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THE SELF-EFFICACY OF FOSTER CARE YOUTH

Exploring Perceptions of Experiences that Promote Self-Efficacy in Foster Care

Youth: A Phenomenological Study

By

Keishea Allen

Dissertation Submitted In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Presented to the Faculty of the
College of Education, Information and Technology

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TRIBUTE

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ABSTRACT

Society expects foster care youth who age out of the system to be independent and autonomous directly, yet this is rarely the case. Many of these youth, unlike children that grew up with familial support, are ill-equipped to overcome the challenges of young adulthood or employ problem-solving skills. Thus, these foster care youth are a potential risk and prone to become a part of a vulnerable population. Foster care youth are less likely to graduate high school, go on to college or trade school, or successfully graduate from an academic program.

Despite these challenges, however, some foster care youth become successful and make a contribution to society by establishing a career or a trade, establishing a family, and sustaining gainful employment. This study aims to explore the perception of success factors that provide foster care youth the ability to be independent, successful, and lead a productive life.

The study uses a phenomenological qualitative design that utilizes a small non-probability sample to explore these perceived success factors. It is anticipated that the findings will assist the childcare system as well as policymakers in gaining a better understanding of the contributing factors that render foster care youth successful, independent, and self-sufficient.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

USDHHS United States Department of Health and Human Services

SDT Self Determination Theory

THE SELF-EFFICACY OF FOSTER CARE YOUTH

Chapter 1:

Overview & History

Foster care youth face daunting situations throughout childhood, experiencing many disruptions in life that can impair the stability of one's livelihood (Hedenstorm, 2014). Frequent moves while in foster care may disrupt a foster child's connections to family, friends, school, and to society as a whole (Ahrens et al., 2011; Courtney et al., 2001; Koh et al., 2014; Leslie et al., 2003). At the same time, various human costs such as drug abuse, early parenthood, homelessness and violence towards other individuals are prevalent risks (Courtney, Dworsky, Brown, Cary, Love & Vorhies, 2011; Courtney, Dworsky, Ruth, Keller, Havlicek & Bost, 2005; Courtney et al., 2001) that lead to negative life trajectories for this vulnerable population. Of all foster youth, ten to fifty percent grow to experience situations such as homelessness, drug abuse, poverty, and prison (Ahrens et al., 2011; Child Welfare League of America, 2007; Courtney et al., 2001; Reilly, 2003; Zlotnick et al., 2012). The frequent removal of foster youth from familiar individuals, lack of support, consistent transiency, and instability plague many foster children while within the foster care system and for many of these issues persist into adulthood. Foster care youth are at profound risk for poverty, psychological and emotional distress, homelessness, early pregnancy, and unemployment (Ahrens, DuBois, Richardson, Fan & Lozano, 2008; Courtney, Piliavin, Grogan-Kaylor & Nesmith, 2001). For many, the inconsistencies and instability of life have a profound impact on emotional health and the future. For some foster care youth transitioning out of foster care, the system ultimately leads to victimization. Interpersonal and life-success skills are often lacking, which result in difficulty connecting and relating to other people (Ahrens et al., 2011; Courtney & Dworsky, 2006; Courtney et al., 2001; Dworsky & Courtney, 2010). Courtney, Dworsky, Lee, and Raap state that youth who age out of the foster-care system at age 18 have a 25% chance of becoming

incarcerated, less than a 50% chance of high-school graduation, and a 20% chance of becoming homeless. Arnett (2007) suggests that youth aging out of foster care are more vulnerable than other young adults due to increased freedom and lack of family connections or adult support. The lack of family connections is a vital aspect of the vulnerability of this particular part of the population. In many ways, the foster care system curtails a person's growth due to a lack of independence, life skills, and a consistent positive adult presence to advocate on behalf of the youth (Christian, 2003). Because of this, some foster care youth are caught in a vicious cycle in which it is impossible to become self-sufficient and independent. However, a small percentage of foster care youth successfully transition from foster care to independent living without experiencing some of the negative trajectories that such individuals are often expected to face. The purpose of this study is to identify the perceptions of experiences that promote self-efficacy and lead foster care youth to successfully transition from foster care into leading independent, successful lives.

Inquiry and Background

Approximately 442,995 children were in foster care at the end of the 2017 federal fiscal year (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019, USDHHS, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, Children's Bureau, 2017). Of the 442,995 children, fifty-two percent were male, and forty-eight percent were female. For a decade, from the 2006 federal fiscal year to the 2016 federal fiscal year, this proportion of males to females was consistent. Most children are placed in foster care due to neglect, abuse, or abandonment (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2002; Courtney, Needell, & Wulczyn, 2004; Courtney et al., 2001; Zlotnick, Tam & Soman, 2012). To understand the implications of foster care on foster youth, one must understand the background of foster care, its intent, current policies, and its leading ideologies.

Child Welfare history in the United States epitomizes the prevailing attitudes toward care of neglected, orphaned, and abused children (Gonzalez, 2015). In the 1700s, children neglected or abandoned by parents would often be indentured to work for other families (Lindsey, 2004; Wulczyn, Chen & Brunner, 2007). In the 1800s, charitable organizations and private religious groups developed the first orphanages. By the late 1800s, children who were residing in orphanages began to be placed with foster families. At this time, prospective foster families were rarely screened for competence, and the homes of such families were rarely monitored for safety (Lindsey, 2004; Wulczyn, Chen & Brunner, 2007). Only two centuries later, does federal legislation mandate the care and protection of children in foster care placement (Gonzalez, 2015).

While all states did not initially provide child welfare services during the following decades, an amendment to the Social Security Act in 1967 now requires that all states offer foster care services for applicable children (Lindsey, 2004; Wulczyn, Chen & Brunner, 2007). This mandate is mainly responsible for the increased number of children placed in foster care or other out of home living arrangements (Lindsey, 2004; Wulczyn, Chen & Brunner, 2007). It was at this time that States chose to create a type of structure and organization, which allows legislation to provide for foster care maintenance payments. Or states being of being eligible for these payments, the 'rules must comply with specific federal law and guidelines' (Gonzalez, 2015).

The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) of 1974 requires states to establish child abuse reporting procedures and investigation systems (Gonzalez, 2015). This period is when the child welfare system embraced better organization and chose to mandate child abuse reporting by hospital doctors and staff as well as human services workers (Gonzalez 2015). When these systems began to expand beyond the original scope of federal intent, many of the youth in foster care would reach eighteen years of age, at which point the state was no longer

required to provide care (Lindsey, 2004). Courtney, Dworsky, Lee, and Raap (2009) stated that youth who age out of the foster care system at eighteen years of age have a higher chance of becoming incarcerated, less than a 50% chance of high school graduation, and a 20% chance of becoming homeless.

