and many of those youths have no connection to family or next of kin (Juvenile Law Center, 2013). The concept of the transition plan was implemented to prepare youths with the life skills they need to function as adults (Naccarato et al., 2008). However, researchers have shown that the transitional plan does not appear to be working as intended (Giffords, Alonso & Bell, 2007). Collins and Ward (2011) revealed that many youth were not aware of the transitional plan. The problem that is the focus of this study is that without a concrete transitional plan that addresses issues such as adequate education and employment, youths liberated from foster care are more apt to become homeless (Naccarato et al., 2008).

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine youths' perception of the transition plan concept and how well the plan mitigated, or failed to mitigate, homelessness after emancipation from foster care. Results from this study could be used by child welfare system and policy makers to gain information about the effectiveness of the transition plan process. Data collected from the participants were used to provide a voice for emancipated youths who have experienced homelessness after leaving foster care. From their voices can come a better understanding of their experiences of

homelessness due to a poorly articulated and implemented transitional plan or lack thereof. It is imperative that the effectiveness of transition planning for foster care youths be addressed for the following reasons: (a) These youths continue to depend on government systems to care for them; (b) the emancipated youths continue to be marginalized by society; and (c) the youths remain a financial burdens to systems that are already financially stressed (Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 2013).

This chapter presents the search strategy for literature on the history of foster care and the laws that govern transitional planning for foster youths who become emancipated from the child welfare system. It also presents information about the transition plan and its purpose for alleviating or mitigating homelessness of emancipated youths. In addition, this literature review summarizes prior research on homelessness and several negative outcomes faced by foster care youths as they emancipate from the child welfare system. Those outcomes include inadequate education, difficulty obtaining employment, physical and mental health issues, substance abuse, and involvement with the criminal justice system. It also discusses variables related to successful independent living for foster youths including social networks, social supports, and mentoring.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The literature review includes studies that have been conducted in the United States and other countries in order to highlight the commonalities and global pervasiveness of this problem (Akister, Owens, & Goodyer, 2010; Anghel, 2011; Berlin, Vinnerljung, & Hjern, 2011; Dima & Skehill, 2011). The literature review included current research and seminal research that is older than five years. The primary purpose

for including articles beyond five years is to bring continued awareness to long standing issues that predispose emancipated foster care youths to homelessness and other related issues that prevent them from achieving successful independent living.

In order to retrieve important and relevant sources on this research topic, I focused on important concepts such as transition plans and youths aging out of foster care. I also conducted searches using several general keywords such as *foster care youth*, *aging out*, *transition plan*, *youth transitioning from foster care*, *child welfare*, *homelessness*, and *transition to adulthood*, and specific keywords including *education*, *employment*, *social support*, *financial support*, as well as *physical and mental health*. I used these keywords in various combinations and searched major databases including Google scholar, Social Work Abstracts, ScienceDirect, and EBSCO. I started with reading the abstract of the articles and critically evaluated each article in terms of relevance and importance to my research question. I selected 100 to 150 papers that were most relevant and read the full texts of those sources. I categorized the articles into different categories such as seminal articles, background papers, research design and methods, and key findings. I then read, analyzed, summarized, and compared those sources in order to comprehend the research topic as a whole.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This research utilizes SCT to examine the transitional plan process and homelessness among youths who were emancipated of foster care. SCT implies that social relationships among people can be productive resources (Coleman, 1990). Social capital is defined as “the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within,

available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit” (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998, p. 243). Through close social interactions, individuals are able to increase the depth, breadth, and efficiency of mutual knowledge exchange (Lane & Lubatkin, 1998). SCT directly addresses the role of connections and interpersonal relationships for emancipated youths in order for them to make a successful transition to adulthood (Avery, 2010). Therefore, SCT serves as the theoretical foundation for this study.

According to Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), social capital consists of the following three distinct dimensions: structural, relational, and cognitive. The structural dimension encompasses the overall pattern of connections between actors. Size and density are the typical structural measures. In this study, structural dimensions were examined among youths in terms of their overall support. For example, they could have a large network with diverse weak connections or have a small network but composed of strong ties. The relational dimension refers to the kinds of personal relationships people develop with each other through a history of interactions. For example, foster care youth could have support from family, formal associations (teachers, counselors, etc.) and informal support systems such as friends and same-age peers (Blakeslee, 2012). The cognitive dimension refers to those resources that provide shared representations, interpretations, and systems of meaning among parties, for example, how youths had shared language, and narratives and how the network affects their accessibility to the knowledge possessed by communities of practice (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998).

Several researchers have shown that successful youth development is inextricably linked to relationships with the family of origin (Arnett & Tanner, 2006; Cooney & Kurz, 1996). Adolescents on the path to early adulthood rely upon their families for myriad forms of support, which may be expressed in several forms, such as instrumental, emotional, or informational support (Collins et al., 2008). Since the family unit is the central provider of lifelong relationships for children (Collins et al., 2008), foster youths without families do not have the comfort and security that belonging to a family network brings, and they lack models for creating resilient families, successful work lives, and strong cultural and ethnic identities (Freundlich, 2009). Unfortunately, most youth who are emancipated from foster care experience deficits in the area of social capital, as they often do not have close relationships with their birth parents or extended family (Freundlich, 2009). Many foster youth aging out have long been disconnected from their family members. Transitioning plan aims to help these youths to develop new relational networks with caring adults who can become “family” for youth as they enter emerging adulthood (Curry & Abrams, 2014).

Pettit, Erath, Lansford, Dodge, & Bates (2011) studied elements of SCT on the life adjustment outcomes of young adults. The researchers hypothesized that the depth of social capital cultivates a range of positive life adjustment outcomes and diverts young adults from negative outcomes. They used a quantitative, prospective, longitudinal design to examine the predictive relationships between social capital depth, social capital breadth, and early adult life adjustment outcomes. Social capital depth was defined as the "depth or quality of the relationships," and the breadth was defined as the "extensivity of



relationships" (Pettit et al., 2011, p. 2). The social capital depth was measured by the quality of relationships with parents, peers, and romantic partners, and social breadth was measured by the number of close friends. The information was initially collected from interviews with participants at age 22 and their families. Later, the early adult life adjustment outcomes, which included behavioral adjustment, educational attainment, and arrests and illicit substance abuse, were collected through follow-up interviews with participants at age 24. The researchers found that social capital was multidimensional and that elements of it conferred distinct benefits during an important life transition. In particular, the depth of social capital was associated with overall better young-adult adjustment, net of prior adjustment, and assets of opportunities. Social capital breadth was only modestly associated with later outcomes. When the overlap between social capital breadth and depth was taken into account, social capital breadth predicted higher levels of subsequent externalizing problems. This study highlights the importance of accumulating social capital for youths to help them successfully transition into adulthood.

The Social Security Act (42.U.S.C. 675 (5) (H)) requires that a transition plan shall be developed for each youth in foster care during the 90-day period immediately prior to the date of rescission, that is, before reaching the age of majority in the state (Baumrucker et al., 2012). The plan may be personalized at the direction of the youth and may be as detailed as the youth elects (Department of human resources, 2009). The plan should contain information on housing, health insurance, education, local opportunities for mentors and continuing support services; work force supports, and employment services. (Department of human resources, 2009). A well-thought-out transition plan can

make the difference between whether a youth becomes homeless and jobless and whether the youth becomes a successful and productive member of society (Britner, Randall, & Ahrens, 2013). The origins of the transition plan concept are rooted in the historical background and development of the foster care system.

## **Literature Review**

### **Historical Overview of Foster Care**

The concept of the foster care system in the United States originated in the establishment of three organizations, which date as far back as 1853. Those organizations were the Children's Aid Society, the Orphan Train Movement, and the Foundling Asylum. Each organization uniquely contributed to the current day foster care system. The first organization to provide foster care-related services for children in the United States was the New York Children's Aid Society (CAS), which was established by Charles Loring Brace in 1853. The CAS was established to provide care for neglected children in New York (<http://orphantraindepot.org/history/>). Through this agency, over 200,000 children were placed between 1854 and the early 1930s (<http://orphantraindepot.org/history/>) (Holt, 2006).

Since its inception, the Children's Aid Society (CAS) has actively lead a national drive towards accepting a new model of foster care system that would place children in foster homes that are within their local community (CAS, 2014). CAS strives to achieve the goals of ensuring that families are preserved, that children have stability in education, that foster children have friends/peers, and that the children have community support. Each of the aforementioned goals can mitigate the trauma a child experiences as a result

of being placed in foster care (CAS, 2014). Consequent to CAS efforts to place abandoned, orphaned, and neglected children, social service agencies (through religious affiliations and state governments) became involved in placing children in formal foster formal homes (Gowan, 2014). During the foster home movement, three states made formal financial payments to caretakers of foster care children and youths (Libal, 2015). Massachusetts began payments for boarding of children in 1865. Pennsylvania passed the very first law in 1885 to license a home and provide financial compensation for individuals to provide for two or more children who were not related (Libal, 2015). In 1893 South Dakota provided grants to the Children's Home Society after the agency become an organized and recognized agency for taking care of children.

The Foundling Asylum was the third organization that provided foster care-related services for abandoned and orphaned children (Gottlieb, 2002). The organization was founded in 1869 by Sister Mary Irene Fitzgibbon, who became worried about the infanticide rates and the babies who were left on the steps of her convent in Manhattan, New York. She later opened a brownstone home in Greenwich Village to house and care for infants who were offspring of unwed parents. Sister Irene depended on lay people disseminating the word regarding the fostering of these children during her travel to various parishes (Gottlieb, 2002). Her intent was to establish provisions so that the children could be raised within the Catholic community (Sister. Marie De Lourdes Walsh, 1960). Sister Irene also collaborated with the Orphan Train Movement e in relocating the children of unwed parents (Creagh, 2012). Youths old enough to work

were placed with families in rural areas in return for employment, housing, education and Christian governance (Creagh, 2012).

During the early 1900's, foster care services became a formalized move away from a religious context and is now governed by legislation, laws, and government funding (Children's Aid Society, 2014). During the transition to formalized care, administrative processes were developed. Furthermore, social agencies began to supervise foster parents. As part of the foster care process, agencies began keeping records on placement services. In addition, agencies began considering children's individual needs when placements were made. The federal government also began supporting state inspections of family foster homes. Services were provided to natural families to enable the child to return home. Foster parents were now seen as part of a professional team working to find permanency for dependent children (National Foster Parent Association 2015).

Between 1961 and 1980, federal funding for foster care was linked to the federal welfare program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) (US department of health and human services, 2005). Since 1980, funds for foster care services have been provided separately under the title IV-E of the Social Security Act. Several laws have been passed since the 1980's that pertain to the transition plan concept. The major laws enacted included the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (Pub.L. 106-169, 113 Stat. 1882, enacted December 14, 1999) and the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoption Act of 2008, which are detailed in the following context.

## **Laws Governing the Transition Plan Concept**

Children and youths are frequently placed in foster care due to homelessness of parents/caregivers, medical neglect, and inadequate educational experiences (Stott, 2013). Without adequate preparation for transitioning, those youths are often confronted with those same issues upon emancipation. Transitioning from foster care to independent adulthood is not only a challenging process. Several laws have been passed to help ease the transition to independent living for emancipated youths.

**Title IV-E Independent Living Initiative of 1986.** As part of P.L. 99-272, the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1985, Section 477 of title IV-E, Independent Living Initiatives, was enacted on April 7, 1986. The act authorizes a program of services and activities designed to assist eligible children in making the transition from foster care to independent living. Eligible children are those ages 16 and over on whose behalf title IV-E foster care maintenance payments are being made (Administration for Children, Youth and Families, 1987). Examples of services and services that may be provided under Title IV-E include: educational and employment assistance, training in daily living skills, supportive individual and group counseling, and housing assistance. The continuum of services may also include supervised practice living and post-foster care services, although funding for any activity or service provided after a child leaves foster care is not allowable under the title IV-E Independent Living Program (Administration for Children, Youth and Families, 1987). A child's eligibility is based on or "linked" to the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. If a child is eligible for federal funding, state spending is matched at the Medicaid matching

rate or Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) ranging from 50 percent to approximately 80 percent, although under the IV-E program, the match is referred to as the “Federal Financial Participation” or FFP. States are also reimbursed at a fifty percent matching rate for Administrative Costs for an eligible child (Stoltzfus, 2012).

**Foster Care Independence Act of 1999.** In December of 1999, Congress approved the Foster Care Independence Act, the Independent Living Program, and P.L. 106–169 (1999). The primary purpose of this act was to provide individual states with increased funding along with greater flexibility for implementing and overseeing programs that assist youths in transitioning from foster care to independence, P.L. 106–169 (1999). Those programs provide services such as assistance obtaining a high school diploma, career exploration, job placement and retention, training in accomplishing activities required for daily living, financial management, substance abuse prevention, preventative health, assistance finding employment, and financial support (Collins, 2004).

**Fostering Connections to Success (2008).** The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act became Public Law 110-351 on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2008. The law made provisions for individual states to offer children receiving placement services a transitional plan to prepare them for emancipation (Naccarato, Brophy, & Hernandez, 2008; Silloway & Bhat, 2009). The transitional plan precedes emancipation and offers personalized services such as collaborative planning and decision making on housing, locating and obtaining appropriate medical coverage, academic support, employment assistance, community support, and assistance with re-connecting with family (Naccarato

et al., 2008). Despite the availability of the transitional plan, many youths who age out of foster care are confronted with the same issues that brought them into care (National Health Care for the Homeless Council, 2011).

### **Need for Transition Planning**

Transitioning from foster care to independent adulthood is not only a challenging process; it can also be life changing. Without the appropriate skills and preparation, life after foster care can be detrimental to these youths. Foster care youths usually leave the system with no type of gainful employment (Osgood, Foster, & Courtney, 2010, Stewart et al., 2014), due to lack of an appropriate education or educational attainment (Courtney, 2009; Day, 2011; Day et al., 2012). When they do find employment, the employment is usually in low skilled and minimum wage jobs (Jones, 2011a). Leaving foster care without gainful employment adds to the issue of obtaining permanent housing (Jones, 2011a). Several researchers have shown the need for adequate transition planning in order to assist foster youths transition into adulthood (Cunningham & Diversi, 2013, Dworsky, et al., 2012).

The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative (2013) conducted research with youths transitioning from foster care to adulthood. Results from the study showed that youths who are emancipated from foster care often lack the support they need to become fruitful, healthy, and connected grown-ups. The researchers showed that young adults need to be connected to family, friends, and other networks by the age of 25 because such connections could provide financial support, guidance, and assistance with the transition from foster care to independence. It was indicated that young people who transition from

foster care experience negative outcomes at a much higher rate than their peers in the general population. For example, youth transitioning from foster care suffer significantly higher rates of incarceration, homelessness, high school drop-out, unemployment, unwanted pregnancy, and lack of access to health care. In particular, the data showed that more than one in five emancipated youths was homeless after 18. With regard to education, the researchers showed that merely 58% of emancipated youth graduated from high school by age 19 compared to 87% in general population. The predicted possibility to earn college degrees by age 25 is also much lower for emancipated youth (3%) when compared to general population (28%). Results from the initiative revealed that one in four emancipated youths would be incarcerated within two years of leaving the system. Findings from the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative (2013) study are relevant to this research study because the results provide evidence that the current transitional planning process has not been successful in preparing foster youths to make the transition into adulthood.

Researchers have also shown that youths emancipated foster care are ill prepared for adulthood (Collins & Ward; 2011; Jones, 2011a). Collins and Ward (2011) found that even though transitional services were available, many youths did not utilize the services. The researchers conducted a mixed method to survey and interview 96 youths who were emancipated from the child welfare system to determine their utilization of pre- and post-transition services before and after their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. The interview included questions related to youths' competence such as housing, education attainment, employment, perceived physical and mental health, health insurance planning. The researchers



suggested that housing assistance was the greatest perceived service need. Also important was employment assistance. Virtually all former foster youths identified with the threats of homelessness and unemployment. About 37% reported they had been homeless since age 18. Fewer than half of the respondents were employed. Although 70% perceived themselves to be in excellent or good physical health, fewer than half (49%) rated their emotional health at this level. Only 9% of the sample reported no educational or job training activities after age 18. Collins & Ward found that of the participants in their study, 52% reported that they had an outreach services during the time they were in foster care, while one third reported that they were not aware of services to assist transiting youths.

Casey et al., (2010) conducted quantitative research to identify variables related to youths' successful departure from a residential facility. The researchers categorized necessary transitions skills as education and employment, self-determination, social support, life skills, hopefulness. The researchers collected self-reported ratings and teacher ratings of the self-determination and life skills of a sample of 104 youth departing the Boys Town Treatment Family Home Residential Program. Self-determination skills were measured via American Institutes for Research Self-Determination Scale (Wolman et al., 1994) that collect information on youths' knowledge, capability and perception of self-determination. Self-determined people know and can express their own needs, interests and abilities. They set appropriate goals and expectation and make choices and plans in pursuit of these goals. They achieve their goals effectively and act independently. Self-determination skills are very important for youths to achieve

independent living. Life skills were measured via Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment (ACLSA, 2006). Check entire doc for APA

The researchers found that there were significant differences between the youths' and their teachers' reports of the boy's self-determination skills. In particular, the self-determination skills consist of knowledge, ability to perform self-determined behaviors and perceptions of the efficacy of youth's self-determined behaviors. The researchers also highlighted the need to provide transition services related to success post-discharge, including individualized transition plans and family involvement during treatment. Findings from the Casey et al. (2010) study provided several implications for practice such as the need for creating individualized transition plans that addresses youths' concerns, strengths, and plans post-discharge. Results also highlighted the importance of engaging families in youths' transition plans well before the youth's transition from foster care. The findings from the study have limited generalizability as the study was conducted in one particular site and the self-reported data might have resulted in bias.

