

2018

# Exploring Possibilities with Professionals on Youth Aging Out of Placement

Karen L. Garrett  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Karen L. Garrett

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## Review Committee

Dr. Ross Alexander, Committee Chairperson,  
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Dr. Mark Stallo, Committee Member,  
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Dr. Michael Brewer, University Reviewer,  
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer  
Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University  
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Abstract

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by

Karen L. Garrett

MSW, University of Pittsburgh, 2006

BASW, University of Pittsburgh, 1985

AS, Community College of Allegheny County, 1983

GED, Connolly Trade School, 1980

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy Administration

Walden University

November 2018

## Abstract

Homelessness with youth aging out the child welfare system has proportionally risen over the years. It is important that policy makers, professionals, and practitioners in the field of foster care understand the conditions youth find themselves in at the time of leaving placement. The purpose of this study was to describe problems that exist for youth aging out of foster care. Post placement outcomes have not generated results that suggest youth are thriving as they return to communities. Attachment Theory outlines relational bonds that form with caregivers when youth are entering and exiting placements. This qualitative study collected data from 11 professionals recruited from 2 organizations in the foster care system. In depth interviews provided a pathway for framing their perspectives on barriers and structural deficits that exist with youth aging out of the foster care system. Data analysis procedures identified common patterns and themes and ranked them accordingly. Unpreparedness, program deficits, and lack of long term supportive systems were key factors discussed in the systems that govern youth prior to emancipation. Supportive services, including (a) housing, (b) education, (c) mental health, (d) aftercare plans, and (e) interdisciplinary approach had significant implications in mediating many of the concerns for youth aging out of the foster care experience. Many challenges still exist for youth aging out of the Child Welfare system that are not easily detected from external sources. Foster care and Child Welfare systems have the potential to improve strategies through policy and programmatic changes that address poor post-placement outcomes. This research identified conditions with a call to action to improve planning for youth aging out of placement and integrating back to society.

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## Dedication

This dedication is a tribute to divine intervention. I would like to thank the creator of the universe for making this journey possible for me. Jesus Christ, who is the lord of my life, has turned many turbulent and crooked times straight for me. From the beginning, I was a child reared in the child welfare system and upon my emancipation, I dreamed as a little girl that I would one day go from having a GED to a PhD. I also want to personally thank my husband and two sons for being patient with me and recognizing that this journey was not a sprint, but a marathon.

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to my amazing Walden University faculty and staff for preparing me for this degree: Chairman, Dr. Ross Alexander and Dr. Mark Stallo, for guiding me in over fourteen quarters of preparation and completion of my proposal, Dr. Clowes, for sound technical advice, and Dr. Hide Yamantani, Professor at the University of Pittsburgh.

Several other individuals have also played integral roles in helping me to complete this goal: Joanne Hollinger (deceased), Neal Williams, Keith & Tonya Smith, Jim Jackson, Ramona Watkins, Denise Hill, Latoya Phifer, Pamela Wilbon, Esther Bush, Cecilia Golden, Cecelia Jenkins, London Frison, Valerie Wheatley, Rev. Samuel Ware, Carrie Washington (deceased), Sarah B. Campbell (deceased), Lillie Mathew, English Burton, Eunice Richardson, Rosilyn Simpson, Kim Jackson, Veronica & Keith Foulks, Winford Craig, Richard Morris, Ryan Scott, Rick Devert, and Cassandra Williams. If I missed someone, please credit it to the head and not to the heart.

Whether you assisted me financially, gave words of encouragement, listened to my woes, stimulated my thinking in the wee hours of the night, or jump started my progression, thank you for allowing God to use you as an instrument of change in my life.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge my dance community, Urban Ballroom & Chicago Style Steppers for helping me to destress with fun and exercise.

## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	v
Chapter 1. Introduction to the Study.....	1
Background of Problem .....	1
Purpose of the Study .....	4
Nature of the Study .....	5
Research Questions.....	7
Theoretical Framework.....	7
Definitions of Terms.....	8
Scope and Delimitations .....	9
Limitations .....	10
Significance of Study.....	11
Social Change .....	13
Chapter 2. Literature Review .....	16
Introduction.....	16
Rights and Responsibilities.....	18
Policies.....	19
Common Problems after Foster Care.....	21
Complicating Factors .....	23
Medical Decisions.....	26
Children’s Aid Society.....	27



Aging Out.....	27
Redefined Terms for Homelessness.....	29
Attachment Problems.....	30
Reunification with Birth Families.....	33
Education Gaps.....	34
Trauma.....	35
Cost of Placement.....	37
Kinship Care.....	38
Improvements in Foster Care.....	39
Emancipation.....	40
Placement Decisions.....	42
Service Providers.....	43
Criminal Behavior.....	46
Support with Aging Out.....	47
Social Responsibility.....	50
Chapter 3. Methodology and Procedures.....	53
Samples and Units of Analysis.....	53
Methods of Data Collection.....	54
Choice of Analysis Method.....	54
Practical Implications.....	54
Qualitative Research.....	55
Role of the Researcher in the Data Collection Process.....	56

Importance of the Study .....	56
Research Problem .....	57
Research Design.....	57
Participant-Researcher Relationship.....	58
Ethical Treatment of Participants.....	58
Data Collection Method .....	58
Validity, Reliability, Generalizability, and Replicability .....	60
Primary Assertion .....	61
Sample Size.....	61
Qualitative Data .....	63
Measures .....	64
Structured Interviewing .....	64
Limitations/Challenges .....	64
Ethical Adherence of Participants.....	65
Data Analysis and Coding .....	65
Summary and Preview to Chapter 4 .....	65
Chapter 4. Results .....	67
Introduction.....	67
Data Collection .....	67
Coding and Themes .....	68
Results.....	70
Research Questions.....	86

Conclusion and Preview of Chapter 5 .....	90
Chapter 5. Procedures, Findings, and Recommendations.....	92
The Problem.....	92
The Procedure .....	92
Interpretation of Findings .....	93
Recommendations.....	94
Implications for Future Research.....	97
Limitations .....	97
Positive Social Change .....	98
References.....	102
Appendix A. Code Chart.....	110
Appendix B. Coded Transcribed Interviews.....	111

List of Tables

Table 1. Concerns Reported After Aging Out of Foster Care ..... 24

## Chapter 1. Introduction to the Study

### **Background of Problem**

Far too many children ages 5–18 are growing up in institutions such as foster homes, youth homes, kinship care, and residential treatment facilities. Youth who are 18 years and older are being released from an institutional life and finding themselves out of the child welfare system with very little support from custodial and or biological parental figure. After care plans in many cases do not exist and few resources exist to help stabilize youth after they have been discharged (Richards, 2014). (This is known as *aging out*—used interchangeably with *émancipation* or *termination*—and refers to youth in foster care who have not been adopted or reunited with their birth families and are still in the system upon reaching the legal age of majority—currently 18 in Pennsylvania.) It is estimated that each year 1,000 youth age out of the foster care system in Pennsylvania. Nationally, 20,000–25,000 youth entering who are entering into placement have severe emotional and behavioral problems, thereby resigning them to long-term placement in group homes rather than placement in foster homes (Pecora et al., 2013).

Youth who may still be enrolled in high school and/or have developmental disabilities are permitted to remain in care until the age of 21. Richards (2014) posited that 1 out of 10 youth released from the foster care system will experience homelessness upon their immediate discharge from placement. Homelessness can range anywhere from a day to multiple days and months. Couch-surfing is all too common among youth in transition (Schmitz & Tyler, 2015). It has been determined that upon release from group-home liv-

ing, youth have different outcomes than those youth who have left placement from kinship care/ foster care. Group home living youth outcomes generally involve the criminal justice system (Robst, Armstrong, Dollard, and Rohrer, 2013). The rate of arrest among young adults increases after out of home treatment, generally group-home living (Robst, Armstrong, Dollard and Rohrer, 2013). It is claimed that these young adults pick up or learn others' negative behaviors [(Ponciano, 2013).

In Pennsylvania, the Department of Human Services, Office of Children-Youth and Families is located in the state capital of Harrisburg. It is the lead agency of which Title IV-B Part 1 program manages Pennsylvania's 67 County Children and Youth Services (CYS). Funds from the federal government are filtered through the state agency administering programs for child welfare services. Funds are disbursed and regulated by guidelines that directly impact in-home services, general protective series, and community and institution based services. (Pennsylvania 2015-2019 Child and Family Services Plan, 2014).

Residential treatment and group homes are considered part of the long- and short-term treatment plans for out-of-home care for youth (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014). The Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau (a division of the United States Department of Health and Human Services), indicated that more than 400,000 youth were placed in custodial care, that is, group homes or residential treatment facilities (2012). It is estimated that a quarter of children in foster care have been removed due to abuse and the other three quarters have been removed due to ne-

glect. According to Schmitz and Tyler (2014), more attention has to be paid to youth released from placement worse yet, it is surmised that children who experienced rejection from either birth parent or from their institutional caregiver ultimately end up homeless or in worse shape (Schmitz & Tyler, 2014).

The life of young people who have multiple foster care placements as opposed to group home and/or kinship care is common (McCombs-Thornton and Foster, 2012). Foster care/ kinship care has not always been the preferred care for youth placed in the child welfare system. Attachment theory has played an integral role in making the connection with the transition period and the discords experienced between caregivers and youth. According to Koehler (2014), a deeper understanding of (a) foster homes, (b) residential treatment facilities and group homes, and (c) the Department of Child Welfare's practices have similar roles as the Juvenile Court as they assume primary responsibility for youth's well-being throughout their placement. The juvenile justice system play a significant role in the lives of youth with long-term care placement (Chow, Mettrick, Stephan, and Waldner, 2014).

Homelessness and housing instability among youth aging out of the child welfare system is a primary issue among youth released from care (Rufa and Fowler, 2018). Homelessness is a problem in communities across Pennsylvania (AFCARS Report, 2016). This problem involves not only individuals, but entire families. On any given day, roughly 16,200 Pennsylvanians are presumed to be homeless (AFCARS Report, 2016). In one school year, school districts around the state provided services to approximately 13,000 homeless children (Getz, 2012).

Each year more than 1.5 million youth become part of the growing homelessness population in the United States (National Center on Family Homelessness, 2011). Possible reasons youth include they are not employed at wages that can sustain affordable housing. Youth have not received their high school diploma thereby having to take menial jobs. Other factors have significant impact that will be discussed later on why youth or young adults, which include those 19–25 years of age, are at higher risk of homelessness. Living in poverty, or trying to avoid it, poses a range of challenges aside from just housing. Problems with housing are found when there are also problems with health, employment and education.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The primary purpose of the study is to explore and describe the phenomena of youth aging out of the Foster care system and within three months ending up without homeless. The investigation with practioners and professionals will allow for policymakers and foster care placements to change, reduce, modify or add to their existing program designs to further aid youth leaving placement with tools to improve post placement outcomes.

The study summarized interviews and denoted the inability of youth to mainstream back into society. The summary deepened the knowledge of the needs of youth aging out of the system (Greenberg and Partskhaladze, 2014). Every state is required to provide custodial care for children in foster care; however, limited support is provided after foster care placements have ceased. The result is a deluge of youth aging out of foster care placement with negative outcomes (Richards, 2014). The existing long-term commitment by the Child Welfare System is provide placement for youth within thirty days.



Permanent placement plan are preferred with guardians or family member. (Malvaso, Delfabbro, Hackett, and Mills, 2016).

Miller, Paschall and Azar (2017) acknowledged that residential treatment is an essential element for children and youth facing placement out of their homes. Residential treatment facilities can be found in communities such like ones that look like where children and youth were removed from. I did not interview individuals who have been in residential treatment about their experiences upon leaving residential care. I explored solutions for youth aging out of the Child Welfare System with caregivers and professionals. I also interviewed administrators, professionals, and direct-care staff who work with youth aging out of the system.

### **Nature of the Study**

I selected qualitative research method to address this phenome of youth aging out as it provided the instrument of an in-depth analysis through interviews. This research method selected provided the sophistication and sensitivity to shed light on barriers that youth are facing prior to leaving placement. Data collection consisted of 11 interviews from two organization that provide foster care and residential treatment for youth ages 16-24, Staff, administrators, direct care workers and professionals were recruited. This strategy provided the best course of action in describing what professionals in the field believed are the barriers and the solutions to helping youth mainstream back into society. In exploring the creation of safety nets for youth on the brink of discharge from the system this methodology produced recommendations. Data was analyzed with a non-bias software that created themes and codes to answer the two research questions.

Creating safety nets for youth aging out aligns with the Department of Health and Human Services' federal mandate to decrease the number of youth leaving placement and becoming homeless within a few months of discharge.

According to Malvosio, Delfabbro, Hackett, and Mills (2016), transition from residential treatment can be a daunting experience and is laden with complex challenges. A possible solution to this problem is suggested by the Office of Children, Youth and Families' Title IV-B Child and Family Service Plan. The plan delineates improvement areas that are needed for youth over the age of 16 and supports them through the age of 21. July 2012, Pennsylvania amended two laws to allow for extended subsidies for youth up to age 21. A pathways to independence for youth aging out of placement could be measured over a longer period of time. The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 and later changed to Chafee Foster Care Independence provides subsidy for youth past their 18 birthday. The Chafee Foster Care Independence program provides financial support for youth transitioning out of foster care by encouraging independent living skills. Moreover, Hartman, Little, and Ungar, (2008) suggested in addition to a multi-dimensional approach, which includes stakeholders. Service providers in the community are not always well suited for helping youths with successful transitioning period. According to the Phoenix Youth Program, homeless youth come from a variety of stereotypical situations that yield negative outcomes, for example, couch-surfing and shelters that return them to the streets. Community partners interviewed did not provide solutions to reducing the number of youth released from foster care without the necessary skills and their ability to adapt to new surroundings (Hartman, Little and Ungar, 2008).

### **Research Questions**

The following two questions guided the study: RQ1: What special challenges exist for youth aging out of the child welfare system? RQ2: Is there a need for aftercare/safety net for youth who have aged out of foster care?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The joint work of John Bowlby and May Ainsworth (1991) introduced attachment theory as a way to understand interpersonal relationships. When confronted with threat of survival, as many children that are placed in foster care experience. Detachment and survival go hand in hand when children are moved from their natural habitation. Separation anxiety is heightened when children and youth are confronted with detachment from familial connections (Hirschberger and Ein-Dor, 2016) . In many cases, the separation generates the “fight or flight” syndrome (Hirschberger and Ein-Dor, 2016). Rejections from foster care placements have spiked, as noted by Jedwab & Shaw (2017); youth typically feel like outsiders. Being pushed into institutional living or being kicked out by a caregiver can be a traumatic event in a child’s life (Schmitz and Tyler, 2014). Being rejected by the mother poses the greatest harm to both genders (Cohen, Remez, Edelman, Golub, Pacidici, Santillan, and Wolfe, 2016). According to Schmitz and Tyler (2014), the step-parent relationship chronically drives youth to run away from home. Attachment theory helps explain the discord that results when an individual is separated from close relationships, either from their natural parents or relationships formed while in residential care.

## Definitions of Terms

*Out-of-care placement:* Any placement of a youth outside of their natural habitation

*Foster care:* A system of care designed to foster a child temporarily and is, in some cases, extended beyond to long term placement (Dyce, 2014).

*Institution placements:* A set of rules and guidelines govern this placement and are managed 24 hours a day which can include delinquent dependents' facilities

*Juvenile court:* A judicial system designed to foster, facilitate, and protect children by mandating protection from state child welfare systems

*Adjudicated dependent:* A child who has been placed in the protection of the state by the Juvenile Courts with the same legal rights as a biological parent

*Adjudicated delinquent:* A child/youth who has violated laws/committed crimes, resulting in the Juvenile Justice system and governing bodies becoming their custodial parent while rehabilitation is occurring

*Group homes:* A place where youth generally between the ages of 12–18 live among other children and their care is provided by in a congregate manner.

*Congregate care:* An interchangeable term to describe living with others in a group

*Kinship care:* Generally involves providing care for youth who require out of home placement. Care is usually provided by a family member or close to the family relative, neighbor or friend of the family (Dyce, 2014).

*Emancipation:* documentation provided by a youth to the courts to indicate that

they are able to care for themselves without state or parental/guardian assistance—the court will make the decision to terminate and/or emancipate the youth from care or state assistance

*Adoption*: Permanent care is being sought to care for children

*Reunification*: Involves providing goal plans with multiple vendors with natural parents to plan for the return of their child/children

*Trauma informed care*: Caregivers understanding how to provide residential and custodial care to children who are under psychological and physical stressors.

*Emergency shelters*: Places that provide immediate respite care to youth placed in care within 24 hours (Dyce, 2014)

*Homelessness*: Having no permanent address or no place of residency whereby routine living accommodations can be met

*At Risk*: A vulnerable state that one is placed in that could require immediate interventions (Fisher & Gilliam, 2012).

*Therapeutic foster homes*: An out of home placement for children with mental health or several health illnesses—typically found in a family like environment in residential areas (Robst, Armstrong, Dollard and Rohrer, 2013).

*Statewide Inpatient Psychiatric Program (SIPP)*: placement decision with youth with severe mental illnesses who often requires inpatient treatment for custodial care outside of the home (Slayter, 2016).

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The scope of this study will be face to face interviews with professionals in the

field of foster care. The content validity of the three questions were provided to all participants addressed (a) barriers (b) a need for safety nets and (c) after care plans. To assure the external validity of this research study organizations were randomly selected from an online directory of human services. The first delimitation in this research study were that all organization must provide services to youth aging out of the child welfare system. The organization could have provided residential treatment, independent living services and or foster care/kinship care. The second delimitation in this study was enforces by Walden University's Institutional Review Board, all organization must sign a collaboration to partner was in order to participate in this research study that clearly delineated their role in the study. The theoretical framework aligned as the relationships with many of the professional interviewed had expressed relational connections to the youth and their experiences while in placement. The participants were (a) staff who worked with youth in placement and or (b) administrators/ professionals that administered programs for youth aging out of the system. The study will address youth who have been adjudicated dependent and are under the Child Welfare System jurisdiction in Greater Pittsburgh area. Individuals who were in the juvenile justice system were not part of the study.

### **Limitations**

One limitation occurred during this research study out of eight organizations contacted by way of telephone, email or flyers, three responded and two actually participated. However, the responded did produce the eleven participants that made the research credible.

### **Significance of Study**

Pennsylvania's 2015-2019 Child and Family Services Plan is part of the continuum of addressing and supporting youth in their transition to adulthood. A state wide initiative is underway to improve outcomes for youth aging out of the foster care. Adoption services is part of promoting permanency planning for youth ages 12 and older. Understanding youth at various ages and stages of their development is a key component of the research study. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program is currently collaborating with other private and public agencies as an additional improvement effort to help youth who are aging out. The research study expands the continuum of solutions to professionals that work day to day and witness first hand the struggles faced by youth who will be exiting foster care. This study sought to help child welfare systems, group homes, and other residential treatment facilities get ahead of the curve in assessing the challenges that many youth are facing before, during, and after leaving treatment programs. Stressors for young people heighten when left with no structural or familial supports. For youth ages 18–24, crime includes petty theft, burglary, and even homicide. This study will provide an in-depth look at the phenomena of youth aging out of treatment facilities. Exploration on foster care, residential treatment facilities, group homes, and emergency institutional care will provide the backdrop of the investigation. Social workers, administrators, direct service workers, and any practitioners who have worked in a facility with youth will be interviewed.