In the 1970s and the 1980s, researchers (McDonald, Allen, Westerfelt and Piliavin, 1996 Child Welfare League, 1999) would discover adverse outcomes for youth leaving care and becoming independent adults. Thus, this research would enact one of the first policies to impact older youth aging out of foster care. The Federal Independent Living Initiative of 1986 (ILP) provides funding to assist more former youth in transitioning from foster care to independence (Child Welfare League of America, 1999). Funding for this federal policy is mandatory in all states under the Social Security Act in 1993 (Lindsey, 2004; Wulczyn, Chen & Brunner, 2007). This funding is intended to assist the respective state's child welfare agencies in meeting the needs of youth transitioning from foster care or juvenile justice facilities to independent living programs (Child Welfare League of America, 1999). Youth are eligible for ILP at the age of 16 and older to transition into independence by becoming self-sufficient adults. Funds can also be used for life skills training and vocational support, educational assistance, and counseling (Child Welfare League of America, 1999).

In 1997, the landmark legislation was known as the Adoption, and Safe Families Act (ASFA) was passed. This legislation is intended to reduce the time that children remain in foster care before being eligible for adoption. This results in children not lingering in temporary custody since it makes permanency planning a goal within the first two years (Child Welfare League of America, 1999). This act also provides a short time frame for the child's biological family to secure custody or lose inherent parental rights to the state (Child Welfare League of America, 1999). This legislation is imperative to child welfare policy. Still, it is less applicable

to youth, the likes of which are not involved in the adoption process for various reasons (Child Welfare League of America, 1999).

The Foster Care Independence Act (FICA) of 1999 now invalidates the Independent Living Program (ILP) by extending independent living services and increasing eligibility of older youth who could access services. Access to services also includes individuals who left care and returned to care before turning twenty-one years of age. This concept has altered the range of foster youth that can access services, a notion absent from previous legislation. FICA funding is also doubled compared to the original to facilitate better state provision and extension of services to all eligible foster youth (Child Welfare League of America, 1999).

At the time, policymakers and welfare workers would suggest a longer time frame under the care of the state for older youth to prepare for transitioning to adulthood after emancipation was indicated (Gonzalez, 2015). The suggestion would propose that time should be extended past the age of 18, and that youth additionally should secure other adults' support before leaving state care (Gonzalez, 2015). The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act" (the "FCA" or "Fostering Connections Act") is a direct result of the advocacy of the extension of care, resulting in its passage into law on October 7, 2008, The FCA provides federal funds to enable states to extend child welfare services through age twenty-one. With this expansion, young adults in foster care can get additional support, especially counseling and psychological help, after being emancipated from care up to the age of twenty-four. By utilizing the -in drop centers, older youth get assistance with career, educational guidance, and other needed referrals (Gonzalez, 2015).

The Foster Care Mentoring Act of 2011 and the Reconnecting Youth to Prevent Homelessness Act of 2011 are the two most recent federal laws directly impacting foster care youth (Gonzalez, 2015). The Foster Care and Mentoring Act supports the establishment or

expansion and operation of programs using a network of public and private communities to provide mentoring to children in care. The purpose of the Reconnecting Youth to Prevent Homelessness Act is to establish financial stability, which includes any necessary extension of foster care, adoption or kinship placements to ensure permanency during the out of care transitional planning phase. This act intends to prevent premature discharge from state care and increase social networks and human connections for youth while transitioning to adulthood (Gonzalez, 2015).

Statement of Purpose

Much foster care youth have difficulties transitioning out of care into an independent and self-sufficient status. However, much foster care youth develop life skills and independent living skills to adequately prepare for successful societal function, thus avoiding dependence on government subsidies. The purpose of this study is to determine the perceived experiences that promote self-efficacy in foster care youth. This, in turn, should provide the opportunity to lead independent, self-sufficient, and successful lives beyond an individual's an exit/transition from the system.

Further, this study aims to highlight youth who successfully age out of care, thus providing information to policymakers, agencies, and other entities that are charged with the responsibility of caring for and working with foster care youth. These stakeholders can benefit from understanding what factors contribute to self-sufficiency, independence, and other positive outcomes for foster care youth. Such knowledge will also enable them to avoid relevant pitfalls, thus increasing the likelihood of living more adaptive, constructive, and productive lives.

Research Question

The ability to live independently of others or social systems establishes a more massive output of achievement for former foster care youth. Before the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, emancipated foster youth received limited services from the state government. Now, states must provide foster care youth ages eighteen to twenty-one with services to help said youth make the transition from foster care to self-sufficiency. Agencies such as the Casey Family Program, the Independent Living Program through the California Community College Foundation, and other state-funded Independent Living Programs offer transitional support through technical and vocational training services. These services are designed to provide former foster youth with employment services, such as personal and emotional support through mentors and dedicated adults, financial assistance, housing, counseling, and many other supports and services (Freundlich & Barbell, 2001). The following research question will guide this study:

1. To what events or experiences do foster care youth attribute personal success?

Significance of the Study

It is crucial for one to understand that depending upon the social issues at the defined period in time, society's view of what is essential will shape the policies that impact foster care (Hendenstrom, 2014). What citizens and politicians feel are crucial are the strategies that will receive attention, support, and financial commitments. If it is a defined period where citizens and politicians think that there are other issues more important and critical than that of aiding foster care youth, social policies and funding will reflect that decision. When social or financial support is lacking for foster care youth, it further impacts the likelihood of said youth leading independent and self-sufficient lives. When foster care youth are unprepared to enter adulthood as self-employed and autonomous individuals, the potential economic and social cost is daunting

(Hedenstrom, 2014). These costs manifest in the form of dependence on social welfare systems such as Medicaid, housing assistance, and food assistance. It is worth noting that at the time of this study, the political climate was one of reducing funding to social programs such as Medicaid, food support, housing, financial aid, and a plethora of other programs. Three basic needs for human beings to function adequately are facing significant funding reductions. Inevitably, this will impact foster care youth.

Perhaps the highest cost to society is for those who become incarcerated. The cost of incarceration varies from state to state. To provide a random sample of the cost of incarceration, the per inmate cost of incarceration was retrieved from the Vera Institute of Justice's website to highlight this point (Retrieved January 2, 2017, from <https://www.vera.org/>). The Vera Institute of Justice sample provides the per inmate cost for 40 states. The information listed shows the highest cost of incarceration to the least expensive cost of incarceration. In regards to this sample, the cost of incarceration in various states is as follows: New York is an astounding \$60,076, New Jersey cost \$54,865, Vermont cost \$49,502, Minnesota cost \$41,364, Colorado cost \$30,374, Arkansas cost \$24,291 and Alabama cost \$17,285. These random costs of incarceration have been chosen to highlight the variance in costs and to show where funding could be re-distributed to assist foster care youth in avoiding the pitfalls of poor decision-making skills, which could lead to incarceration.

For example, in a state survey of California prisoners conducted by the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) in collaboration with the California Senate Office of Research (SOR) in June 2008, 2,564 adult inmates were polled to discern how many were once foster care children. Of the 2,564 inmates, 356 of the inmates, 14%, were in foster care at some point in their lives. Of this percentage of inmates, nineteen percent of male inmates reported being incarcerated less than two years of leaving foster care. Fifteen percent of female inmates

said being detained less than two years of going to foster concern. Fifty-five percent of male inmates and sixty-three percent of female inmates said being arrested five years after leaving foster care (McCarthy and Gladstone, 2011).