Courtney, Lee, and Perez (2011) used data from the Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth to assess the kinds of help provided to foster youth who make the transition to adulthood and the factors associated with receipt of help. The researchers found that foster youth in transition did not appear to receive the types of assistance that are addressed in federal legislation, even though the programs received funding to provide services to support the youths' transition to independent living. Courtney et al. (2011) further recommended that efforts should be made to provide foster youth with the assistance called for in federal law. The researchers also

supported the extension of foster care through age 21 to ensure that such assistance is given. Furthermore, they argued that foster parents should play a more active role in providing youth with life skills training. Results from the Courtney et al. (2011) study are relevant to the present research as the results provided empirical evidence of factors that may significantly impact youths' outcomes when enumerating from the foster care system. These outcomes include providing support for the extension of foster care through age 21, involving foster parents more actively and providing youth with life skills training. In addition, it supported the argument that the transitioning youth did not receive sufficient help that are called for in federal legislation.

Dumaret et al. (2011) conducted a mixed methods study to investigate the educational achievement, behaviors, and transition to independent living of former fostered youth. The researchers used postal surveys and interviews of 123 foster youth who were emancipated of a private French organization, the SOS (Save Our Souls) Children's Villages. SOS Children's Village is an international, non-governmental social development organization that provides long-term care to children without parental care and to children from vulnerable families. Their findings indicated that two-thirds of the youth who were emancipated of foster care became independent without major problems by the age of 24 to 25. Several factors were found to be related to the youths' success at becoming independent. Those factors included the absence of severe emotional and behavioral disorders, diplomas obtained from high school or a university, or job training. The researchers suggested that implementing appropriate therapeutic care during placement, when needed, also contributed to successful transition for the participants.

The researchers also indicated the need to provide support for youths well beyond the age of 18 in order to help them develop personally and academically. A major limitation of the study was that the results were derived from one particular organization, and the results might not be generalized to youths leaving other organizations. The Dumaret et al. (2011) research is relevant to the present study because the researchers examined factors associated with the transition to independent living such as educational and psychological services, housing services, adult welfare services, job training, informal support, and educational attainment. These factors are key elements of the transition plan process (Stott, 2013). The results highlight the need to emphasize educational attainment. In addition, findings from the study revealed that special consideration and treatment of severe emotional and behavioral disorder should be taken when designing and implementing transition plans for youths aging out of foster care.

Allen and Williams (2012) presented a conceptual framework and set of practices for helping youth gain the life skills that are essential and effective for the transition to independence. The framework addressed key concepts such as life skills, the nature of the transition, and independence, and the requirements and supports needed for life-skills program to be implemented successfully. They argued that there is a strong possibility that youth in transition face numerous skills deficits. The child welfare service delivery system serves as the catalyst for youth to make a successful transition to self-sufficiency and independence. In the framework they built, self-sufficiency is achieved when program participants has mastered the nine content areas including job seeking skills,

personal development, home management, open rapport, career exploration, money management, personal hygiene, sex education and community resources.

Each content area has specific goals, objectives, and modes and methods of learning that are conducive to group process. Allen & Williams (2012) concluded that although every child welfare agency provides service to older adolescents with consideration of life-skill development, the numbers of youth formerly in the custody of state and county child welfare agencies that are currently homeless, incarcerated or suffering in intractable poverty suggest that many youth are not adequately prepared to participate in mainstream societal activities when they are discharged from foster care, residential placements, or other child welfare agencies. In addition, they stressed that how the life-skills program is presented or implemented is far more important than the content of the programs itself, which further highlights the need of more effective transition planning.

### **Outcomes Associated with Emancipation from Foster Care**

Youths transitioning from foster care to independence face the typical developmental challenges associated with facing adulthood, and they also face challenges that are unique to youths who transition to adulthood after being in the foster care system of the state for many years (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016). Some of those challenges include the stigma of being labeled a bad youth, family separation, multiple placements, psychological issues, multiple school placements, and the insufficient/loss of school credits (Goodkind et al, 2011). Jones (2011b) used three years of longitudinal data to determine the outcomes for 106 youths who were emancipated from foster care. They

indicated that the following common issues existed amongst the emancipated youths:

homelessness, inadequate education, unemployment, lack of support systems, and lack of financial support.

**Homelessness.** Homelessness is a major problem faced by foster care youths who age out of foster care (Betz, 2010). According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2014), approximately 23,090 youth were emancipated from foster care in the United States during 2013. One quarter of them has experienced homelessness within four years of exiting foster care (USICH, 2010). The prevalence of homeless among youths who age out of foster care varies depending on the data collection methods and the sample from which the data were collected. For instance, Kaplan (2009) gave estimates of homelessness that ranged from 14% to 58%. Fowler et al. (2009) reported that approximately 20% of former foster youths experienced chronic homelessness. Courtney et al. (2010) estimated that 37% of former foster youth had been homeless or had moved from one temporary housing arrangement with friends, family, or strangers to another. Dworsky et al. (2013) reviewed research published between 1990 and 2011 and suggested that between 11% and 36% of the youths who age out of foster care became homeless during the transition to adulthood. By comparison, approximately 4% of a nationally representative sample of youths aged 18 to 26 years who participated in the third wave of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health reported ever being homeless, this suggests that youth aging out of the foster care system are especially vulnerable to homelessness (Dworsky et al., 2013).

Fowler et al. (2009) conducted a longitudinal study to examine the nature of housing problems among adolescents who were emancipated of foster care. They found that housing instability was associated with emotional and behavioral problems, physical and sexual victimization, criminal conviction, and high school dropout status. On the other hand, stable housing enabled youths leaving foster care to build social networks that provided a base for them to engage with education, training, and employment opportunities (Johnson et al., 2010). Thus it is of great importance for foster care systems to consider housing as an important outcome in the design of transition plan for the youths aging out (Torrico & Bhat, 2009).

In contrast, Annick-Camille (2011) conducted a study in France that revealed positive outcomes for youths who were emancipated from foster care. Data from three generations of youths who left care were collected using surveys and interviews. They showed that of the emancipated youths who participated in the study, two-thirds had positive outcomes as they left care with academic diplomas, and they had few or no mental health or behavioral issues (Annick-Camille, 2011). Two measures contributed to the positive outcomes found in this study: the implementation of appropriate therapeutic care during placement and the development of care leaver support well beyond the age of 18 to help youths personally and academically as they transitioned into adulthood. This study took place in France but the results are relevant to the current research as the findings showed that concrete planning during foster care and after youths leave care is of utmost importance for a successful transition (Annick-Camille, 2011).

**Inadequate education.** Education is the key to independence, self-sufficiency, and success for youths aging out of foster care (Dworsky & Perez, 2010). According to the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (2009), having a college degree is associated with better health, more meaningful employment, and higher socioeconomic status. However, foster care youths who are emancipated often miss out on educational opportunities due to inadequate academic preparation, loss of housing, financial difficulties, and lack of knowledge of the various educational options available. According to Stott (2013), after the passage of the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (FCIA), 50% of foster care youth had been discharged without a high school diploma, and 21% to 50% of the young adults did not currently have a high school diploma or GED. Researchers have documented lower high school completion rates and lower college enrollment rates among foster care youth compared to the general population (e.g., Courtney, 2009; Day, 2011; Day et al., 2012). There are many barriers that have contributed to the lower rate such as not being adequately prepared for college, lack of knowledge regarding the financial aid that is available for attending college, and the fact that youth from foster care tend to live in high-poverty areas with low-performing high schools (Dworsky & Perez, 2010).

Day et al. (2012) conducted a study to address the barriers to completing high school and enrolling in college as perceived by youths in foster care and foster care alumni. The students spoke before panels of policymakers at two public forums. Eight major themes emerged from the testimony these participants gave about barriers that impeded their educational success. These themes are need for permanent relationships



with caring adults outside of school, need for connections with teachers and other adults at school who understand the unique challenges faced by youth, need for teachers to be sensitive to individual student learning needs, lack of resources to address basic school-related needs, lack of access to extracurricular activities, unsafe schools, untreated mental health issues, and lack of preparation and support for independent living. The most frequently cited theme was a lack of supportive relationships with caring adults. The Day et al. research is relevant to this study as it provides an overview of the barriers to better education from the perspectives of former foster youth.

Even foster youth are able to make it to college; they experience a higher dropout rate than their non-foster care peers. Day et al. (2011) compared college retention rates between a group of 444 undergraduates who had been in foster care and a group of 378 low income, first generation college students who had not been in foster care. These researchers sought to determine whether students who had been in foster care were more likely to drop out than their non-foster care peers after controlling for race and gender. The researchers used low income, first generation college students as a comparison group because such students share similar challenges faced by youths in foster care. Those challenges include issues such as poor academic preparation, limited financial resources, and a lack of family support as their parents may not have attended college. Day et al. found that former foster youth were significantly more likely to drop out of college before the end of their first year (21% versus. 13%) and prior to degree completion (34% versus. 18%) than their non-foster care low income, first generation college peers. The difference in drop out remained statistically significant even after controlling for gender

and race. Several limitations of the study were noted by the authors: a) the study only included students from a single four-year university, which raised questions about the generalizability of the results; and b) the data analysis did not control for several potentially confounding variables (e.g., measures of prior academic performance such as high school GPA and ACT/SAT scores). This research is relevant to this study as it provided support that college students who have been in foster care continue to lag behind their peers in educational attainment with respect to college retention and graduation. Therefore, it is critical that child welfare systems implement transition plans to encourage and support the postsecondary educational aspirations of these youths.

Although foster care youths lag behind their peers in terms of educational attainment there are foster youths who achieve academic success. Hass, Allen & Amoah (2014) explored how academically successful youth in foster care described the turning points and the second chances in their lives that contributed to their academic success. Hass et al. (2014) interviewed 19 young adults who were removed from their biological parents as children. The authors revealed that a sense of autonomy, social and instrumental support, and access to “safe havens” interacted to facilitate successful turning-point events in the participants’ lives. Although the interviews provided in-depth knowledge of these youths’ perceptions of turning points, it should be acknowledged that this study utilized a relatively small sample of youth drawn from a specific program in a particular area of the country. This research is relevant to the present study because it provides a firsthand perspective of the turning points that contributed to the educational success of these youth. Furthermore, this research helps this researcher to gain a better

understanding of how she can design her interview questions to determine the educational aspirations and outcomes of youths who are aging out of foster care.

**Unemployment.** Researchers have revealed that unemployment or under-employment is a major problem among former foster youth (Osgood, Foster, & Courtney, 2010). Even when they are employed, foster youths tend to earn substantially less than the general population of youth and youth from low-income families (Stewart et al., 2014). Macomber et al. (2008) showed that 22% to 33% of former foster youth in California, Minnesota and North Carolina were not connected to the labor market by age 24. It was also revealed that these former foster youth earn only about \$690 in California, \$575 in Minnesota, and \$450 in North Carolina compared to their peers who earn \$1,500 a month at age 24 nationally.

Hook & Courtney (2011) used data from the Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth to test the statistical relationship between multiple factors such as demographics, human capital, and social capital, employment, and wages of former foster youth at age 24 years. They analyzed the data using multilevel models and logistic regression to predict employment. They found that by age 24, just under half of former foster youth were employed, a rate that was much lower than that of young people the same age in the general population, which was about 80%.

Dima (2013) conducted a mixed method study involving young people and professionals from the statutory and voluntary sector in Romania to study employment and work related issues faced by young people leaving public care. The data were collected in three phases: Phase 1 consisted of semi structured interviews with 34 young

people who have been out of the care system for 2-4 years; Phase 2 collected data in six focus groups with 32 professionals covering a broad range of occupations, (social workers, psychologists, placement center managers, NGO workers, managers from child care institution); and Phase 3 consisted of a working group activity with 6 young people and 6 professionals who had participated in the previous stages. Findings from the study showed that youth who were emancipated were poorly equipped for the labor market because of low-level qualifications and undeveloped social and relational job skill. The inadequate preparation for the labor market resulted in increased unemployment, job instability, exploitation, and marginalization.

Dima (2013) pointed out that the transition planning tended to be ineffective when it only provides a first job without appropriate after care support. Instead, it is more effective to deliver counseling programs and services that can empower youth and help them to improve their skills. The Dima study is relevant to the present research as it emphasized the importance of providing transition plans that include vocational guidance and career counseling for youths leaving foster care (Dima, 2013).

Stewart et al. (2014) examined the long-term effect of emancipation on employment outcomes for former foster youths. The researchers linked child welfare, wage, and public assistance administrative data from three states (California, Minnesota, and North Carolina). They addressed the question of whether or not youths who are emancipated continue to experience less employment and lower earnings compared to their peers up to age 30. The researchers found that low rates of employment and earnings persisted for age-out youths compared to the low-income youths from national

samples. The data also showed that work experience prior to age 18 improved employment outcomes for foster youths in their mid to late twenties in all three states. Longer stays in care also appeared to improve employment outcomes for foster youths in North Carolina and Minnesota. The primary implication of the study was that the former foster care youth continue to struggle in the employment gap even up to age 30. The results imply that such youths continue to need financial assistance well into adulthood.

**Poor mental health.** Researchers have shown that youth experiencing homelessness are more likely than their housed peers to report various mental problems, drug addictions, or suicide attempts (Edidin, et al., 2012; Toro, Dworsky, & Fowler, 2007). Nearly half of youths who experienced homelessness have been diagnosed with a mood disorder (Merscham et al., 2009). The homeless youth population is often found to experience depression, anxiety, or posttraumatic stress disorder and many of these problems can develop into adulthood and affect them to succeed later in life (Masten et al., 2005). Researchers have also shown that foster care youth are more likely to engage in transactional sex than their peers, which is often associated with the increased risk of sexually transmitted diseases, injury due to physical or sexual victimization, and having a serious mental health disorder (Ahrens et al., 2012). These negative outcomes coupled with the lack of health care often pose a substantial challenge for youth transitioning out of foster care.

Despite educational success and strong social support, former foster youth remained anxious about their lives and harbored doubts about their ability to cope (Hass & Graydon, 2009). Unrau, Font & Rawls (2012) showed that many youth who have

endured cumulative and complex trauma struggle with attachment issues, regulation of emotions, and cognition and attention. Thus, services addressing the mental health needs of these youth are extremely helpful (McKenzie-Mohr, Coates & McLeod, 2012).

Nevertheless, Herbers & Cutuli, 2014 suggested that few evidence-based interventions available which specifically focusing on youth experiencing homelessness.

Hughes et al. (2010) conducted a study to understand the mental health needs of youth accessing an overnight youth shelter. The researchers collected data from a convenience sample of youth between the ages of 16 and 24 years who had spent at least one night in the only youth shelter in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The researchers performed both quantitative and qualitative analyses to examine the relationships among the mental health needs of these homeless youths, their hopes about the future, as well as their use and satisfaction with health services. They found that about half (48%) of the youth were clinically symptomatic. Most youth accessed a range of general health services. However those most in need had not accessed any mental health services and they had significantly less service satisfaction and less hope about the future. This research indicated that there was an association between homelessness and mental health status of youths who were emancipated of foster care. This research highlighted the needs and challenges of youth transitioning out of care because of their increased proclivity to mental health problems. The Hughes et al. (2010) study is relevant to my research because it provided empirical evidence to support that an effective transition plan must address the mental health needs of youths leaving foster care.

Youths in the child welfare system may suffer from longstanding social and psychological impairments that may impede their ability to attain proficient life skills, such as job-seeking skills, finance and home management skills (Allen & Williams, 2012). Therefore, a transitional plan helping these foster youths to acquire the needed life skills is of great importance. Allen & Williams (2012) further stressed that aging out can be frightening and anxiety provoking. These foster youth must believe they have the capacity to implement and carry out a plan of action that will allow them to effectively manage their lives. They suggested using group work model to support the acquisition of life skills.

**Risk of involvement with the criminal justice system.** Youth who are emancipated from the foster care system are at a high risk for arrest. Cusick & Courtney (2007) found that youth who reached the age of majority while in the child welfare system experienced higher rates of offending at ages 17 and 18 when compared to a national sample of same-aged peers. By age 19, 57% of male foster youth and 34% of female foster youth reported having been arrested compared to only 20% of males and 3% of females in the national sample.

Lee et al. (2014) conducted a quantitative study to determine the prevalence of arrests among youths who were emancipated of foster care. The researchers used archived survey data from the Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth (MEAFFFY) database. The database included 732 youth who were emancipated of the foster care system. Lee et al. (2014) linked the data with official arrest data to estimate the prevalence of arrests among the youths. The data revealed that 34%

women and 59.2% men who had been in foster care had been arrested at least once. Among those arrested, 20.3% of women and 35.2% of men were arrested for violent offenses. Using survival analysis and multivariate event history modeling, the researchers found that extended foster care was associated with a lower risk of arrest in the first year after emancipation. In addition, Lee et al. found extended care services had a positive effect on reducing crime rate among young men while early parenting had a positive effect on reducing crime rate among young women. This study had several limitations. First, the database did not have information on arrests that occurred in other states. In addition, the evaluation of extended care failed to take into account the types or duration of services received by foster youths. Overall, findings from the Lee et al. (2014) study supported the notion that the child welfare system can serve as an agent for social control that helps to reinforce social relations and promote social development. Social control refers to an individual's relationship to social institutions. As social control theorists argue, an individual engages in delinquent acts when their bonds to society are weakened (Schreck, 2014). As institutions of social control, the foster care system can play an important role in facilitating the youths' transition to adulthood by ensuring each youth has access to a comprehensive transition plan for moving into independent living.

**Lack of financial support.** Most of the children who are placed in foster care achieve some type of permanency by the age of 18, however approximately 25,000 foster care youths per year do not achieve permanency by the time they age out of care (Silloway & Bhat, 2009). Financing the transition for this populace is challenging as they are confronted with challenges such as medical and mental health issues, lack of



employment, lack of education, homelessness, and incarceration (Silloway & Bhat, 2009). Similarly, Lee & Berrick (2014) showed that adequate human and financial capital positively affected the practical aspects of reaching adulthood for foster youths.