The Bureau of Children and Family Services is one of the four bureaus managed at the state level and has the oversight of the regional offices throughout the state. In

Pennsylvania, this study will provide an extension of the strategic plan 2015–2019, that captures the state plan for improvement. Goal 4 “Youth are supported in their transition to adulthood (p. 138)”.

The Federal plan is mandated and provides the oversight in ensuring children at risk of abuse and neglected be protected. When out-of-home placement is warranted in an effort to protect the child or youth from immediate harm the state is required to have protective services in place to offer comprehensive custodial care. (Strategic Plan, 2015–2019).

The Pennsylvania Department of Human Services-Office of Children, Youth and Families: Title IV-B Child and Family Service Plan has set goals to improve the transition from youth to adulthood. The department’s branch recognized the need to create pathways to independence is essential. It has made the connection that there is inconsistency in abilities of the youth to connect to the outside world into adulthood. Benchmark targets include the percentage of youth who earned core continuing training education certificate, the percentage of youth who made gains in math and literacy between entry and exit, and the percentage of youth who earned a high school diploma or GED. Fowler, Marcal, Zhang, Day, and Landsverk (2017) mentioned the importance of further exploring maintaining a safety net, beyond placement, as a precursor for the epidemic of youth aging out of foster care with minimal to none supervision.

Grouping youth in meaningful ways based on their level of care (i.e., residential care and foster care) and/or minimum to maximum security placements has become the norm (Forsyth, 2017). Specific interventions apply for youth that have been adjudicated



dependent upon juvenile offenders' placements. These youth often age out of the system and have a higher propensity to homelessness, incarcerations, and mental health concerns (Forsyth, 2017).

When the need arose to understand youth transitioning out of foster care in Pennsylvania, the following organizations led the way by which the federal government set mandates (Strategic Plan, 2015-201): Department of Human Services, Pennsylvania Commission of Crime and Delinquency, Juvenile Court Judges Commission, Department of Education, Pennsylvania Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers, and Pennsylvania Council of Children-Youth and Family Services. These organizations joined together to lead an interagency initiative designed to further develop job readiness, academic, and employability skills for youth who were nearing the termination of services. This interagency initiative was created to improve the outcomes of 18–24-year-olds who age out of the system (Richards, 2014).

### **Social Change**

This study has implications for social change as it impacts communities where youth live after being discharged from placement. Creating safe zones in communities where youth can receive additional help after exiting the child welfare system has serious ramifications. The study analysis uncovered a need for organizational behavior changes in preparing youth for the real world.

The results from this study have substantial implications for social change and offered that leaders in the community, mental health organization as well as legislators to

add resources to offer policy changes on transitional supportive services for youth beyond their discharge.

The social change impact of this study over time is designed to decrease the homeless population of youth leaving placement without the necessary skills. Reintegration into communities where many will return will require their ability to live independently (Strassburger, 2016). It can help to provide recommended solutions derived from the data collected into the Pennsylvania' Child and Family Service Plan 2015-2019 strategic plan. (Pennsylvania Department of Human Services Strategic Plan, 2015–2019). The federal government has become involved in the process of mitigating the negative impact of prematurely releasing children from the child welfare system. Not all children who reach the age of 18–21, have the necessary skills to maintain their own housing situation (Richards, 2014). The aim of this study was to examine, explore and define the complexities of youth aging out of the child welfare system and its impact on society.

#### Summary

Youth aging out of the foster care are not having much success as it relates to maintaining housing post placement. AFCARS report, 2016 reported that after care plans are few and following up with youth after discharge can be a daunting task. The numbers are growing in both directions. The number of youth who are entering foster care and the number of youth per year that is exiting. Many youth have experienced multi-placements therefore complicating medical and school records. This study will address the barriers and explore rather a need for safety nets are warranted for youth aging out of placement. As we look forward, the literature review will increase our knowledge in understanding

terms that are used interchangeably and conditions that youth in placement find themselves in sometimes at no fault of their own.

## Chapter 2. Literature Review

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to investigate why so many youth are being discharged from foster care placements and ending up in worse shape immediately afterward. Foster care is designed to help families and their children who are experiencing chronic discord (Beyerlein and Bloch, 2014). Out-of-home placement is decided by the Juvenile Court and governmental agencies when children, birth to 18, need protection generally or are in immediate harm. CYS has relied on kinship care as an alternative care placement instead of placement in a group or independent living. In kinship care, organizations try to find relatives who are familiar with the child and can provide custodial care on a short- to long-term basis, as needed. Reunification strategies are enacted immediately after the danger has passed (Clemens, Helm, Myers, Thomas, & Tis, 2017).

Foster care in the United States is based on the premise that the child welfare system has the legal authority over children from age 0–18, to provide protection from danger, malnutrition, physical or mental harm, and deprivation of any (Cohen, Remez, Edelman, Golub, Pacifici, Santillan and Wolfe, 2016). When there is risk of harm factors it is expedient for the child welfare system to remove the children from their biological or custodial care (Menn, 2015). Fisher and Gilliam (2012) explained that children who have experienced trauma at the hands of their guardian which include their birth parent require immediate investigation by the child welfare system. They are called upon 24 hours a day to substantiate any abuse with physical documentation (e.g., a medical report that can include an overall physical with photographs, a social worker assessment, and/or

remanded extended medical treatment that requires hospitalization). The law in many states requires that an adjudication hearing on children in placement occur within 72 hours of what? (Miller, Paschall and Azar, 2017). At hearings, evidence is produced and testimony is heard on whether it is best to adjudicate the child to the custody and care of the state. It is important to note that only the Juvenile Justice System can order adjudication. This action transfers the responsibility from the known biological or guardian to the state in which the child(ren) reside (Koehler, 2014).

Ponciano (2013) suggest creating an atmosphere where youth who have been subjected to housing outside of their natural habitation for a variety of reasons. A report from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development detailed the needs of young people who are becoming homeless. It reported that over 30,000 youth are aging out of foster care systems with little to no external supports available. While some youth have completed their high school diplomas, others have not. Children are sometimes labeled as “the forgotten” after they have entered into placement (Koehler, 2014). Some of this phenomena has been attributed to the child welfare systems which governs the life of a child once they have become adjudicated. Caseworkers fail to provide the routine visitation in an effort for reunification. Often, children fall into the system with chronic misbehavior and mental deficiencies. Some have come into residential treatment with an addiction to drugs, alcohol, and/or a nicotine addiction.

Rodriguez and Ritchie (2009) suggested that employees and administrators have abdicated their responsibilities of protecting the youth from harm while in their care. Babies have come into care abused and malnourished. In all of these cases, the state has a

responsibility to protect and remove children from volatile situations. Remedies will be explored in the methodology of this qualitative study. These children are the most vulnerable and oftentimes require a safe haven to continue to thrive. Placement can range anywhere from one day to several years which may extend beyond their eighteenth birthday. Koehler (2014) also addresses that congress in 1912 established an agency specifically to devote attention to the welfare of minors.

Greenberg and Partskhaladze (2014) discovered in Georgia a way to eliminate institutional care by creating a less restrictive way of providing residential care. Following the creation of the 1974 Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, the federal government provides funds to prevent and treat child abuse and neglect. It was established to benefit children of foster care to include adoption. It is important to note that laws are currently in place to protect over 740,000 children who have suffered maltreatment or alleged abuse or neglect every year. Removal from one's home is a traumatic experience and often results in mental and behavior health dysfunctions (Beyerlein and Bloch, 2014). Duke, Farruggia & Geramo (2017) writes that the four vital areas of concerns that still exist for youth who age out of the system after their discharge are homelessness, poor academic results, teen pregnancy, and incarcerations.

### **Rights and Responsibilities**

Despite all the laws governing the protection of children, abuse and neglect still occur (Forysth, 2017). Once a child is adjudicated as dependent and/or delinquent, the state takes on the parental assignment: to protect, to foster, and to ensure that no harm or

maltreatment continues. The juvenile justice system relies heavily on the child welfare system to provide for the safety of children in foster homes, residential treatment, group homes, and kinship care (Fisher & Gilliam, 2012). Chor, Mcclelland, Weiner, Jordan and Lyons (2015) commented that a growing number of youth released from placement are monitored in mental health and correctional facilities. Children in foster care rely on their case worker to keep them safe. Case workers are expected to make regularly visit to the child to assess their current situation. Courts have a considerable responsibility to mandate a higher level of supervision for any child welfare placement. The defined limits of protection of children in placement is always the state's duty and responsibility to protect from harm. If a child is at all harmed, the parties will then be liable, including the facility where the child was living. For their protection and safety, the child will be subject to immediate removal during the investigation. This study explored the responsibilities of the governing bodies' responsibility as it related to children who are aging out of the child welfare system and within 3–6 months end up couch-surfing (Koehler, 2014).

### **Policies**

Policymakers have become very interested in the plight of youth exiting placement and transitioning back into their communities without the social graces and skills to tackle on the very adult-like responsibilities. Up until now, policymakers have relied on Child Protective Service Act to remediate the transition of youth returning back to society (Miller, Paschalland Azar, 2017). Governor John H. Chafee introduced legislation back in 2006 to protect youth returning back into communities by creating a

fund that supports their transition. Recent policy initiatives have centered around extending the length of treatment beyond the statutory age of 18–21 years of age to improve educational and employment outcomes (Miller, Paschall & Azar, 2017). Several decades of laws have been passed to protect the well-being of children including the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 and the Adoption Act of 2008. These two acts ensure that children in care receive no maltreatment. Families who wish to foster or adopt must comply with compliance standards that includes training and home visits. The Social Security Act also made provisions for children with disabilities to include mental and physical impairments. Children have rights in the Juvenile Court proceedings and are often appointed a child advocate lawyer to represent their rights under a special litigation clause in the protective constitutional rights of a minor (Koehler, 2014).

The Adoption and Safe Family Act (ASFA) was adapted to protect children from staying in foster care too long. When a child had been out of their natural habitation for longer than twelve months, a permanency hearing to terminate parental rights was evoked. However, placement still extended beyond the 39–43 months. Incentives were granted to agencies to place children in kinship care or adoptive homes, while there was some upward trajectory. The following years, it leveled off (McCombs and Foster (2012). The *Journal of Housing & Community Development*, as reported in the Jim Casey Initiative, states that three states have extended the age of release from the child welfare system from 18–21 years old. Extending the age provides some relief for some, while others transitioning still fall between the cracks (Richard, 2014). Additionally, Independent Living Policy of 1986 focused on following teens from their sixteenth



birthday by providing financial support for future living support.

### **Common Problems after Foster Care**

According to Fowler, Marcal, Ahang, Day, and Landsverk (2017), aging out of foster care has become an epidemic that requires special attention. Articles are popping up everywhere in the last three years on children aging out. However, the gap exists on how to prepare youth for transitioning into adulthood from the programs in which they have spent a large amount of time. In this context, aging out of the system simply means that much of the support they have been accustomed to receiving while in custodial care is no longer available. This includes examples such as adequate housing with all utilities provided, all financial support including meals, and medical appointments. The critical factor is that there is a loss of social support. So, the transition to adulthood is laden with negative outcome indicators.

A study conducted in the Midwest revealed that after a two year follow-up on youth who aged out, thirty percent of them experienced at least one night of nowhere to live. Housing instability is the culprit by which brought this phenomena of aging out to light (Ponciano, 2013).

Another gap that must be addressed is looking at risk factors that influence homelessness while youth are in residential care. Foster care has been one of the oldest forms of protecting children from abuse and neglectful situations. Moreover, Ponciano (2013) stated that positive results have been limited when it comes to placement in the American foster care systems. Much of the incongruence between the concept of care and the actual results stems from policy initiatives that do not adequately address the

problems that exists with children leaving care.

Up until the last decade, little to no attempts had been made to address youth while in placement. The Department of Health & Human Services have now taken on the responsibility of improving the outcome trajectory for youth aging out of the system. Many journals and articles have been published to record the low literacy rates of youth leaving foster care and not receiving their high school diploma or GED. One strength noted, however, is that children of foster care make the necessary adjustments to living outside of their natural environment with family member or kinship relationships (Ponciano, 2013).

Richards (2014) has documented a small amount of research about growing statistics on youth aging out of foster care system and becoming homeless. The research notes that interviews were conducted with youth in foster care. Some research showed inconsistencies in alignment with policies that manage the child protective service system. It purported that youth while in care are not giving the pathway of successful maturation in careers beyond placement (Richard, 2014). Koren and Gefen (2015) conducted a study that created the connection between challenging behaviors of youth in foster care and the emotional investment portrayed by caregivers. Essentially, the more a caregiver invests in the well-being of a child/youth, the more life becomes easier for the child/youth in a group home setting. The results included that training on many levels with caregivers will improve the emotional support on feelings. As well, adaptation to communal living will become more palatable.

Training and commitment entangled with emotional investments parallels

parental sensitivity training which then affects children's behaviors while in foster care. This study encouraged direct care workers to begin to look at themselves as the child's parental figure in an effort to ease the tension of the group home placement (Skelton, Crosland and Clark, 2016). Some of the behaviors that children in a group home setting experience are school performance, running away, personal appearances, problems with biological parents, theft, wetting the bed, suicidal behaviors, sexual behaviors, aggressiveness, social problems, anxiety, and other physical and mental problems.

Children may be removed for multiple reasons, some reasons are disclosed prior to placement and other factors are not uncovered until placement. Child Welfare systems records and collects Background information on each child in placement (Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, Strategic Plan, 2015–2019). There are some immediate reasons for placement, including: physical abuse, sexual, neglect, poverty, court ordered, emotional abuse, and family discords. The length of time in placement is also an attributed factor when considering placement for children already in placement. Foster care was not designed to be a permanent placement for a child; however, according to Pecora, Ayer, Gombos, Wilson, Cross, Crudo, and Corwin (2013), far too many have stayed in care in excess of four-plus years.

### **Complicating Factors**

Lockwood, Friedman and Christian (2015) emphasized the average stay for many children is 8 months which is not always a one stop occurrence. Children have been changed from placement to placement for a variety of reason. The children who enter placement with disabilities tend to reside in care for longer stays. Outcomes and finding

permanency placements for those children with disabilities become scarce. It has been reported in the last decade that a decline in the number of children in the child welfare system needing care has declined slowly. What has not declined is the multiple placements and entering and exiting the child welfare system per individual has increased. Multiple placements while reunification with family and or other legal guardians is on the uptick. The goal of placement is never the same for every child. Some changes have to make in the best interest of the child because their natural environment may be hazardous (Fowler, Marcal, Zhang, Day and Landsverk, 2017). Group home placement tends to be the preferred placement for older children/adolescents. Statistics for permanent placement of adoption of older children is drastically reduced as the child ages. Most adoptions occur with younger children with a preference to babies. Moreover, the juvenile court system, when possible, try to keep family members together. The instability that some children experience within the child welfare system can be a daunting experience at best. Children who remain in placement longer than 24 months have a propensity toward long term treatment stays (Cohen, Remez, Edelman, Golub, Pacifici, Santillan and Wolfe, 2016). A summary of the major concerns for children aging out of foster care is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

*Concerns Reported after Aging Out of Foster Care*

Concern	Summary of the Data
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Delinquency and Incarceration	28–31% report being arrested 15% report being convicted of a crime 20–30% report being incarcerated by 21 years of age
Food, housing, and income security	Higher rates of food insecurity, difficulty paying rent or mortgages, and increased reports of economic hardship—near to 50% of females and 25% of males receive government benefits, such as food stamps or public housing
Employment	40% of 19 year olds are employed, capered to 58.2% of peers; earnings tend to be \$6,000–\$10,000 per year lower on average and they are slower to progress in the job market.
Education	More likely to be enrolled in college (37.2% versus 11.7%) and equally likely to obtain a high school diploma or GED; less likely to have a bachelor’s degree (1.8% vs. 22.5%). Only 16% reported receiving college application assistance and only 18% received financial aid application assistance.
Homelessness	Between 11% and 36% will become homeless as they transition to adulthood, compared to 4% of their peers
Mental Health	Over half have a least one mental health problem compared to 22% of the general population More experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than Vietnam or Iraq war Veterans One third reported suffering from depression, dysthymia, post-traumatic stress disorder, social phobia, alcohol abuse/dependence, or substance abuse/dependence. 47% received mental health services while in foster care, but only 21% report receiving mental health services after leaving the child welfare system.
Pregnancy	Younger age at first conception and higher median number of sexual partners. More likely than peers to become pregnant (50% vs 20%)

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*Note.* Lockwood, Friedman, and Christian (2015) as reported in Child Welfare Outcomes

2009-2012; Report to Congress. Washington, DC: Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, p. 309

### **Medical Decisions**

In the state of Pennsylvania, specifically Allegheny County, until 2015, attorneys appointed by the courts could make medical decisions on behalf of children placed under the jurisdiction of the state (Jedwab and Shaw, 2017). Court Appointed Special Advocates in Pittsburgh have now assumed the role of presenting what is in the best interest of the child. When the role switched over to Court Appointed Special Advocate, clear lines of authority had to be drawn and approved across the state. Special attention had been given to birth parents, when capable, rather than the Child Protective Services' caseworker having the ability to make sound judgment on the treatment or behavior disturbances of children in complex situations. Some states had precluded foster parents in making or explaining medical recommendations on behalf of children requiring additional mental health supportive services (McCombs & Foster, 2012).

Birth parents who have children in care for no fault of their own are always recognized as having the legal rights to medical determination. Some medical decisions are based on cultural norms where the child is most familiar (Strassburger, 2016). There are certainly drawbacks that affect caretakers, physicians, child protective services' caseworkers, and youth in making decisions on whether a particular treatment is appropriate. In such cases, when a consensus cannot be drawn, the Juvenile Court System will act on behalf of said child. Hayes, Geiger and Lietz (2015) further supports foster parents' rights to make medical decisions on children in their care. Cited concerns varied

on receiving behavioral health treatment in a timely manner.

### **Children's Aid Society**

A historical perspective in providing programs to youth in foster care began in 1853 under the Children's Aid Society. Their primary purpose was to help orphaned children in foster care by creating programs that were designed to fix at-risk youth. The term "strength-based" was coined to be an alternative to punitive treatment modalities. Programs were springing up all over the U.S. foster care systems. Services were not just for incorrigible children; they also served the poor and provided refuge for homeless children (Batista & Johnson, 2017). Youth empowerment programs began to provide the structure for facilitation life skills for youth. CAS is one of the oldest forms of treatment programs developed for adolescence, orphan and strengthening youth engagement. Foster care and other institutional care was expected to provide a safe haven for children who had been abused and/or neglected (Batista and Johnson, 2017).