An Annie E. Casey Foundation study (2004), shows that male former foster youth are more than four times more likely to be arrested than the general population, and females are ten times more likely to be arrested than the general population. Another study, The Chapin Hall Midwest Study at Age 21, shows that thirty percent of youth participating in the Midwest Study report being arrested, 15% report being convicted of a crime, and 29% report being incarcerated. In the California State Prison-Child Welfare Data Linkage Study (2014), the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), Research Services Branch (RSB), matches records from two datasets: California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) prison inmate admissions data and CDSS Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) foster care data. The CDCR's dataset contained 133,149 unique counts of inmates born after January 1, 1982, and admitted to state prison between January 1, 2000, and July 31, 2013. The CWS/CMS dataset included 1,014,282 youth aged 15 and over as of July 31, 2013. An open-source probabilistic record linking software was used to match records from the two datasets. Significant findings from the analysis include: (i) 28 percent of the inmates had a case and placement history before their incarceration; and (ii) female inmates possess a higher percentage of matched records in the CWS/CMS file than male inmates. A secondary analysis recommended by the University of California, Berkeley (UCB) researchers focuses on young adult inmates with foster care placement history. For that analysis, CDCR's dataset contains 31,586 unique counts of inmates born on or after January 1, 1988, who were admitted to state prison between July 1, 2011, and June 30, 2013. These records were matched to CWS/CMS individuals born before June 30, 1999, and had a placement episode that began or was open on or after July 1, 1998. The CWS/CMS had 405,670 cases meeting these criteria. This analysis

reveals that 27 percent of young adult prison inmates had experienced a foster care placement. The money spent to incarcerate inmates, where applicable, could be allocated to provide the resources needed for foster care youth transitioning out of care to live independent and successful lives.

Much of the research conducted on foster care youth focuses on the challenges that foster care youth face. Still, few studies present the success factors of foster care youth who navigate the system and go on to live independent and self-sufficient lives. With more focus on the success factors of the child who successfully transitioned out of foster care, stakeholders will be able to identify the factors for success. These factors can then be utilized to create model programs and impact policy for all foster care youth. This study will determine the perceptions of experiences that promote self-efficacy in foster care youth and will provide stakeholders with a value-added approach to the self-efficacy of foster care youth.

An Interdisciplinary Approach

This study will have wide-reaching implications for several interdisciplinary fields. For example, teachers, doctors, social services, mental health, business owners, policymakers, and government officials all play a role in the interaction with foster care youth. Being armed with up-to-date information on ways in which each field can help to contribute to the successful outcomes of foster care youth could begin to make a difference in the lives of those youth.

A study commissioned by the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care contends that policymakers and service providers do not give enough consideration to the views of the youth, parents, and foster parents (Hochman, Hochman & Miller 2004). Foster care is seen as a last resort to temporarily keep children safe from abuse and neglect from immediate family. The goal is to reunify the child with the immediate family in the shortest amount of time possible, preferably twelve months or less (Lewis, 1964); foster care is viewed as a temporary measure.

Therefore, the longer a child stays in foster care, the more likely the child will have to move from placement to placement. The average number of installations is two. However, nearly 18% of children have experienced six or more placements (Freundlich & Barbell, 2001). The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 provides monetary assistance to the child welfare system to facilitate permanency for foster youth. In instances where reunification is not possible, the Act provides incentives to encourage foster families to adopt or become long-term adoptive care parents (Westat, 2001). The study will help remedy this situation by identifying the experiences of foster care youth, as well as consider the feedback of that youth on the impact of multiple placements. The adventures of these individuals will aid in presenting effective solutions in addressing this concern.

The longer a child remains in foster care, the more complex reunification becomes with the immediate family. After twelve months of out-of-home care, a child will go through a permanency hearing to decide the last residence, whether that is with kin or an adoptive family. In 2001, 57% of the children exiting foster care were reunified with one or both blood-related parents, although nearly one-third of these children returned to foster care within three years (Wolanin, 2005).

Advocates and policymakers should work with businesses, school social services providers, child care systems, and mental health agencies to create and form partnerships that will enhance and contribute to the success factors, thereby impacting a positive outcome of foster care youth. The data that will be collected in this study will potentially contribute to the establishment of programs that will assist foster youth in becoming successful.

Cultural Implications

The largest contingent of children in foster care is those of a minority background. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services claims that children of color represent 64% of

all the children in the foster care system, though they represent only 39% of the child population in the nation (Casey Family Programs, 2006). The 2005 Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) estimates that there were about 523,000 children in foster care in 2003. Of those, Black children in foster care made up a disproportionately high number of 35%, given that Blacks make up 15% of the U.S. population of children. Of the other racial groups, White children represented 39%, Latina/Latino children represented 17%, Asian children represented 1%, Native American children represented 2%, and the unknown racial groups made up 6% in 2003. Males in foster care were 7% higher than females. The median age was 10.9 years old (Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, 2005).

Children of color, especially Black children, are less likely to reunite with their families according to a study by Westsat (2001), which found that 34% of White children were reunited compared to 9% of Black children. The study “concluded that race continues to play a major role in the reunification of children in addition to other children, family and case history characteristics, [such as] age of entry, caretaker job skills, caretaker substance abuse problems, and caretaker services” (p. 14).

Research needs to focus on why these children end up in foster care. Has society stratified these children? Do these families require additional support that would allow children to be adequately raised without removal from said family? Can families remain intact, if provided with the appropriate support?

Theoretical Framework

This study will utilize the theoretical frameworks of Erikson’s Stages of Psychosocial Development Theory, Vygotskies Environmental Theory, and Deci and Ryan’s Self Determination Theory. In exploring the perceptions of experiences that promote self-efficacy in foster care youth, these theoretical frameworks will provide insight into the development or

stagnation of development within foster care youth; where and how an individual develops psychosocially, the sociocultural exposure and cognitive developments, combined with the intrinsic motives and extrinsic forces inherent in human nature has a severe impact on the sensitive population of foster care youth.

Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development Theory

Each person in life has a unique identity. That is, the fact of being who or what a person or thing is (Oxford Dictionaries). Erik Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development emphasizes the sociocultural determinants of development. It presents these determinants as eight stages of psychosocial conflicts (often known as Erikson's stages of psychosocial development) that all individuals must overcome or resolve successfully to adjust well to the environment (Heffner, 2014 & PsychologynotesHQ, 2017).

A person's identity is composed of the different personality traits that can be considered positive or negative. These personality traits can also be innate or acquired, and they vary from one person to another based on the degree of influence that the environment has on the individual. The final result is that human beings possess many characteristics that are honed in many different aspects that eventually define individual identity (Heffner, 2014 & PsychologynotesHQ, 2017). Erikson states that all humans encounter a particular crisis that contributes to psychosocial growth at each of the stages of psychosocial development. Whenever humans experience such a crisis, it must be faced and resolved. Failure to overcome such an emergency may lead to a significant impact on human psychosocial development (Heffner, 2014 & PsychologynotesHQ, 2017). Foster care youth often encounter crises beyond the scope of possessed ability or reason.

Stage One – Trust vs. Mistrust

The first stage of Erikson's stages starts from infant to approximately 18 months. At this stage, infants must learn how to trust others, particularly those who care for the infant's basic needs. The infant should feel that adequate care is provided to them on a basic level of necessity.