### **Variables Related to Successful Independent Living for Foster Youths**

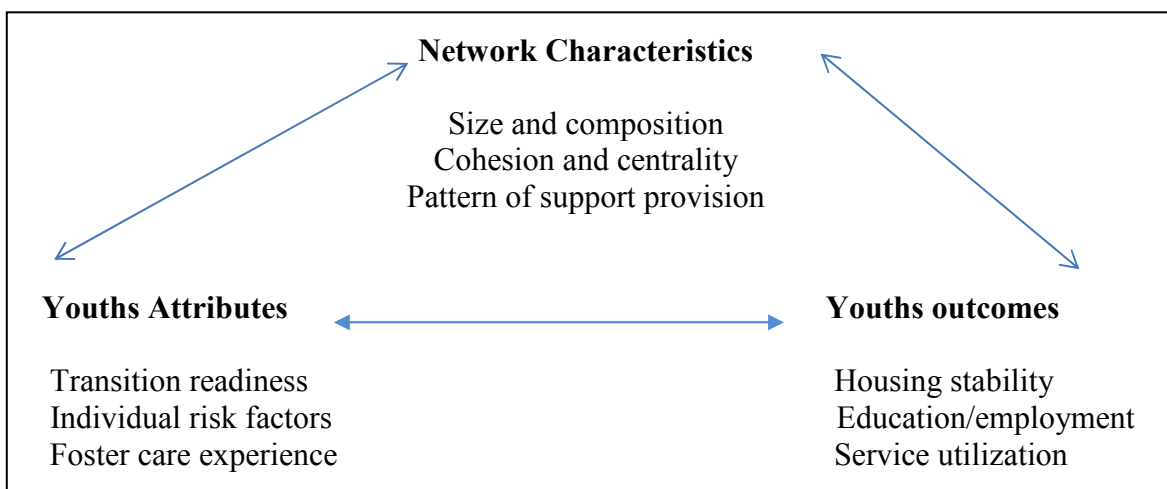
The transition to independent living is a challenging experience for any young person and especially for those who are foster care youths. Researchers have identified several variables related to the development of effective life skills for youths transitioning out of foster care, including social networks (Blakeslee, 2012), social supports (Singer, Berzin, & Hokanson, 2013) and mentoring (Avery, 2011). Conversely, few sources of social networks, support and mentoring are found to be associated with a more problematic transition (Hiles et al., 2013). In the following section, I synthesized research relating to young people's experiences of social networks, social support and mentoring during their transition from foster care. Relevant theory was considered and the implications for policy, practice and future research are discussed.

**Social Networks.** Blakeslee (2012) argued that solidifying a social network prior to emancipation is of paramount importance for youths as it opens the door to social resources that this subpopulation needs to become successful individuals. Blakeslee's (2012) model (Figure 1), describes how characteristics of structural networks and youth attributes impact the outcomes for youths who age out of the foster care system.

Blakeslee (2012) conducted social network analysis to measure the interconnected relationships among youth and the service network of caseworkers, foster parents, other providers, biological family and community supports. The model includes three

interrelated factors: network characteristics, youths' outcomes, and youths' attributes.

Blakeslee (2012) argued that network characteristics are correlated without comes and attributes.



*Figure 1.* Modeling the influence of network structure on transition outcomes

Social network variables may also moderate or mediate the associations between individual youth risk factors and transition outcomes. This model includes several network measures that may account for the influence of network characteristics on youths. These network characteristics are size and composition, cohesion and centrality and pattern of support provision. These network measures can be operationalized as overall support provision in youth networks. Blakeslee (2012) listed several examples of outcomes such as housing stability, education, and employment and service utilization. For example, consider whether foster youth in stable placements have larger network size or relatively stronger relationship ties throughout the network. Higher social network density may be associated with well-planned transitions as a result of increased network stability, ongoing collaboration and regular monitoring of youth needs (Blakeslee, 2012).

The third factor in the model is youth attributes including individual risk factors, transition readiness and foster care experience. This model provides a way to explore how social resources embedded in personal networks may be affected by various youth experiences in foster care. It also provides a framework to investigate how the availability of support as youth transition from foster care ultimately influences youth transition outcomes. By assessing the patterns of relationships, the researcher identified social network characteristics associated with particular subpopulations of foster youth who experience relatively successful or unsuccessful transition outcomes (Blakeslee, 2012). It was concluded that emancipated youth who are susceptible to poor outcomes leave foster care without satisfactory resources. Furthermore, social network characteristics may also be independently related to the outcomes of foster care youths (Blakeslee, 2012). The model provides a comprehensive paradigmatic way of taking social structure in the context of support and resource provision to this vulnerable population.

**Social Support.** Numerous researchers have demonstrated the importance of social support in the transition to adulthood for youth emancipating from the foster care system (Antle, et al., 2009; Collins, Spencer, & Ward, 2010; Settersten & Ray, 2010). Singer et al. (2013) conducted a study to explore how youths utilized their social networks and the overall quality of the social support systems. The researchers conducted 20 semi-structured interviews with foster youth aged 18 to 21 years. The researchers analyzed the data using consensual qualitative research methods to develop core themes around shared youth experiences. They categorized support from relational network members into four main groups: informational, instrumental, emotional, and appraisal

support. These types of support have often been used and defined in the social support literature (Demaray & Malecki, 2014, Thoits, 2011, Pappas, 2014). Informational support was defined as guidance or advice given from others; instrumental support consisted of things such as spending time with someone or providing the youths with materials or money; emotional support included companionship, affection, and trust building with others; and appraisal support included evaluative feedback from others. The researchers found that the poor outcomes youths faced while transitioning out of the foster care system were due to a lack of instrumental and appraisal support although the youths did receive some sort of emotional support.

Hiles et al. (2013) reviewed 47 studies published since 2001 that related to young people's experiences of social support during their transition from foster care. The authors adopted a qualitative study design since it allowed for personal experiences to be described in rich detail. The researchers identified a number of key themes from the interviews. First, past experiences of social support affected care leavers' current transition. Second, supportive relationships during the transition from care is crucial, which include relationships with professionals, peers and mentors and with their birth families, Third, practical supports are equally important as emotional supports. These practical supports may include helping with finding accommodations, accessing education and employment opportunities and financial support. Finally, the social support available to these care leavers varied greatly. Some received sufficient support while others felt completely unsupported or lacking in specific types of support. They also summarized recommendations from various studies that suggested the need for young

people to have more control over the pace and timing of their transition. Hill et al. (2013) also suggested there is a need to improve the capacity of foster care to allow youths to return to care if desired, or to stay in care beyond age eighteen. In addition, professionals, foster care parents, and peers who offering support to transitioning youths need to be aware the emotional challenges these youths are facing in this stressful period of time of aging out. This study is relevant to this study as it provides historical background information on social supports of foster care youths when they age out.

**Mentoring.** Mentoring provides foster care youths with emotional support and assistance in learning life skills as they transition from foster care to an independent life of their own. Mentors can inspires and guide a youth in foster care to pursue a productive future and reach his or her full potential (Munson et al., 2010). Researchers have shown that the presence of a mentor is associated with better outcomes for youths transitioning from foster care. Some of those outcomes are fewer depressive symptoms, less stress, better overall health, and higher educational attainment (Ahrens et al., 2008, Munson et al., 2010). Furthermore, mentoring programs help youth overcome the challenges of transitioning to adulthood by providing consistent, caring support, and modeling of important life skills (Ahrens et al., 2011). However, due to the limited financial resource, not every youth who leaves foster care has access to mentors or mentoring programs.

Avery (2011) summarized the published work of various researchers to determine the effectiveness of programs used to mentor youths in foster care for transition to adulthood. The ideology of mentorship is not new to child welfare, and it has resurged in the last decade (Avery, 2011). Mentoring for foster care youths was first presented at the

federal level through the passage of the Foster Care Independence Act (FCIA) in 1999. This law unequivocally listed mentoring as a needed resource that provides emotional and personal support with dedicated and caring adults for youths aging out of foster care (Avery, 2011). According to Avery (2011), mentoring programs are crucial elements in promoting permanency and positive outcomes for foster care youths. Many foster care youths have had multiple placements before aging out and many times youths are emancipated out of the system before they form a connection with anyone (Avery, 2011).

Hudson (2013) conducted a qualitative study using focus group interviews of youth living in foster care to obtain their perception about mentoring. A total of 27 youth in foster care participated in the focus group. The youths discussed their viewpoints of a good mentor, someone who guides them, understand and listens to them. They also expressed the need of multiple mentors, who can serve specific needs, like a spiritual mentor, an adult mentor, peer mentor and a career mentor. In particular, a career mentor from the field they want to enter is very helpful. The participants expressed a desire for a positive future for themselves via connections with a career mentor. However, the youths also remarked that they were given few opportunities for career mentoring although learning opportunities from a career mentor may be a lifeline for preventing negative psychosocial outcomes for foster youth (Hudson, 2013). This study has several limitations. First, a qualitative methodology was used; therefore, comments from participants may not representative of all youths in foster care. Second, the ethnicity of the participants was primarily African American and the results may not represent perceptions held by White, Hispanic, or Asian-Pacific Islander youths. In addition, an

overwhelming majority of the participants were actively engaged in the discussion; however, a few participants did not contribute a great deal to their particular focus groups; therefore, their perspectives were missed. This study is relevant to my research because it provided empirical support of positive impact of career mentors on youths in foster care. Career mentoring is an essential part of the transition plan and can help youth become better prepared in their job searching and career development.

Bruster and Coccoma (2013) conducted a study to examine whether exposing foster care youths to postsecondary education through mentoring using college students could increase their awareness and desire to further their education beyond high school. Mentees aged 15 to 18 years old were surveyed prior to and after the mentoring experience in order to examine the effectiveness of the mentoring program. The results showed that mentoring was effective and highly worthwhile when working with youths who are aging out of foster care. The youths who participated in the mentorship program had high academic self-efficacy. Several youths stated that although they already had plans for college after graduation, the project reinforced their thoughts that college or a vocational program was the key to self-sufficiency. This literature is relevant to this study as it provides empirical evidence of the positive impact on mentoring program on educational aspirations. As the transition plan should include information on local opportunities for mentors and continuing support services, this literature serves a great example of how utilizing college students as mentors could help foster youths to achieve their academic self-efficacy.

## Summary

Youth who age out of foster care face a myriad of issues. Researchers have shown that these youth are often without safe or stable housing (Betz, 2010, Courtney et al., 2010), have limited employment skills (Osgood, Foster, & Courtney, 2010, Stewart et al., 2014) or educational attainment (Courtney, 2009; Day, 2011; Day et al., 2012). They also suffered from lack of social networks and social supports (Antle, et al., 2009; Collins, Spencer, & Ward, 2010; Settersten & Ray, 2010) and experience many psychological and medical issues. They are more likely to have substance abuse problems (Narendorf & McMillen, 2010) and involved in the criminal justice system than the general population (Lee et al., 2014). There is a consensus among these researchers that it should not be assumed that youths will automatically become self-sufficient adults when they age out (e.g., Collins, Spencer, & Ward, 2010, Courtney et al., 2010, Day et al., 2012, Lee et al., 2014).

The needs of these youth in foster care were recognized in the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, and so far, there have been many efforts to address the unique needs of these youth in transition at federal and state levels. In particular, transitional plan is required by law to provide continuity of care through transition, educational opportunities, employment assistance, family preparation, independent living programs, and etc. However, given the high risk of homelessness and many problems associated with the transition, it appears that the transition plan falls short of meeting its objective (Pecora, 2012).



This literature review included studies that explored the theories and models of transitioning out of care. In particular, the SCT was discussed in detail with the aim of laying the theoretical foundations of this study. Accumulating social capital is the key for youths to successfully transition into adulthood (Pettit et al., 2011). It provided a historic overview of foster care from the early establishment of Children's Aid Society, the Orphan Train Movement, the Foundling Asylum to the later formalized care (Gowan, 2014). This literature review then examined welfare benefits and policies including Title IV-E Independent Living Initiative of 1986, Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, Fostering Connections to Success of 2008 and discussed the need of jobs (Jones, 2011a). The literature review also provided an in-depth examination of care leaver outcomes or factors impacting these outcomes including homelessness, physical health, mental health, education, employment, social support, substance abuse problems and involvement in criminal justice system (e.g., Betz, 2010, Narendorf and McMillen, 2010, Lee, Courtney, & Tajima, 2014). It should be emphasized that a more holistic approach should be taken to address the needs and experiences of youth as different factors work together in this process.

The problem of homelessness is far from solved and is likely to rise. Given the complexity and long-term nature of the transition to adulthood and the great challenges the youth are facing, there is still a large need of further researches and practices to improve outcomes for youth in transition from foster care to adulthood especially due to the fact that population of foster youth who are aging out each year is on a steady rise. This literature review identified at least one research gap that there is still few qualitative

research which aimed to hear the youth's voice and study in depth their shared experiences before and after they transit out of foster care. Thus, the present research was conducted to fill this gap and provides in depth data that could be used for improvement in transition planning.

The next chapter details the research design, rationale, and methodology of the study. It provided a justification for the chosen design, the means used for data collection, participants, instruments, and the techniques employed for data analysis.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

Homelessness is a potential issue that youths face when they are emancipated from the child foster care system (Betz, 2010). The youths face challenges in obtaining an adequate education (Edidin et al., 2012), and they subsequently have difficulty obtaining employment (Edidin et al., 2012; Osgood et al., 2010). Researchers have also shown that emancipated youth are at high risk of physical illness, mental disorders, and involvement with the criminal justice system (Edidin et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2014). The transitional plan process was implemented to prepare youths in foster care with the life skills they need to function as adults. A transitional plan details the process associated with assisting youths in obtaining housing, medical coverage, mental and behavioral health coverage, drug and alcohol treatment, employment, educational planning, and money management skills (Naccarato et al., 2008). However, research has shown that the transitional plan process does not appear to be working as intended (Giffords et al., 2007). Past studies have shown that individuals who age out of the child welfare system without adequate transitional assistance are at risk of experiencing homelessness (Singer et al., 2013; Torrico & Bhat, 2009).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to accomplish the following: (a) examine youths' perceptions of the transitional plan; (b) record their experience, if any with, the transitional plan; and (c) determine how well the plan mitigated homelessness of the youths after they were emancipated from foster care. The results from this study could inform child welfare system administrators and policy makers about the shared

experiences of youths who became homeless after being emancipated from foster care. The youths in the study revealed their experiences in terms of their successes and challenges during transition. This information in turn could help child welfare agencies and policy makers gain a better understanding of how homelessness affects emancipated youths due to a poorly articulated and implemented transitional plan.

In this chapter I present details of the research design, rationale, role of the researcher, and the research approach that I employed in this study. I also present the methodology and justification for the chosen design. In addition, I provide a discussion of the means that were used for data collection, the recruitment of participants, the instrumentation, and the techniques that were employed for data analysis. This chapter also includes a description of the ethical issues and considerations that were taken and a discussion of the issue of trustworthiness.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

This study is qualitative in nature and focuses on examining the shared experiences of youth when they age out. The following research questions were addressed:

RQ1: What is the youths' perception of the transition plan?

RQ2: What are their experiences with the transitional plan process? and

RQ3: How well did the plan mitigate homelessness of the youths after they were emancipated from foster care?

The descriptive phenomenological approach was utilized to guide data collection and interpretation of the results. Phenomenology is a philosophic attitude and research

approach that argues that the most basic human truths are accessible only through inner subjectivity, and that the person is integral to the environment (Flood, 2010).

Phenomenology begins with an experience or condition and, through the narration of participants of either a shared single incident or shared condition, investigates the effects and individual perceptions of that experience (Bound, 2011). This approach can be traced back to early 20th century philosophers such as Husserl, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty who studied the conscious experiences of individual experiences (Moustakas, 1994). In modern social science, phenomenological research denotes the study of individuals' perceptions, feelings, and lived experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Descriptive phenomenology can be utilized to attain exact meaning through observing and understanding in depth the reality of the participants (Giorgi, 2009). This descriptive phenomenological approach is appropriate for this study as the study's focus is on the participants' description of their lived experiences of the transition plan and how the plan helped them move towards emancipation for the child welfare system.

The phenomenon I aimed to understand was the youths' perceptions of the transition plan process and the degree to which the transition plan mitigated homelessness among the emancipated youths. In addition, findings from the study provided empirical evidence regarding the extent to which a transitional plan helped (or hindered) the transition of youths to successful independent living. Results from the study may be used to make suggestions for improvements in the current implementation of the transitional plan process in order to properly prepare youths for independent living after they leave foster care.

Both quantitative and qualitative research designs have been used to gain an understanding of the problem of homelessness among emancipated foster care youths (Fowler et al, 2009, Day et al, 2012). For instance, Fowler et al., (2009) conducted a quantitative study to examine the nature of housing problems among adolescents who were emancipated of foster care. Day et al., (2012) conducted a qualitative study to address the perceived barriers to education among foster care youths. Mixed-methods research was also conducted to study the effectiveness of transition services. Collins and Ward (2011) conducted a mixed method to survey and interviewed 96 youths who were emancipated from the child welfare system to determine their utilization of pre- and posttransition services before and after their 18th birthday. A number of researchers have concluded that youths who age out of foster care experience a number of poor outcomes such as homelessness, inability to obtain employment, as well as poor mental and physical health (Jones, 2011a; Shin, 2009). These researchers provided valuable insights into the transition plan and homelessness, yet there is still a gap in knowledge in terms of the shared experiences of emancipated youths who experienced homelessness after aging out of the foster care system (The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 2013).

Different research designs have their own advantages and disadvantages. Quantitative research establishes statistically significant conclusions about a population by studying a representative sample of the population, but the data is static and structured in an artificial setting (Bryman, 2012). On the other hand, qualitative research describes an event in their natural setting (Flick, 2009). Qualitative research concerns words and meaning and takes the views of the participant into consideration. Qualitative research

offers detailed data and that is unstructured (Bryman, 2012). Mixed methods research is an approach to inquiry that combines both qualitative and quantitative forms (Creswell, 2013). O’Cathain et al. (2007) stated that mixed methods research increases validity, improves development of one method due to the other, and can give voice to marginalized groups. However, mixed method requires researchers to develop a broader set of skills to analyze data from multiple sources and is often time consuming. In this study, I seek to understand the experiences of youth who became homeless when they were emancipated of foster care and the degree to which the transition plan prepared them for emancipation. Therefore, the use of a qualitative research design using a phenomenological perspective was appropriate for this study.