### **Aging Out**

Exiting programs (e.g., foster care, group homes, residential treatment facilities, emergency care, adoption and kinship care) are controlled by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Family. Reunification with a parent or caregiver is the preferred method of permanent placement for children and youth. However, progress is to be marked with measure service plans and continual court intervention monitor progress. Many service plans for youth that are in high school reflect their expectations on completing a four year college degree.

This growing phenomena of homelessness among youth aging out of the foster

care is gaining traction among politicians and the child welfare system (Richards, 2014). However, there are no formal reports or disclosures that provide solutions to the growing epidemic. The courts have created “court team” initiatives on youth who are exiting from foster care systems as it relates to children who are zero to three years of age (Thornton and Foster, 2012). They rely heavily on the Adoption and Safe Families Act, introduced in 1997, to prevent prolonged length of stays in foster care for those aged from 0–3 years old. Caregiving training programs have proven to improve the success rate of youth transitioning into adulthood. It cannot be suggested, however, that youth are completely being mistreated in care. It is important to acknowledge that there are an increasing amount of solutions on decreasing the amount of negative outcomes after they leave treatment facilities.

According to a youth report in 2006 (Skelton, Crosland, Clark, 2016), a summary of foster care children indicated that their caregiver was not helpful and unsupportive in their development. Prior to the negative social norms that have arose from leaving the system, when a child became of age, it was seen as a positive attribute in the development of a young person. The euphoria of leaving placement and mainstreaming back into society as an independent is an exceptional moment for youth that age out (Richards, 2014). The relationship between school placements and the foster care placements as youth developed their own autonomy is also important to address. Serbanescu and Ilie (2016) coined the phrase as a way to help with transitioning to adulthood, providing identity, and autonomy development as a treatment model as a young person nears the age of graduation from high school. They believed that at the age of fourteen, this reform



process should begin. Later noted is explicit correlation into integration resulting in success when fewer placements for children are secured.

To further explore the conditions that youth who have aged out of the system encounter in Australia. They consider leaving placement a statutory sanctioned step that occurs at the age of 18. Young people are forced to be able to meet their basic needs upon discharge that include finding reasonable housing accommodations, employment and to live in communities with little to no social supports present (Malvaso, Delfabbro, Hackett and Mills, 2016). A definition explored by the Housing and Urban Development clearly delineate homeless in categories of severity. However, homelessness is homelessness by all standards.

### **Redefined Terms for Homelessness**

Chronic homelessness pertains to an individual or family with a disabling condition who has been continuously homeless for a year or more, or has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years (Housing and Urban Development, 2017).

Homelessness refers to an individual or family with a primary residence that can be a public or private place not designed for regular sleeping accommodations, such as a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground; or an individual or family living in a supervised building (i.e., a shelter) publicly or privately operated (Housing and Urban Development, 2017). Shelters are designated to provide temporary living arrangements including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or government programs.

Individuals exiting institutions where he or she resided for 90 days or less is considered an emergency shelter. Unstable housing exist for youth who feel as though they cannot stay or do not know if they can stay where they slept last night. This excludes youth living in emergency shelters or transitional housing, as well as youth living in a place not meant for human habitation.

### **Attachment Problems**

Attachment theory is used as a basis to better understand the termination of the child, particularly, in foster care. Attachments that are made in foster care emulate parental and relational experiences. For instance, when a child has to say goodbye, it can elicit a feeling of loss and abandonment. When children are removed from their environment into the jurisdiction of the state, similar experiences may have active emotional and physical traumatic episodes. Coping with loss is quite common among children placed in institutions or foster care (Marmarosh, 2017). As mentioned earlier, staff turnover often creates anxiety and stress for children while in care. It has been viewed as a recurring damage to emotions, after children have already experienced separation from their birth or parental figure. Separation anxiety can cause overpowering feelings of sadness, stress, and, oftentimes, anger.

According to Pittman (2012), beginning research modeled the attachment theory from a baby to its birth mother; latter involvement considered the conditions and environment that surround a young person's habitation not limited to foster care. Attachment theory synthesizes and recognizes relationships across a dyadic cosmos of experiences that can enhance how a person encounters institutional care. Similarly,

Pittman (2012) explored attachment behavioral systems, as in the behaviors that are exhibited when a child begins to cry when there is unfulfilled need. So, an attachment behavioral system has the ability to span the entirety of a child's long term placement journey. Children in foster care have to struggle with the advantages and disadvantages of attachment theory. Some children move in and out of placement and thus, have to be acquainted with new people continuously. Statistics have shown that some children have had over four different placements throughout their time in care. At some point, children build up a defense to avoid vulnerable and painful separations. In protecting their interests, and to take care of themselves, a metabolic process of avoidance is used to lessen the threat of such conditions. In the absence of a positive attachment system, negative avoidance may precipitate, therefore having children laden with anxiety and stress. Many of children have had multiple caregivers over their lifespan and fear termination by avoiding and minimizing the importance of working through a termination plan. Attachment theory can highlight this avoidance tactic. Making and forming attachments can be one of the scariest positions in which children are faced with entering and exiting placements.

Bell (2012) discussed both Bowlby and Freud's work in regards to attachment theory. The paper also examines how attachment theory fits in relation to cognitive and behavioral forms of control, within the context of the caregiving systems. These cognitive and behavioral forms of control fluctuate depending on how long a child has been away and what meaningful relationships existed prior to placement in foster care. Poor behaviors in children result when the ability to adapt to change is a difficult process.

Attachment theory has become synonymous with the survival technique, a social defense mechanism when faced with an undesirable and desired termination, used to cope with separation (Ein-Dor and Hirschberger, 2016). Attachment theory studies have found there are four coping styles to anxieties and stress: (a) low anxiety: suppressed feelings which are not communicated or physiological displayed but are not overwhelming; (b) high anxiety: individuals display more frequent physical characteristics (e.g., frequent sweating); (c) repression: holding back thoughts and feelings; (d) using a defense mechanism (Rodriguez and Richie, 2009).

Attachment theory can be used as a way to understand coping strategies and anxieties in the context of youth in foster/non-parental care. Many of the bonds that support healthy attachments spring from childhood and are interchangeably expressed from foster parents, adoptive and or biological parents. A new training modality has been introduced to parents and young children in foster care with the major constructs centered on attachment. Therapists have describe it as an evolutionary thinking challenging attitudinal positive reinforcement. This paradigm shift relieves the pressure of separation in young children by building block of acceptance and positive reinforcements (Cohen, Remez, Edelman, Golub, Pacifici, Santillan, and Wolfe, 2016).

Some studies have suggested that youth who are exiting the system equate this separation as a form of rejection. This feeling of rejection, as reported by young people ages 19–21, indicates by their feeling of abandonment and rejection from specific caregivers leads them to homelessness.

This growing social problem of nearly over 1.5 million adolescents a year often

shows up in the mental health organizations. Homeless youth often experience a surge in illicit substance abuse in relation to their unstable living conditions (Schmitz and Tyler, 2015).

In summary, Bell (2012) posits that the next steps in attachment theory will foster beyond the biological attachment to systems that play a significant role in the level of care or systems that surround children. Attachment theory has its primary underpinning in creating stability for children. Children do much better when they are attached to a caring individual who provides a nurturing and caring environment.

### **Reunification with Birth Families**

Reunification is the premise for which all children, young or old, must embrace as a reasonable solution to placement. It is part of the law of the 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act as reunifying children with their birth parent or other relatives must be processed in the juvenile court system. Adlerian approach to system changes suggests that there are many challenges that exist for families, agencies, family counselors, and foster parents, particularly when parental rights have been terminated.

The goal of reunification is, at best, a strained process for a variety of reasons, including, but not limited to: the distance between the natural or guardian home and expectations of regular visits with the child. Adlerian approach further denotes that training for both the caregiver and foster care is a necessary component of reunification. Training in long term treatment placement is meant to be ongoing with caregivers and parents/guardians. Children with discouraging behaviors, severe mental health diagnoses, substance abuse issues, and poor academic achievements are less likely to be reunified

(Guardia and Banner, 2012).

### **Education Gaps**

Kirk, Lewis, Brown, Nilsen, and Colvin (2012) report that foster care teens pose the greatest risk factors for post-educational success. As many adolescents age out of foster care their trajectory of success has hinged on academic achievements while in foster care. Many of youth have not completed their high school diploma or GED. According to research conducted by the CYS, it is critical for the school systems to become aware of the children in foster care and make adjustments accordingly. Children's records are oftentimes not secured from placement to placement, therefore leaving the child struggling to be placed in the right grade. This often happens when children have had to move to other cities or even other states. This transition has placed burdens on improving the educational outcomes for children in foster care. Further estimates shown in the report included only 10% of children leaving foster care that go directly to college.

As well, a person can examine how the education of foster children is different depending on the demographic. For instance, according to the research by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (2014), the LGBTQ community of youth educational needs have not been addressed. In terms of racial statistics, African American children outweigh others receiving foster care. African Americans only make up twelve percent of the national population, but over half of those in foster care are African American children. Furthermore, African Americans tend to be less concerned about attending colleges compared to other cultural/racial demographics. When

discussing gender, it was recorded that there was very little difference as to who posed a greater risk of low education. So attempts to explain the gender gaps have been attributed to cultural norms, with girls having a slight advantage over males, particularly when it comes to minorities. So the education, or lack thereof, of foster children can not only depend on their overall situation but also their background.

Allegheny County in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and the entire state of Ohio have introduced a seamless process for children in their care to have access to the public school records of all the children in their care. (Clemens, Helm Myers, Thomas and Tis, 2017). They reported graduation rates among children in foster care have significantly improved when both entities are aware of the child's systematic changes in the child welfare foster care. Unfortunately, the outcome for high school children across the country is still far below the non-foster care student for graduation. Children who experience school mobility during their high school years typically have to waive issues with loss of credits earned or incomplete assignments that do not translate from school to school. As well, trauma was reported as a big factor towards foster children's educational incompetence. This trauma causes the lack of attention on academic subject matter. Overall, foster children often are delayed in their academic progress and loss of course credits threatening incompleteness.

### **Trauma**

Children in placement experience a host of traumatic experiences that range from physical abuse, cognitive and emotional deficiencies, bullying, multiple placements,

removal from home and lack of trust from parental figures, attachment discords, and mental health concerns, in addition to all the adjustments that have to occur while in foster care/treatment facilities. These negative factors are overwhelming for children in foster care and they have to contend with them in and out of placement. Much of time, foster children who have entered into care have experienced maltreatment at the hands of those who were meant to protect them (Duke, Farruggia & Geramo, 2017). In fact, abuse at the hands of caregivers have caused many youth to have multiple placements (Schmitz and Tyler, 2015). Multiple placements create higher instability for youth eventually resulting in living on the streets, couch surfing and moving from shelters to shelters.

Unfortunately, many foster children have had more than one cause of maltreatment, in addition to the violence they may have witnessed. Some diagnoses that have been uncovered has been as a result of coming into placement. Children have been diagnosed with having depression and post-traumatic stress disorders that have resulted in developing new disorders that were not present prior to placement. The Children's Bureau (2014) has recorded the high rates of incarceration among juveniles that are labeled as high risk. Lee and McMillen (2017) recorded that children are coming into foster care with high levels of mental health concerns. The initial plan that is mandated does not always capture the behavior and mental health needs. It further suggests that about half of the youth need services, yet only a third are receiving said services.

The American Association of Children's Residential Centers has created evidence-based programs that are utilized in group home settings. This helps quicken the process for appropriate referrals to clinicians/therapists. One of the drawbacks noted for



evidence-based programs is the cost to train and maintain staff to administer to children in treatment. That being said, the treatment model has been found effective in treating behavioral health concerns among youth/preadolescents.

### **Cost of Placement**

According to statistics stated on the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services website, the average cost of adopting from foster care can run anywhere between \$0 to \$2,500. The cost per child per year in foster care averages a little over \$6,500; however, the cost varies from state to state and increases as the needs of the child involves other services. Foster care parenting has additional costs that are often overlooked. The responsibility of the potential foster parents includes securing clearances and physical examinations that are costly. In Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, a person becomes a foster parent with Families United Network, Inc., whose dedicated staff go above and beyond with specialized training and 24/7 support. A stipend is included to provide for the needs of each foster child. In order to become a foster parent, the person must meet certain minimum requirements:

- Be 21 years of age or older
- Obtain criminal history clearances and child abuse
- Have a stable source of income, driver's license, vehicle registrations & insurances and homeowner's or renter's insurance
- Have adequate space in your home for an additional child/children
- Pass a home safety inspection
- Be able to provide transportation for the children placed in your home

- Be free of communicable diseases (Menn, 2015)
- Possess patience and understanding for the needs of children of all ages

Foster care families/individuals are expected in many cases to purchase furnishings for their expected child that may include a bed and all its components all extra other furnishing are at their own expense. Foster parents receive on an average of \$20–\$25 a day as well, the fees vary depending on the age of the child and if there are known physical ailments that would not be covered by disability support (Menn, 2015). Parents who have met the requirements for having children placed in their home average anywhere from \$25–\$30 a day.

### **Kinship Care**

The Adoption Act of 2008 began to prioritize the need to have children placed with their relatives opposed to foster care. Kinship care organizations provide families with stipends to care for children outside their nuclear family. Kinship care provides the best alternative for placement until a reunification plan is created. It involves securing relatives or even family friends interested in caring for the child to provide immediacy placement instead of going into the care of an unfamiliar person (i.e., foster care).

Attachment theory suggests that the stability of familiar surroundings and close relationships far exceeds having the child removed to unfamiliar territory (Ein-Dor and Hirschberger, 2016). Juvenile court systems have enacted kinship care whenever the biological parent or guardian cannot protect the child. Federal policies suggest that kinship placement provides an emotional support which consequently minimizes the amount of placements that may or may not be culturally sensitive to the need of the child.

Undocumented children tend to have poor results than African American children in securing placement with in their migrant family's homes (Scott, Faulkner, Cardoso and Burstain, 2014).

### **Improvements in Foster Care**

In the 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act, Former President Bill Clinton passed a motion to eliminate the long amount of time (15–22 months) a child could remain in care before the biological parental rights could be terminated. The ASFA federally mandated that children in foster care beyond a year must have required hearings to ascertain future plans for the child. Becoming a foster parent involved a scrutiny of background checks that included home visits, criminal and child abuse clearances, and a series of state-offered training. The 50-page application process includes detailing any psychological, medical, and family history. Foster parents also have to undergo medical exams. The stringent process for foster parents is critical in ensuring that children have safe and secure homes. Birth parents are always the number one option for the reunification plan, followed by relative/kinship care. Foster care placements are preferred over group home and institutional placements; however, there are not nearly enough foster parents in the system to handle the demand of children coming into care. The state of Georgia closed all of its large run institutional care for children. It then replaced it with family care for children and limited their foster care group homes to no more than ten children. It began offering more employment opportunities to aspiring social workers. This decision was a decentralization of what was a large social service provider to a reintegration model of children growing up in a family environment. Now

one agency in Georgia provides alternative entitlement support through the Child Welfare Project. This project gave the state the ammunition it needed to improve the service delivery system for children coming into care. The state of Georgia recognized the possibility that a child may have someone in their family that can care for them temporarily until the biological parent(s) can recover from their situation. The state chose to do away with large numbers of youth in placement facilities. This concept focused on strengthening placements with an evidence-based model on family/kinship care (Greenberg and Partskhaladze, 2014). This model recognized that supporting a child in a family-like setting is less traumatic for the child.

### **Emancipation**

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau (2016) children are aging out of foster care by way of emancipation. Emancipation involves the legal system making the decision of releasing the youth at the legal age of 18–21, depending on the state. Many of the factors that surround the discharge from the system requires the Department of Human Services providing the courts with the history of the child's involvement and readiness to be released on their own recognizance. The primary decisions that are considered upon emancipation are concerning postsecondary school enrolment, employment, and housing. This decision making process will help determine the readiness of a youth becoming emancipated. Generally, the youth must prove that they have a placement outside of foster care. Placements have been with friends, family, or, in some cases, the youth aging out have secured their own residence by virtue of securing an apartment (Harachi and

Tajima, 2015).

Stigmatization follow youth who have had deviant or delinquent behaviors while in foster care. The consequences of their behaviors are identified in their involvement in criminal behaviors immediately followed by their discharge from foster care. The pressure to enter back into society is difficult, especially if the emancipated youth is involved with drugs and alcohol. Compounded with constant moving or running away while in placement makes the transition back into society that much harder. Even in an ideal situation, a great deal of the youth returning back to mainstream society are still becoming homeless and finding themselves on the wrong side of the criminal justice systems (Harachi and Tajima, 2015). Negative labeling has also heavily contributed to the likelihood of adolescents, who have been emancipated by the juvenile justice system, becoming repeat offenders in the adult criminal world. If there is an older child who has arrived in foster care and has mental health concerns, then the risk factors are heightened upon the child's termination. Many return to the streets of crime without any clear directions for positive re-integration (Havlicek, Millen, Fedoravicius, McNelly, & Robinson, 2012). One thing is evident: youth must be supported in the transition period out of foster care placement.

Lastly, there has not been a great deal of attention given to older foster youth stepping into settings that are less restrictive and conducive for continued re-enforcement of independent living skills. There is a definite lack of foster placements for older youth so consequently there is also a lack of service providers with an understanding of teaching older youth how to become independent (Fowler, Marcal, Zhang, Day, &

Landsverk, 2017).

### **Placement Decisions**

A study by Chor, McClelland, Weiner, Jordan, and Lyons (2013) addresses the amount of time a child remains in placement and how that can affect a child. The study denotes a decrease from three years to twenty three months. Additionally, there are a hundred thousand less children coming into residential care. Kinship care and non-kinship care have both seen increases in children. The Department of Health and Human Services has changed placement decision-making by integrating teams of individuals that support the welfare of children. It is a faster approach to collecting information of the child's placement history, where the child lived prior to placement, and if the child was placed in a number of foster care placements or in kinship care. This is all to ensure that the best decision is made in the interest of the child (Chor, et al, 2015). The Child and Youth Investment and The Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths are both multi-purpose tools used to help youth from pre-adolescence to 16 years of age. The state welfare agencies try to provide the least restrictive environments for those aged 13–18 through these multi-purpose tools. State agencies train staff on the CANS method of evaluation for youth entering care at this critical junction as they will be undergoing termination of placement and requiring independent living skills sooner than later (Richards, 2014). It is estimated that over 90 percent of the children that represent the child welfare system received a score in the clinical range of mental health albeit, 60 percent received services (Lee and McMillen, 2017). Many children are removed from parents who have neglected them as a result of them struggling with an addiction to drugs

and or alcohol. Forysth (2017) writes that abuse is easily detected, generally with bruises or sexual abuse while neglect is withholding services and providing a safe place to live. In an effort to protect the child from continued neglect or abuse, a substantial amount of children are placed in foster care.