Small babies are new to this world and may view the outside world as threatening. Depending on how babies are treated by other people, the sense of threat can be replaced by trust. When this happens, the infant gains a sense of security and begins to trust other people.

The first and most important person to teach an infant about trust is usually the parents or caregivers. Parents are expected to take good care of children and attend to a child's needs. For example, the parents of a baby provide that baby with food, shelter, sustenance, security, and comfort (Heffner, 2014 & PsychologynotesHQ, 2017).

Stage Two – Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt

At step two of the Erikson's stages, children should be taught the primary ways of competent care, including changing clothes and eating food. If a child can't take care of basic needs and continues to rely on others for attention, the child may feel ashamed when seeing other kids of a similar usage performing these tasks(Heffner, 2014 & PsychologynotesHQ, 2017).

Stage Three – Initiative vs. Guilt

As children continue to grow up, the urge to explore and do things autonomously increases. At step three of the Erikson's stages, children can learn new concepts introduced in school and are expected to practice these lessons in real life. Children in this stage know that

these tasks can be accomplished without assistance, but failure to do so may result in the sense of guilt (Heffner, 2014 & PsychologynotesHQ, 2017).

Stage Four – Industry vs. Inferiority

At Erikson's psychosocial stage four, children mature, and the level of self-awareness increases. Logical reasoning, scientific facts, and other matters that are typically taught in school are now truly understood.

Children also become more competitive during this Erikson stage of development. The need to perform feats and tasks that other children are capable of increases. When the effort is made to perform a task and success follows, the child develops self-confidence. However, if the result is a failure, the child tends to feel inferior to others (Heffner, 2014 & PsychologynotesHQ, 2017).

Stage Five – Identity vs. Role Confusion

During adolescence, young people are expected to develop a sexual identity. This is gained through the discovery of oneself and in the course of finding meaning to one's personhood. This transition from childhood to adulthood may also result in an identity crisis.

Some adolescents may feel confused and are unsure whether an activity is appropriate to engage in personally. Crisis at this stage may also be brought about by one's expectations and from others, such as parents(Heffner, 2014 & PsychologynotesHQ, 2017).

Stage Six – Intimacy vs. Isolation

Step six of the Erikson's stages is very apparent for young adults aged thirty to forty. People at this stage become worried about finding the right partner and fear that failure to do so may result in a life of solitude.

Young adults are most vulnerable to feelings of intimacy and loneliness because this stage of a person's life involves a great deal of interaction with others. Unfortunately, not every young adult finds individuals deserving of lifelong commitment. Some may choose to spend life single (Heffner, 2014 & PsychologynotesHQ, 2017).

Stage Seven – Generativity versus Stagnation

Adults aged 40 to 50 tend to find meaning in work. This is the point in which one feels compelled to contribute something meaningful to society and leave a legacy. Failure to achieve this may result in the notion of being an unproductive member of the community (Heffner, 2014 & PsychologynotesHQ, 2017).

Stage Eight – Ego Integrity vs. Despair

At the last stage of Erikson's stages, people are sixty years of age or older and are typically retirees. It is at this point that a sense of fulfillment stemming from significant accomplishments in youth becomes essential. These individuals need to look back on life and feel that it was lived to the fullest. If the individual feels that life has been meaningless thus far, feelings of despair will likely be experienced (Heffner, 2014 & PsychologynotesHQ, 2017).

Foster care youth face implicit hindrances that impact the ability to complete stages 1-5 of Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development, which are critical years for any youth. For

foster care youth, these years are even more crucial, grounded in the discovery of one's self and personal identity. The essential virtues of hope, will, purpose, competency, fidelity, and love are often lacking in these youth. This lack of development can lead foster care youth down a spiraling path of failure, unworthiness, and distrust.

Vygotsky's Environmental Theory

Vygotsky's Social Development Theory is the work of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934). Vygotsky's work was mostly unknown to the West until being published in 1962. It asserts three major themes regarding social interaction, the more knowledgeable other, and the zone of proximal development.

Vygotsky's main assertion was that children are entrenched in different sociocultural contexts, with cognitive development check space advancing through social interaction with more skilled individuals. The Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development is mainly concerned with the more complex cognitive activities of children that are governed and influenced by several principles. Believing that children construct knowledge actively, Vygotsky's theory is also one of those responsible for laying the groundwork for constructivism (Vygotsky, 1980). Foster care children frequently lack positive role models to interact with and aid in constructing a social framework for appropriate life skills. Consequently, these children are inadequately socialized to solve problems and acquire an autonomous and productive sense of being.

Zone of Proximal Development

Vygotsky is most recognized for the concept of Zone of Proximal Development or ZPD about the learning of children. Children who are in the area of proximal development for a specific task can almost perform the job independently but are just shy of being capable.

However, with an appropriate amount of assistance, these children can accomplish the task (Moll, 2014).

The lower limit of a child's zone of proximal development is the level of analysis and problem-solving reached by a child without any help. The upper limit, on the other hand, is the level of additional responsibility that a child can receive with the support of a skilled instructor. As children are verbally given instructions or shown how to perform specific tasks, the newly acquired information is organized into the child's existing mental schemas to assist in the ultimate goal of completing the task independently. This emphasis on the concept of Zone of Proximal Development made by Vygotsky underscores the notion that social influences, particularly instruction, are of immense importance in the cognitive development of children (Moll, 2014).

Foster care youth often experience frequent periods of transiency. Thus, moving from place to place or school to school makes it difficult for these youth to establish rapport with others. Therefore, some foster care youth may never experience the tutelage of a skilled instructor or recognize when a qualified instructor is available.

More Knowledgeable Other

Children are entrenched in a sociocultural backdrop (e.g., at home) in which social interaction with significant adults, such as the parents, plays a crucial factor that affects individual learning. These adults need to direct and organize the learning experiences to ensure that the children can master and internalize the learning experiences. According to Vygotsky's theory, any person who possesses a higher skill level than the learner about a particular task or concept is called a More Knowledgeable Other or MKO. This person may be a teacher, a parent, an older adult, a coach, or even a peer (Moll, 2014).

Scaffolding

Vygotsky's concept of scaffolding is closely related to the idea of the Zone of Proximal Development. Scaffolding refers to the temporary support given to a child by More Knowledgeable Others, usually parents or teachers, that enable the child to perform a task until such a time that the child can already play the task independently (Moll, 2014).

Scaffolding entails changing the quality and quantity of support provided to a child in the course of a teaching session. The more-skilled instructor adjusts the level of guidance needed to fit the student's current level of performance. For different tasks, the instructor may utilize direct instruction. As the child gains more familiarity with the job and becomes more skilled at it, the instructor may then provide less guidance (Vygotsky, 1978).

Children who experience more difficulty in task performance require more considerable significant assistance and guidance from an adult. When the child has learned to complete the task independently, the scaffolds are removed by the adult, as they are no longer needed.

A significant contribution of Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development is the acknowledgment of the social component in both cognitive and psychosocial development. Due to Vygotsky's proffered ideas, research attention has been shifted from the individual onto larger interactional units such as parent and child, teacher and child, or brother and sister (Moll, 2014).