Phenomenological research is a means to harness and explore the shared experiences of participants in order to examine their different perspectives of the experiences and gain a better understanding of the shared experience (Aparicio, Pecukonis, & O’Neale, 2015). Creswell stressed (2013) that the type of problem best suited for this form of qualitative research is one in which it is important to understand several individuals’ common or shared experiences of a phenomenon. The shared experiences of these foster care youths are important as these youths are ultimately responsible for their own successful independent living after they age out of the foster care system.

### **Role of Researcher**

The researcher plays a vigorous and involved role in a phenomenological study (Patton, 2002). According to Creswell (2013), the researcher is the primary

mode/instrument of data collection. The researcher's secondary roles includes the following: (a) creating or choosing the appropriate tool for collecting data; (b) observing respondents' behaviors; (c) ensuring the emotional and physical safety and well-being of the respondents; (d) acquiring the proper authorization to conduct the study through the Institutional Review Board (e) securing a site for the study; (f) gaining approval to conduct the study from the community and other stakeholders; and (g) conducting the research in a way that ensures credibility, reliability, and validity of the results (Creswell, 2013). In this study, I was the observer and the interviewer. Therefore, I collected, analyzed, and interpreted the data. I have extensive experiences working with foster care youths and attempted to limit my personal bias and approach the phenomenon with an open mind and remain neutral. I also used bracketing to minimize my personal bias with the phenomenon being studied.

Bracketing was utilized throughout the research process. Bracketing is a methodological device of phenomenological inquiry that requires deliberate putting aside one's own belief about the phenomenon under investigation or what one already knows about the subject prior to and throughout the phenomenological investigation (Carpenter, 2007). I used the following strategies to achieve bracketing. First, a literature review was conducted to gain deeper knowledge about the research area while remaining curious about the research question. Second, I used a reflexive diary to help develop bracketing skills and facilitate decision-making during the progress of a phenomenological investigation. The reflexive diary serves as a self- assessment tool to identify and suspend any prior or existing knowledge about foster youths' experiences with the transitional



plan (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Third, maintain curiosity in the participants and generate knowledge from participants using semi-structured interview (Chan et al., 2013). These bracketing strategies assisted me in maintaining objectivity and minimize the interference of bias with the phenomenon, collection, analyzing and interpretation of the data (Chan et al., 2013).

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection Logic**

I used a purposive sampling strategy to recruit participants for this study. The purposeful sampling strategy is appropriate when a specific phenomenon is being studied and the participants must share the identical experience (Creswell, 2013; Ritchie et al, 2014).

The inclusion criteria for this study, requires that participants must have the shared experience of aging out of foster care. They must also have the shared experience of having completed a transition plan before leaving foster care. Participants therefore had experiences related to how the transition plan process prepared them for emancipation. The following inclusion criteria were used to select volunteers to participate in the study: (a) between the ages of 18 and 21 years, (b) emancipated from the Philadelphia child welfare system during 2011 through 2014, and (c) participated in a transitional plan before leaving foster care. According to Getz (2012), nearly 1,000 Pennsylvania youths are emancipated of foster care without achieving permanency each year. Permanency is defined as children having stability in their living situations and continuity in their family relationships and connections (Williams-Mbengue, 2008).

Therefore, the size of the estimated population for this study is the approximately 3,000 youths who are emancipated of foster care in Pennsylvania during 2011-2014.

Ten individuals were recruited to participate in the study. The targeted participants were former foster care youths who are aged 18 through 21 and were emancipated of foster care from the Department of Human Services, Children, and Youth in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Several researchers have indicated that when conducting qualitative research, the use of ten participants is an ideal method for capturing detailed information about each participant (Collins, Onwuegbuzie, & Jiao, 2006; Creswell, 2009; Creswell, 2013). The concept of saturation is also a major guiding principle for sample size determination in qualitative research. Saturation is reached when the researcher gathers data to the point of diminishing returns, when nothing new is being added (Mason, 2010). Charmaz (2006) argued that the aims of the study are the ultimate driver of the project design, and therefore the sample size. She suggested that a small study with modest claims might achieve saturation quicker than a study that seeks to describe a process that spans disciplines. In this study, the sample size of ten was chosen because such a sample is considered appropriate for a small-scale phenomenological study (Mason, 2010).

### **Instrumentation**

I used a semi-structured interview to collect data for this study. The rationale for using semi-structured interviews is that it allowed the investigator to concentrate on the phenomenon being studied and it simultaneously allowed the participants to express their perspectives of the phenomenon (Maxwell, 2013; Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Phenomenological interviews enable the researcher to obtain rich information of the shared experience of participants (Collins, Onwuegbuzie, & Jiao, 2006). Semi-structured interview is a versatile and power tool in qualitative research (Galletta, 2013). Semi-structured interview allows participants the freedom to express their views in their own words and the questions can be prepared ahead of time. It also provides more detailed information and can be used to understand perspectives and experiences (Galletta, 2013). A copy of the interview protocol is located in Appendix A.

The interview questions were developed based on the research question and the literature reviewed for this proposal. The interview questions covered youths' experiences in foster care, their experiences with the transitional plan. In particular, questions on whether the plan was helpful for them in terms of gaining housing, health insurance, education, local opportunities for mentors and continuing support services, and work force supports and employment services and their experiences during transition out of care and after leaving care were asked. The content validity of the instrument was established by expert review. I invited both my committee members and three outside experts who have extensive experiences in my field to review the questions to ensure content validity.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

**Recruitment of participants.** I contacted Covenant House and Methodist Services to recruit youths who have been emancipated from the child welfare system and are currently homeless. I informed the agency of the purpose of the research and my desire to recruit participants who have transitioned out of foster care. I asked the

appropriate representative if I may recruit participants from the agency by posting flyers in the agency to announce the study (see Appendix). I obtained a letter of cooperation that allowed me to recruit participants for the study from each agency. After I obtained authorization from each agency and the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) from Walden University to conduct the research, I posted flyers which announce the study and invites individuals to participate in the research. The flyer contained information that explains the research, outlines the benefits of the research, and the anticipated duration of the study. The recruitment flyer provided contact information for the researcher. Individuals were instructed to contact the researcher via telephone or email if they wish to participate in the study.

Individuals who agreed to participate in the study were pre-screened for eligibility using a short questionnaire (Appendix C). This short questionnaire contained a set of questions designed to ensure that participants meet the inclusion criteria for participating in the study. The responses of pre-screening questionnaire used for purposively sample 20 individuals to participant in the study. The volunteers were then scheduled for an interview. I tape recorded each interview.

**Informed consent.** The informed consent informed participants that the interviews were audio-taped upon consent. Before the interviews began, I covered the informed consent immediately before each interview was conducted. I took steps to ensure that the participants have sufficient information to make an informed decision about participating in the research study. For example, I explained the consent form using plain language that participants can understand. I addressed their questions and concerns

regarding any details about the research study, the procedures, the benefits, the risks, and their rights volunteers in the research.

**Scheduling of appointments.** I scheduled appointments to conduct the interviews at a time and place of convenience for each participant. If the participant does not have a preferred location, I suggested a neutral location.

**Interviewing.** At the beginning of each interview, I informed the participants that I was interested in their honest thoughts and opinions about their experiences with the transition plan and homelessness. During the interviews participants were given ample time to think about the questions, and then they were given ample time to speak freely without interruption. When it became evident that a participant has finished answering the questions from the interview protocol, I gave the prompt, “Is there anything else you would like to add?” This question allowed participants to give further thought to their responses and the opportunity for them to include anything that might have been missed.

**Exit strategy.** A plan was needed for exit strategy for participants to exit the research. Researchers engaging vulnerable participants in sustained contact for the purposes of trust and rapport building are obligated to engage them in meaningful dialogue around closure (Morrison et al., 2012). Therefore, I informed the participants in advance when the study would complete. I ended the interview with a sincere thank you and offer my contact number to the participants if they want a follow up conversation.

**Follow-up.** Follow-up with participants may be needed for two reasons. First, a participant may want to discuss further their experiences with the transition plan if the participant felt the interview was not sufficient relaying the information that the

participant wanted to share. Second, during the data analysis, I may observe some discrepancies or I may have questions for which I want to schedule a follow-up conversation to obtain clarification from a participant. I indicated in the informed consent that a follow-up interview may be required and also reinforce the possible need for a follow-up interview before I start asking questions during the initial interview.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Each interview was transcribed verbatim into a Microsoft word document and the transcription was validated by the researcher for accuracy by listening to each interview again and comparing each audio file to the transcribed record to ensure the accuracy of transcripts. Colaizzi's seven- step process was utilized to accomplish the data analysis (Colaizzi, 1978). The data analysis plan consisted of the following steps: (a) reading and re-reading the transcripts, (b) extrapolation of statements directly tied into the phenomenon, (c) formulation of themes that are meaningful to the research, (d) grouping of themes, (e) comprehensive description of the findings of the phenomenon, (f) description of the central structure of the phenomenon and (g) verification of the findings by the participants.

Step 1 of the data analysis was accomplished through constant comparative analysis. This step involved reading and reading each line of the transcripts to identify common ideas, potential themes, and recurring concepts. This stage is often referred to as "open coding" (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). This process was carried out until no new codes are found.

Step 2 of the data analysis was accomplished by axial coding. The “open codes” were categorized and grouped around conceptual commonalities (Padgett, 1998).

Step 3 of the data analysis was accomplished by formulation of themes that are meaningful to the research. A theme represents a level of patterned response or meaning from the data that is related to the research questions at hand. Typically, themes are identified if they apply to a substantial amount of cases or they featured strongly in a small number of cases and that defining it contributed to the analysis as a whole (King & Horrocks, 2010)

Step 4 was to group themes. This involved identifying themes that are related and then merge some of the related themes together. The norm is two to five overarching themes (King & Horrocks, 2010).

Step 5 was to provide a comprehensive description of the findings of the phenomenon. The coding and themes were summarized in a way that captured the main findings of the study.

In Step 6, the codes were analyzed further to discover what stories the codes told and identify the themes, which is often referred as thematic coding (Padgett, 1998). This served as a way to strengthening the process (Lichtman, 2012).

Step 7 involved verification of themes by participants. In this step, data were revisited to verify, test, and confirm the themes (Lichtman, 2012).

NVivo software was used to assist in the data analysis of the interviews (QSR International Pty Ltd, 2010). The transcribed records were coded for emergent themes. Using an iterative process, I reviewed codes, identified emerging themes, and resolved

any discrepancies through consensus with various responses and consistency values. The data were imported to NVivo. Nodes were created. Nodes represented a code, theme or idea about the data. For example, housing, education, employment, physical and mental health, mentoring and supports are possible nodes included in this study. I then highlighted the text and code in NVivo by selecting existing nodes or form new nodes (Lyn, 2005). I also created memos to help me record my thoughts on the study as a whole. After all transcripts are coded, I used the classification function in NVivo to create classifications (Lyn, 2005). The classifications were further used to identify themes. Within each theme, the representative verbatim comments from the participants were quoted and analyzed to support the main findings (Lyn, 2005).

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness refers to the “truth value” of the study’s findings or how accurately the investigator interpreted the participant’s experiences (Jeanfreau & Jack, 2010). Generally, rigor in qualitative research is established through the study’s confirmability, credibility, and transferability (Jeanfreau & Jack, 2010). Trustworthiness is important, as there are great expectations that scientific results should be reliable, research has the potential to contribute to the common good, and that research were conducted ethically. Consequently, the scientific community needs to ensure the trustworthiness of the data collected (Yarborough, 2014). As Loh (2013) stressed, researchers need to ensure quality of the research and demonstrate the validity, reliability and generalizability of the research so that the research findings can be accepted into the pantheon of knowledge and to be received as suitable for use in various means and way.



The following section describes the additional measures I took to ensure the trustworthiness of the data collected.

**Credibility (internal validity).** Credibility in qualitative research can be achieved by asking participants to verify the information that they gave to the researcher to check for accuracy (Creswell, 2013). Specifically, the participants were asked if the transcripts of dialogues match what they actually intended. Self-reflection is a way to check for bias and understand the research topic. This assists in the establishing credibility of the research (Creswell, 2013). Self-reflection was achieved using reflective journals, which helped me to record my thoughts and feelings throughout the research process. I used reflective journals to discuss how my personal background may affect my research and what strategies I used to address the potential problem. This ensures that I am aware of possible biases and attempt to control them. Further credibility was accomplished by providing a rich description of the phenomenon that is being researched from the interviews of the participants and providing examples of the participants' experiences relative to the themes that emerge from the data that I collect.

**Transferability (external validity).** According to Shenton (2004), transferability in research occurs when the finding of a particular study can be related to a wider population and other circumstances. Transferability of the data was achieved by carefully drafting the introduction and literature review chapters of this study. These two chapters will establish the context of study and provide a detailed description of phenomenon in question to allow comparisons to be made. According to Bitsch (2005), to ensure transferability of qualitative inquiry, the researcher must provide a detailed description of

the method of inquiry. A detailed description involved the researcher elucidating all the research processes, from data collection, context of the study to production of the final report. My thesis served as a final report of this study, including a detailed description of the methodology and research process from data collection, data analysis and interpretation. This helps other researchers to compare the study to other possible contexts to which transfer might be contemplated. In addition, purposive sampling provides greater in-depth findings than other probability sampling methods (Cohen et al., 2011) because it allows the researcher to make a decision about the selection of participants.

**Dependability (reliability).** Dependability in research can be obtained when future researchers replicate prior research (Shenton, 2004). To enable other researchers the possibility of replicating my study, I recorded the inquiry process. I also ensured that all data were properly recorded and stored, which include interview and observation notes, audio tape of the interview, documents and records collected from the fields, informed consent forms, and other related documents. The aforementioned steps if, followed correctly allowed for future replication of the study (Shenton, 2004).

**Confirmability (objectivity).** Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results from a study could be confirmed or corroborated by others (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). Confirmability was achieved by reflexive journal, where I can reflect on, tentatively interpret and plan data collection. This journal included all events that happened in the field, it included my personal reflections of those events, and it included any questions and thoughts I had during the data collection and interpretation. The

reflexive journal serves as the documentation of the procedures for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study. Another researcher can take a "devil's advocate" role with respect to the results. The evaluation process can be documented to confirm the study. After the study has been conducted, one can conduct a data audit that examines the data collection and analysis procedures and makes judgments about the potential for bias or distortion (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). Remaining objective and ensuring the findings are from participants' expertise and experiences are crucial (Shen, 2004).

### **Ethical Procedures**

Wassenaar and Mamotte (2012) emphasized the importance of ethical considerations in social research. The authors argued that social science research should be rigorously ethically reviewed. There are several ethical issues that pertain to this study which include confidentiality, informed consent, and failure to inform the IRB of any changes during the study (Wassenaar & Mamotte, 2012). This study poses minimal risks to the participants, however ethical concerns that were considered to ensure anonymity, confidentiality, and informed consent.

The primary avenue for addressing ethical issues and concerns were addressed by my obtaining permission to conduct the research. I obtained permission to conduct the study from the relevant authorities including Walden University before commencement of the study. I obtained a letter of cooperation from the organizations whom I will contact for recruiting participants. I then submitted the relevant forms to obtain IRB approval from Walden University. I described the potential risks and benefits of the study in the

IRB approval form. I did not recruit (solicit) participants in public place and did not observe people for research unless they are aware of it.

The participants in this research is a vulnerable group as they are likely economically disadvantaged and also may have one of the following conditions: mentally disabled, emotionally disabled, pregnant, less than fluent in English or in crisis (such as natural disaster victims or persons with an acute illness). It is my responsibility to ensure that all regulations and documentations are handled with special attention and avoid even subtle coercion. De Chesnay and Anderson (2011) discussed several special considerations for research dealing with vulnerable population. First, the researcher should demonstrate that the research benefits the vulnerable population. For example, the research results in implication that helps to reduce disparity between the vulnerable population and the general population (De Chesnay & Anderson, 2011). This research benefited the emancipated foster care youths as it provided insight into how transition plan can be reframed to better support youth during this period of transition. Second, research involving vulnerable population typically requires a full IRB review in order to protect the rights of the population (De Chesnay & Anderson, 2011). De Chesnay and Anderson (2011) also supported the notion that qualitative research is typically conducted with great attention to respect the autonomy of the participants. In this study, I intended to hear the voice of emancipated foster youth. With my extensive social work experiences and careful research planning, I paid special consideration to this group and protect their research through the entire research process.

Working with this vulnerable population or any other group, informed consent is one of the primary ethical considerations in research involving human participants. The purpose of the consent is to ensure that participants understand the research study and voluntarily agree to participate (Roberts, 2002). Informed consent should provide subjects information they need to understand the research and anticipated risks and benefits. Furthermore, the research should ensure that the participants are able to communicate, understand, and logically work with this information. As a result, the informed consent should be written in languages that they participants are able to comprehend. Check et al., (2014) recommended that the language would ideally be short, simple, easier to read, and accurate. Informed consent was obtained from each participant before the interview (See Appendix D). The participants were reminded that they can withdraw from the study at any stage if they wished to do so. I kept IRB and relevant authorities informed if there was any change once the study has begun. Any change to study protocol was done through an amendment to the original IRB application.

I addressed privacy and confidentiality of the information obtained from the participants through the following; (a) personal information regarding the participants or interviews will not be shared with unauthorized individuals; (b) names of the participants were removed replaced by identification numbers; (c), and the data were analyzed in this anonymous format. Privacy of the participant was achieved by using codes on data documents instead of recording personally identifying information. Additionally, I kept a separate document that links the study code to subjects' identifying information and keep it locked in a separate location along with other hard copy data documents and records.

I assigned security passwords to computerized records. Information was kept in its original form for at least five years or longer depending on the current standard ("Retention of research records and destruction of data," 2015). Data can also be stored until there is no further need for it to be protected ("Retention of research records and destruction of data," 2015). Data were stored on a computer, external hard drive. Hard copies of data were stored in a fireproof, locked safe along with any other IRB related documents in my office and destroyed according to retention of research records and destruction of data (2015) after five years of completion of this thesis.

During the course of the study, the research procedure might reveal or create an acute psychological state that necessitates referral. In order to manage this, information of affordable mental health counseling and psychological services were provided (see Appendix-E). This provides participants with information about free or very low cost counseling and a hotline to call if they become distressed as a result of participating in this study.