### **Service Providers**

Foster parent recruitment is primarily focused on young children and not on older youth. Foster care is often used as a broad term to reflect all care for all children. Older youth are expected to receive treatment from group homes and private and the non-profit service industry. Subcontractors of residential services provide out of home placement facilities under the Department of Human Services Children and Youth Service Placements for Children. The following is how these services are grouped in Allegheny County (Pennsylvania):

- Foster Homes for Children With Disabilities
- Foster Homes for Dependent Children
- Group Homes for Children and Youth With Disabilities
- Group Homes for Dependent Children
- Kinship Care
- Supervised Living for Older Youth
- Therapeutic Foster Homes
- Therapeutic Group Homes

CYF protects children, eighteen years of age and younger, from abuse and neglect and works with families to provide a safe and loving permanent home for children. When

CYF accepts a family, it coordinates efforts with the family and its natural supports, as well as other DHS program offices, to offer a wide range of options for families. Type of service provided by Children, Youth and Families in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania are subcontracted to providers throughout the city and surrounding counties. Some placement do exist out of the state.

As mentioned in the introduction, those responsible for the policies, raw data, child abuse prevention and treatment, and foster care programs are those chartered through local government entities. They have fiduciary and programmatic responsibilities in providing supports to strengthen families and prevent out-of-home placements which include support, basics, early childhood education, and food. CYF's primary role and responsibility is to intervene to protect children at risk of abuse and neglect. They are also responsible for writing investigative reports of child abuse and neglect, having a Child Protective Services unit on-call 24 hours a day, and to provide general child protective services. As a part of the federally mandated charter, all of CYF will create family plans with reunification at the forefront of the decision making.

A designated team of trained staff includes caseworkers who are involved in conferencing and emergency and planned temporary out-of-home placement—which includes kinship/non-kinship foster care, group homes, and residential treatment facilities. Reuniting families whenever possible is always the goal. Oftentimes, in order to keep families together, family services may be the supportive services needed to ensure the child's safety in their respective homes. Depending on the circumstances and the age of the child upon entering care, providing permanent homes for children is



considered part of the plan. Biological parents have, in some cases, elected to seek adoption from the onset of placement. When an adoption family or individual is available, the courts intervene to make sure that the process is adhered to when terminating parental rights. This process in which a child has to be removed from his or her natural environment is as important as providing youth who will be aging out of the system with homemaking skills, financial literacy, budgeting skills, and training in a career occupation to maintain a level of self-sufficiency. Young adults with mental instabilities and behaviors that are not socially accepted will require additional support beyond the 18–21 age limitation, as the statistics have shown.

A disruption in placement can result can occur as a result of the child's behavior no longer can be tolerated by the foster family/individual. This separation is associated with attachment discords that may result in creating additional stressors on both the child and the foster parent. Youth aging out of foster care, or transitioning out of the formal foster care system, are one of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged populations.

The Department of Human Services- Office of Children, Youth and Families is the only state agency designated to administer and supervise the Foster Care Independent Program. The agency closes cases soon after the adjudication of emancipation or voluntary termination by the foster care youth. All contracts with services and auxiliary services would cease immediately at this point. Efforts would begin to provide wrap-around services, but the responsibility of managing the young adult would shift (Clemens, Helm, Myers, Thomas, and Tis, 2017). The John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program provides funds to help older youth in foster care and former foster

care youth acquire training. The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 aims to assist youth aging out of foster care in the United States in obtaining and maintaining independent living skills. The Independent Living (IL) Program is funded by Title IV-E, state, and local funds (Chafee Foster Care Program, 2012). Beam (2013) mentions a story about a teenager who was set to become adopted but could not be adopted due to the adoptive parent's lack of knowledge concerning the Chafee laws. The foster care parent believed in providing a safety net nine months out to see if the young adult could manage an apartment.

### **Criminal Behavior**

A study was conducted to compare, across foster care settings in the US, the arrest rates among youth who are in out-of-home placements. The young people were interviewed at three separate age intervals to ascertain their proclivities to criminal behavior. The results were consistent: youth who have exhibited high risk behavior (e.g., run away, illicit drug use, sexual exploitation and untreated mental health issues) are more likely to continue anti-social behaviors as a young adult. The labeling theory suggests "once labeled always labeled" for deviant behaviors (Lee, Coutney, Harachi and Tajima, 2015). However, the findings were not conclusive on whether young adults released from foster care committed more crimes than non-residential deviant youth. As well, a study was done on those in care versus non-residential care of youth becoming an adult, noting that once treatment is secured while in a therapeutic setting, arrest during treatment is significantly reduced.

Youth between the ages of 18–21 are leaving foster care with many structural and

physical handicaps that prevent them from transitioning into adulthood (Richards, 2014). The staggering criminal behaviors that follow is steadily rising to include drug usage, theft, car violations, burglary, and prostitution. So, many of the youth have remained in foster care for more than four years after the maximum age. Parents have neglected to provide a safe haven in many cases due to addiction in the family, whereby CYS had no other alternative but to seek placement. Children who enter into placement in their teens have difficulty obtaining a permanent place with a foster family. So, children are then being released without the proper supportive services to maintain a semblance of security out of placement (Duke, Farruggiaand, and Germa, 2017).

### **Support with Aging Out**

Creating a safety net for children gaining out of placement by seeking guidance from those who have made a professional living out of helping children in foster care, group homes and kinship care is very important. Evidently, not all youth want to stay in care beyond the age of 18. As well, unexpected terminations are not planned. Challenges that exist are still prevalent among youth exiting the child welfare system and require examination of subgroup terminations to create a healthy transition for all youth leaving placement.(Miller, Paschall, and Azar, 2017).

Further noted that no study exist to determine the rates and the needs of youth aging out of the system with follow-up services. Children are forced out, no matter their current conditions. Children who live with their parents beyond their 18th birthday is not an uncommon phenomena in the United States. Continued support in academic pursuits, housing, food and emotional support is critical for developing young people into become

productive and self-reliant individuals/ (Forsyth, 2017). To expect anything less from our children and youth that is aging out of the system is not appropriate. We will continue to examine and describe this phenomena from the lens of professionals. Young people rely on our professional to guide them and make the best recommendation for their specific circumstances (Forsyth, 2017).

The story is written by a sociologist in a capital murder case to illustrate the depth of abuse and neglect a youth aging out the foster care system experienced.

A foster care placement story of a now convicted two count manslaughter/capital murderer. Sam was born in Louisiana in 1976, He was accused of killing two women and then burning their bodies in the trailer in which they lived. There was no physical evidence connecting Sam to the crime. However, witnesses says he had interacted with the two victims the night before at the bar. Sam's first placement in foster care lasted 14 months the official reason for termination was due to illness of the foster mother, 2<sup>nd</sup>. Lasted 5 months, the official reason form termination was due to illness of the foster mother. Sam was in placement with his sister. Sam's sister had to be removed and they could not handle her, but agreed to keep Sam. 3<sup>rd</sup> placement lasted 18 months, terminated at the request of the foster mother. Both children were being sexually abused by the foster father, no charges were filed but recorded in the foster care records. 4<sup>th</sup> lasted 5 month, Foster parent requested removal. 5<sup>th</sup> Placement lasted 10monthes, Foster parents retired from the system, the foster parents had several behavior modification plans that eventually disallowed them from being foster parents but only after 31 foster

children. Sam was a victim of their behavior modification plans because Sam wet the bed and was humiliated. 6<sup>th</sup> placement was with the goal of adoption, however when Sam turned 12 his Foster father died and Sam did not do well. Sam started some minor theft and some burglaries as the adoptive family income had severely diminished. Sam is arrested several times and eventually expelled from school. When Sam is 13 he and his sister return to the foster care system. 7<sup>th</sup> set of foster parents is the last time Sam lives with his biological sister. Sam begins to run away too much and goes from the 7<sup>th</sup> set of foster parent after a secure custody institution. Sam stayed in secure custody of the facility until connected with his 8<sup>th</sup> foster mother, while in a secure custody, his medical records reflected over a 100 trips to the infirmary for problems of bruising and rectum bleeding. Sam is released in 1994 at the age of 18, since Sam was considered a delinquent at this time, he was not eligible for benefits available for those children aging out of foster care. The beginning of the story is the end for Sam. (Forsyth, 2017, p.142-143).

This story provided a snap shot in the life of a youth who suffered numerous placement throughout his adolescent years. Many of his placements and exits were not his fault, however the residual effects can be daunting (Beyerein and Bloch, 2014). The story reinforces that within the foster care system the need to have trauma informed professionals is an ongoing service that is not provided. This segment of going from placement to placement makes room for trauma and mental health collaborations. The language used in the story is verbatim of the author and is meant to describe how this

study and future ones with practitioner interventions can help to understand barriers and experiences and to increase awareness of the residual effects that of out of home placement have on youth (Beyerein and Bloch, 2014).

### **Social Responsibility**

As agents of change, it is our social responsibility to create a world for young people who may require a little more assistance with transitioning into the larger community. Maladjustment behaviors and intolerances to social norms and behaviors is not always the young person's fault. In group home living, children have adapted to surrounding behaviors, sometimes for survival and sometimes for inclusion. Policy makers made some adjustments in terminations for the placement to extend, if the youth is in college.

In terms of racial diversity/conflict, it is important to understand challenges that exist for African American vs. their Caucasian counterparts in placements, especially when comparing the males. African American males are disproportionately being removed from at-risk situations and placed in residential group homes (Dyce, 2014). While in care, the African American males have higher risk factors of not succeeding in school and are reported to being the special education for remediation. Removal from home is already stressful without having to deal with feeling like a failure among their peers in school. There is a high rate of suspension and an even higher rate of school drop-outs among African American males. A large majority of African Americans come from socially disadvantaged communities where the expectancy to succeed in the workforce or in education becomes secondary to survival. Witnessing common homicides is one

epidemic that threatens the fiber of many low-income African American communities. In trauma-laden communities, resources are scarce and very little social capital exists for preventative risk factors. Dyce (2014) suggests that more calls are made to remove black children than white children. The fact remains that when children/youth come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and are placed in group homes or residential treatment facilities, the interdisciplinary approach to managing placement is critical.

Schools and behavioral health disciplines will need to work closely to ensure out-of-home placements are classified immediately. This classification will help provide accurate treatment plans to increase positive outcomes for African American youth and other youth alike. Since July 2005, Children and Youth and Family Services have begun to look at managing the changes that, through experience of out-of-home placements statewide, be followed by the Child and Youth Investment Teams, with particular emphasis on children entering into placement at 12 years old and beyond (Chor et al, 2015).

### Summary and Preview of Chapter 3.

The literature review is a compilation of social issues that children and youth experience at the hand of the system that is designed to protect, care and provide guidance for long term planning. In every state, a federal mandate governs the well-being of every child that enters into the Child Welfare System. A large majority of children enter into protective services by way of having experienced some form of neglect. Examples include failure to provide adequate housing and safety by their biological parent or caretaker, also, failure to thrive in an effort to meet child developmental milestones. Abuse is the second largest

reason that children and youth are removed. The following chapter three is presented to offer a methodology to explore with professional on youth who are aging out of the system who have come into the child welfare system for many of the aforementioned reasons above.



### Chapter 3. Methodology and Procedures

The purpose of this study investigated why so many youth are being discharged from foster care placements and ending up in worse shape immediately afterwards. Exploring barriers, and ascertaining a need for safety nets can best be answered through in-depth interviews with people who work in the field of foster care. Couch surfing has become a new phenome with youth aging out of the foster care system.

#### **Samples and Units of Analysis**

It is extremely hard to capture interviews from previously discharged youth who aged out of the systems. Addresses, in many cases, are unknown and confidential. However, many of them are included in the Bureau of Justice System. The sample of analysis consisted of interviewing direct care staff, foster parents, and professionals within the Child Welfare System who were the primary gatekeepers of youth leaving the system upon their maturation age, which varies in different parts of the United States.

The focus group included 10–15 individuals from group homes, behavioral placements, foster homes, and specialized living arrangements where youth are placed and then discharged to emancipation. The content from the interviews was analyzed and recorded to support the process of children aging out.

### **Methods of Data Collection**

The qualitative data collection method provided rich content from an open-ended interview. Three questions were provided to foster parents, group home administrators, and direct care worker prior to the scheduled time. The following questions guided the interview process:

1. What are some impediments you have viewed with youth aging out of foster care?
2. In your opinion, how can the system strengthen youth adapting living skills for to age out of foster care?
3. If aftercare plans were a part of discharge for youth aging out, describe a plan and how it would work.

### **Choice of Analysis Method**

The content analysis incorporated the raw data uncovered in the interviews into themes in order to bring some explicit information into understanding the phenomena. Summarizations of all interviews were coded with particular themes. Eleven participants were recorded without names to protect their confidentiality in the study.

### **Practical Implications**

In an effort to assure ethical considerations, the IRB from Walden University was met prior to any contact with participants. A letter to all participants was given; it

described the nature of the study, which included confidentiality statements. All participation was voluntary and all participants could choose to withdraw at any time. Due to the researcher's bias, having been a youth who aged out of the system more than 30 years ago, any known relationships uncovered was disclosed.

This chapter defined the research, design, collection, and the analysis process. The procedure for sampling participants, recording research bias, and study participant conflicts will be addressed. This study examined descriptive qualitative approaches to reveal on a deeper level understanding of youth who have age out of the system and how to create safety nets to prevent homelessness. Their views, values and opinions will be the driving force to understanding their needs upon release.

Rudestam (2007) said that when considering any subject as to choose an area of research that is of particular interest not to lose the way on the topic as you go down the road of exploration. This researcher is a product of the child welfare system and knows all too well the plights that face youth returning back to society.

Creswell (2008) stated that writing research questions that have meanings which mirror one's own personal or professional experiences will provide that snapshot that digs deeper into many individuals who have left institutional care belong to vulnerable populations.

### **Qualitative Research**

The responses captured in the interviews were significant in the developing of this qualitative research design. Using qualitative research means the use of real people or groups of people in real-life situations (Patton, 2002). Conducting this study with

institutional care facilities gave me the opportunity to be *in* their world, but not of it. This phenomenological study focused on interviewing individuals/organizations that provided foster care to youth who are aging out of the Child Welfare System in Pittsburgh, PA.

### **Role of the Researcher in the Data Collection Process**

As the social researcher, I was responsible for administering the survey questions to the participants. My role remained as a student in search of meaning as the participants explained their understanding of children who are aging out of the system. A transcription software was used to capture verbatim conversations with administrators, caseworkers, and direct care staff. Also, I had a paper and pencil for cross- references. All information will be kept in a secure location to protect the privacy of participants. Finally, my role evolved into the data-gathering instrument whose skills in listening, observing, and understanding were extremely important. Bias, prejudices, and empathic responses have no place in the interviewing process. It had been noted that some researchers choose to talk very little, allowing interviewees to focus solely on their responses. Lastly, I had to be cautious so as not to impose my views on the interviewee or to try to sway the interviewee to conclude the results I might have wanted. It is important to keep your comments to a minimal (Rubin and Rubin, 2005).

### **Importance of the Study**

Perlmutter and Porter (2005) suggested that doctoral students should be thinking beyond the dissertation phase by choosing a topic of great importance. Useem (1997) further asserts that the dissertation topic researched should in some way expand the knowledge bases that already exist. The significance of this study is predicated on the

enormous amount of youth released back into society independently trying to survive beyond three to six months.

### **Research Problem**

In Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, it is estimated that one thousand youth per year age out of the foster care system; throughout the entirety of the United States, the numbers are between 20,000 and 25,000. Many youth that are in placement have severe emotional and behavioral problems and are therefore sent to long term placement in group homes (Pecora et al., 2013).

### **Research Design**

Social research design heled to add value toward the quest in finding meaning to world problems, by utilizing a litany of tools, aimed at finding real solutions to real problems (Patton, 2002, p. 218). Qualitative research has become the preferred form of inquiry when trying to understand human behaviors. Qualitative method researchers views social validity in the context of using rating scales, questionnaires, and direct observation (Leko, 2002). This qualitative design lends itself to understanding a variety of phenomena that occur in their own settings.

This descriptive study yielded the best way of looking at thematic responses. Qualitative method design has many of the same components as the experimental design, with the exception of random assignment and sampling. After reviewing research designs and reviewing other researchers who have interviewed subjects to understand current social phenomena, this qualitative method provided the tool to capture data and answers the three open-ended questions which best suited for interviewing administrators,

caseworkers, and direct care staff.

### **Participant-Researcher Relationship**

Creswell (2012) asserted that in considering qualitative method studies must provide description and themes in order to gauge perspective. Qualitative study has its roots in anthropology, as in looking at individuals in their own environment. Researchers are generally interested in how things occurred. In understanding the phenomena of youth aging out of the system through looking at foster care and placement care. My hypothesis is that legislation for policy changes may directly impact how youth are supported beyond placement.

### **Ethical Treatment of Participants**

Protecting participants is by far a top priority in this dissertation. Participants were notified, in writing, at the beginning of the process to request their informed consent to participate. Informed consent, confidentiality, and the study goals were openly discussed and mutually agreed upon prior at the beginning of the interviewing process. Participant identification was coded numerically so as not to identify their true identity. I used the discretion of the committee prior to sampling as sample sizes in qualitative studies vary. No participants were interviewed prior to obtaining an adult informed consent in writing.

### **Data Collection Method**

Researchers who conduct qualitative data analysis often have a large volume of information to record and will need to access tools to help synthesize results. Even the best software will have a hard time deciphering meanings expressed in interviews.

Interviews may occur on non-traditional hours and I made myself available to become flexible and set time limits. An audio devices was used along copious note taking. The A recommended software used and all words in the text were captured and automatically coded.

### **Recruitment Strategy**

Eight agencies were identified from an online directory of a human services directory that provides foster care services to youth aging out of the foster care system. I contacted six out of the eight via telephone and e-mail. Three of the six organizations responded to the call to participate in the research study. One decided that this was not a good time to engage their staff in a research project as they were about to undergo an 18-month research project. Thus, of the six organizations that received information, two agreed to participate in this research study and confirmed it by submitting to Walden's IRB their letter of cooperation. I later made follow-up phone calls and spoke with individual organization whom asked me to resend the information. The information was sent by their request and also to enlarge the pool of participants for recruitment. I sent reminder e-mails 3–5 days later to garner their support. I explained on the phone that this study is voluntary and that they were free to accept or turn down the invitation without any retribution. Moving forward, the two agencies that agreed to participate are addressed as *ABC & XYZ* to protect their privacy and anonymity. I sent the consent form to all agencies, wanted research flyer, letter of cooperation from a research partner and an e-mail describing me as the researcher for this study and all the ramifications. I identified the procedures that I was asking the agency executive director to secure a confidential

meeting room or office for approximately 30 minutes. I explained that interviews would be audio-recorded with a debriefing session to follow.

### **Validity, Reliability, Generalizability, and Replicability**

Trochim (2006) discussed how transcribing and preparing the information collected in the interviews should be done relatively soon after and preferably on a computer system. The process include interviewing, evaluating, and reviewing the content. Information presented from the interviewee may require re-evaluation and should be done as often as necessary until the research question or hypothesis is addressed. Qualitative methods use coding and themes to provide meaning to recorded interviews. All recording were transcribed to produce results. (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). Determining groups and selecting codes for interviews is at the discretion of the researcher.