Vygotsky's theory likewise calls attention to the variability of cultural realities, stating that the development of children who are in one culture or subculture, such as middle-class Asian Americans, may be different from children who hail from other societies or subcultures. It would not be fitting, therefore, to utilize the developmental experiences of children from one culture as a norm for children from different cultures (Vygotsky, 1980).

Foster care youth is comprised of varying cultural backgrounds and usually come from lower socioeconomic families. Without the support of a stable adult, these youth often do not receive the support needed to thrive cognitively optimally and psychosocially. This leads to a lack of preparedness in academic skills, social skills, and life function skills.

Self Determination Theory

One aspect of removing barriers for foster care youth who are aging out or transitioning out of care is the ability for these youth to assess personal levels of self-determination and achieve something in life, or at minimum to be keenly aware of the impact that self-determination will have on the outcome of one's life. The cumulative experiences for each foster care youth should provide the ability to utilize personal experiences as a propelling force to move forward and thrive in life. However, this researcher notes their own personal biases and believes that anyone who has had a challenging childhood, should want to overcome the obstacles of that childhood and live a productive life with positive outcomes. Deci and Ryan summarized this bias as the ability to want to have a successful future. The ability to mobilize one's efforts and persist at the tasks of life and work (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000).

Self Determination Theory (SDT) is the relationship between the extrinsic forces acting on persons and the intrinsic motives and needs inherent in human nature (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). SDT represents a broad framework for the study of human motivation and personality. SDT articulates a meta-theory for framing motivational studies, a formal theory that defines natural and varied extrinsic sources of motivation, and a description of the respective roles of intrinsic and types of extrinsic motivation in cognitive and social development as well as in individual differences. Perhaps, more importantly, is that SDT propositions also focus on how social and cultural factors facilitate or undermine people's sense of volition and initiative, in addition to personal well-being and the quality of individual performance (Deci & Ryan, 1985 &

2000). “Conditions supporting the individual’s experience of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are argued to foster the most volitional and high quality forms of motivation and engagement for activities, including enhanced performance, persistence, and creativity. Besides, SDT proposes that the degree to which any of these three psychological needs is unsupported or thwarted within a social context will have a robust detrimental impact on wellness in that setting” (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). The dynamics of psychological need support and need thwarting have been studied within various settings (classrooms, teams, organizations, families, cultures, and clinics) using specific propositions detailed within SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). The framework of SDT thus has both broad and behavior-specific implications for understanding practices and structures that enhance versus diminishing need satisfaction and the full functioning that follows from it.

SDT is an organismic dialectical approach. It begins with the assumption that people are active organisms, with evolved tendencies towards growing, mastering ambient challenges, and integrating new experiences into a coherent sense of self (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). For foster care youth, this very sense of self can be enlightening or detrimental to the person. The research of McDonald et al. (1996) shows that foster care youth often don’t have a consistent, supportive system in place to rely on for personal growth and learning needs. Thus, many foster care do not develop a coherent confident sense of self. These natural developmental tendencies do not, however, operate automatically, but instead require ongoing social nutrients and support (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). That said it is the social context, which can either support or thwart the natural tendencies toward active engagement and psychological growth, as well as catalyze lack of integration, defense, and fulfillment of need-substitutes. Thus, it is the dialectic between the dynamic organism and the social context that is the basis for SDT’s predictions about behavior, experience, and development (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000).

SDT focuses on healthy development and functioning, explicitly utilizing the concept of basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. To the extent that the requirements are continuously satisfied, people will develop and function effectively and experience wellness. However, to the extent that the basic psychological needs are thwarted, people will develop and work effectively and experience wellness but will more likely experience ill-being and non-optimal functioning. The darker sides of human behavior and experience, such as certain types of psychopathology, prejudice, and aggression are understood in terms of reactions to basic needs having thwarted either developmentally or proximally (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). SDT's formal theory is comprised of six mini methods. Each of the methods were developed to explain a set of motivationally based phenomena that emerged from field and laboratory research. Each theory addresses one facet of motivation or personality functioning (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). A close look at these theories helps to explain how demotivation might be a hindrance to the self-efficacy of foster care youth. It is essential to know that a vulnerable context like foster care youth could exasperate the pitfalls of those outcomes. Providers must seek to develop the tools and skills necessary for foster care youth to build self-efficacy.

Formal Theory: SDT's Mini Theories

1. Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET) equates to intrinsic motivation, motivation that is based on the satisfaction of behaving "for its own sake." CET addresses the effects of social contexts on intrinsic motivation explicitly, or how factors such as rewards, interpersonal controls, and ego-involvements impact intrinsic motivation and interest (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). CET emphasizes the critical roles played by competence, and autonomy supports fostering intrinsic motivation, which is essential to education, sports, art, and many other domains (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000).

2. Organismic Integration Theory (OIT), explains the topic of extrinsic motivation in its variety of forms, with their properties, determinants, and consequences. Extrinsic motivation is behavior that is instrumental in aiming toward outcomes extrinsic to the action itself. Yet, there are distinct forms of instrumentality, which include external regulation, introjection, identification, and integration (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). The subtypes above fall along a continuum of internalization (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). The more internalized the extrinsic motivation, the more autonomous the person will be when enacting the behaviors. OIT is additionally concerned with social contexts that enhance or forestall internalization, which contributes towards people either resisting, partially adopting, or deeply internalizing values, goals, or belief systems. OIT particularly highlights support for autonomy and relatedness as critical to internalization (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000).
3. Causality Orientation Theory (COT), describes individual differences in people's tendencies to orient towards environments and regulate behavior in various ways. COT describes and assesses three types of causality orientations: the autonomy orientation in which persons act out of interest in and valuing of what is occurring, the control orientation in which the focus is on rewards, gains, and approval; and the impersonal or motivation orientation characterized by anxiety concerning competence (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000).
4. Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT) further discusses the concept of evolved psychological needs and the relation of those needs to mental health, and wellbeing. BPNT argues that psychological well-being and optimal functioning is predicated on autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Therefore, contexts that support versus thwart these needs should invariantly impact wellness. The theory argues that all three requirements are essential and that if any need is stopped, there will be distinct functional

costs (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). Since basic needs are universal aspects of functioning, BPNT looks at cross-developmental and cross-cultural settings for validation and refinements (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000).

5. Goal Contents Theory (GCT) is fostered out of the distinctions between intrinsic and extrinsic goals and their impact on motivation and wellness. Goals are seen as differentially affording basic need satisfactions and are thus differentially associated with well-being (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). Extrinsic goals such as financial success, appearance, and popularity or fame have been specifically contrasted with intrinsic goals such as community, close relationships, and personal growth, with the former more likely associated with lower wellness and greater ill-being (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000).
6. Relationship Motivation Theory (RMT) correlates to relatedness. This has to do with the development and maintenance of close personal relationships, such as. Best friends, belonging to groups and romantic partners. This is one of three basic psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). RMT is concerned with these and other relationships. RMT posits that some amount of such interactions is not merely desirable for most people. Still, it is essential for healthy adjustment and well-being because the relationships provide the satisfaction of the need for relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). However, Deci and Ryan (1985, 2005) show that not only is the need for relatedness satisfied in high-quality relationships, but the need for autonomy, and to a lesser degree competence, are also satisfied. Indeed, the highest quality personal relationships are ones in which each partner supports the independence, power, and relatedness of the other (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). If the autonomy, competence, and relatedness skills of foster care youth are not thoroughly developed without significant setbacks, these experiences and crafts are often lacking. Overall, cross-cultural tests of SDT have led to an increased understanding of how economic and cultural forms impact

the invariant aspects of human nature (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). By focusing on the fundamental psychological tendencies toward intrinsic motivation and integration, SDT occupies a unique position in psychology, as it addresses not only the central questions of why people behave in specific ways but also the costs and benefits of various ways of socially regulating or promoting behavior (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000).