### **Summary**

A description of the methods and research design that were employed in this study has been provided in chapter 3. This chapter began with the research question and the rationale for utilizing phenomenological a qualitative research design for this study. I then reviewed the role of researcher, the methodology, and sites for data collection, participant selection, data collection techniques, and methods of analysis. Finally, the issues of validity and reliability and the ethical concerns of the study have been discussed. The impetus for this study is a direct result of the overall expectations that the

youths voices should be heard to address what needs to change in the transition plan that precedes emancipation for the child welfare system.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

This study employed a phenomenological methodological approach to address the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the youths' perception of the transitional plan?

RQ2: What are their experiences, if any, with the transitional planning process?

RQ3: How well the transition plan mitigates homelessness of youths after they are emancipated from foster care?

This chapter presents the findings from the data analysis of 10 subjects to address these research questions. The participating youths' experiences, successes, and challenges during transition were explored in the following domains: housing, education attainment, employment, physical or mental health, and finding mentors and continuing support.

This chapter starts with an overview of the organizational setting and demographics of the sample. These conditions may influence the interpretation of the study results. Data collection and analysis processes are then discussed as well as the results in terms of main themes that emerged according to the three major research questions addressed. Finally, a summary of answers to research questions is provided. The results from this study were used to inform child welfare system and policy makers about the shared experiences of youths who became homeless after being emancipated from foster care.



### **Setting**

Participants aged from 18 to 21 years who were emancipated from Covenant House and Methodist Services in Philadelphia, PA were recruited for this study. Covenant House was established in 1999 and is the largest private child welfare agency in the Delaware Valley, and it is the provider of services to homeless and runaway youth in Philadelphia.

### **Demographics**

A total of 10 individuals participated in semistructured interviews. All participants were from Philadelphia, PA. Eight participants were females and three were males. The majority of the subjects were African American (80%). The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 21 years and all had participated in the transition plan, which is a plan developed 90 days prior to a youth's 18th birthday and includes specific options on housing, health insurance, education, local opportunities for mentors and continuing support services, and work force supports and employment services. It is as detailed as the child may elect.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Covenant House and Methodist Services were contacted about the purpose of the research and my desire to recruit participants who had transitioned out of their foster care programs. I obtained permission from each agency to recruit participants by posting flyers to announce the study (see Appendix A). The flyer contained information about the objectives and benefits of participating in the research study as well as the anticipated duration of participation (see a copy of the Flyer in Appendix B).

I reviewed informed consent with individuals who expressed interested in participating in the study, and those who signed the informed consent were prescreened for eligibility using a short questionnaire. To be eligible, the participant has to be aged 18 and 21 years, emancipated from the Philadelphia child welfare system during 2011 through 2014, and have participated in a transitional plan before leaving foster care.

The appointments to conduct the interviews (Appendix A) were scheduled at a time and place of convenience for each participant and the interviews were recorded and transcribed. After the interviews were transcribed, the data were cleaned to remove the names of individuals. I then imported the data into NVivo for coding and analysis (QSR International Pty Ltd, 2010, see appendix F). I read the transcripts to identify recurring themes. The themes were used to develop a codebook that was used to code the data in NVivo. The following main themes emerged from the data analysis: housing, education attainment, employment, physical or mental health, finding mentors and continuing support, and the overall impact of transition plan, which were based on the questions designed in the unstructured interview.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is critical to ensure the quality of the research and demonstrate the validity, reliability, and generalizability of the results so the findings of the study can be added to the knowledge base of the research area and the study can yield valid practical implications (Loh, 2013). Trustworthiness in this study was established through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The following sections describe the measures I took to ensure the trustworthiness of the study.

**Credibility (Internal Validity)**

Studies show that from the perspective of establishing credibility, researchers must ensure that those participating in research are identified and described accurately (Elo et al., 2014). Credibility in this study was achieved by extended engagement with participants, careful observation in the field, and asking participants to verify the information that they gave to me to check for accuracy. Specifically, the participants were asked if the transcripts of their dialogues matched what they actually intended to say. In addition, reflective journals were written to record my thoughts throughout the research process. Curry, Nembhard, & Bradley, (2009) described that credibility can be achieved when presenting findings that plausibly explain the phenomenon of interest and portrayal of respondent experience. In this sense, credibility was achieved by a rich description of the phenomenon that resulted from the interviews of the participants. Direct quotes of the participants were referenced in the results section to support the findings.

**Transferability (External Validity)**

Transferability of the data was achieved by carefully drafting the introduction and literature review chapters to establish the context of study and provide a detailed description of phenomenon in question to allow comparisons to be made. This dissertation serves as a final report of the study, including detailed descriptions of the methodology and research process from data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of the findings. This permits other researchers to contrast the study to other possible contexts to which transfer might be contemplated. Finally, purposeful sampling was

utilized in this study. According to Teddlie and Yu (2007), purposive sampling leads to greater depth of information from a smaller number of carefully selected cases, whereas probability sampling leads to greater breadth of information from a larger number of units selected to be representative of the population.

### **Dependability (Reliability)**

According to Elo et al., (2014), dependability refers to the stability of data over time and under different conditions. Dependability can be achieved if another researcher can readily follow the decision trail used by the initial researcher (Thomas and Magilvy, 2011). To ensure dependability in this research, I recorded the inquiry process of this study using a journal and field notes. I ensured that all data were properly recorded and stored, which included interview and observation notes, audio tape of the interview, documents and records collected from the fields, informed consent forms, and other related documents. These steps allow for future replication of the study.

### **Confirmability (Objectivity)**

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results from a study could be confirmed or corroborated by others (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). Confirmability was achieved by reflective journal, where I considered the plan of data collection and the details on the research process. This journal included all events that happened relevant to the study and my personal thoughts on those events. This served as the documentation of the procedures for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study. This journal can be provided to other researchers if they want to replicate the study.

## **Results**

The following sections present the findings of my study. The main themes in each domain (housing, education, employment, health, mentoring and support) were discussed alongside the quotation of the participants. In general, there are some positive outcomes as a result of the transition plan in every domain. A few participants achieved stable housing; others had multiple episodes of homelessness. Most of the participants received their high school or GED and a few attended community colleges. However, none of them was enrolled in a four-year university. Most of them were able to find temporary or part time employments although mostly low-wage jobs. All participants expressed they had good physical health while a few expressed concerns of mental health issues. The majority felt that they did not get sufficient support and need more mentoring and continuous support. Overall, youths transitioning out of care are falling behind their peers. The details of the findings are presented below.

### **Housing Support Through Transition Plan**

The main objective of the study was to examine the impact of the transitional plan concept on homelessness among youths who age out of the foster care system. Three research questions were addressed: a) What are the youths' perception of the transitional plan? b) What are their experiences, if any, with the transitional planning process?; c) How well the transition plan mitigates homelessness of youths after they are emancipated from foster care?

The first interview question was designed to explore the experiences which former foster youths had in achieving housing through the transitional plan to address all

three research questions of the study. The major themes identified were achieving stable housing, homelessness, transition, and social workers.

**Stable housing.** In terms of achieving stable housing, three respondents expressed that there were able to achieve stable housing and social workers played an active role in their transition. They had greatly benefited from the transition plan in helping them to find a stable housing. One participant stated:

My case worker was able to help me find an affordable apartment that I can live in after I aged out of care.” Similarly, another participant answered, “I had a good experience with the transitional plan. My social worker worked with me and I was able to have stable housing when I aged out.

The third participant also noted, “My social worker assisted me in finding housing.”

These answers supported that case workers provided these youths with advice and resources and some even helped with locating affordable apartments. For these three youths, stable housing was made available and they did not have to make great efforts on their own to attempt to find housing.

**Homelessness.** On the other hand, the rest of the seven participants indicated that they had struggled with housing after aging out of services and had to go between houses of their friends and shelters for several months before they could find a stable place to live. They reported being homeless for at least some period of time. For example, one subject mentioned that she had to stay in train station occasionally. Two subjects lived with friends temporarily. The quotes from participants illustrate the theme of homelessness:

- “I lived in AC [Atlantic City] with my mother and tried to find resources but there were not enough resources. Came to Philadelphia, Some nights stayed at the train station.”
- “I asked prior worker to send information to Philadelphia. I had an apartment through Methodist and I am currently going to AIC [Achieving Independence Center].”
- “I was going through a lot of things. Being homeless was one of them. I did not have any money and I was assisted through the shelter to get my Social Security Card and ID.”
- “I did not receive help through the plan when I age out. I went from house to house and I am now living with friends until I can get enough money to get my own place.”

**Transition.** Another theme identified was transition. The youths went through a difficult transition to adulthood and independence with many challenges. During this transition, most of participants turned to their friends or relatives for support. They also tried to get a job to save money for obtaining housing stability. One subject expressed that she looked for a job and saved money for a room at Covenant House. For those who did not get sufficient help to obtain housing through transition plan, they tried to obtain a temporary place and find a job to save enough money for stable housing. For example, one participant stated, “I went to stay with a friend then from house to house.” Another one answered,

My worker helped me to find housing but I could not afford the rent so I could not take the apartment. I had to start looking for job right away. Look in the paper for cheap apartment. I am staying with friends and different people.

Most of these respondents received help from friends. Only one individual mentioned she lived with her mother for a period of time.

**Suggested improvements to transition plan.** The interviewees were also asked about their opinions on how to improve transition planning in order to help them to obtain stable housing. Three of them suggested free temporary housing to be set up for the initial period when they aged out. For example, one youth noted, “They must make sure we can afford what they find us. They must start making sure that they put us up in free housing for a few months after we leave the system.” Another youth suggested, “Special houses should be set aside for kids aging out. The child welfare agency should pay the rent for at least one year so we can get ourselves together to move on.”

Additionally, suggestions were made to provide more resources, housing in safer areas, training on practical job skills, more organized and faster service in transition planning and routine checkup post transition to make sure they are on track. One youth stated, “We should have been taught skills like how to pay bills, get a job and keep it.” On the positive side, one participant enthusiastically told me, “It is good to be young. A lot of people told me, you should not depend on anyone but get it yourself. However the transition plan process should certainly get better organized. The waiting process is too long.”



## Education Support

The second question asked about the youths' experiences in achieving education through the transitional plan. The main themes were achieving education, experiences with transitional plan, and suggestions made to improve education outcomes.

**Education achievement.** Six of the participants indicated that they were able to complete high school or obtain their GED. The youths indicated that they appreciated the help from their social workers in this process. They also emphasized the importance of education and expressed their desire to further pursue higher education. The participants offered the following comments regarding their education:

- “I am happy I was able to get my high school diploma, my social worker made sure that I graduated.”
- “My case worker as well as my foster parent helped me with this step. I finished high school and then I started classes at CCP [Community College of Philadelphia] located on Spring Garden Street.”

There are various reasons that the other four participants did not complete high school or earn their GED. One participant noted:

They got me into school ARISE (Arise Academy High Charter School) and in the grade that I need to be. The welfare system provided me this school. However the school is now torn down and I could not complete high school.

The other three described that they did not get help. They simply said, “No, the plan did not help me with education.” One participant stated, “I was in the 10th grade when I left DHS [Department of Human Services]. Was not really educated, was not prepared.”

Foster care plays an important role in helping these youths to continue with school and encourage them for better education attainment as some youths may not realize the importance until they became older. For example, one subject expressed in responding to their experiences in achieving education, “I don’t know because I did not want to go to school when I was in foster home.”

**Experiences with transition plan.** Those who did not get help from their caseworkers, felted unprepared and struggled. The respondents mentioned that they prepared for themselves in various ways including saving money for tuition, signing up college tours, and did online search for information. However, overall, the theme is that they did not get resources they needed in order to be self-sufficient in obtaining better education. Only one participant went to community college. She noted, “I was able to complete high school and am now taking classes at Community College of Philadelphia.”

**Suggested improvements to transition plan.** The respondents were further asked about their suggestions to improve the transition plan in order that others may obtain better educational attainment. Those who got help with their education felt very satisfied with the current planning process except one, who suggested, “Not really anything except for helping me to find scholarships that really was not done. It was talked about but I never sat down with my caseworker to apply for scholarship other than FAFSA.”

For those who did not get sufficient help with their education, the main theme was a need to provide more resources or guidance in terms of various education options they could have, such as college and practical certifications.

## **Employment Support**

The third question was related to the youths' experiences in finding employment through the transitional plan. The main themes were effectiveness of transition plan, obtaining employments, and job skills.

**Effectiveness of transition plan.** The results showed that transition plan was not very effective in this aspect. Only two respondents indicated that they received some sort of employment assistance through the transition plan. The rest of the respondents expressed that the transition plan was of little help. Instead they tried searching online ad, paper ad, walking from store to store and applying for jobs on their own. They mentioned they obtained employment in various places like fast food chains, grocery store, Purdue (Purdue Farms), bars, and babysitting. One participant described how she found employment. "I completed employment training through Achieving Independence Center (AIC). I am self-disciplined in a professional manner." Another participant voiced his concern about employment. "Because I am not being able to really get the education that they wanted, employment was a little difficult for me to find. I have been able to get small jobs here and there that help to support me."

He added that he got job through helping others. "One of the things that I did was helped a lot of people out and have odd jobs like cutting grass, painting and some landscaping work."

**Suggested improvements to transition plan.** The participants were further asked about their suggestions to improve the transition plan in order to help future foster care youths obtaining employment. The main themes were providing more job opportunities,

teach job preparation skills and practical work skills, and provide information about programs that are available.

***Job preparation skills.*** In particular, job preparation skills were mentioned by five of the respondents. They emphasized strongly the importance of job preparation skills such as drafting resume, practicing job interviews and proper dress attire for interview. Three respondents mentioned about the need to teach them job skills before they transition out of care. For example, one respondent stated, “Having someone to sit down and show me how to fill out applications and build a resume would have really help me.” Another respondent said, “They need to teach us job skills, filling out resumes, how to dress and interview.”

***Job opportunities.*** Five respondents also mentioned providing more job opportunities would be helpful, for example, bring them to job fairs, building connections with employers who are hiring. Finally two respondents stressed the importance of raising awareness of various work programs that are available. For example, one respondent addressed, “No one told me about work programs. That was a major setback. Work papers can be done in 9th grades for different jobs. I wish I was told about these work papers.”

### **Support for Physical and/or Mental Health**

The fourth question was related to the youths’ experiences in improving your physical or mental health through the transitional plan. The main themes were mental health issues, health insurance, and assistance with managing their health during transition.

**Mental health issues.** All respondents of this study had good physical health. However 36% reported various mental health issues such as anxiety, depression and anger issues and some required therapies. For example, one participant explained, “I am going to Men and Women for Human Excellence (MWFHE) for group and individual therapy. I need to get back on meds. However no plan was put in place prior to aging out.” Similarly, another said, “I participated in therapy once a week at Covenant House. I get medical care from Covenant House.”

**Health insurance.** Foster care youth often has more health related issues than their peers due to abuse, poverty and neglect (Edidin, et al., 2012) and as a result, they need health care coverage during transition out of care. However health-care coverage policies are often difficult to be understood. Eligibility requirements and application may exceed the understanding of youths who have just aged out of the foster care system without much knowledge about their benefits and how to access them. In this study, several participants expressed they are not familiar with health care coverage. For example, one noted, “We should have medical insurance through the state. This should be automatic to all kids who age out of foster care.”

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), enacted in 2010 and implemented in 2014 (P.L. 111-148), had increased the number of individuals who have access to health insurance, simplified insurance enrollment, and required that benefits include substance abuse and mental health coverage for youths who were aged out of foster care. The ACA includes a targeted provision to ensure these young people can have health insurance without interruption until they are age 26. However, in this study,

youths did not discuss about this, which confirmed that there are challenges in identifying those who are eligible, communicating the changed benefits to them at the state level.

**Assistance with managing health through transition.** Some of the respondents did not feel that they need help from transition plan. Nevertheless, others did hope to have routine medical care and insurance plan for a period time post transition. Several participants got help from transition plan. For example, one respondent expressed, “My foster parent always kept up on my yearly physical. My dental that occurred every six months and my caseworker just made sure they were keeping up on that.” Most others worked on their own to call for help from their family, participate in therapies, apply for public welfare, and keep positive.

**Suggested improvements to transition plan.** When asked about their suggestions on improvement of transition plan, most of them expressed the needs to obtain insurance or have programs for their medical needs at least for a period of time post transition. They also mentioned that they needed help with managing their health such as referring doctors in their areas and some basic training on using medical service such as how to make a doctor appointment. For example, one participant said, “I wish that my case manager had followed up and showed me which agency is close to me so that I can get the treatment that I needed.”

### **Finding Mentors and Continued Support**

The participants were further asked to discuss how the transition plan may or may not help them with finding mentors and providing continuing support. The main themes

were continuing support and mentors were important, transition plan was not very helpful and they had constructive suggestions on how to improve transition plan.

There was a consensus among the youth that mentoring relationships were valuable and desirable. They mentioned their caseworkers, counselors, foster parents, family members, peers, and friends as their mentors. There also mentioned organizations like AIC (Achieving Independent Center) where they can get some support. The comments below from participants illustrated this theme:

- “I used my aunt. She was always my support.”
- “Making friends is the best way. I learned from my mother, past worker, boyfriend and I found support on my own.”
- “I have a counselor that I see once a week through Covenant House. I also talk to another lady there.”
- “I keep in touch with the girls from the foster home.”
- “Well, I still keep in touch with my foster mom and she watches my son. Sometimes we still keep in contact.”

The transition plan did not provide sufficient guidance and information in helping youths to find their mentors. Most of the respondents felt unprepared. They reported having no or little help from the transition plan in getting a mentor. Although it is of great benefit for these youths to have a mentor, they face many challenges in getting supportive relationships. Several participants agreed with this assessment. “This part of the plan was not discussed with me. I have no supports or mentors. I did not get any mentors

assistance from the plan.” Another echoed that sentiment. “The plan did not connect me with mentors or continuing support. I can still talk to my social worker if I want to.”