### **Procedures for Handling Cases Known to the Researcher**

A consent form was used with all participants known or not known. Coming in contact with someone that I know required full disclosure and immediate acknowledgement. All participants were afforded the opportunity to elect not to participate. Even after signing the consent form, participant could still abandon the study without retributions. I was able to get ample number of participants by way of voluntary self-selection. The goals of the analysis is to reflect the interviewees' responses and behaviors by describing it in the words of the interviewees and through actual events. (Creswell, 2007).



In qualitative analysis, it sometimes appears to be not organized, due to the twists and turns, and the right sizing approach to obtaining the desired results. The desired results is answering the research question: What challenges exist for youth aging out of the system? As a researcher, I needed to keep building on my new findings, while gathering evidence, testing, and challenging my emerging hypothesis.

### **Primary Assertion**

The aim of this study is to investigate why so many youth are being discharged from foster care placements and ending up in worse shape immediately following discharge from placement: Is there a need for post placement safety nets? This research design integrated bureau of homelessness and housing statistics on homeless youth 18-21, with a particular emphasis on youth released from the child welfare systems. This study provided recommendation gathered from administrators, caseworker and direct care staff, who work with youth who are pre/post the age of exiting the Child Welfare System.

### **Sample Size**

Ten caseworkers, administrators, professional and direct care workers from any of the organizations listed below were invited to participate in a brief interview. The following list is organizations that provide services to Children Youth & Family Services in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

- Adoption Connection
- Bradley Center Inc.
- Center for Family Excellence

- Cornell Abraxas Group
- Family Services of Western Pennsylvania
- Family Links
- Gateway Rehabilitation Center
- George Junior Republic in Pennsylvania
- Glade Run Lutheran Services
- Holy Family Institute
- Paula Teacher and Associates Inc.
- Residential Care Services Inc.
- Second Chance Inc. (A)
- Three Rivers Adoption Council, Inc.
- Three Rivers Youth
- Touching Families, Inc.
- Transitional Services, Inc.
- Ward Home
- Weiblinger Residential Care

## **Qualitative Data**

The qualitative data obtained from interviews with social service administrators who have connections with youth in foster care, group homes, residential treatment facilities, kinship care and congregate facilities that exit youth from social services under the child welfare systems. Descriptive statistics used to summarize the data collected in the interviews to help us to understand the phenomena of children aging out and what recommendation can be made in creating safety nets. Interviews questions were scripted from start to finish with no deviation. The nature of the study and its significance as it relates to social change behaviors in the Child Youth and Family Services mission of protecting children who are slated to age out of the system. The researcher established a rapport by briefly explaining the study and introduced myself as a student researcher.

All interviews met the study criteria and participants agreed in writing by signing a degree to consent to participate. Participants were asked open ended questions that last no longer than thirty minutes. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim per participant. Pseudonyms may be used to preserve the participant confidentiality if warranted. No participant received any numeration for their participation in the study.

Walden University IRB approved this study prior to any engagement with participants. The Walden University approval number is 08-07-18-0113235. In an effort to gain a deeper understanding of children aging out of the system and becoming homelessness, participants were not queried into their relationship with the youth via caregiver, foster parent, administrator, social worker, mental health therapist, caseworker to name a few.

To establish clarity in some response the interviewer asked few probing questions as the three questions presented were understood.

### **Measures**

This study did not measure age of the youth upon exiting through emancipation by the courts. Also, did not ask questions regarding the number of current services that support youth aging out of the foster care system. The measures included barriers, after-care plans, structural deficits and if safety nets are warranted. However, many referrals made outside of the organizations remained involved as indicated in many of the transcribed interviews noted. Examples of outside organizations include gym/healthcare memberships, medical facilities, doctors, dentists, churches, schools and post-secondary/trade schools. Other thoughts to ponder include: upon exiting care where did youth go when their struggles become insurmountable?

### **Structured Interviewing**

The interview were recorded for accuracy of responses. Three questions guided the researcher to ensure that every participant was asked the same questions and recorded from their point of view. The causes, challenges and recommendations the participants noted helped to shape the phenomena.

### **Limitations/Challenges**

Social threats to internal validity are always eminent when dealing with people. I clearly delineated my role as not being viewed as part of their treatment while conducting interviews with foster care and institutional care facilities. Participation was voluntary.

### **Ethical Adherence of Participants**

As previously mentioned, participants were notified in writing at the beginning of the process and all signed informed consent to participate. A copy of the informed consent form approved for this study will be safeguarded until expiration time. The recruitment flyer used to elicit interest in the study is provided in Appendix A.

### **Data Analysis and Coding**

Researchers who conduct qualitative data analysis often have a large volume of information to record and will need to access tools to help synthesize results. Even the best software will have a hard time deciphering meanings expressed in interviews, therefore interviews may occur on non-traditional hours and the researcher will have to become flexible and set time limits. If audio devices are not permitted, copious note taking will be replaced which may extend the allotted time of the interview. It has been documented researchers' ability to gain access can be challenging and sometimes unwanted. This population of professionals welcomed the process of providing insight into this phenomenon.

### **Summary and Preview to Chapter 4**

Continuing to release youth without a safety net of some kind has increased the homeless population and, in some cases, increased criminal behaviors. Analyzing factors that support the cultural norms of institutional care for youth between the ages of 12–18 will allow for fundamental transformation over time. In order to effect social change, a careful dialogue with professionals, caretakers and administrators must follow. Helping

youth prepare for adulthood is what many of the professional have recanted as their primary foci along with structural and cultural effects that society, educational institutions, and employers have on youth (Duke, Farruggia and Germa, 2017). Each year, the statistic reflect a staggering amount of individuals being released from foster care. I will attempt to shed light on the plights of institutional care strengths and weakness in an effort to create safety nets for youth emancipated. The research reviewed legislation that effect foster care compliances, training and the rights afforded to youth upon their discharge. However, no two cases are alike as youth in foster care often are not quite ready to be discharged from placement according to many of the professionals' interviewed. The upcoming chapter will present the results, findings and recommendations. Codes and themes are presented as a way to aggregate all responses from participants. Result of the interviews will help to understand why so many youth are not successfully thriving after three months of leaving placement in some cases.

## Chapter 4. Results

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to investigate why so many youth are being discharged from foster care placements and ending up in worse shape immediately afterward. Two organizations responded favorably to the task of becoming active research participants. 11 professionals in the field of foster care answered three questions: What impediment/barrier have you viewed still exist with youth aging out of foster care? In your opinion, how can the system strengthen youth's adaptive living skills as they transition? And in exploring safety net for youth, please describe a discharge plan and follow-up.

### **Data Collection**

Organization *ABC* responded immediately and scheduled a date and time to meet. Upon arrival, I was greeted with several participants who volunteered to participate in the study. Thus, instead of conducting one interview at the initial site visit to *ABC*, three interviews were recorded and later transcribed. To my surprise, the following week, five more interviews were scheduled and completed with organization *ABC*. Then, three more professional interviews were completed with organization *XYZ*, which yielded a total of 11 interviews.

Before starting the interview, each participant signed the consent form and circled the box "yes," granting permission for audio recording for accuracy. Prior to beginning the audio recording, I presented a deck of cards to all participants and asked them to select one, for example, a Mr. King of Hearts and a Ms. Eight of Spades. This

naming strategy added another layer of anonymity to the interviews. All transcribed interviews were named according to the selected card. Thirty minutes were allotted for each interview but none lasted longer than 15 minutes, including the introduction, the three questions and the debriefing.

### **Coding and Themes**

During the coding and themes process, it became apparent to narrow the research questions from the original three to two research questions.

RQ1. What special challenges exist for youth aging out of the child welfare system?

RQ2. Is there a need for aftercare/ safety net for youth who have aged out of foster care?



## Chart of Codes

Column1	Column2	Column3	Column4
Chart of Codes			
<u>Question</u>	<u>Codes</u>	<u># of Partici- pants</u>	<u>% of Partici- pants</u>
Q1 What are some impediments you have viewed with youth aging out of foster care?	Unprepared	6	54.55%
	Programs do not address needs	4	36.36%
	Knowledge/use of support	2	18.18%
	Lasting support	4	36.36%
	Mindset	4	36.36%
Q2 In your opinion, how can the system strengthen youth adaptive living skills for youth aging out of foster care?	1-on-1 support	6	54.55%
	Prepare in advance	3	27.27%
	Real-world skills	9	81.82%
Q3 If aftercare plans were part of discharge for youth aging out, describe a plan and who would provide the follow-up.	Planning	3	27.27%
	Housing	6	54.55%
	Work	5	45.45%
	Social safety net	10	90.91%
	Intro to support services	8	72.73%

## Results

In this section, I review the themes gleaned from each of the three interview questions and then discuss these findings in light of this project's two research questions: Sample full transcripts for the study are provided in Appendix D.

### **Interview Question 1: What are some impediments you have viewed with youth aging out of foster care?**

Five primary themes emerged from this question: (a) youth are unprepared, (b) existing programs do not adequately address their needs, (c) there is a lack of knowledge/use of support available, (d) lack of lasting support and (e) type of mindset.

**(a) youth are unprepared.** Six participants reported that youth were generally unprepared, lacked the necessary skills, and/or were too dependent on the system.

They hear that age, I'm 18, and they are ready to go. And I get concerned about how they will have some skills and we're trying to teach them some of those skills... But I think that sometimes they're just so ready to get out because they feel like they have been in this situation for so long that I want to be out and see what it's like. (Participant 3)

“So some of them are aging out and still missing some of the important skills as far as employment... They're are not understanding the consistency of going to work every day. They feel they can call off and say whatever, that they call off their boss later on down the line and explain the situation. And stuff like that. They often lose jobs, jumping around from place to place... they jump around from employer to employer. They're still jumping around from school to school.” (Participant 4)

“Sometimes you know they have been taught different ways to manipulate different systems. And that sometimes holds them up from just being able to just do things the correct way. And just go on out on their own legally. And also take in information from people who are trying to show them how to do things the right way.” (Participant 7)

**(b) existing programs do not adequately address their needs.** Three participants noted a lack of education or understanding the value of education.

“These kids have never, or many of these children have never been taught the value of an education.... It's not something they see ... of value and of course we all know with the lack of education, whether you're aging out of foster care or simply becoming an adult, that lack of education is a barrier to your future.” (Participant 1)

“A lot of times they refuse to get prepared. Example would be completing high school. Or you know, to do the work while in high school.” (Participant 2)

“Sometimes they age out and don't have their diplomas yet. That's definitely still a barrier. They're out there still uneducated and without the skills.” (Participant 4)

- *One noted that it is easy for youth to become dependent on the system, which makes it difficult to know how to handle life on their own.*

“I still think they lack the independence because they've grown so dependent on the system and the system caring for them that... even though they're in independent living programs they are still not grasping the skills and the strengths that they need to be able to live affordable on their own.” (Participant 11)

- *The second code indicated that existing programs available for youth do not*

*adequately address their needs. It is noted that (2) existing programs do not adequately address their needs and that is a big barrier to success. Four participants expressed concern with how youth are pushed through the system:*

“[Going] from Children Youth and Family Juvenile Probation Office to just Juvenile Probation Officer, they lose all of their services... then they age out juvenile so... they're on probation... And so a lot of times when they come into the system, they come dual. They have JPO and CYF. So if they lose CYF then JPO they [have] no structure, they have no support... So once again they turn 18 then become homeless because they don't have housing. The education liaison stay with them til there 24 but they don't provide housing.” (Participant 5)

“So I feel like sometimes they don't... know... or not educated enough or they don't have the workers who like explained to them...[about] what they can do. Before the system and a lot of workers are pounding away... there's just some try and push them through the system once they turn 18 they're done and that's it... I think that youth don't understand like what they do with services they can have for aging out of this system.” (Participant 8)

- *Age is also a factor in considering the role of existing systems, according to two participants:*

“They are often unsure and... the way that [the] system pushes them along, as far putting them in different programs according to their age, and that not according what their needs are.” (Participant 4)

“So the fact that they have not reached permanency is that after a certain age there is a

belief that young people cannot reach permanency... You know when ... reunification is ruled out, that they can't reach adoption or subsidized guardianship. So indeed most folks say if they're 16 let's put them in a group home... Let them age out. So I think the barrier is the structure of the system and the fact that the system does not pay much attention after a certain age.” (Participant 6)

- *Third, there is a lack of knowledge or appropriate use of existing support that is available when youth age out—This was described by two participants:*

“They hold tight to the practices and the different beliefs that they have learned through their family which may not always be helpful for them. Sometimes you know they have been taught different ways to manipulate different systems. And that sometimes holds them up from just being able to just do things the correct way. And just go on out on their own legally and also” (Participant 7)

“You get free dental and you free medical you get a free education. I knew some colleges they offer scholarships for foster children. So I don't think they don't know about it. I'll take advantage of it and a lot of youth ... feel like just want to get out a system because it's a stigma to be in the system but then they should really say well there [are] some advantages like being in the system or at least take advantage of what's offered to them. (Participant 8)

- *Fourth, four participants felt that youth struggle due to a lack of lasting social support that goes with them once they leave the system. In many ways, youth may be largely abandoned by the people and structures that cared for them. Four participants noted this issue:*

“You're just general support, you have nobody to call to ask these questions to, they all go away at 21. And so where you may have been in the system your whole life, now you're on your own. Harder to problems solve because unless you've been in a program like this which is transitional living [which] is preparing you to do that. There's more kids in foster care right now because the county is going that way versus independent living programs. So they don't get the support they need to transition from foster care to independent living.” (Participant 5)

“They... try and push them through the system once they turn 18, they're done and that's it. And that said... I think that youth don't understand like what they do with services they can have for aging out of this system.” (Participant 8)

“They don't have lasting supports and they have those people who work in the child welfare system who have had them come through a program or whatever. What have you those become those support people but they don't have the lasting supports like a family person who can reach back to or a old teacher or a person from church or something like that. So while people who are in the system don't mind helping you sometimes, time will not allow them to give them the support that they need.” (Participant 9)

“They are all not ready... I think a barrier is that can still feel abandonment. Its like okay now that I age out, what do I do next, where do I go next, whose home do I belong to?” (Participant 10)

- *Fifth, the mindset of the youth can interfere with their own success after aging out of foster care. Four participants described scenarios in which the youth themselves seem to get in their own way in terms of how they approach aging out:*

“They are their own barrier because they're not usually prepared...as much as they think they are. And a lot of times they refuse to get prepared. Example would be completing high school, or you know, to do the work while in high school. And so they're not prepared with all the work that it takes to be an adult.” (Participant 2)

“I feel like our teens are leaving foster care just because they're sick of the rules. Not because they're prepared to go, but because they're just tired of all the different rules.

Things like that they hear that age I'm 18 and they are ready to go, and I get concerned about how.” (Participant 3)

“I believe some of the barriers that the youth face.... they sometimes can be family. A lot of times they come from families that are somewhat dysfunctional and they are very close. They hold tight to the practices and the different beliefs that they have learned through their family which may not always be helpful for them.” (Participant 7)

In summary, youth aging out face a number of challenges dealing within the current system. Some of these issues relate to the system itself, whether programs address the actual needs of youth, failing to educate youth on what support is available after aging out, and fail to prepare them with necessary skills. Other challenges pertain to the youth themselves and the degree to which they do, or more often do not, take responsibility and attempt to prepare themselves for life after aging out. All participants felt there were many challenges youth face and that there is great room for improvement.

**Interview Question 2: In your opinion, how can the system strengthen youth adapting living skills for youth aging out of foster care?**

Three primary themes emerged from responses to this question: (a) 1-on-1

support, (b) preparing youth for transitioning in advance, and (c) developing real-world skills.

- *Seven participants believed individual support and/or mentorship would be very helpful for youth aging out. This would provide advice, accountability, skills and address their individual needs:*

“Some of them have family but they're not positive... I think sometimes they need that mentor. Or that other person that they know is going to give them good advice regardless if it's something they want to hear or not. So I guess they continue to try to build that aspect up I think it could be a real asset to the kids because the way they used to have what they call Independent Living workers set up I felt like it was a great support for them.” (Participant 3)

“Job mentors and actually field that they're interested in, if they're able to. Go to that place. And actually be with that mentor for a while to see what it takes to actually have that position and how to interact with people. And how to maintain a job without letting your life issues get in the way.” (Participant 4)

“So before they transition I would offer is that they need to work with the young person individually. When you have the Transitional Living Programs pretty much it's a one size fits all. But a child's needs are young adults needs is very different and therefore we need to be able to talk to the young person about their specific needs and then that program that is designed for that young person can be tailor made for that purpose for that young person.” (Participant 6)

“I know we have caseworkers but maybe have several different workers you know kind



of like wraparound services for special needs kids or just you know make sure they understand what's ahead of them, because everybody you know faces challenges.”

(Participant 8)

“Well one of the things that they need is someone to consistently hold them accountable.”

(Participant 9)

“I would think to be able to contact them at least weekly especially at first and you can dwindle down as time as time goes on but I think at first at least stay in contact, you know we stay in contact with them and let them know you're still there... So I think the most important thing is to have someone that they're comfortable with. And for me aftercare would be someone they can talk to they you refer to they can even visit.”