Foster youth's negative developmental consequences due to being placed in care are well documented (Burns, Phillips, Wagner, Barht, Kolko, Campbell, et al., 2004). However, few studies exist on the self-efficacy of foster care youth. More focus has been placed on the adverse outcomes of foster care youth. The negative consequences include increased behavior and mental health problems (Clausen, Landsverk, Ganger, Chadwick & Litrownik, 1998; Lawrence et al., 2006), more troubled peer relationships (Bolger, Patterson, & Kupersmidt, 1998) and decreased community involvement (Courtney et al., 2001). These developmental areas consistently present challenges for foster youth living in care and for those who have transitioned out of consideration. These areas have also been found to have mediator effects for other outcomes (Kuperminc, Emshoff, Reiner, Secrest, Niolon & Foster, 2005). Depending on the results of this study, effective measures should be taken to improve, ensure, and enhance the self-efficacy of foster care youth.

Definitions of terms:

The terms below are used throughout this study.

Aging-Out. This is represented as the age in which a state entity is no longer responsible for foster care youth because the youth have reached the legal age limit for which an entity is responsible for said youth. In most states, youth age out at age 21, however, if a youth is enrolled in college or trade school some states allow that youth to continue being in foster care

until the academic program is completed, within a reasonable amount of time (Child Welfare League of America, 1999).

Autonomy. Freedom from external control or influence, independence. Independence or freedom as of the will of one's actions. (Retrieved October 11, 2016, from <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/autonomy>)

Efficacy. The power to produce a desired result or effect. (Retrieved October 11, 2016, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/efficacy>)

Emerging Adulthood. The period of life from age 18 through the late twenties. This is a period of time when young people are exploring the possibilities of life and beginning to define a personal identity as adults rather than teenagers. It is a period of exploration, instability, potential, self-focus, and a sustained self of being in limbo (Arnett, 2004).

Independent Living Program (ILP). A federally funded government program that was developed in 1986 after research showed foster care youth were over-represented in the homeless population. An amendment to the plan occurred in 1999, and it is now known as the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (Wolanin, 2005).

Motivation. The act or process of giving someone a reason for doing something. A force or influence that causes someone to do something. (Retrieved October 11, 2016, from <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/motivation>)

Opportunity. An amount of time or a situation in which something can be done. (Retrieved October 11, 2016, from <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/opportunity>)

Post-Secondary. After high school. Post high school (Created October 11, 2016, by Keishea Allen)

Self-Determination. The process by which people assume control of life. Controlling one's destiny, facilitated by a combination of attitudes and beliefs which lead people to set personal goals and take the initiative to reach these goals. (Retrieved October 11, 2016, from <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/self-determination>)

Success. Foster care youths who have aged out or transitioned out of foster care and can live independently, in the sense that no government assistance is being received. The youth maintain permanent residency and sustain financial, emotional, and mental stability while not relying on government assistance to survive. Foster youth have the desire and will be motivated to become self-sufficient and be independent. (Created October 11, 2016, by Keishea Allen)

Support. To give help or assistance to someone. This may be social, financial, or emotional. (Retrieved October 11, 2016, from <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/support>)

Well-Being. The state of being comfortable, healthy, or possessing the ability to function independently. (Retrieved October 11, 2016, from <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/well-being>)

Limitations in Current Research

The flaws in current research:

1. This research does not focus on factors such as sexual orientation, religion, and culture, which may have a substantial impact on the outcomes for foster care youth. However, this study is not looking at those variables.

2. This study solely focuses on young adults who graduated high school, college, or a trade school and the factors that contributed to the success of those individuals. It will also

include information on some young adults who did not successfully navigate the path of trajectory for success.

3. The sample identified for this study was two young adults who resided in the tri-state area and were willing to discuss the perceptions of personal experiences that promoted self-efficacy in foster care youth.

4. The willingness to foster care youth to participate in interviews may impact the study.

5. Foster care child who does not possess a definite sense of self-success, based on society's definition of success.

6. Lack of access to the wide geographical spread of agencies and providers.

Retrospective Reconstruction can compromise the trustworthiness of the data because when asked to recall events, participants may not recall those events accurately and thus fill in or make up the details that are not remembered

This study was a non-probability purposive sample, from 2 young adults who aged out of the system, attended some college and are employed. This sample size does not represent the entirety of foster care youth and thus will not generalize to the broader population.

Assumptions

For this proposal, the following hypotheses were acknowledged.

- Young adults in foster care face several challenges within the system which impacts upon the ability to complete school
- Many foster care youths aging out of foster care lack the necessary skills (job-readiness, post-secondary resources, health insurance, etc.) to achieve personal success

- Foster care youth lack guidance or a consistent mentor or family member to offer support with decision-making skills to impact the youth's future positively
- Foster care youth will be able to articulate personal experiences and respond to all questions. Honesty is assumed, and the child has spent enough time in and out of foster care to provide the information that is being sought

It can be reasonably expected that these are challenges for foster care youth. These assumptions enhance the study by recognizing the shortcomings of the foster care system and the outcomes that the system promotes. Relegated to a powerless position in society, foster care youth are at the will of the courts (Bass, Shields & Behrman, 2004; Blome, 1997; Hochman & Miller, 2004; Pecora, Williams, Kessler, Hiripi, O'Brien, Emerson, Herrick & Torres, 2006). Once a youth ends up in the hands of the child welfare system, the future of that youth becomes unpredictable and unstable (Blome, 1997; Williams, McWilliams, Mainieri, Pecora & LaBelle, 2006), where anything can happen. Best-case scenario, the youth reunites with the birth parent(s). Worst case scenario, the child drifts from one foster home to another until being emancipated at the age of eighteen and ends up in prison or on the streets (Blome, 1997; Davis, 2006; Merdinger, Hines, Lemon, Wyatt & Tweed, 2002; Zweig, 2003).

Organization of the Study

This phenomenological study includes an overview and history of foster care in Chapter I, including specific legislation that impacts foster care youth both now and in the past. Chapter II will discuss self-sufficiency, education attainment, and outcomes. Section III will present the research design, research questions, the justification for the methodology, sample selection, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter IV will give a summary of the rich qualitative narrative of the sample participants. This chapter will provide a look at the life of each participant and discuss success as it is perceived by those participants. It will also give the themes that emerge

from the study, while Chapter V will provide the summary and recommendations for the success of foster care youth.