They did not make great efforts in finding mentors on their own, partly because of their feeling of insecurity with a socially constructed image of being deviant and viewed to be associated with behavior problems. For example, one respondent said, “I don’t believe anyone care about me so I stay to myself.” One youth noted that she preferred a mentor that she did not know. “It is better to have mentors who don’t know my history and everything about me and whose house I was under, someone who is neutral.”

**Suggested improvements to transition plan.** The participants provided constructive advice on how to improve transition plan in helping them to find mentors and obtain continuing support. One respondent suggested that the plan should start connecting youths with mentors two years prior to their aging out so the relationship can be strong and connected by the time they age out. Similarly, another respondent thought the mentoring relationship should start earlier when they are still in foster care. One respondent recommended assigning them a mentor who can provide them supports in three to six months post their transition. Youth also expressed that multiple mentors may be needed. One participant stated, “The plan should have different support groups based on why we went into placement so they can identify with us and be lifelong support and mentors.”

### **Overall Transition Plan Impact**

**Biggest impact.** The participants were asked about the area of the transition plan that had the biggest impact on their transition. The main parts of the transition plan that



participants indicated were the most impactful were housing, education, and mentors/support systems.

**Housing.** Approximately 40% of the respondents mentioned that transition plan on housing mattered most for them. The comments below helped to illustrate this:

- “Housing since I did not have anywhere to go. I was going from place to place but now that housing is in place things are better. Just needs to keep doing well, therapy, medical, mental and school.”
- “Housing because I believe I need this as a foundation for aging out.”
- “Housing because my worker helped me and I could not go back home.”

**Education.** The second theme was education had the second biggest impact among these youths. Getting a high school diploma is critical for a successful transition to adulthood. One participant said, “The part of the plan that helped me most was getting my high school diploma.” Another stated, “It was probably the educational part. Thanks God that I had at least a GED because if I did not have I would not have any opportunity so I think that part has the biggest impact.”

**Mentors/support system.** The third biggest impact was mentors and having a support system Although transition plan did not provide them sufficient information and guidance they need in finding mentors the youth felt that this had a great impact as they really needed continuous support from mentors that they already have or transition plan could potentially help them to find one: Mentor and support is the most that impacted me. One participant said, “I am only 19 years old. Every child should have some type of

support. We will always need support.” Said another, “Mentoring part of the plan impacted me most because I really needed guidance.”

**Least impact.** Finally, the participants were asked about the areas of the transition plan that had the least impact on your transition. They frequently mentioned housing, medical care, and mentors/support systems.

**Housing.** Two respondents mentioned transition plan impacted them least in terms of housing. One said, “The housing section of the plan because I was homeless when I aged out and bounced around from house to house.” Another mentioned, “Housing because I spend a lot of time trying to find somewhere stable and secure to live and made it very stressful and hard for me to do anything else.”

**Medical care.** One respondent mentioned about mental health area. She responded, “Even though they told me what was wrong it still happened and I was not told how to control it. My mother, my children and boyfriend were the ones who helped me. DHS only put a name to it but did not give me what was needed.”

**Mentors/support services.** One respondent expressed the concern about supports and mentors as she felt alone after aging out and she could not get help from transition plan in connecting her with a mentor.

### Summary

This chapter presented the key findings from the current study. The main themes emerged in each of the domains were discussed along with evidences from analysis and quotation of the participants. The findings supported that overall transition plan had some positive impact on these participants in helping them achieving self-sufficiency.

However, youths aging out remain at great risk and had poor outcomes in transition to adulthood. Strikingly, many youths did not take advantage of the transition plan due to lack of knowledge or involvement. The majority of the participants perceived that there is still a lot of room for improvement in transition planning. The participants were struggled with achieving housing stability. They had lower educational achievement compared to their peers and had limited opportunities in terms of employment. Although both child welfare system and youths themselves had made great efforts during transition, there are still many barriers to self-sufficiency such as housing, financial obstacles and mental health issues.

The next chapter provides the discussion of these findings and critically evaluates the study along with findings from literature as well as a synthesis the key findings of my research and highlight limitations and recommendations of future research. It also discusses the implications to policies and practices.

## Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to examine youths' perception of the transitional plan concept, their experiences with the transitional planning process, and the degree to which the plan mitigates homelessness after emancipation. Due to the overwhelming responses from word-of-mouth contacts from some of the participants, the snowball sampling approach was an effective method of recruiting participants for the study. Three youths who volunteered to participate were not included as the sample size needed had already been reached.

The following three research questions were addressed:

RQ1: what are the youths' perception of the transition plan?

RQ2: What are their experiences with the transitional plan process?

RQ3: How well did the plan mitigate homelessness of the youths after they were emancipated from foster care?

This study consisted of a qualitative, phenomenological approach, which involved 10 individuals between the ages of 18 through 21 who had become emancipated from the Department of Human Services, Children and Youth in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, foster care system within the past three years. The participants provided valuable feedback on their experiences with the transition plan process in terms of housing, education, employment, health, mentoring, and support. The participants discussed how the transition planning process impacted their lives as well as suggestions on how the transition plan could be improved.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The findings are discussed in the following section to address the three research questions utilized in the study.

#### **What Are the Youths' Perceptions of the Transition Plan?**

This question was addressed through exploration of the participants' perceptions in several domains: housing, education attainment, employment, physical or mental health, and finding mentors and support systems. The perceptions of the transition plan from these youths were mixed. This is consistent with a recent qualitative study conducted by Gonzalez (2015). Using semistructured interviews of eight youths aged out of foster care, Gonzalez (2015) found that some youths were able to overcome obstacles and navigate the transition to adulthood by tapping both internal strengths and external resources provided by a transition plan, while others experienced negative outcomes like unplanned pregnancy, unemployment, criminal justice involvement, and substance use.

To a few participants, the transition plan had positive impacts on them in helping them achieve self-sufficiency. For example, one youth expressed, "The part of the plan that helped me most was getting my high school diploma." Another youth said, "I had a good experience with the transitional plan. My social worker worked with me, and I was able to have stable housing when I aged out."

However, for the remainder of the youths who aged out, the transition plan was ineffective in many domains. The youths remained at great risk and had poor outcomes in transition to adulthood. Many youths did not take advantage of the transition plan due to lack of knowledge or involvement. Youths expressed many concerns and perceived that

the transition plan did not help them in resolving these concerns such as housing, supports, education, and employment. One participant expressed his housing concerns in the following manner. “I did not receive help through the plan when I aged out. I went from house to house, and I am now living with friends until I can get enough money to get my own place.” Another youth added, “My transitional plan was not able to help me. I was homeless for about the first year after I aged out.” A third said, “I had to work under the table for a long time. I had no good help from the plan.”

These findings are consistent with a recent study conducted by Mitchell, Jones, & Renema (2015). Mitchell et al. (2015) conducted a longitudinal research study to examine the experiences and thoughts of youth as they transitioned out of foster care at the ages of 17 to 21. Their results showed that youth did not receive adequate support from a transition plan. Sixty percent of youth reported they were either not aware of their transition plan or did not know if they played a role in the development of their transition plan (Mitchell et al., 2015). Similarly, Cunningham and Diversi (2013) found that youths had a lot of anxiety during the transition regardless of the transition planning, with economic challenges and housing instability and loss of social support.

### **What Are Their Experiences With the Transitional Plan Process?**

Youth discussed their experiences with transition planning in terms of how the transition plan had or had not helped them and what they ended up doing on their own to achieve self-sufficiency. Results from the study indicated that participants faced challenges in the following areas: education, employment, healthcare, mentoring/social

support, and housing. The findings from this study are discussed in the context of the literature in the following paragraphs.

**Education.** An area that respondents identified that profoundly affected their lives was education achievement. For these youths, education is the key to success and is closely connected to employment. As indicated by Stott (2013), half of foster care youth had been discharged without a high school diploma, and 21% to 50% of the young adults did not currently have a high school diploma or GED. Similarly, researchers have documented lower high school completion rates and lower college enrollment rates among foster care youth compared to the general population (Courtney, 2009; Day, 2011; Day et al., 2012). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015), 69.2% of 2015 high school graduates were enrolled in colleges or universities.

The majority of the respondents were able to complete high school or obtain a GED. However, only two of them were enrolled in community college. None of them attended a 4-year university. This indicated that they lagged behind their peers in terms of college enrollment. There are many barriers that have contributed to the lower rate of college enrollment such as not being adequately prepared for college, lack of knowledge regarding the financial aid that is available for attending college, and the fact that youth from foster care tend to live in high-poverty areas with low-performing high schools (Dworsky & Perez, 2010). This concurs with the present study.

The participants expressed that they were facing many challenges in obtaining higher education. First, they lacked knowledge of educational options and had few resources to gain this knowledge. Second, they did not have time and financial support as

they often had to work to support themselves. A couple of respondents expressed interest in college and signed up for college tours. However, overall, they had low expectations and were not confident that they would go to college in near future. Those who did not complete high school education expressed that they did not get much help from transition plan. Previous researchers concluded that education success is associated with strong personal motivation, having a close supportive adult, stability in care and school placements, satisfactory accommodation, and financial help (Jackson & Cameron, 2013). My results are in agreement with these findings. For example, one participant stated that her caseworker as well as her foster parent helped her with education. She was able to attend classes in community college in Philadelphia. Another participant stated that his caseworker helped him with filling out Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The third participant expressed that her mother helped her with college tours. These supported that social workers and family members had a positive impact on their education. These findings demonstrated the importance of social networks, which supported the SCT in that social capital affected positively on education outcomes.

In addition, strong aspiration for attending college was found among several participants. Some were working to get better prepared. Previous researchers showed that 70% of youth aging out want to attend college (Courtney et al., 2004).

The Educational Training Voucher (ETV) is a component of the Foster Care Independence Act that was enacted in 2008 (Fostering Connections to Success and Promoting Adoptions Act, 2008). It aimed to provide the states to fund youth who have aged out of the foster care system and who are enrolled in college, university and



vocational training programs (Fostering Connections to Success and Promoting Adoptions Act, 2008). However, no respondent mentioned this program during the interviews. They were not aware of this program, as their caseworkers did not provide information about ETV. Only two participants talked about FAFSA, about which their caseworkers did provide information and help with the application. There is a clear need to support these youths with information about higher education to raise their awareness and aspirations.

**Employment.** The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (FCIA, 1999) required transition plan should support youth by providing emotional and personal support to transition through relationships with committed adults and mentoring. However, results from this study clearly revealed that this goal was not fully achieved for the participants in this study.

Youths aging out of foster care face significant challenges in obtaining employment due to low educational attainment, low social supports, limited work experiences, and lack of job training. Even when employed, they tend to get lower wage and only have temporary jobs (Foster, & Courtney, 2010, Stewart et al., 2011). Data from this study supported findings from previous researchers. Most of the respondents obtained employment without much assistance from foster care and transition plan. Particularly, respondents stressed that they needed help such as drafting resumes, interview practice, job placement and job trainings. Respondents reported getting jobs in various places like fast food chains, grocery store, Purdue, bar and babysitting. However, the majority of these jobs were low paying and temporary positions.

**Healthcare.** The study also yielded empirical evidence on the roles of transition plan on physical and mental well-being. Previous researchers have shown that youth in foster care has an increased risk for physical and mental health issues than their normal peers (Pecora, et al., 2009). Participants in my research all reported having good physical health. However, 36% of participants reported various mental health issues such as anxiety, depression and anger issues. They also expressed the basic needs with aids of referring doctors in their areas and some training on how to use medical service like how to make an appointment on their own. It was also suggested that medical insurance or Medicaid should be expanded for those who transition from foster care for a period of time.

**Mentors/social support.** Another area identified was mentors and social support. The main theme was that continuing support and mentors were vital, however transition plan was not very helpful in helping those getting supports and mentors. Previous studies highlighted the significance of mentors and social support for youth transitioning from foster (Antle, et al., 2009; Collins, Spencer, & Ward, 2010). Several participants in this study indicated that they received numerous forms of support from their caseworkers, counselors, foster parents, peers, family members and friends. They also mentioned that they received support from organizations like AIC (Achieving Independent Center). Past researchers have revealed that strong social support networks lead to positive outcomes youth in foster care like improved mental and physical health, better development, higher education, and higher employment rates (Settersten & Ray, 2010). However, several participants expressed further needs and desires for ongoing support and particularly

mentor. Some participants stated they felt unprepared for independent living; they also felt they did not have adequate guidance and information in finding mentors.

**How well did the plan mitigate homelessness of the youths after they were emancipated from foster care?** Only three of the 10 participants were able to achieve stable housing and social workers played an active role in their transition. They had greatly benefited from the transition plan in helping them to find a stable housing. However, the rest had experience multiple episodes of homelessness.

Consistent with the conclusions of previous researchers (Kaplan, 2009, Courtney et al., 2010, Dworskey et al, 2013), I found that the youths aging out of foster care were at high risk of becoming homeless. Kaplan (2009) estimated that homelessness was ranged from 14% to 58% among youths aged out. Furthermore, among youths who were homeless, it was reported that 20% of them experiences chronic homelessness (Fowler et al., 2009). Similarly, Courtney et al. (2010) estimated that 37% of former foster youth had been homeless or had moved from one temporary housing arrangement with friends, family, or strangers to another. Dworsky et al. (2013) reviewed research published between 1990 and 2011 and suggested that between 11% and 36% of the youths who age out of foster care became homeless during the transition to adulthood. In this study, about 40% of the respondents perceived that housing mattered most to them. The vast majority of them (70%) reported episodes of homelessness, which resulted in them not having “permanent housing” (homeless, staying with friends, etc.). The homelessness for some was temporary while it lasted for several months for others.

**Results in relationship to conceptual framework.** The findings from my study supported the conceptual framework of SCT used in this research. SCT implies that social relationships among people can be productive resources (Coleman, 1990). Social capital is defined as “the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit” (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998, p. 243). SCT directly addresses the role of connections and interpersonal relationships for emancipated youths in order for them to make a successful transition to adulthood (Avery, 2010). Social capital is especially essential for youths in foster care as they get ready to make the move to adulthood. Very often, these youths’ ability to make and keep up social capital is impeded by their past experiences with loss or disruption of connections with their families, schools, and communities. In this study, the relationship between emancipated youths and social workers, youths and their family members and friends positively affected their outcomes in obtaining stable housing. In particular, findings from this study demonstrated that the receipt of support from transitioning plan, especially from their social workers was critical to those youths obtaining stable housing. Three subjects mentioned that their caseworkers provided them advice, resources, and some assistance with locating an affordable apartment. Philadelphia Safe and Sound (2007) showed that transitioning planning and service delivery had a system-wide inconsistency among different foster care agencies within DHS (Department of Human Services). The vast majority of youths in their study reported that caseworkers were not supportive in helping them to transit to adulthood successfully. Conversely, some youth had very caring

caseworkers that were involved in their care. This is consistent with my study to highlight the importance of caseworkers that are dedicated to improving youths' outcomes and lives every day. In addition, family and friends played an important role in supporting their transition out of homelessness. These findings supported the SCT as social capital led to positive outcomes during the transition to adulthood.

**Summary of results.** Transition to adulthood happens gradually. However, these youths aged out of foster care often have to face the immediate challenges of adulthood in a variety of life domains without gaining sufficient life skills and supports from their immediate families. This study shows youths who had made a successful transition out of care are more confident; more equipped with skills and had a stronger support network. Transitioning plan made a big difference for them with great efforts their case workers made. However, for those who were unprepared, they have lagged behind in many domains, they had struggled to get a stable housing, get an employment and have little support from their social network. It is evident that these domains are interrelated. For example, an employment often means they could save money to afford an apartment. On the other hand, a stable housing can ensure their peace of mind to focus on other life challenges. Those who had a strong social network had better chances of obtaining housing and employment.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Findings of this study should be interpreted in the context of its limitations. First, the sample size was small and the sampling location was restricted to one area within the Philadelphia Child Welfare System, which could limit the ability to generalize the

findings. Moreover, as the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 provided states to have flexibility in how they manage administration of transitioning plans, there are differences across the states in terms of designing and executing the transitional plan concept. As a result, findings from this study may not be generalized to other states.

Second, the study did not address the details of the youths' experiences prior to aging from foster care. It is possible that their experiences prior to aging out may have influenced their development, perceptions, and experiences with the transition plan. This researcher did not examine how the experiences prior to aging out of foster care affected the participants' post transition adjustment.

Third, this study used the self-reported experiences of youths who aged out of foster care. However, youths' experience alone may be limited in understanding this complex process of aging out which involves many other people such as social workers, mentors, foster parents etc. Social workers, parents and mentors play important roles in promoting youths to build skills and move towards self-sufficiency. Their opinions need to be taken into account to design programs and make policy changes to meet youths' needs toward a successful path into adulthood.

Fourth, the study used interview to collect data, which may make interviewees subject to social desirability bias. Social desirability bias is the tendency for people to present a favorable image of themselves on questionnaire (Moshagen et al., 2010). In this study, although the questions were carefully crafted to minimize this bias, it cannot preclude the possibility that some of the interviewees may avoid some discussion on their undesirable behaviors or perceptions on transition plan.

Last but not least, some of the participants may not be able to articulate their feelings and thoughts effectively due to mental health issues or poor communication and social skills. This will limit the data interpretations.

### **Recommendations**

Given the limitations of the current study, future research should be conducted to a larger sample covering multiple states. Future research should also explore the perspectives of others, especially social workers that may help to understand the complex experiences of the transition out of care. This study highlighted the various outcomes these youths experienced during their transition from foster care. Future research should examine how and why these differences may exist. For example, several participants indicated that social workers played an important role in participant's experiences with transition plan. It should be further explored how and why the experiences with social workers were so different within the same child welfare system so that the best practices can be shared. Due to the overwhelming response, it is my intention to broaden this research in the future.

### **Implications**

Various policies have been implemented to improve youths' outcomes in the child welfare system (e.g., Foster Care Independence Act 1999; Fostering Connections Act 2008). Despite the efforts made at the federal and state level, youths aged out are still at greater risk for a number of poor outcomes across several domains. My study yields several practice and policy implications. First, housing is a major element in the transition plan. My study highlighted a few areas warrants further improvement. First,

transitional housing should be strengthened in the plan. Jones (2011a) showed that youths residing in transiting housing reported more positive outcomes (such as housing stabilities, higher employment rate, less substances use and criminal justice contact). In this study, several participants expressed that although they were provided information and resources, they felt helpless that they just could not afford the cost or their friends and families just do not have the housing they need. In this critical period time, youths are facing all challenges to achieve self-sufficiency, a direct placement to an affordable housing for the first a few months out of foster care could be a life saver for these youths as they can focus on other things like seeking an employment, obtaining skills and saving enough money so they can move to a place on their own.