(Participant 10)

“I would think like more aftercare services. Like still connect with them still communicate. And still have some kind of network with them... Just to see like every 3, 6, 9 months a year or if you have to go be going beyond a year just to follow up with them to make sure that they're doing or living like they supposed.” (Participant 10)

- *Second, three participants felt the system could do more to prepare youth significantly in advance of aging out. Building skills and planning takes time, so participants felt youth would be better served by having a longer and more in-depth plan for transition:*

“Those perks should be weeded off because of the fact that they become dependent on that. And so it's like okay at this age you need a job so you can buy your own bus pass. You don't stop get a clothing allotment at 18, but preparing them for that so that you're

not so dependent on the system that they can't be successful on so if it was more of that kind of thing going on really. Like curriculum based independent living process where young people realize like I am in the system but at this age I'll be doing this. At this age I will be doing that so that they know... But if it's transition that way then they already know at 21... I'll be ready to live in society, I will be ready to pay taxes, I might have a car because I'm 21, you know that kind of thing. But that got to be all built in so that they know because right they don't know.” (Participant 5)

“As they get older starting to transition them from needing the system so much. A lot of times they are very dependent on their caseworkers and the county for their needs. If they can slowly start to get them to be able to provide for themselves encourage them to get a job so that they can be used to. Doing the different things that they have to do once they become independent.” (Participant 7)

- *Nine participants (almost all) noted that youth need to practice learning and using real-world skills in order to be successful once they age out. The system provides so much for them while under 18. So, out-of-care education could come as a shock and make it more likely that, if youth are not adequately prepared, they will return to the system:*

“You have to have both the education and the life skills you have to know how to balance a checking account. You have to know how to budget for groceries and clothing in rent and I understand the concept of budgeting... How do you apply for a driver's license? How do you apply for how you get a bus pass.... How do you how you get yourself on one from one place to another on the current transportation system just all those general

life skills that many of our foster teens have just never had anybody to teach them that? All the things that folks growing up in a household, mom and dad teach them these things but these kids need the life skills in conjunction with the formal education.” (Participant 11)

“The program that we have it is called supervise independent living. But it's still much supervised like there still things that they don't have to do. Pay for and things like that... it's almost like. The. Practice right before. Going out on my Own. I mean we're there we'll still have all those supports that they need. But really they're doing it on their own far as paying their rent. Having a job. Things like that.” (Participant 3)

“Put them into more actual situations. If they're in foster care and coming from group homes and things like that. We provide them a false environment, we provide them with some sort of structure. But. We often work in Point systems and different Things like that. And that's not out in the real world I believe we can give them more exposure to what going on in the real world.”(Participant 4)

“They provide food shelter. They don't have to pay any bills which is not realistic once they go out into the real world. And in kind of doesn't prepare them correctly. When teaching trying to teach them life skill lessons and how to save money. They don't really at that time see the benefit of it. They want to just spend their money they get the money they just want to spend their money a lot of time so. That can be hard because. If we're trying to teach them.” (Participant 7)

“I guess that would be like if they needed to know life skills these life skills that they need to know how do we go about teaching at my skill in making this stick and making

sure that the youth is held accountable so even if they are in a program some type of a transitional program how do we take those life skills and turn them into a reality even though it's a falsehood at that time. So if they don't have to pay an electric bill, do we monthly give them what we would call an electric bill and have them pay in false dollars in some way so that the young people will understand that this isn't something that's going to be given to me. This is something I'm going to have to do when I get out home. So we have to try to create those things that are a guess that are that will become natural things when they get out and there in a real world.” (Participant 9)

- *One participant specifically felt assistance with housing would help ease youth into living on their own. This would help in building their skills and ease the transition:*

“I think they should meet with housing providers and set up some type of system so these kids can be placed or given affordable housing at least to start out. I mean they would have to work and pay their way and everything like that but I think at least starting with a place to lay their head.” (Participant 11)

In summary, the three main codes for question 2 included 1-on-1 support, preparing for transitions in advance, and real-world skills. Easing the transition between group home or independent living programs to completely living on one's own takes time to build up the necessary skills and to create a good plan for aging out.

**Interview Question 3: If an aftercare plans were a part of discharge for youth aging out, describe a plan and who would provide the follow-up?**

There were five themes for this question: (a) planning, (b) housing, (c) work, (d) social safety net, and (e) introduction to/information on available community support services.

**(a) importance of planning**

- *Three participants felt it important to begin planning with youth far in advance before they age out. Just as with question 2 above, there are many elements to living on one's own, not only in developing skills but in considering all of the pieces of adult life. This includes housing, working, needs for childcare or healthcare, and many other elements:*

“I think that plan needs to be done way before they are about to leave. I think a good year before there hitting eighteen, they like to do it at eighteen I've been so they can kind of foresee and Think about what I am going to do. What do I need to do within this Year to get myself ready To be out on my own. A Lot of the kids don't think that far ahead.”

(Participant 3)

“But I would probably start a discharge plan at least a year in advance and have set goals in specific areas they need to know on what are you going to do about housing what are you going to do about their education.” (Participant 9)

Participant 7 suggested a “Plan B” as well. It is important not only to create a plan, but also to consider what might happen if that plan does not work out.

**(b) housing needs**

- *Regarding particular needs, these were the most important needs so youth do not*

*become homeless. Five participants discussed needs regarding having a job, while six discussed housing. Since much of these discussions overlapped, quotes below reflect both of these codes:*

“First of all as you know making sure the youth has a safe secure place to live. To me it all centers on that... And making sure that they have a living wage job. where they can afford the housing and also afford the food and the miscellaneous things that you need to live with day to day.” (Participant 1)

“Well. I guess the agency could make sure that they receive their housing if they're employed and being able to pay their rent. And they're. Good at budgeting. So they're not broke. Or lose their housing.” (Participant 2)

“Then make sure that when they're discharged that they have the basics like a package you know. That they have what they need. For their apartment, that they have an apartment that their not sofa surfing. That they have what they need for their apartment. That. That is secure with a job that they have transportation.” (Participant 5)

“Like a lot of times we say what you are going to do for work. Oh I'm going to find a job. we need to add more to that like where are you going to look for a job.” (Participant 3)

- **The fourth code is having a social safety net.** This includes social support from a number of possible sources, including relatives, mentors and follow up from case workers. These people may provide advice, emotional support, financial support, and general assistance. This is particularly important when youth do not have healthy or supportive family ties, so they have a relationship with other

adults who can provide them various forms of assistance.

“But as they prepare to leave trying to set them up with some kinship care relationship where again if something would happen that would be unforeseen perhaps they could go back and access resources from a relative or family member. You know. If you go to to get over that hump that might be caused by their.] their situation.” (Participant 1)

“I really believe that the caseworker the previous caseworker on occasions when they left should still be involved. Some kind of way because. this is hard when they go through in and out of homes in our home then on top of that you go from caseworker to caseworker where you never get really settle with anyone or get comfortable. So I think that for me is to get them comfortable enough with someone and ask why I believe that I would think the last caseworker would have the most information on them... I would think to be able to contact them at least weekly especially at first and you can dwindle down as time as time goes on but I think at first at least stay in contact, you know we stay in contact with them and let them know you're still there. Later someone can come and talk to someone they can refer back to. They get questions or living out here and easy. And then when they go is not easy. So you just can't imagine what their mind frame is. So I think the most important thing is to have someone that they're comfortable with. And for me aftercare would be someone they can talk to they you refer to they can even visit. An. That would be no follow up plan as well just to have constant communication ongoing until. If there isn't until you know you have a whole lifelong friend.” (Participant 10)

“That they will maintain contact with their last provider maybe over a period of time, at least maybe twice, once or twice a month. I know that seems a lot but they still may be

struggling to be on their own. Still need some sort of support until they're able to totally transition and feel comfortable on their own In the communities in which they will live. So maybe a follow up plan like aftercare, Even if that's just Phone calls.” (Participant 11)

“Just someone outside find that relationship or something outside of people who get paid to do it. And sometimes family and sometimes it's just a family friend. Or someone like that. But I think they need those outside support. And sometimes they don't know them like it could be....A lot of times. In these discharge plans or transition plans the kids are naming their staff. Like who outside of them can you still call, they have to find that type of relationship. Now I'm not saying that the staff is going to turn them away or anything like that. But it would just be nice. If we could realistically look at that, because once all this is over who do you have?” (Participant 2)

“Because once you leave there's about 10 or 20 other kids just like you on that staff caseload they're trying to help them out.” (Participant 3)

“We also make sure that we keep in contact we have a Facebook page. We have a Facebook alumni page that we make sure actually be linked to because of her Facebook. So we made sure before they leave click us on Facebook so that we can still reach out to them and then we can reach out to us if they still need that extra support.” (Participant 4)

“So one of the things that we have to do when we think about the young people moving out in their safety nets how do we reconnect young people back to their family. Young people back to their communities. Because what I've seen is that when young people are taught it's time for them to transition or they turn the age of majority. It's like all the systems says we're done with you. But that young person based on their maturity based



on where if they're in school whatever they need, that safety net. And so those what we talk about in our sector is that it's just not legal permanency but it's also relational permanency. And Dr. Gina Samuels from the University of Chicago, she is the person that is talked about this relational permanency and introduced it to our sector. So I think that if we look at relational permanency and move young people back to their communities with their support systems they will do better.” (Participant 6)

- **The final code is the linkage to community support services.** Eight participants noted this need. While much support ends at age 18, there are also other programs available or community support that youth may not be aware of without that information being provided. This may include printed information and introducing youth to community members and assistance programs in person: “Also setting them up with someone in the system where if they do run into a unexpected expense car breaks down or they get sick and end up off the job for a while where they can access financial help and other help to get over those Humps during the first couple of years that they're there out there. Because we all know things like that are going To Happen making sure they're set up to continue their education.” (Participant 1)  
“All the things that they had when they were with you. Make sure that they have those things on their own and then make sure that they have a. Resource pack. So that whoever they need to call because before that we were calling all these people, now they need to know how to call all these are all people that you need to call for this reason. Whatever reason that they're looking for. If they need utility assistance they need help with their rent if they are looking for jobs and their felons you know all that should be in a packet

all to give it to them so that they have that at their fingertips.” (Participant 5)

“So I think a discharge plan would be like making sure that if they're going to you know continue their education what services. Like when schools are having you know scholarships or they can go and what are they interested in, not all kids want to go to a four year college. So there's a trade schools or different programs they can go to different certification programs making sure like. What's interesting to them and if they have special needs and make sure what services are in place for them like if there is they have drug and alcohol issues make sure that there is some places they can go to make sure they have some sort of like mentors this because around this system doesn't mean there is not service system in place for youth that age out of the system.” (Participant 8)

According to the participants in this study, discharge plans should include extended planning, housing and work considerations, a social safety net and introductions to community support services. Youth aging out have many needs and in order to be successful living on their own, the system could provide much greater support in advance.

### **Research Questions**

This section will evaluate the above findings in conjunction with this dissertation's two research questions.

#### ***RQ1: What special challenges exist for youth aging out of the Child Welfare System?***

Youth aging out of the system face a number of challenges. First, we can consider issues with the system itself. If youth are receiving services according to their age instead of their actual needs, this will not prepare them with the skills needed for them to live by

themselves. Without 1-on-1 attention and consideration of their individual needs, there are many potential points of failure for youth who are by themselves. If youth are pushed toward aging out because of their age, they may be missing out on much needed care and attention which, if properly addressed, could increase the likelihood that they would avoid negative outcomes like homelessness, crime, and drug use.

Lasting social relationships are necessary for both general assistance and help moving through life, but also in building a sense of attachment and belonging. Many youth are missing a sense of stability and belonging, due to issues in their family of origin, as well as problems with the system. Youth who are moved constantly to different homes and caseworkers lack a consistent safe space/safe person. This could affect the youth both emotionally and developmentally. While these youth have been through a lot compared to their peers that does not negate the need for social connection; if anything, it seems likely it would increase their need for secure social bonds.

The mindset of youth is another problem, though given the challenges already discussed it seems logical youth would not develop a healthy mindset ready to properly take responsibility for themselves. It is not hard to see why they would hesitate to prepare themselves with necessary life skills when they have not had any prior experience with real responsibility. It is hard for them to accept or commit to any responsibility when they are constantly moved around from home to home and detached from long-term human connection. This simply causes a great deal of stress in their lives. The neurobiological effects of stress do not lend to a healthy mindset. At the same time, to be functioning adults, these youth need to develop a healthier mindset because ultimately they will be

completely responsible for themselves. As Participant 2 described, they can sometimes seem like their own worst enemy. At the same time, we must ask: does the blame really lie with the youth themselves, or is this a consequence of their life experiences and problems in the system thus far? Growing up in a tumultuous environment may make acquiring life skills more difficult and may result in mental and emotional health problems that can further compound risks of homelessness, crime, and drug use upon release.

***RQ2: Is there a need for aftercare/ safety net for youth who have aged out of foster care?***

It is abundantly clear from this project that there is a great need for aftercare and creating a safety net for youth who have aged out of foster care. This includes physical/practical needs, social needs, and life skills. The process of planning for transition could potentially serve as a teaching experience to help youth understand not only what they will need to do, but also enforce excellent practice to actually experience adult thinking concerning solving life's problems and issues.

There are a number of physical and practical needs for youth aging out of the child welfare system. The most important are housing and work, so that youth are able to care for their most basic needs and do not become homeless. This may also include food, healthcare, mental health services, childcare, and funds available for emergencies. As the eight participants suggested, information on local community resources should be provided to youth before or upon discharge. Some suggested making in-person introductions so that youth have will have the opportunity to present themselves to these

resources. This may make it more likely that a young person would utilize these services if they are comfortable approaching the location and workers involved. These are simple starting needs, but youth need much more help in addition.

A social safety net is imperative for a young person aging out. A typical child will have their parents and other family members to help guide through life's challenges, like finding work, a place to live, or buying a bus pass. Youth involved in the child welfare system often lack healthy family support. Although the system handles their needs under 18, going out on their own after that time often means figuring out how to manage their needs by themselves. This is why, as so many participants noted, ongoing check-ins beyond discharge from a trusted adult are important for youth. They may not understand how to manage life's various needs by themselves, without having had a healthy model at home, due to their time spent in the child welfare system. In addition, social support encourages high self-esteem, provides emotional support, and leads youth to better decision-making. It seems highly desirable for caseworkers to maintain contact with youth beyond 18 years of age, noting that caseworkers should only do as much as they can do possible.

Life skills are also of utmost importance. It is not enough to simply earn a paycheck, but they need to understand how to responsibly use their money, budget, and save for emergencies when possible. Particularly, if they have come from a difficult background, emotional immaturity, impulsiveness, and risky decisions may be common. Preparing youth in advance for the various challenges they might face can be important to teach problem-solving. For instance: what happens when the electric bill comes the same

day that their favorite band's concert tickets go on sale? It is important to help these young people understand the difficult choices we must sometimes make in life, the sacrifices we must make now to plant seeds for a better future all take emotional maturity, and making mistakes and learning from those mistakes.

The act of creating a discharge plan in conjunction with the youth themselves has the potential itself to be a learning exercise by teaching many of the skills needed for a successful adult life. Having to break down a big goal into numerous, achievable pieces is an important skill necessary to achieve any goal—finishing a college degree, writing a book, or even maintaining a regular blog on the internet. Having incremental success completing the plan piece by piece can help build self-esteem and problem-solving skills for when they are by themselves. This may help them see that impulsive decisions can be detrimental to their well-being despite the fact that they may feel good in the moment. Having to consider and weigh various options can help them tune into their own needs to see which way is best to pursue for them as an individual. Creating a backup plan can help them realize that every plan has pitfalls and unexpected challenges; so, preparing them for the likelihood that at least some portion of their efforts will not work as hoped, can help build resilience; so, when they do face challenges, the negative outcomes are less likely.

#### Conclusion and Preview of Chapter 5

In conclusion, there are many ways for improvement regarding the situation of youth aging out of the child welfare system. While some needs are currently being met through some programs, virtually all participants felt much was left to be desired. The

major consequence is that youth whose needs are not adequately addressed while still in the system run a huge risk of returning through the criminal justice system, creating additional strain on the system, and causing even greater life difficulties for youth who have already suffered a great deal. Perhaps the system needs to re-evaluate its programs in conjunction with the desired outcome for these youth, such as supporting the development of a healthy, functioning adult who contributes to society rather than simply pushing them through various programs until age 18. It is unfortunate these youth who have already been through so much then do not receive adequate preparation not to mention consistent positive role models may not even understand their issues. This is why ongoing support beyond eighteen years old appears essential for successful integration into the community as a functioning adult. Ultimately, these youth will be by themselves, so efforts must be made to prepare them as much as possible for the, sometimes harsh, realities of life in the modern world.

## Chapter 5. Procedures, Findings, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

In this study, I examined the challenges and needs of youth aging out of the foster care system in Western Pennsylvania. Two organization provided the critical feedback, findings and recommendations to aid our understanding of why so many youth are unprepared for adulthood. Youth in placement have been recorded by professional as having a false sense of the real world. Budgeting and financial planning does not register as a top priority for youth in placement. Many are “sick and tired” (Participant 3) of the Child Welfare System and want to be released rather they are prepared or not. Youth leave with serious emotional and behavioral problems (Pecora et al. 2013; Schmitz and Tyler 2014). These young people receive little support after aging out.

### **The Problem**

Youth aging out of foster care are at risk for a number of serious issues, including homelessness, crime, and mental health problems. One in 10 will experience homelessness; couch-surfing is common (Richards 2014; Schmitz and Tyler 2015). These youth are more likely to become involved in the criminal justice system, not only creating more challenges for themselves but also placing additional burdens on the society (Robst et al., 2013). Greater attention to preparing these youth for life beyond institutional living may help alleviate some of these severe problems for both the individual and community.

### **The Procedure**

In this study I asked three questions of 11 professionals working with youth in the child welfare system:



Q1. What are some impediments you have viewed with youth aging out of foster care?

Q2. In your opinion, how can the system strengthen youth adaptive livings skills for youth aging out of foster care?

Q3. If aftercare plans were a part of discharge for youth aging out, describe a plan and explain whom would provide the follow-up?

### **Interpretation of Findings**

Youth aging out of the system face a number of challenges, including inadequately addressed needs (e.g., (a) housing (b) budgeting (c) social awkwardness, and having a positive mindset. First, the system does not adequately address their needs and gives little attention to individual circumstances or the skill-building necessary to enable them to successfully live by themselves. Second, lasting social relationships are necessary for healthy human development, mental and emotional health, as well as accessing a network of resources. Unfortunately, family-of-origin issues tend to lead youth to the system, which further compounds instability this problem by bouncing individuals between different homes and caseworkers. Youth have a difficult time building social relationships that last beyond their institutional care. Finally, their mindset is often skewed by reality and can interfere with their success, though it may be misplaced to blame them entirely. In a dysfunctional environment, it is challenging to develop healthy mental and emotional skills, particularly when youth have been exposed to abuse, trauma, and neglect.

There is much need for proper skill development and follow-up from the system itself. While living in an institutional setting, most needs are managed; however, youth

must learn how to properly access community resources and have adult life skills to be able to care for themselves on their own terms. Securing basic needs, including affordable housing, living-wage work and food are the most immediate needs so youth do not become homeless. Additional resources, such as health insurance, mental health care, childcare and help for emergencies, are also important considerations. Beyond basic needs are life skills, such as budgeting, paying bills, applying for legal identification, and other skills youth typically learn from their caregivers. Ensuring youth have a social support system for both practical help and mental/emotional needs is imperative, as the system largely serves this role until age 18.

In Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, a 412 Youth Zone program provides homeless youth, aged 18-24, with life-skill assessments, individualized goal plans, job and career development, personal safety and health, career development, job skills, financial assistance, employment assistance housing, and household and dormitory items. 412 Youth Zone's hours of operation are from 11am–7pm, Monday through Saturday, and closed on Sundays. No overnight shelter or dormitories exist for youth because they are considered adults and must find housing among the general population.

### **Recommendations**

First, there is much room for improvement in preparing youth for aging out. Case-workers should begin preparing youth at least one year prior to aging out. The process of being guided through long-term planning can help build many of the skills necessary to

successfully live as a functioning adult. Breaking down a big goal into numerous, achievable components will serve these individuals as they progress in their education or build careers. Having incremental success completing the plan piece by piece can help build self-esteem and problem-solving skills for when they are out by themselves. Considering various options, for instance where to live, where to work and whether to pursue further education, can help build decision-making skills.

Getz (2012) addressed the concern of creating a smooth transition out of the foster care system. This research study suggested that no matter how smooth the transition, many are not mentally or emotionally ready for adulthood. It became evident through this research study that there needs to be more in-placement structural changes. It was recommended that a simulation of real life experiences would benefit youth preparing for emancipation. Participant 3 noted some examples, including having some of their support removed as they begin to transition (e.g., clothing allotment and bus passes). Participant 3 further noted that while many of them have jobs, their income is not used for real life commitments. Pay checks are spent haphazardly and no real life budgets are created. Follow-up care is a must for youth who have aged out of the foster care systems, which should include time periods spanning weekly to 3, 6, and 9 months.