Summary

Child welfare organizations are created to protect vulnerable children. It is the goal of Child Welfare Services (CWS) to facilitate child safety and well-being (Newtown et al., 2000; Roy, Rutter & Pickles, 2000; Redding et al., 2000; Vuchinich et al., 2002; Sullivan & Van-Zyl, 2005; Vacca, 2008). Unfortunately, many adolescents who age out of the foster care system do not have a stable and permanent plan with reliable relatives, guardians, or someone that can be relied on and called family. Much foster care youth have little, if any, medical, financial, or social support.

The research indicates that foster care youth face numerous challenges throughout life, which impacts the likelihood of becoming independent. In studying foster care youth, this researcher anticipates that the perceived experiences that promote self-efficacy of foster care youth will be better understood and that these findings will assist child care workers and other policymakers in relevant work with this vulnerable population. Consideration of existing conducted research should be utilized to improve policies and programs for foster care youth. There is a need for more research so that child welfare agencies and policymakers can better understand how to support foster youth in the transition to young adulthood.

Chapter 2:**Literature Review**

The objective of this literature review is to identify and assess those studies critical to the success of foster care youth, precisely the self-efficacy outcomes of foster care youth that aged out or transitioned out of foster care. The researcher focuses on the factors which affect the aging out or transition from foster care to aid in finding relevant studies related to this topic.

“I think the one thing I wished I learned more about was the importance of saving money. I know that it was always something that the staff was telling me I should do, but I just had no idea how much it cost to live on your own. When you live in a group home, you don’t have to worry about paying for anything, but boy, when you’re on your own, you have to pay for everything!” (Mallon, 1998). This statement from a former foster youth demonstrates the specific and profound need for foster youth to receive thorough life skills and transition skills training.

Scharf, Maysel, and Kivenson-Baron (2004) examined the association between attachment representations and successful coping with developmental tasks of emerging adulthood. The responsibilities included dealing effectively with the home-leaving transition, advancing in the development of the capacity for mature intimacy in friendships and romantic relationships while maintaining close and autonomous relationships with parents, and developing a sense of efficacy and individuation. The examination found that although these developmental tasks begin to evolve before late adolescence, the jobs are a more central and salient part of emerging adulthood functioning during the third decade of life (Scharf et al. 2004). Much foster care youth lack the skill sets to manage the feelings of doubt and anxiety that one might face upon leaving home for the first time due to lacking the support system to rely on for emotional and financial support or encouraging words.

One can compare this to the college freshman leaving home for the first time to go away to school. There is a pervading atmosphere of excitement and fear. Will it be a simple matter to acclimate to the new environment? Will the roommate be relatable or irritating? The college freshman typically has family support and people available to contact when feeling anxious or need emotional help. The foster care youth/emerging adult often lacks those connections, making the transition more difficult and challenging.

McDonald, Allen, Westerfelt, and Piliavin (1996) examined 27 studies that were carried out over the last 30 years and provided information on outcomes of foster care youth. What happened to children after leaving foster care? The measurements of the studies varied (McDonald et al., 1996). Some analyses were prospective, others retrospective, some large, some small, some from other nations and some American. One study measured the effects of foster care on children who were removed from homes as a result of maltreatment (McDonald et al., 1996). The ages of the children entering foster care and the length of time in care varied from study to study and within education. The individual experiences of the children would also vary, as would the type of foster care, such as group homes, foster families, or institutions. Some foster care youth was returned to original homes, and others were discharged after aging out (McDonald et al., 1996). Most of the studies presented difficulties with attrition. Nonresponse rates were generally between one-third and one-half. Thus, there was no way of ascertaining if those who voluntarily participated in studies differed from those who did not (McDonald et al., 1996). The studies were evaluated on the basis of their quality, as judged by the inclusion of data from a comparison group, the size of the sample, the age of the former foster child at follow-up (the older the former foster child, the better), attrition, and the time period during which the study took place (time periods after the passage of P.L. 96-272 in 1980 were preferred since that was the point that foster care ceased to be seen as a viable solution to the problems necessitating out of home care). Results from more methodologically sound studies were given

higher weight in the review of outcomes. The inclusion of a comparison group or comparative data was believed to be most critical for judging results. Even so, the synthesis of the work consists of the broadest generalizations (McDonald et al., 1996).

The 27 studies summarized that it appears children who spent time in family foster homes are functioning better as adults than those who spent time in group care or at institutions. The explanation for this could simply be that children with severe problem behaviors are not put into family care. The summary also shared that children who were placed in foster care because of parental neglect, abandonment, or abuse had more negative outcomes than those set because of mental illness, death imprisonment or physical illness of the caretaker. Moreover, children with fewer different placements while in care also functioned better as adults. However, fewer investments could indicate that the child was stable and adaptable, to begin with.

Perhaps, one astonishing finding was that children in foster care for more extended periods of time do better than those returned to biological homes after a short period of time. This result clearly depends on the quality of the foster care and whether the needs of the children are met once returned home. Similarly, contact and closeness with the biological family while in custody may be advantageous to the child, but could also be harmful. Four outcomes were identified in the studies: (1) Adult self-sufficiency (including educational attainment and intellectual ability, employment and economic stability, and residential status and housing); (2) family and social support systems (marital stability, parenting capability, friends); (3) sense of well-being (mental and physical health and satisfaction); and (4) behavioral adjustment (criminal behavior and use of alcohol and drugs). These outcomes proved to be essential for the independent success of foster care youth. This study will emphasize the perceived perceptions of success for foster care youth, as told through the knowledge of those youth, which will assist in shaping outcomes for foster care youth in the future.

Education Attainment and Self-Sufficiency

The majority of the studies of former foster children revealed that the level of education in the demographic is below the average for those of comparable age in the same state or country (McDonald et al., 1996). Children in foster care are likely to repeat a grade, be placed in special education programs, and have low attendance and behavioral issues in school (Elze, Auslander, Stiffman & McMillen, 2005; Geenen & Powers, 2006). Foster youth children often enter care already behind in education and fail to catch up (Elze et al., 2005). In a study of 17,422 children over four years, Conger and Rebeck (2001) found that foster children's reading and math mean scores were below the citywide average before foster care placement, and scores remained below the mean after entering foster care. Burley & Halpern (2001), in a study of 424 foster parents in Oregon, found that approximately 37% of children in foster care were performing below grade level compared to the national average of 20%.

Foster care youth often lack some of the necessary support structures that children generally have in a family home. One study showed that the adults in the lives of foster care youth spent less time on homework than other adults, and the adults in the foster youth's lives were less likely to oversee homework (Blome, 1997). As foster care youth enter high school, the amount of time spent on homework is significantly less than peers with 63% of sophomores in foster care reporting that time spent on homework was three hours or less a week while 48% of the comparison group reported three hours or less spent on homework per week (Blome, 1997). Foster children are less likely to take college preparatory classes as part of the high school curriculum (Blome, 1997). Foster youth are frequently not provided college information and options about applying to higher education (Davis, 2006).

Foster youth attending school function at a level that was below average and below the potential capacity available. Foster youth are more likely to pursue vocational training than

college. Youth who are discharged from family foster care generally complete more schooling than those from group settings. The younger the child at placement, the fewer years of education usually attained (McDonald et al., 1996). The researcher believes that further studies should be conducted on the impact of foster youth placed in group settings in comparison to those placed in family foster care. The researcher also hypothesizes that group homes do not provide the structure and support that foster children need to emerge as self-sufficient young adults.