Second, social workers appeared to play a critical role in transitioning planning. This was supported by my study. In several domains, participants expressed that their case worker helped them to locate an affordable apartment; made sure they graduated from high school and served as their mentors and help them better manage their physical and mental health checkups. These youths who got a caring social workers showed a higher success in their transition. Conversely, youths who did not receive much help from their case worker felt anxious and less confident. They also showed a higher rate of homelessness and unemployment. Thus, policies or services should emphasize the role of social workers and enable social workers and youths to build better relationships. There should be period check points for these youths to reach out to their case workers after aging out.



Third, youths expressed their specific needs in several domains based on their own situations. Transition planning should be tailored to each particular youth's needs and abilities. For example, youths mentioned that transition plan could help them to gain employment by teaching basic job preparation skills (such as drafting resume, practicing job interviews, proper dressing for job interview), practical work skills training, access to job fairs, building connections with employers who are hiring. These needs should be taken into consideration when drafting transitioning plan for individual youths.

Fourth, youths provided various constructive suggestions on how to improve transition plan. The consensus was that starting the transition planning early and providing specific support for a period of time post transition. Findings from This study highlighted the gap between the intention of the transitioning plan and the actual execution of the plan. There are many areas youths are not aware of the resources available. They were also not engaged due to the lack of awareness. Youths should be encouraged to share their experiences.

### **Conclusion**

This study used the phenomenological approach to study youths' perception and experiences with the transitional planning process, and the degree to which the plan mitigates homelessness after emancipation. The results demonstrated that housing mattered most to these youths. Despite the efforts of transition plan, the majority of them reported episodes of homelessness. The study also explored several important aspects of these youths' experiences with transition planning such as education, employment, physical and mental health, mentoring and support. Youth discussed the big impacts of

their lives by the transition plan as well as made valuable suggestions on how the transition plan could be improved. Findings from this research contributed to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence on shared experiences of these youth on the transitional plan and its correlation to homelessness. This study enhanced social change initiatives by providing insight into what these youths needs most and yield practical implications for child welfare system to better support youth during their transition to adulthood.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

### *Interview Plan*

#### **Introduction of interviewer**

Hello, my name is Sharon Sutherland and during this interview, I would like to discuss your experiences on aging out.

#### **Questions**

1. Please introduce yourself.
  
3. Tell me about your experiences in achieving housing through the transitional plan
  - 3a. What did you do on your own (separate from the transition plan) to try to find stable housing?
  - 3b. What changes could have been made to the transition plan to better help you find stable housing?
  
4. Tell me about your experiences in achieving education through the transitional plan.
  - 4a. What did you do on your own (separate from the transition plan) to try to achieve better education?
  - 4b. What changes could have been made to the transition plan to better help you achieve a better education?
  
5. Tell me about your experiences in finding employment through the transitional plan.
  - 5a. What did you do on your own (separate from the transition plan) to try to find employment opportunity?
  - 5b. What changes could have been made to the transition plan to better help you an employment opportunity?
  
6. Tell me about your experiences in improving your physical or mental health through the transitional plan.
  - 6a. What did you do on your own (separate from the transition plan) to try to improve your physical or mental health?
  - 6b. What changes could have been made to the transition plan to better help you maintain physical and mental health?
  
7. Tell me about your experiences in finding mentors and continuing support through the transitional plan.
  - 7a. What did you do on your own (separate from the transition plan) to try to find a mentor or continuing support?

7b. What changes could have been made to the transition plan to better help you find mentors or continuing support?

8. Tell me about the area of the transition plan that had a big impact on your transition and why.

9. Tell me about the area of the transition plan that had the least impact on your transition and why.

Probing question: What else would you like to tell me about your experiences with your transition plan?

Can you expand a little on this?

Can you provide me some examples?

## Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer

**VOLUNTEERS WANTED  
FOR A RESEARCH STUDY****Transitional Planning and Homelessness of Youths Emancipated From the  
Child Welfare System**

Are you currently between the ages of 18 and 21 years? Were you emancipated from the Philadelphia child welfare system during 2011-2014? Did you participate in a transitional plan before being emancipated from foster care? We are conducting a research study about transitional plan and are looking for your input! This study will examine youths' perception and experiences of the transitional plan and how well the plan mitigated homelessness of youths after they were emancipated from foster care.

You will be invited to participate in an interview over-the-phone, in-person or via Skype. The interview will consist of questions focused on your experiences on transitional plan and the transition out of foster care and will only take about a couple of hours.

Your participation is likely to help us find out more about how transitional plan can be improved and help youths to be more successfully transit to independent living in the future.

You travel costs will be reimbursed if you have to meet the interviewer at a place that requires travel. You will also receive a \$15.00 Gift Card at the conclusion of the interview process.

Please contact Sharon Sutherland if you are interested in participating this study.

## Appendix C: Pre-Screening Questionnaire

Please be advised that all information contained on this form will be kept strictly confidential and will not be given to or viewed by any unauthorized individuals. No personal information will be shared or published in any form or fashion. Thank you for your participation.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact information:

Email address

Telephone number

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: Male  Female

Ethnicity:

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White
- Hispanic or Latino

Which foster care agency were you receiving services from when you emancipated of foster care? \_\_\_\_\_

What month and year did you stop receiving foster care services?

\_\_\_\_\_  
Were you participating in a transitional plan when you ended services? Yes  No

## Appendix D: Information of Affordable Mental Health Counseling and Psychological Services

If you become distressed as a result of participating in this study as the research procedures might reveal or create an acute psychological state that necessitates referral, please refer to below information for free or very low cost counseling or hotline number to call.

For referrals to affordable community mental health services:

Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disability Services

(<http://dbhids.org/mental-health-services/>)

Mental health delegate hotline: (215) 685-6440 7 days a week/24 hours per day

Your local Mental Health America affiliate is an excellent resource for information about local programs and services including affordable treatment services.

(<http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/find-affiliate>)

Phone: (800) 969-6642

Network of Care offers information including descriptions of community treatment services and other supports for the following states: Arizona, California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Montana, Nebraska, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia, and Washington

(<http://networkofcare.org/splash.aspx>).

Phone: (415) 458-5900

HelpPRO® Therapist Finder offers FREE Secure HIPAA Compliant Video Counseling and provide search tool of Therapists who provide services including psychoanalysis, meditation and relaxation, dream work, coaching, neuropsychological testing, home studies and more (<http://helppro.com/>).

Use this link to get information on free consulting offered by Dr . Patricia Constantinian , Psy.D.[http://helppro.com/HP/Provider/198726832900001/Patricia\\_Constantinian\\_PsyD.aspx](http://helppro.com/HP/Provider/198726832900001/Patricia_Constantinian_PsyD.aspx) in Pennsylvania area or call Phone: (267) 342-2099

## Appendix E: Interview Data

This appendix contains samples of all the participant interviews. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed.

Participant: A. I.

*Introduction of the researcher:*

*Please introduce yourself:*

My name is A. I.

Question 1: a-b

*Tell me about your experiences in achieving housing through the transitional plan*

I did not receive help through the plan when I age out. I went from house to house and I am now living with friends until I can get enough money to get my own place

*What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan to try to find stable housing?)*

I asked different people if I could stay with them. I am working and saving as much as I can to move

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you find housing?*

Special houses should be set aside for kids aging out. The child welfare agency should pay the rent for at least one year so we can get ourselves together to move on

Question 2: a-b

*Tell me about your experiences in achieving education through the transitional plan*

I am happy I was able to get my high school diploma social worker made sure I graduated

*What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan to try to achieve a better education?)*

Nothing. I am still thinking about taking college courses later on

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you achieve a better education?*

I am no sure as I was not ready for college

Question 3: a-b

*Tell me about your experiences in finding employment through the transitional plan*

The plan or my social worker did not help me here

*What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan to try to find an employment opportunity?*

Filled out applications at a lot of fast food chains

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you find employment opportunity?*

Job training, mock interviews, job fairs and more preparation before aging out

Question 4: a-b

*Tell me about your experience in improving your physical or mental health through the transitional plan*

I was good on routine medical care before I age out and I had no mental health issues

*What did you do on your own to (separate from the transitional plan to try to improve your physical or mental health?*

Nothing. I had no need or medical issues right now. The state will have to pay if I get sick or I don't go to the doctor

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you maintain physical or mental health?*

The state should cover us for at least one year after we age out

Question 5: a-b

*Tell me about your experiences in finding mentors an continuing support through the transitional plan*

The plan did not connect me with mentors or continuing support. I can til talk to my social worker if I want to.

*What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan) to find a mentor or continuing support?*

I did not know how to go about finding mentors or continuing supports because I was not told how to

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you find mentors or continuing support?*

The plan should start connecting us with people and organizations when we turn 16 so that this relationship can be strong and connected by the time we age out

Question 6

*Tell me about the area of the transition plan that had a big impact on your transition and why?*

The part of the plan tha helped me most was getting my high school diploma

Question 7

*Tell me about the area of the transition plan that had the least impact on your transition and why?*

The housing section of the plan because I was homeless when I age out and bounced around from house to house. *What else would you like to tell me about your experiences with the transition plan?*

*Can you expand on this?*

*Can you provide some examples?*

My social worker making sure that the plan would work way before I age out. The plan should be based on individual needs and we should have a say in the plan.

Participant: A. J.

*Introduction of the researcher:*

*Please introduce yourself:*

My name is A. j.

*1.1. Tell me about your experiences in achieving housing through the transitional plan*

I went to stay with a friend then from house to house



*1.2. What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan to try to find stable housing?)*

Had to do what any mother would do. Stayed with friends. One person helped me more than I helped them. I had to learn to grow up and pay my own bills

*1.3. What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you find housing?*

Yes. should have been taught how to pay bills, get a job and keep it. Should have been taught those skills.

*2.1. Tell me about your experiences in achieving education through the transitional plan*

I was in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade when I left DHS. Was not really educated, was not prepared

*What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan to try to achieve a better education?)*

I signed everything myself. Called mother and told her what I was doing, I then forged her signature to go on college tours as my social worker was not helpful

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you achieve a better education?*

Should have us attend college tours, prepare us for college and be more supportive in our academic choice

*Question 3: a-b*

*Tell me about your experiences in finding employment through the transitional plan*

I was not prepared through the plan. Was not taught how to talk/dress for interviews

*What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan to try to find an employment opportunity?)*

I worked at a bar under the table, baby sat to pay bills and rent as welfare was not enough

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you find employment opportunity?*

Help us to find jobs before aging out. Teach job skills to us before aging out

*Question 4: a-b*

*Tell me about your experience in improving your physical or mental health through the transitional plan*

Only told me about my mental health but did not teach me how to make appointments or manage my anger issue. I had no physical health assistance.

*What did you do on your own to (separate from the transitional plan) to try to improve your physical or mental health?*

I called my mother for answers. I would explain to her what was going on and she would make my appointments.

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you maintain physical or mental health?*

Teach us how to do these things

*Question 5: a-b*

*Tell me about your experiences in finding mentors and continuing support through the transitional plan*

It was terrible. I appreciate AIC (Achieving Independent Center) I still go there and can until I am 21 but they should not be the only support.

*What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan) to find a mentor or continuing support?*

Make friends which is the best way. Learned from my mother, past worker, boyfriend. Found support on my own

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you find mentors or continuing support?*

We should be given a life long mentor when we leave foster home for at least 21-23 years old. Should start with the younger children in placement as they need someone to talk to.

*Question 6*

*Tell me about the area of the transition plan that had a big impact on your transition and why?*

Mentor and support. I am only 19 years old. Every child should have some type of support. We will always need support

*Question 7*

*Tell me about the area of the transition plan that had the least impact on your transition and why?*

Mental health area, even though they told me what was wrong it still happen and I was not told how to control it. My mother, my children and boyfriend were the ones who helped me. DHS only put a name to it but did not give me what was needed.

*What else would you like to tell me about your experiences with the transition plan?*

*Can you expand on this?*

*Can you provide some examples?*

They just need to teach the youths before they leave DHS. Taxes, employment, what to wear, dr. appointments, how to fax. Teach us before we age out so that we can run like deers.

Participant: A. P.

*Introduction of the researcher:*

*Please introduce yourself:*

My name is A. P.

*1.1. Tell me about your experiences in achieving housing through the transitional plan*

Ammm, well, my case worker was able to help me find an affordable apartment that I can live in after I aged out of care

*1.2. What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan to try to find stable housing?)*

Does not apply because of first answer? Answer-- (I mean I look on line to see what was out there an what their prices were)

*1.3. What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you find housing?*

Does not apply, case worker helped. Addition, I mean I know that very case worker is not like mine so I am sure that there are things that cold be better, jut not in my case.

*Tell me about your experiences in achieving education through the transitional plan*

Well I finish high school and hen I started amm classes at CCP on Spring Garden. My case worker as well as my foster parent helped me with this step

*What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan to try to achieve a better education?)*

Yea, I looked online at what schools were out here that were close n the area because did not want to go far especially with me wanting an apartment. It was just research.

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you achieve a better education?*

Amm, not really anything except for helping me find scholarships that really was not done. It was talked about but I never sat down with my caseworker to apply for scholarship other than FAFSA

*Question 3: a-b*

*Tell me about your experiences in finding employment through the transitional plan*

Amm, my caseworker and I talked about employment but I went and applied for jobs on line at Chic Filet fast food chain,

*What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan to try to find an employment opportunity?)*

Answered in part a.

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you find employment opportunity?*

They should have more jobs out there ready and waiting for children who age instead of us having to look on our own I feel like me caseworker should have and could have sat with me and help me to fill out applications

*Question 4: a-b*

*Tell me about your experience in improving your physical or mental health through the transitional plan*

My foster always kept up on my yearly physical. My dental that occurred every six months and my caseworker just made sure they were keeping up on that. I really didn't have any mental health counseling did not continue at the end just when I first got in care.

*What did you do on your own to (separate from the transitional plan) to try to improve your physical or mental health?*

Nothing really I don't feel that I need counseling. And all my doctors' appointments are up to date I mean they could have helped me find a doctor for me to have after leaving care.

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you maintain physical or mental health?*

Amm, I guess talking to me about the mental part and what I feel is needed after care and I can't really think of anything right now

*Question 5: a-b*

*Tell me about your experiences in finding mentors and continuing support through the transitional plan*

Well, I still keep in touch with my foster mom and she watches my son. Sometimes we still keep in contact

*What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan) to find a mentor or continuing support?*

Nothing really. I did not have to go out looking for mentors they were there already.

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you find mentors or continuing support?*

Amm maybe, better help looking for outside mentors who don't know my history and everything about me and whose house I was under. Someone neutral.

*Question 6*

*Tell me about the area of the transition plan that had a big impact on your transition and why?*

Ammm, I would say housing because I know that it is important for anyone to be without a home after leaving care and the education part because I did went to further my education possible going to a four year college to make a better living for myself and my son

*Question 7*

*Tell me about the area of the transition plan that had the least impact on your transition and why?*

Well, nothing really had the least impact. I cant really say I had a negative experience before aging out of foster care because of what was set up for me

*What else would you like to tell me about your experiences with the transition plan?*

*Can you expand on this?*

*Can you provide some examples?*

Amm, nothing really that I can thin

Participant: AW

*Introduction of the researcher:*

*Please introduce yourself:*

My name is A. W.

*1.1. Tell me about your experiences in achieving housing through the transitional plan*

My Transitional Plan was not able to help me. I was homeless for about the first year after I aged out

*1.2. What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan to try to find stable housing?)*

I amm bounced in between the house of friends and couple of shelters

*1.3. What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you find housing?*

Ammm, I wish that I was given more offers to find stable housing and actually be set up with some type of independent living before I age out

*Question 2: a-b**Tell me about your experiences in achieving education through the transitional plan*

Ammm, that whole, I did finished, complete my GED but I do hope wished I had the opportunity to go to college.

*What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan to try to achieve a better education?)*

I just ammm was, the GED was pretty much the extent and I am still to this day trying to struggle to get into college

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you achieve a better education?*

Amm, I wish that I had had the opportunity to have amm, to have more financial aid given to me or had a guidance counselor to get me in the education filed to help me get what I want.

*Question 3: a-b**Tell me about your experiences in finding employment through the transitional plan*

Employment, because of me not being able to really get the education that wanted, employment was a little difficult for me to find. I have been able to get small jobs here and there that help to support me

*What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan to try to find an employment opportunity?)*

One of the things that I did was helped a lot of people out and have odd jobs like cutting grass, painting and some land scaping work is what I did

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you find employment opportunity?*

Having someone to sit down and show me how to fill out applications and build a resume would have really help me.

*Question 4: a-b**Tell me about your experience in improving your physical or mental health through the transitional plan*

Physical health has always been good. The thing that I struggle with a lot was mental health just being able to have the resources to go seek therapy, did not think that medication was an issue but having therapeutic resource is big for me

*What did you do on your own to (separate from the transitional plan to try to improve your physical or mental health?*

Just kinda just going around and asking amm people that have similar situation to mine and just ammm trying to see where they or who they see and getting, getting linked up with a therapist

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you maintain physical or mental health?*

Good I wish that my case manager ammm had followed u and showed me which agency are close to me so that I can get the treatment that I needed

Question 5: a-b

*Tell me about your experiences in finding mentors and continuing support through the transitional plan*

Ammm, I found, I was able when I was in between homeless shelters, I was able to find mentors through there that were able to help me

*What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan) to find a mentor or continuing support?*

Answered in the first question

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you find mentors or continuing support?*

I think a lot of issues that I have could have been avoided I was kinda assigned someone to follow me for maybe three to six months and just kinda help me out. Some I could talk to or show me some type of resources. That could have helped.