According to the Children and Youth strategic plan, individual subgroups have been assigned to address intervention services provided. This research study captures a microcosm of practitioners that could help to expedite structural and collaborative meaningful dialogue on changes within the foster care noted throughout interviews.

Recent policies targeting financial resources for foster care youth transitioning is currently being debated in Harrisburg under the Mental Health Services network. One of the recommendations is to create and solicit ongoing services require rental assistance resources (Miler, Paschall and Azar, 2017). Positive outcome post-placement recommendations require resources beyond placement. Dual safety net programs are preferred to reduce fragment services provided after placement.

Attachment theory is the premise of youth forming relationships outside of their biological families. However, n placement noted by several participants in the study. Practitioners, care givers, foster parents, administrators and caseworkers become the only people that are viewed by the youth as caring. Boundary issues after placement have become obscure with youth and their caregivers. Participant 10 stated that the youth often move within close proximity of where caregivers or professionals live. Therefore, recommending mobile aftercare services may reduce youth anxieties of separation.

Second, practical real-world skills can be practiced so that youth are not caught off-guard by their electric bill or run out of food before their next pay-check. It may be useful to think backwards: what does a happy, healthy, and successful adult look like? From there, the youth can be led to the desired outcome through planning and skill building.

Finally, the process of researching this topic has demonstrated that utilizing a brief interview schedule can yield a wealth of useful information that may prove useful in studying this population, as workers are often overburdened.

1. What special challenges exist for youth aging out of the child welfare system?

2. Is there a need for aftercare/ safety net for youth who have aged out of foster care?

### **Implications for Future Research**

There has been very little research on youth that have returned back to placement after the age of 18, with neither negative nor positive outcomes being reported. This research study was completed with the assistance of two organizations and eleven professionals. So, a more robust cross-section of service providers that aid youth beyond their matriculation in systems beyond the age of 18 is worthy of further research.

### **Limitations**

The study utilized the organizations that responded favorably; however, only two out of the eight organization participated. Foster parents, as they have a major in foster care, were welcomed to participate; however, getting recruitment information to them was difficult. Child welfare professionals were excluded as many of the foster care programs are administered by Pennsylvania Department of Human Service and have subcontracts to provide service. Participant 3 commented that they were glad this study focused primarily on the practitioner in the field who work with the youth. The system that they referred to has a set of rules and timelines that youth have to address to decide whether they are emotionally prepared.

This study did not focused on youth being discharged from the Juvenile Probation Service. A research study on professionals in the adjudicated juvenile services may have had a different perspective on barriers that exist among this population. The Bureau of Juvenile Justice Service maintain records of offences and crimes committed (BJJ, 2014).

This may also prove a useful strategy for collecting future data from youth themselves, who may be more difficult to reach for in-depth study. Learning firsthand about the challenges aged out youth face, from their own perspective, may help elucidate other needs not currently addressed by the system.

### **Positive Social Change**

As this researcher was completing the writing of this dissertation, I received an e-mail from an executive who participated in the study requesting statistical information used in my research to strengthen their proposal. The proposal is geared to help youth who are aging out to develop “real world” life skills that will hopefully improve outcome placement for youth aged 18–24. This study is by no means the only answer to helping youth; however, it provided a glimpse of understanding into the phenomena of youth who in up homeless after exiting placement within three months (Richard, 2014). Professionals who work with youth, 16–21 years of age, and are responsible for them while in placement provided scenarios that they have witnessed firsthand and solutions to combat this epidemic. The transcribed summary and analysis may provide an opportunity to make a difference systemically within the walls that foster youth.

Chor, McClelland, Weiner, Jordan and Lyons (2014) offered up the concept of investment teams. In the state of Illinois, Children and Youth Investment Teams (CAYIT) could provide the opportunity for creating safety nets of support for youth aging out of foster care. Invoking social change in how organizations’ behaviors address youth aging out of foster care in a concentrated effort can be a step in the right direction. Exploring

how to develop that model in wrap-around services of youth aging out of foster care beyond their emancipation is a possibility. This model can include shifting the paradigm of mobile aftercare going to their place of residency for follow up and additional support. The frequency of aftercare visits, as noted, may occur more often in the beginning and diminish as self-sufficiency increases. The CAYIT centered on youth post-foster care is a step that would require frequent modifications per individual needs. The discussion started with the document aforementioned as the Office of Children, Youth and Families—Title IV-B Child and Family Service Plan Federal Fiscal Years 2015-2019, with major emphasis on furthering academic program and improving coordination of services in relation to the Pennsylvania Juvenile Justice system.

Understanding the challenges that youth face in exiting placement is not the sole importance to understanding foster care according to Dyce (2014). Continuing their education beyond the walls of institutionalism has created barriers for them that diminish their effectiveness in mainstreaming back into society. African American males have been purported as having worse education deficiencies than, for instance, Caucasian males. The types of placements that youth are exiting from range anywhere from emergency care, kinship care, shared family care and residential/group homes.

Mental health services is one of the areas that Participant 8 mentioned as having severe ramification of not being monitored once youth leave custodial care. Dyce (2014) commented that male adolescent children have mental health and psychosocial issues that prevent successful outcomes. The stigma associated with mental health in, specifically,

the African American communities is deep rooted and often times has gone unchecked (Dyce, 2014).

Shaw and Jedwab (2017) wrote that permanency plans for reunification is highly sought after as the first line of defense for youth exiting programs. As mentioned earlier, the Chaffee Foster Care Independence laws in the state of Pennsylvania have allowed youth who have left placement at age 18 can return to placement up to 21 years of age and sometimes up to 24 years of age. Participant 4 mentioned that it not always possible for youth to return to their families of origin. Many want to straddle off to their new place of residence and have no desire to look back. As recorded, they are tired of the system and want to exit as quickly as possible, whether prepared or not. In many cases, as Participant 1 suggested, they have not completed high school and have not obtained employment with sustainable wages.

One participant in the research study shared how many youth she suspected resorted back to delinquency behaviors. The analysis did not record or reflect recidivism as it relates to criminal behaviors. This participant also mentioned teen moms who require additional support but are often disregarded after they are discharge from placement. Support for the teen mom comes when the child has been born. All services and support (e.g., AFDC and health insurance) focus on the teen mom, while her individual needs such as education support, drug and alcohol abuse support, and mental health is disallowed as a primary concern.

Finally, the analysis clearly delineated that housing is one of the major culprits for instability among youth aging out of placement. This empirical research was tailored to



understand if there is a need for creating safety nets for youth aging out of foster care.

The results indicated a resounding 'yes' and began to carve out a coherent perspective on how to formulate one. Further research on the creation of safety nets for youth aging out of foster care may improve post placement outcomes. The tension and conflict with youth aging out of foster provides the vehicle for behavioral and structural societal changes within the confine of foster care and its auxiliary placements.

In Conclusion, societal and behavioral changes which this study suggest can be a long arduous process, but a must. Our young adults require more than meeting milestones at a particular age. Policy changes which allow youth to return to placement beyond their eighteen birthday has extended the preparation time. However, addressing complex issues stemming from institutional living, cultural bias and neglect and abuse requires much more attention. The interviews in this research has provided a closer vantage point of the concerns that our young people are expecting upon emancipation that does not always mirror real life expectations. As noted earlier, there is limited affordable housing for the general population and the housing availability for youth aging out of the foster care is leaner. Pennsylvania's Department of Human Services currently engages youth in care, in planning, education, advocating and forming partnerships to create positive change. Its strategic plan 2015-2019 boast of having similar discussions with state wide representations from a wide array of service providers. This research study recruited micro level professionals to address the ongoing needs of youth aging out (Pennsylvania's 2015-2019, Child and Family Service Plan).

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## Appendix A. Code Chart

Column1	Column2	Column3	Column4
Chart of Codes			
<u>Question</u>	<u>Codes</u>	<u># of Partici- pants</u>	<u>% of Partici- pants</u>
Q1 What are some impediments you have viewed with youth aging out of foster care?	Unprepared	6	54.55%
	Programs do not address needs	4	36.36%
	Knowledge/use of support	2	18.18%
	Lasting support	4	36.36%
	Mindset	4	36.36%
Q2 In your opinion, how can the system strengthen youth adaptive living skills for youth aging out of foster care?	1-on-1 support	6	54.55%
	Prepare in advance	3	27.27%
	Real-world skills	9	81.82%
Q3 If aftercare plans were part of discharge for youth aging out, describe a plan and who would provide the follow-up.	Planning	3	27.27%
	Housing	6	54.55%
	Work	5	45.45%
	Social safety net	10	90.91%
	Intro to support services	8	72.73%

## Appendix B. Coded Transcribed Interviews

**180912\_0019.MP3**

[00:00:01] second part to Ms. Six of Diamond All Right testing. We're going to complete our interview with Ms. Six of Diamond by asking her the final question which is.

[00:00:08] In exploring safety nets for youth aging out of foster care. Please describe a discharge plan and follow up.

[00:00:19] It seems kind of tough for me since I'm not on the CFF side. As far as you know I'm a caregiver caseworker. Is. Playing.

[00:00:34] When you think about leaving the place. We think that maybe some of the things that you think that that might be helped them as they saw us like after care plan. I really believe that the caseworker the previous caseworker on occasions when they left should still be involved. Some kind of way because.

[00:00:57] This is hard when they go through in and out of homes in our home then on top of that you go from caseworker to caseworker where you never get really settle with anyone or get comfortable. So I think that for me is to get them comfortable enough with someone and ask why I believe that I would think the last caseworker would have the most information on them.

[00:01:20] So I guess to have a follow up plan aftercare plan and just tell me a little bit what you think and aftercare plan would look like for somebody transitioning out. I would think to be able to contact them at least weekly especially at first and you can dwindle down as time as time goes on but I think at first at least stay in contact, you know we stay in contact with them and let them know you're still there. Later someone can come and talk to someone they can refer back to. They get questions or living out here and easy. And then when they go ain't easy. So you just can't imagine what their mind frame is. So I think the most important thing is to have someone that they're comfortable with. And for me aftercare would be someone they can talk to they you refer to they can even visit. An. That would be no follow up plan as well just to have constant communication ongoing until. If there isn't until you know you have a whole life long friend.

[00:02:27] Thank you so much for answering that third question. I appreciate your candor in terms of the follow up plan. Ms Six of Diamond, part two

**180912\_0018.MP3**

[00:00:00] Thank you. Hello.

[00:00:04] Testing one two three were with Ms Six of Diamond and we're going to ask her the same three questions she's has sign the consent form and we're going to start with the first question. And the first question is.

[00:00:17] What impediments or barriers have you viewed still exists with youth aging out of foster.

[00:00:23] I am assuming they are aging out because they are too old to be in foster care

[00:00:40] Own.

[00:00:48] I believe that some of them still are not ready even though they're old enough to I guess quote on quote to be on their own. But I think due to their Experience. They are all not ready and they might still, I think a barrier is that can still feel abandonment. its like okay now that I age out, what do I do next. Where do I go next. Who's home do i belong to. So that for me I think would be a barrier as far as their mindset.

[00:01:23] Thank you. Thank you. In your opinion how could this system strengthen use adaptive living skills as they transition out of foster care.

[00:01:38] I would think like more aftercare services. Like still connect with them still communicate. And still have some kind of Network with them.

[00:01:56] Because I guess this might be an emancipated though.

[00:02:04] . I think that's their. Request. Yes well I guess. I would think for their adaptive living skills I think for me I would think they would need to. Still have some kind of follow up.

[00:02:21] Just to see like every 3, 6, 9 months a year or if you have to go be going beyond a year just to follow up with them to make sure that they're doing or living like they supposed.

**180828\_0004.MP3**

[00:00:03] Testing one two three. I'm going to be asking Ms Seven of Club The three research questions in regards to creating safety nets for youth aging out of the foster care. Again I'm going to stick right to the script and that question one is in your opinion what impediments barriers have you viewed still exists with youth aging out of the foster care. For me I believe the first.

[00:00:37] Barrier for youth in the foster care system is the number of supports they have they they don't have lasting supports and they have those people who work in the child welfare system who have had them come through a program or whatever. What have you those become those support people but they don't have the lasting supports like a family person who can reach back to or a old teacher or a person from church or something like that. So while people who are in the system don't mind helping you sometimes. Time will not allow them to give them the support that they need. So I believe that's one of the major things that.

[00:01:23] Is a barrier for our youth in the foster care system.

[00:01:27] Thank you. Question 2 In your opinion how can this system strengthen youth adaptive living skills as they transition out into foster care.

[00:01:39] Well one of the things that they need is someone to consistently hold them accountable. So we need to create planes that will help youth understand give them an understanding of what it is that they need to do. So.

[00:01:57] For example I guess that would be like if they needed to know lifeskills these life skills that they need to know how do we go about teaching at my skill in making this stick and making sure that the youth is held accountable so even if they are in a program some type of a transitional program how do we take those life skills and turn them into a reality even though it's a falsehood at that time. So if they don't have to pay an electric bill, do we monthly give them what we would call an electric bill and have them pay in false dollars in some way so that the young people will understand that this isn't something that's going to be given to me. This is something I'm going to have to do when I get out home. So we have to try to create those things that are a guess that are That will become natural things when they get out and there in a real world. While they're still with us in the transition periods if that makes sense.

[00:03:02] thank you. And the last question. Question 3 in explorer and safety nets for youth aging out of foster care. Please describe a discharge plan and a follow up sessions that you think would be appropriate.

[00:03:16] I think a discharge plan needs to happen 40 40 even discharge from us if we know a date. And sometimes we don't. And that's that's the difficult piece in it. We don't always know a date when our young people are going to leave us.

[00:03:30] But I was start I would probably start a discharge plan at least a year in advance and have set goals in specific areas they need to know on what are you going to do about housing what are you going to do about their education. What are you going to do about their employment what resources and life skills they need to know in master before they leave here. What are some.

[00:03:56] Healthy Lifestyles and things like that they can use or be part of in order to kind of maintain what they're doing. Because we also we also know that what we put in our bodies will help how we function and our kids always eat the right things or do things to keep their energy levels and stuff like that. So that's important the other thing that's important is their mental health. And I know a lot of times they will shy away from that because that's the one thing they can refuse once they get a little older. So making sure that they understand that's all in the Healthy Living Portion. And I'm speaking of.

[00:04:36] So I will start that discharge plan at least a year out and then meet with them probably monthly to just see what little tiny steps we made towards progress on those those major goal areas. And what we still need to do what can we add to what can we scratch out and take away so that they can actually see that they are making progress towards those end goals. And then as far as follow up I will probably do at least for the first six months after they leave us. I will probably do some type of follow up for those first six months and then just have them check back in with us after that six month period.

[00:05:16] So if they choose between a six month in a year period to check back in maybe give them some type of a motivation some type of gift card or something like that.

[00:05:29] If they check back in especially at that year mark they say hey this is what I'm doing now.

[00:05:33] I'm still on this track as far as my discharge plan and everything is going well. So I think that would be a great idea.

[00:05:40] All right. Thank you. Ms. Seven of Club for your answers again. And this concludes our portion of the research study. And we'll be. Providing for you and others the aggregate responses of all the participation.

**180912\_0020.MP3**

[00:00:00] Ms Nine of Heart

[00:00:04] We're going to ask the nine of hearts the same three questions we've asked all participants in this research study creating safety net for youth aging out of foster care. Question number one what impediments are barriers. Have you viewed still exists with youth aging out of the foster care thing.

[00:00:26] For me I think there they don't have a final training on what to do after they turn after they age out of the system. like for instance like you know when kids like their bank accounts or school and or like it is having even a they sometimes have forever. They have always maybe trust the system. So sometimes they just don't take advantage of it.

[00:00:51] They always take advantage of like a lot of the perks of a system because there's no parks but like you know you get free dental and you free medical you get a free education. I knew some colleges they offer scholarships for foster children. So I don't think they don't know about it. I'll take advantage of it and a lot of youth find feel like just want to get out a system because it's a stigma to be in the system but then they should really say well there isn't some advantages like being in the system or at least take advantage of what's offered to them. So I feel like sometimes they don't know or either or not educated enough or they don't have the workers who like explained to them and want what they can do. Before the system and a lot of workers are pounding away who you have. They there's just some try and push them through the system once they turn 18 they're done and that's it. And that said so I think that youth don't understand like what they do with services they can have for aging out of this system.

[00:01:48] Huge workers move moved. Question number two in your opinion how can this system strengthen use adaptive living skills as they transition out of foster care.

[00:02:00] I think they can they make sure that they understand what's ahead of them give them proper training give them just guidance and is making sure that they have a place to go after they turn 18 either they can live with a relative or if's independent living or they you know they have special needs to make sure they have services in place and where they can reach out to if they're in need. we see a lot of like homeless youths week making sure that they have places to go and understand what's owed to them in a way and what services they can get. So I think this thing having like independent living programs and just really you know I know we have caseworkers but maybe have several different workers you know kind of like wraparound services for special needs kids or just you know make sure they understand what's ahead of them because everybody you know faces challenges with particular people they have kids in the system instead of always have a family. You know even if they get adopted like sometimes their adoptive parents

pass away and they still have a lot of family to turn to or they feel obligated to support like their parents. You know who else has their own issues so they have to take care of themselves and learn out like what services are in place.

[00:03:17] Thank you. And the final question for us is in exporting safety nets for youth aging out of foster care. Please describe a discharge plan and follow up.

[00:03:28] So I think a discharge plan would be like making sure that if they're going to you know continue their education what services. Like when schools are having you know scholarships or they can go and what are they interested in. not all kids want to go to a four year college. So there's a trade schools or different programs they can go to different certification programs making sure like. What's interesting to them and if they have special needs and make sure what services are in place for them like if there is they have drug and alcohol issues make sure that there is some places they can go to make sure they have some sort of like mentors this because around this system doesn't mean there is not service system in place for youth that age out of the system. And I also think just having a discharge not just like putting something in writing but like workers and introduce them to people that they know in follow up have meetings with them have like some sort of like interviews processes with schools and with community services like they should really follow up and not just put it in writing like that explain to the youth like what.

[00:04:33] Once you're out of the system you're there you're kind of on your own. So these are the services these are the places you can go to and really like I said it. really reach out to these you know programs with the child. have like have second chances like we have college tours so we take our children on college tours. We have more we have an independent living program making sure you meet with the resident adviser and people that can actually they can depend on and making sure that they you know and have like applied for food stamps that they need to for welfare services for like you know services for mental health and just like if they can you apply for benefits if SSI they need to if they have children of their own like this you know making sure they have that person they can go to not lie just aging out without a plan with nothing.

[00:05:19] No plans.



**180828\_0005.MP3**

[00:00:03] Testing. 1 2 3.