Question 6

*Tell me about the area of the transition plan that had a big impact on your transition and why?*



I think that had a big impact was probably the educational part. Because that the aspect with me. Thank God that I had least have a GED because if I did not have that I would not have any opportunity so I think that part has the biggest impact.

*Question 7*

*Tell me about the area of the transition plan that had the least impact on your transition and why?*

Housing because I spend a lot of time trying to find somewhere stable and secure to live and made it very stressful and hard for me to do anything else.

*What else would you like to tell me about your experiences with the transition plan?*

*Can you expand on this?*

*Can you provide some examples?*

It was a good plan when it was first given to me but it needed to have more follow through to make sure that I was able to meet all toe goals and able to get on my feet.

Participant: D.

*Introduction of the researcher:*

*Please introduce yourself:*

My name is D

*1.1. Tell me about your experiences in achieving housing through the transitional plan*

Amm, I participated in a transitional plan

*1.2. What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan to try to find stable housing?)*

Amm, I looked for a job and I saved money for a room at Covenant House

*1.3. What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you find housing?*

N/A.

*Question 2: a-b*

*2.1. Tell me about your experiences in achieving education through the transitional plan*

Amm, I received my GED through E 3 Center and I took nursing courses through CAPA. The classes got too expensive so I had to stop the classes

*2.2. What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan to try to achieve a better education?)*

Amm, I received my GED through the E 3 Center and I took nursing classes at KAPA but had to stop because it got too expensive.

*2.3. What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you achieve a better education?*

N/A

*Question 3: a-b*

*Tell me about your experiences in finding employment through the transitional plan*

N/A

What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan to try to find an employment opportunity?

I went from store to store and asked if they were hiring

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you find employment opportunity?*

N/A

*Question 4: a-b*

*Tell me about your experience in improving your physical or mental health through the transitional plan?*

N/A

*What did you do on your own to (separate from the transitional plan to try to improve your physical or mental health?*

Amm, I participated in therapy once a week at Covenant House. I get medical care from Covenant House

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you maintain physical or mental health?*

N/A

What did you do on your own to (separate from the transitional plan to try to improve your physical or mental health?

Amm, I participated in therapy once a week at Covenant House. I get medical care from Covenant House

What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you maintain physical or mental health?

N/A

Question 5: a-b

*Tell me about your experiences in finding mentors an continuing support through the transitional plan*

N/A

*What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan) to find a mentor or continuing support?*

Amm, I have a counselor that I also see one per week and that is through Covenant House. I also talk to another lady

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you find mentors or continuing support?*

N/A

*Question 6*

*Tell me about the area of the transition plan that had a big impact on your transition and why?*

N/A

*Question 7*

*Tell me about the area of the transition plan that had the least impact on your transition and why?*

N/A

*What else would you like to tell me about your experiences with the transition plan?*

*Can you expand on this?*

*Can you provide some examples?*

N/A

Participant: J. B.

*Introduction of the researcher:*

*Please introduce yourself:*

My name is J. B.

*Question 1: a-b*

*Tell me about your experiences in achieving housing through the transitional plan*

My social worker assisted me in finding housing

*What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan to try to find stable housing?*

Nothing. I took the advice and resources of my social worker

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you find housing?*

No changes

*Question 2: a-b*

*Tell me about your experiences in achieving education through the transitional plan*

I was able to complete high school and am now taking classes at community college of Philadelphia

*What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan to try to achieve a better education?)*

Nothing, my social worker helped me with filling out the applications ad FAFSA

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you achieve a better education?*

Nothing

*Question 3: a-b*

*Tell me about your experiences in finding employment through the transitional plan*

I had to work under the table for a long time. I had no good help from the plan

*What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan to try to find an employment opportunity?)*

I work under the table for a long time to pay my way

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you find employment opportunity?*

They need to teach us job skills, filling out resumes, how to dress and interview

*Question 4: a-b*

*Tell me about your experience in improving your physical or mental health through the transitional plan*

I still do not have medical insurance. I have no mental health issues.

*What did you do on your own to (separate from the transitional plan to try to improve your physical or mental health?)*

Ask around, apply for public welfare

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you maintain physical or mental health?*

Find us medical insurance through the state. This should be automatic or all kids who age out of foster care

*Question 5: a-b*

*Tell me about your experiences in finding mentors an continuing support through the transitional plan*

I did not age out with any mentors or support

*What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan) to find a mentor or continuing support?*

I keep in touch with the girls from the foster home.

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you find mentors or continuing support?*

They should give us community support groups that can be there for us after we age out

*Question 6*

*Tell me about the area of the transition plan that had a big impact on your transition and why?*

Housing because my worker helped me and I could not go back home. The education pat was good too

*Question 7*

*Tell me about the area of the transition plan that had the least impact on your transition and why?*

All the other areas of the plan as I am still struggling in these areas.

*What else would you like to tell me about your experiences with the transition plan?*

*Can you expand on this?*

*Can you provide some examples?*

The social workers should listen to us more, ask out opinions and support us more. Don't automatically judge us because of how we behave. We have been hurt and abused.

Participant: J. O.

*Introduction of the researcher:*

*Please introduce yourself:*

My name is J. O.

*1.1. Tell me about your experiences in achieving housing through the transitional plan*

I had a good experience with the transitional plan. My social worker worked with me and I was able to have stable housing when I aged out.

*1.2. What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan to try to find stable housing?)*

I did not have to do anything on my own

*1.3. What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you find housing?*

For me, nothing

*Question 2: a-b Tell me about your experiences in achieving education through the transitional plan*

It helped me to get my GED, better than nothing at all. I do wished it was a high school diploma though

*What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan to try to achieve a better education?)*

I am now looking to go to a community college to take some classes for my CAN license (Certified Nursing Aid)

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you achieve a better education?*

I don't know. Maybe give us more options for education like let us go to trade schools

*Question 3: a-b*

*Tell me about your experiences in finding employment through the transitional plan*

I did not get much help here. I did it on my own

*What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan to try to find an employment opportunity?)*

I checked the papers and go from store to store and filled out applications

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you find employment opportunity?*

The plan should prepare us more by sending us to job fairs and making sure we know how to dress and interview.

*Question 4: a-b*

*Tell me about your experience in improving your physical or mental health through the transitional plan*

Nothing, but I had no medical or mental health issues. I went into foster care because my mother lost her house and never got it back

*What did you do on your own to (separate from the transitional plan to try to improve your physical or mental health?)*

Nothing

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you maintain physical or mental health?*

I don't know because I have no issues here

*Question 5: a-b*

*Tell me about your experiences in finding mentors an continuing support through the transitional plan*

This part of the plan was not discussed with me. I have no supports or mentors

*What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan) to find a mentor or continuing support?*

Nothing really. I talk to the people that I know from placements when I can or see hem

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you find mentors or continuing support?*

The plan should have different support groups based on why we went into placement so they can identify with us and be lifelong support and mentors.

*Question 6*

*Tell me about the area of the transition plan that had a big impact on your transition and why?*

The housing and education sections. I believe I need these parts as a foundation for aging out.

*Question 7*

*Tell me about the area of the transition plan that had the least impact on your transition and why?*

The supports and mentors as I feel alone after aging out

*What else would you like to tell me about your experiences with the transition plan?*

*Can you expand on this?*

*Can you provide some examples?*

Nothing

Participant: K. S.

*Introduction of the researcher:*

*Please introduce yourself:*

My name is K. S.

1.1. Tell me about your experiences in achieving housing through the transitional plan

I did not get help with housing before aging out

*1.2. What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan to try to find stable housing?)*

Yes I was homeless after aging out. When I got out of St. Gabriel hall I went six months going from house to house. Three months I tried to get my own place it took me about nine months.

*1.3. What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you find housing?*

First of all, they should have never let me told me to sign out at 17 to leave me at the youth study center with no resource let me sign out and left me there. Did not call to check up on me. I did not have any resource. I got sent out to St. Gabriel's home.

*Question 2: a-b Tell me about your experiences in achieving education through the transitional plan*

No, the plan did not help me with education.

*What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan to try to achieve a better education?)*

I worked my ass off to get my own apartment. Oh amm, I went to placement and was going to school but I did not complete high school in placement. I am going to school to get my CPR training on my own.

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you achieve a better education?*

Give me amm, more guidance, more tools, more resources should have been given to me for education

*Question 3: a-b Tell me about your experiences in finding employment through the transitional plan?*

I did not get any help here.

*What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan to try to find an employment opportunity?)*

I went to Valley Youth House and AIC. I filled out applications on my own. I went to about 4 places on my own for at least 6 months.

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you find employment opportunity?*

No one told me about work programs. That was a big major. Work papers can be done in 9th grades for different jobs. I wish I would lean more about these work papers

*Question 4: a-b*

*Tell me about your experience in improving your physical or mental health through the transitional plan*



Amm, no, I did not get any help here

*What did you do on your own to (separate from the transitional plan to try to improve your physical or mental health?*

I had to find my own doctor. I think they were so dependent on the person that I lived with to do those things.

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you maintain physical or mental health?*

I believe they should help me with therapy.

Question 5: a-b

*Tell me about your experiences in finding mentors an continuing support through the transitional plan*

I did not get any mentors assistance from the plan

*What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan) to find a mentor or continuing support?*

I used my aunt. She was always my support

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you find mentors or continuing support?*

Amm, I don't know. I don't care about that part.

*Question 6*

*Tell me about the area of the transition plan that had a big impact on your transition and why?*

Mentoring part of the plan. Because I really needed guidance.

*Question 7*

*Tell me about the area of the transition plan that had the least impact on your transition and why?*

Medical part of the plan.

*What else would you like to tell me about your experiences with the transition plan?*

*Can you expand on this?*

*Can you provide some examples?*

Ammm the plan needs a lot of work. They need to accept more people over 21.

Participant: S. F.

*Introduction of the researcher:*

*Please introduce yourself:*

My name is S. F.

*Question 1: a-b**Tell me about your experiences in achieving housing through the transitional plan*

Living in AC with mother and trying to find resources but there was not enough resources. Came to Philadelphia, Some nights stayed at the train station. Asked prior worker to send information to Philadelphia. Ha an apartment through Methodist. Currently goes to AIC.

*What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan to try to find stable housing?)*

Applied state ID for Pa. Went to AIC and filled out paperwork. Got housing through AIC.

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you find housing?*

Better area. Sometimes does not feel safe. There was a shooting. Housing should be in better locations

*Question 2: a-b**Tell me about your experiences in achieving education through the transitional plan*

No help was offered with education

*What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan to try to achieve a better education?)*

Reached back out to the agency for assistance and they refer to Philadelphia

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you achieve a better education?*

Could have already have a plan in place before turning age 18. Starting Job Corp soon. Did everything on her own.

*Question 3: a-b**Tell me about your experiences in finding employment through the transitional plan?*

Still have trouble. Not looking right now because of going into Job Corp for CNA. T. P. did not assist.

*What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan to try to find an employment opportunity?)*

Fill out application, look on-line. Worked a few days at the Fresh Grocer, missed some days and had to stop.

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you find employment opportunity?*

Could have taken me places, connected me to a job. Need a job to keep food stamp. Still not helping to find employment.

*Question 4: a-b*

*Tell me about your experience in improving your physical or mental health through the transitional plan*

Going to Men and Women for Human Excellence for group and individual therapy.  
Needs to get back on meds. No plan was put in place prior to aging out

*What did you do on your own to (separate from the transitional plan to try to improve your physical or mental health?*

Called her insurance to seek out treatment

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you maintain physical or mental health?*

They should set up kids who come into the system to see medical and mental health [prior to aging out instead of expecting kids to do everything prior to aging out of the system.

*Question 5: a-b*

*Tell me about your experiences in finding mentors an continuing support through the transitional plan*

No support. Only support is boyfriend and mother.

*What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan) to find a mentor or continuing support?*

Just find friends. Neighbor upstairs is a support when needed.

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you find mentors or continuing support?*

Have more mentoring program like big brother big sister. Should have that for the teenagers because I would have liked that.

*Question 6*

*Tell me about the area of the transition plan that had a big impact on your transition and why?*

Housing. Because I did not have anywhere to go. Was going from place to place but now that housing is in place things are better. Just needs to keep doing well, therapy, medical, mental and school.

*Question 7*

*Tell me about the area of the transition plan that had the least impact on your transition and why?*

Everything helped after going to AIC. AIC does not help with anything else except housing. Coach at AIC does not help or have weekly contact as she should.

*What else would you like to tell me about your experiences with the transition plan?*

*Can you expand on this?*

*Can you provide some examples?*

No.

Participant: W. F.

*Introduction of the researcher:*

*Please introduce yourself:*

My name is W. F.

*1.1. Tell me about your experiences in achieving housing through the transitional plan*

I really did not participate in the transitional program

*1.2. What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan to try to find stable housing?)*

Was going through a lot of things. Being homeless was one of them. I did not have any money w was assisted through the shelter to get my social security card and ID.

*1.3. What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you find housing?*

It is good to be young. It's not up to the kids to decide but they need to put things in motion to be one (child welfare system.) Moe motivation to see how these kids struggle when they age out. A lot of people told me, you should not depend on anyone but go out and get it yourself. The waiting process is too long. Get better organize.

*Question 2: a-b Tell me about your experiences in achieving education through the transitional plan*

They got me into school ARISE. ARISE got me in the grade that I need to be. The welfare provided this school. The school is now ton down. Did not complete high school.

SW. motivated me a lot.

*What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan to try to achieve a better education?)*

I did not start until I got out of prison. IT was time for me to sit back and think that I needed better for myself. I am currently in school. I went to the Arise at 11th and Spring Garden and was given information about Youth Build.

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you achieve a better education?*

Can say much now that they are tearing down school to low budget. Make are that the children get the correct information and education before tearing he school down. Loves to do Industrial work. Working on getting certification for OSH-10. Certification for Field work, Construction in safety.

The CWS can give a lot of support for education

*Question 3: a-b*

*Tell me about your experiences in finding employment through the transitional plan*

Yes, but I have to do most of it myself. Completed employment training through AIC. Self-discipline in a professional manner. Yes. Worked for UPS and Purdue. Currently working at Shop rite.

*What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan to try to find an employment opportunity?)*

I moved to Delaware for a little bit. Applied to Purdue and received a job

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you find employment opportunity?*

They can at least put out, explore different things/programs that are out there. Do temp agency, get a contract with them. Not only print out of available jobs. More hands on experience

*Question 4: a-b*

*Tell me about your experience in improving your physical or mental health through the transitional plan*

Really did not need the services. Being in different group home made me strong. Showed me different aspects of adult life, responsibilities because you do not want to be stuck in a group home forever.

*What did you do on your own to (separate from the transitional plan to try to improve your physical or mental health?)*

Self-discipline, training, sound peace of mind. Keep a great mind set.

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you maintain physical or mental health?*

They should open to the kids more about these services. Grew up around a lot of elders. I listened to their stories and how they grow up in the system allows me to give you answers for this research. Not just my story but theirs also

*Question 5: a-b*

*Tell me about your experiences in finding mentors and continuing support through the transitional plan*

Mostly friends. No families. I found them by myself. Had to choose your friend. Friends are not forever. Does not work like that with maturity.

*What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan) to find a mentor or continuing support?*

Did not find anybody. They found me.

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you find mentors or continuing support?*

Can't really speak because I do not know others mindset not everyone will agree to getting close to a child.

*Question 6*

*Tell me about the area of the transition plan that had a big impact on your transition and why?*

Nothing really. Everything that comes to me I was chosen for another purpose.

*Question 7*

*Tell me about the area of the transition plan that had the least impact on your transition and why?*

Nothing really.

*What else would you like to tell me about your experiences with the transition plan?*

*Can you expand on this?*

*Can you provide some examples?*

Prior to aging out, people going into placement come out stronger than they come in not physically but mentally. Made a lot of friends while in placement. Friends on both side of the field. Professional and peer group. Count it as me being social.

Participant: M. B.

*Introduction of the researcher:*

*Please introduce yourself:*

My name is M. B.

*1.1. Tell me about your experiences in achieving housing through the transitional plan*

I did not get all the help that I needed from the transition plan. My worker helped me to find housing but I could not afford the rent so I could not take the apartment

*1.2. What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan to try to find stable housing?)*

I had to start looking for job right away. Look in the paper for cheap apartment. I am staying with friends and different people

*1.3. What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you find housing?*

They must make sure we can afford what they find us. They must start making sure that they put us up in free housing for a few months after we leave the system.

*Question 2: a-b*

*Tell me about your experiences in achieving education through the transitional plan*

I still don't have a high school degree or GED. Did not help me

*What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan to try to achieve a better education?)*

I don't know because I did not want to go to school when I was in foster home

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you achieve a better education?*

*Question 3: a-b*

*Tell me about your experiences in finding employment through the transitional plan*

*No help I am still looking for work*

*What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan to try to find an employment opportunity?)*

Looking online and in the paper

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you find employment opportunity?*

Teach us to interview, dress right and link us with stores and people who hire folks

*Question 4: a-b*

*Tell me about your experience in improving your physical or mental health through the transitional plan*

I don't have any medical problem or mental health problem

*What did you do on your own to (separate from the transitional plan to try to improve your physical or mental health?)*

Nothing I don't need help right now

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you maintain physical or mental health?*

I don't know.

*Question 5: a-b*

*Tell me about your experiences in finding mentors and continuing support through the transitional plan*

I can talk to my social worker if I want but I don't have anyone else

*What did you do on your own (separate from the transitional plan) to find a mentor or continuing support?*

Nothing. I don't believe anyone care about me so I stay to myself

*What changes could have been made to the transitional plan to better help you find mentors or continuing support?*

Connect us with people in the community, give us mentors to stay with us so we can have someone to talk to.

*Question 6*

*Tell me about the area of the transition plan that had a big impact on your transition and why?*

I don't know because I am still not stable right now with anything that the plan should have helped me to get

*Question 7*

*Tell me about the area of the transition plan that had the least impact on your transition and why?*

I think all of it

*What else would you like to tell me about your experiences with the transition plan?*

*Can you expand on this?*

*Can you provide some examples?*

I did not have a good experience with the plan and that is all I am going to say because I am still upset with all of this. I stayed too long in placement only to end up like this