[00:00:08] Testing. I have Ms. Jack of Heart. Who's going to be answering questions about creating safety nets for youth aging out of foster care. Ms. Jack of Heart Has already signed her consent form and we're going to proceed. Question 1 which is what impediments or barriers have you view still exists with youth aging out of foster care.

[00:00:32] I believe some of the barriers that the youth face.

[00:00:36] They sometimes can be family. A lot of times they come from families that are somewhat dysfunctional And They are very close. They hold tight to the practices and the different beliefs that they have learned through their family which may not always be helpful For them. Sometimes You know they have been taught different ways to manipulate different systems. And that sometimes holds them up from just being able to just do things the correct way. And just go on out on their own. Legally And Also take in information from people who are trying to show them. How to do things the right way.

[00:01:27] Thank you. Thank you. Question number two in your opinion how can this system strengthen youth adaptive living skills as they transition out of foster care.

[00:01:42] As they get older starting to transition them.

[00:01:45] From needing the system so much. A lot of times they are very dependent on their caseworkers and the county for their needs. If they can slowly start to get them To be able to provide for themselves encourage them to get a job so that they can be used to. Doing the different things that they have to do once they become independent. They provide food shelter. They don't have to pay any bills which is not realistic once they go out into the real world. And in kind of Doesn't prepare them Correctly. When teaching trying to teach them life skill lessons and how To save money. They don't really at that time see The benefit Of it. They want to just spend their money they get the money they just want to spend their money a lot of time so. That can be hard because. If we're trying to teach them. How to have How to live independently. and they know they can just fall back and call their case worker or child advocate and get what they need then that's what They're going to do.

[00:02:54] Thank you so much. Very well said. Question 3 and exploring safety nets for youth aging out of foster care. Please describe a discharge plan and follow up.

[00:03:20] I think it will be good Just so that to Put places.

[00:03:26] Resources in place in case they are in need of things if they went to their own place, just give them a list of different Resources that they can use. If they need food, If they need help trying get their health insurance. Anything that their children may need. Since you know a lot of them are moms when they are aging out. Making sure that they know the 412 youth zone is available for them to go down. And get services there.

[00:03:59] And maybe create a plan B. If this doesn't work out then what So that they can have a housing or

[00:04:06] Just something to fall back on to. Thank you so much. That concludes our 3 research questions again I wanted to thank Ms. Jack of Heart For her participation in this voluntary study. Thank you.

### **180912\_0017.MP3**

[00:00:00] Testing one two three. We're going to be talking to Ms. Four of Spades in regards to answer in the three questions that we've asked all participants.

[00:00:11] He first question is what barriers or impediments have you viewed still exists with youth aging out of the foster care world.

[00:00:23] The fact of the matter is that the system is failing young people throughout their tenure in the child welfare system. So the fact that they have not reached permanency is that after a certain age there is a belief that young people can not reach permanency whether that's it. You know when reunification is ruled out that they can't reach adoption or subsidized guardianship. So indeed most folks say if they're 16 let's put them in a group home let's. Let them age out. So I think the barrier is the structure of the system and the fact that the system does not pay much attention after a certain age. So that becomes the biggest barrier in my opinion.

[00:01:07] Thank goodness for a spade. Question 2 In your opinion how can this system strengthen use adaptive living skills as they transition out of foster care.

[00:01:17] So before they transition I would offer is that they need to work with the young person individually. When you have the Transitional Living Programs pretty much it's a one size fits all. But a child's needs are young adults needs is very different and therefore we need to be able to talk to the young person about their specific needs and then that program that is designed for that young person can be tailor made for that purpose for that young person.

[00:01:46] And therefore all the skills the tools necessary for that young person to thrive will be very specific to them. And I believe by doing so that all of the adaptations that are necessary for the system to make for that young person they will be able to do that. Perfect.

[00:02:03] Thank you. And the last question is exploring safety nets for youth aging out of foster care. Please describe a discharge plan and follow up.

[00:02:12] So if a youth is aging out one of the things that we know through research and data is that young people.

[00:02:20] Everywhere have resources they have relatives cousins fictive kin community people teachers. So one of the things that we have to do when we think about the young people moving out in their safety nets how do we reconnect young people back to their family. Young people back to their communities. Because what I've seen is that when young people are taught it's time for them to transition or they turn the age of majority. It's like all the systems says we're done with you. But that young person based on their maturity based on where if they're in school whatever they need that safety net. And so those what we talk about in our sector is that it's just not legal permanency but it's also relational permanency. And a professor from the University of Chicago I think it's nice that her panache something anyway she is the person that is talked about this relational permanency and introduced it to our sector. So I think that if we look at relational permanency and move young people back to their communities with their support systems they will do better.

[00:03:28] Thank you so much. And that does conclude our interview. Thank you for your time.

### **180906\_0012.MP3**

[00:00:01] All right. Hi. We are here with Ms. Four of Diamond. We're going to ask her the same three questions we've asked all participants. Question number one what impediments or barriers have you viewed still exists with youth aging out of foster care.

[00:00:19] What impediments or barriers housing. Especially. If a young person.

[00:00:30] Has gone from CYF JPO to just JPO they lose all of their services when that happens when they age out juvenile so that they have they're on probation says juvenile probation. And so a lot of times when they come into the system. They come dual. They have JPO and CYF. So if they lose CYF Then J-P O they no structure they have no support for And that kind of thing for a young person. So once again they turn 18 then become homeless because they don't have housing. The education liaison stay with them til

there 24 but they don't provide housing. If you live if you go to college outside western Pennsylvania. So you're kind of stuck here when to go a community college. When maybe have been. Approved to go to a

[00:01:39] Bigger college or a four year college. So I believe that housing is the biggest thing. But then. You're just general support you have nobody to call to ask these questions to they all go away at. 21. And so we're you may have been in the system your whole life now you're on your own. Harder to problems solve because unless you've been in a program like this which is transitional living where is preparing you to do that. There's more kids in foster care right now because the county is going that way versus independent living programs. So they don't get the support they need to transition from foster care to independent living. And so I think those are the top two but if you get into like. Teen moms that leave our program think you have that support around the child instead of.

[00:02:46] A lot of support. There's open cases on the kids and basically they don't need an open case on their child. They just need to support that teen mom because she's a mother and she's getting ready transition out what does she need. What does she need for the child what does she need for herself how is she going to be successful. Once she leaves CYF once she leaves the foster care program or congregate care program that's she in. So that's really hard because a lot of the teen moms their children end up being CYF dependent because they don't have the support that they need Those are the Top three Things.

[00:03:34] Question 2 In your opinion how can the system strengthen youth adaptive living skills as they transition out of foster care.

[00:03:45] I think it should be 24/7 21.

[00:03:49] Then you get the midway. You know. Of course. I feel like. When. When they are in Care they you are transitioning them the whole time because In one part CYF you're you do get a lot of perks for being there.

[00:04:10] Those perks should be weeded off because of the fact that they become dependent on that. And so it's like okay at this age you need a job. So you can buy your own bus pass. You don't stop get a clothing allotment at 18, but preparing them for that so that you're not so dependent on the system that they can't be successful on So if It was more of that kind of thing going on really. Like. Curriculum Based independent living.

[00:04:45] Process where young people realize like I am in the system but at this age I'll be doing this. At this age I will be doing that so that they know. That they've.

[00:04:57] Gotten to that level. Its so messy right now that a 13 year old is getting services of 18 year old no 18 year old might not get services that they need at all. You know. But if it's all if all youth get it set up that way and they can transition out and they're not dependent on the program. They are strong they're independent and they're able to live on their own they have their housing they have a job they're able to Navigate the community. You know those kinds of things are important but they're not happening quite that way and they're just kind of closed out at 21. Is just like well what does that mean.

[00:05:39] But if it's transition that way then they already know at 21 , I will be ready I'll be ready to live in society I will be ready to pay taxes I might have a car because I'm 21 you know that kind of thing.

[00:05:53] But that got to be all built in so that they know because right they dont know. if you

[00:05:59] asked a young person you know what do they need to be independent. They don't they can't you know they think they know.

[00:06:08] Just being able to navigate to through CYF is enough they can't think about anything else.

[00:06:18] And lastly the question is in exploring safety nets for youth aging out of foster care.

[00:06:24] Please describe a discharge plan and follow with safety net. Oh definitely There has to be follow-up. Right, once there discharged you have to have You know maybe a month, six months You know. Twelve months some kind of follow-up to know that that young person is not in need of something. You know because they're not going to call you. You know you got to call them you know. So like there was a staff person to do that, it would be great And. Then make sure that when they're discharged that they have the basics like a package you know. That they have what they need. For their apartment, That they have an apartment that their not sofa surfing. That they have what they need for their apartment. That. That is secure with a job that they have transportation. All the things that they had when they were with you. Make sure that they have those things on their own and then make sure that they have a. Resource pack. So they whoever they need to call because before that we were calling all these people, Now they need to know how to call all These are all people that you need to call for this reason. Whatever reason that they're looking for. If they need utility assistance they need help with their rent if they are looking for jobs and their felons you know all that should be in a packet all to give it to them so that they have that at their fingertips. And with us calling at the month six month you know month three months six months. And 12 months then we know that they're okay and if they're not okay then we can do something about.

[00:08:20] That.

[00:08:22] Thank you very much. That concludes our portion of the interview. And again I want to thank you for your time and we'll be following up.

### **180905\_0009.MP3**

[00:00:02] Testing one two three. I'm going to be interviewing Ms. Five of Spades and we start by asking the first question which we've been consistent. What impediments are barriers have you viewed still exists with youth aging out of foster care.

[00:00:24] the level of consistency for them, the stability, I believe is still missing. They are often unsure and often and the way that.

[00:00:39] System pushes them along. As far Putting them in different programs according to their age. And that not according what their needs are.

[00:00:50] So some of them are aging out and Still missing some of the important skills as far as employment As. They're are not understanding the consistency of Going to work everyday, They feel they can call off and say whatever that they call off their boss later on down the line and explain the situation. And stuff like that. they often lose jobs. jumping around from place to places just like they were placement. they jump around from employer to employer. They're still jumping around. From school to school. Sometimes they age out and don't have their Diplomas yet. That that's definitely still a barrier. There out ther still uneducated and without the skills.

[00:01:40] Thank you. Question number two in your opinion how can the system strength then use adaptive living skills as they transition out of foster care.

[00:01:52] Put them into more actual situations. If they're in foster care and coming from group homes

[00:02:03] And things like that. We provide them a false environment We provide them with some sort of structure. But. We often work in Point systems and different Things like that. And that's not out in the real world I believe we can give them more exposure to what going on in the real world. For. As far as Mentors. Job Mentors and actually field that they're interested in, if they're able to. Go to that place. And actually be with that mentor for a while to see what it takes to actually have that position And how to interact with people. And how to maintain a job. Without letting your

[00:02:45] Life Issues get in the way. Thank you very much. And lastly question three in exploring safety nets for youth aging out of foster care. Please describe a discharge plan and follow up.

[00:03:01] So discharge plan. Pretty much.

[00:03:03] Always. We always go after the goal of the team And work that goal Then. You. Know if the goals is to get our own apartment we work that end goal. staff lines up all the housing places and take them to the different housing So they know where they are located. They go off the documentation that they need to apply for. Housing as well as apply and do the following. They also seek furniture and different programs that can assist.

[00:03:34] They have that are lined up when they leave as well. So they have all their contact information they have their workers at a facility or agency that they applied to Obtain information in a package. So. They have that As well. We always make sure they have vital documents as well because we know that's a chore for them to obtain and get in. They're not always sure Even where to get those documents. So we will always make sure they have that upon their discharge as well. We also make sure that we keep in contact we have a Facebook page. We have a Facebook alumni page that we make sure actually be linked to because of her Facebook. So we made sure before they leave click us on Facebook so that we can still reach out to them and then we can reach out to us if they still need that extra support.

[00:04:23] Or any questions. That concludes our interview. Thank you again Ms. Five of Spade.

### **180906\_0013.MP3**

[00:00:01] All right. We're here with Ms. Five of Heart she has voluntarily signed the consent form and we're going to ask her the same three questions that we've asked all participants. And the first question is what impediments or barriers have you viewed still exists with youth aging out of foster care.

[00:00:21] I feel like our teens are leaving foster care just because they're sick of The rules. Not because they're prepared to go. But because there just tired of all the Different rules. Things like that they hear that age I'm 18 and they are ready to go. and I get concerned about how.

[00:00:51] They will have some skills and we're trying to teach them some of those skills. But a lot of times they feel like away. That. You know. Well you know what your talking about it's your job. Because you know.

[00:01:04] That's back in day and not now. But I think that sometimes they're just so ready to get out because they feel like they have. Been in this situation for so long that I

just want to be out and see what it is like you. Said they're not prepared yet they're prepared. And I think that's why they change things up to teens and come back into the system because a lot of reason that they turn 18 and then they find out you know what it was harder and then they did these things probably the exemption cases where they come back into the system.

[00:01:48] Question number two.

[00:01:51] In your opinion. How can the system strengthen its youth adaptive living skills as they transition out of foster care systems. I think they. Are. More.

[00:02:17] I think their thoughts. Well I guess they consider them like scattered sites and stuff. Like that. Like. The program that we have it is called supervise independent living. But it's still very Supervised Like there still things that they don't have to do.

[00:02:35] Pay for and things like that. I think if the system found a way to have more of those scatter site around where it's almost like. The. Practice right before. Going out on my Own. I mean we're there we'll still have all those supports that they need. But really they're doing it on their own on their own terms far as paying their rent. Having a job. Things like that. I think that could really help them and always have that supported service. I think they have it now. Up until. He. Is 24 which I think is great. So they always have because all the kids that are in the system don't have a supportive family.

[00:03:14] not all of them. Some of them have family but they're not positive. Thank you. Really assist them but I think sometimes they need that mentor.

[00:03:24] Or that other person that they know is gonna give them the good advice regardless if it's something they want to hear or not. So I guess they continue to try to build that aspect up I think it could be a real asset to the kids because the way they used to have what they call Independent Living workers set up I felt like it was a Great support for them. They were In homes worker. So they would go to wherever the kids came to be in a group plan to be at home wherever as long as they used to be in the system they had IL work. And I think they changed that Now we're all IL workers are in one place and the kids have to come to them. That doesn't help you that is some time is they put a meet the kids where they are. And I think that was a great support once they change that a lot of the kids kind of fell off. Come along and a lot of them still come back talking about they miss that. Things like that. They sometimes need that supportive adult. That's now As they put It Like judging them because of their behavior. They're just there to help them . They have you support partners now. In there. I think they're good. But to me. I still feel like they're still youth. I mean so. I feel like if they have that Older more supportive person.



[00:04:49] It could be a real asset. And lastly question number three is exploring safety nets for youth aging out of foster care.

[00:05:00] Please describe a discharge plan and follow up this term when they're leaving out of the system like a transition plan. I think that plan needs to be done way before there are about to leave . i think a good year before there hitting eighteen, they like to do it at eighteen I've been So they can kind of foresee and Think about What am I going to Do. What do I need to do within this Year to get myself ready To be out on my own. A Lot of the kids don't think that far ahead. But if you have somebody set to do that that's the only thing you're working on with that. I think that would be great and they should have things on there like housing. Employment. Health insurance and if they have children you know child care plans Things like that. And also which is very important. Is. That. They called. Just someone outside find that relationship or something outside of people who get paid to do it. And sometimes family and sometimes it's just a family friend.

[00:06:19] Or someone like that. But I think they need those outside support. And sometimes they don't know them like it could be. Somebody to grow up with their mom but their mom is doing bad but. Mom still remember that that really helped out. So I just think they have to find a Way to build that to even on their transition or discharge plans. O.k. if you leave the system and everything shuts down Okay. Who else could you call just in case a lot of times in these discharge plans or transition plans the kids are naming their staff like who outside of them can you still call they have to find that type of relationship now I'm not saying that the staff is going to turn them away or anything like that but it would just be nice. If we could realistically look at that, because once all this is over who do you have

[00:07:16] Because once you leave there's about 10 or 20 other kids just like you on that staff caseload they're trying to help them out. So they just I would like to see that more on a discharge plan that realism.

[00:07:31] like a lot of times we say what are you going to do for work. Oh! I'm going to find a job.

[00:07:36] we need to add more to that like where are you going to look for a job Things like that. And. I think it needs to start earlier than 18 but that's typically when they start the transition at 18. You. Know that before. Doesn't they start started that age I'm 18. And when they starting getting that itch I'm grown and it's time for me to go. OK. But you're about. You don't have. A job. You don't have anywhere to Go or live. Oh, Ill apply for housing. Yes. We should have done that a while ago so is those type of things. I know sometimes they just seem like they should know they are ready but no not all the time. So it really, that discharge plan really has to lay out all these things they are going to need. Because the last thing our kids think of is health insurance. That's the last thing on their

mind is health insurance. I think that's important that we teach them how to get that. So Employment, housing health insurance. And I even like to be realistic with them too because like here everything is taken care of, how are you going to feed yourself, where are you going to wash them clothes at. Where are you going to get the money for it.

[00:08:41] Things like that. Thank you so much. Ms. Five of Heart

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[00:00:01] OK. We're going to be interviewing Ms. Five of Clubs and we're going to ask her the same questions that we've asked all voluntary participants.

[00:00:11] and let's start out. OK. What impediments or barriers have you viewed it still exists with youth aging out of the foster care.

[00:00:27] Well. The only thing I can think of is they are their own barrier because they're not usually prepared

[00:00:37] As much as they think they are. And a lot of times they refuse to Get Prepared. Example would be. Completing High school. Or you know. To. To do the work while in high school. And so they're not prepared with all

[00:01:04] the work that it takes to be an adult.

[00:01:10] Question number two in your opinion how can the system strengthen youth adaptive living skills as they transition out of foster care.

[00:01:26] Well. I think the different agencies and different programs they have out there address

[00:01:38] All or most of the needs of the kids have. But again they don't always take advantage of them when they should. Because. Again. They're just not mature enough. Yes they Have Had a lot of experiences in life that a lot of other kids their age Never had but they're still not mature enough to focus on What they need And. How to use it. When they get it. It's easier to blame somebody else. And not do what they have to do.

[00:02:24] Q.

[00:02:25] And lastly Question 3 In exploring safety nets for youth aging out of foster care. Please describe a discharge plan or follow what you think. Appropriate.

[00:02:44] Well. I guess the agency could make sure that they receive their housing if they're employed and being able to pay their rent. And they're.

[00:03:08] Good at budgeting. So they're not broke. Or lose their housing. So they can make sure they know about different resources like food banks or whatever so they can feed their child. And themselves. Make sure they're making contact with. The. Workers that they had before like in DHS they had you know there are a lot education liaison different people in. that order. Yeah I think that's pretty much it is just following up To see that they're there doing the steps that they had pre decided what They were going to take Once they move out. Again it's kind of hard to do that whenever the kids are just so anxious to move out they don't want to come up with a safety net but usually the direct care person tries to work with them to set that up. Thank you very much for your participation.

[00:04:21] Concludes this interview with Ms. Five of clubs did you have something else. Sounds like I'm blaming the kids for everything cause there good kids.