According to a longitudinal study of children raised to adulthood in foster care, findings concluded that the youth would continue to need support into the young adult years. This is consistent with the increasing evidence that suggests the general population of young adults is also dependent upon familial support into the mid-twenties (Schoffield and Beek, 2009; Stein, 2006). Long-term results for former foster youth have been historically poor (Barnow et al., 2015).

As a youth in foster care reach the age of emancipation, the likelihood of facing numerous difficulties in securing their basic needs is significant (Ryan, Hernandez, and Herz, 2007). Essentials such as affordable housing, healthcare access, social connections, educational opportunities, and gainful employment are difficult for these youth to grasp. Studies have recorded a correlation between time spent in foster care and lower levels of educational attainment (Wade and Dixon, 2006). While many of these children enter care with educational deficits, there are statistically few programs that promote significant gains in education for foster youth. The peers of non-foster care youth who present with educational deficits often benefit from additional support such as tutoring to assist in overcoming those deficits. Training, in most cases is not free, and families of non-foster care youth pay for this service. Tutoring entities such as Kumon provide individual instruction support for students in math and reading. Toru Kumon began providing an education based on the concept of self-learning to the son of the

Kumon family (2018, Kumon North America). As the son began surpassing the current grade level, other parents took notice and wanted to achieve the same for. The difference between foster care youths with a deficit and non-foster care youths with a deficit is the parent or caregiver who notices the shortcomings and advocates on behalf of the child to ensure that the deficiencies can be addressed and hopefully overcome. This, in turn, leads to the array of adverse outcomes that have been documented for youth exiting the foster care system (Ryan et al., 2007).

Studies have shown the importance of workforce training for foster care alumni. Positive long-term outcomes were associated with improved employability. Comprehensive income support, likewise, was proven to increase the overall well-being of former foster care youth during the transition into adulthood (Barnow et al., 2015). One form of income support is demonstrated in independent living programs. Research has shown that emancipating foster youth who joined an independent living program had a higher probability of becoming self-supporting at the end of the program when contrasted against children who did not receive a similar intervention (Scannapieco, 1995). During a study of five foster care systems that were given the grant to fund two years of programming for emancipated foster youth, it was found that long-term employment support services yielded a higher rate of positive achievements in employment and education (Barnow et al., 2015). In another study, university graduates with experience in foster care were compared with graduates in the general population. This study concluded that both groups had a similar rate of employment at a livable wage but differed in that the group of foster care alumni was less likely to have attained homeownership and more likely to have a combined household income below the poverty line (Salazar, 2013).

In the studies by Smithgall, Gladden, Howard, George & Courtney (2004), Smithgall, Ratner & Walker (2010), it is summarized that youth entering foster care are likely to be “old”

for the respective grade level (i.e., have been held back one or more years) and tend to perform poorly on standardized assessments than other students at the same age. Smithgall et al., 2004 & Barrat and Berliner, 2013 summarized that schools that foster care youth attend are often among the lowest-performing schools. While in foster care, youth continue to lag behind non-foster care peers academically (Burley and Halpern, 2001; Courtney et al., 2004; Smithgall et al., 2004; Pecora et al., 2006; Barrat and Berliner 2013). Barrat and Berliner, 2013; Burley and Halpern 2001; Courtney et al., 2011; Pergamit and Johnson, 2009 and Wolanin, 2005 found that foster care youth are less likely to graduate from high school than peers. Although a majority of foster care youth aspire to attend college (Courtney et al., 2004 & McMillen et al., 2003), it is less likely that this will occur compared to peers (Brandford and English, 2004 & Wolanin, 2005).

A small sample of studies has examined the outcomes of transitioning out of care by interviewing samples of foster care youth after aging out (Barth, 1990; Cook, Fleishman & Grimes, 1991; Courtney, Pillavin, Grogan-Kaylor & Nesmith, 2001; Festinger, 1983; Jones & Moses, 1984). The findings of these studies are consistent. The research found that former foster youth are likely to experience problems across a variety of domains and are not prepared to live independently as self-sufficient young adults (Barth, 1990; Cook, et al. 1991; Courtney, et al. 2001; Festinger, 1983; Jones & Moses, 1984).

According to these studies, many foster youths do not graduate from high school before or after aging out (Barth, 1990; Cook et al. 1991; Courtney, et al. 2001; Festinger, 1983; Jones & Moses, 1984). It is not uncommon for former foster youth to receive government benefits such as welfare benefits (AFDC/TANF, food stamps and or Medicaid (Barth, 1990; Cook et al., 1991; Courtney et al., 2001; Festinger, 1983; Jones & Moses, 1984).

Burley and Halpern (2001) and Wolanin (2005) suggest four significant factors that contribute to a foster youth's inability to graduate from high school and enroll in postsecondary school.

1. The pre-care experience, such as abuse and neglect that brings a child into foster care. What the child experienced before foster care placement has a tremendous effect on psychosocial development. A negative environment, where adults neglect the needs of the child and are abusive, can impact a child's ability to develop relationships, build trust with other adults, and regulate one's behavior and emotions. The abuse and neglect a child sustained before foster care can have a lasting effect.
2. The trauma of being taken away from family and placed into another family environment may cause emotional challenges that can impact academic performance. Between 40-60% of foster youth have at least one psychiatric disorder that may have been caused by pre-care and foster care experiences. Emotional challenges, which can range from emotional to behavioral problems, may have a direct influence on a child's ability to do well in school, uniquely if the issues are not identified and treated.
3. Foster youth often experience instability as a result of having to move from placement to placement and having to adjust to new families, neighborhoods, and cultures. Moving around can directly impact the child's ability to keep up with schoolwork, develop friendships, focus on homework, and keep track of school records. Although there are special education services for foster youth, the constant changing of schools makes it difficult to maintain curriculum continuity.
4. Parents in poverty are less capable of sheltering these children from harmful elements in society, such as drugs and crime. They are unable to provide adequate nutrition and health care when compared to higher-income parents. Most children in foster care are from poor and impoverished families. Children in low-income communities attend

schools that may not provide the same level of education as children living in middle-class neighborhoods.

These four factors listed are just a few of the significant obstacles that can affect the educational outcomes of foster youth. The challenges do not end with high school graduation, as finishing high school does not guarantee a healthy and fruitful life (Lee, 2010).

Academic performance is associated with opportunities for adult employment and socioeconomic status: therefore, the poor showing of children who have been in foster care is clearly a matter for concern (McDonald et al., 1996). The studies indicate that a majority of former foster children (between 64 and 92 percent) are self-supporting adults. The job of this group tends to be steady, though it is precarious. Approximately 25 percent of former foster children received public assistance at some point as an adult. Specific studies within the meta-analysis reflected that those discharged from foster family homes progress better than those from group settings, and adoptees do better than foster children (McDonald et al., 1996). Foster families and to a lesser extent, biological families appear to provide economic support for a significant portion of adult former foster children. This seems to be similar to the situation one would expect to find for young adults in the general population (McDonald et al., 1996).

The majority of foster care follow-up (McDonald et al., 1996) studies (e.g., Meier, 1965; Ferguson, 1966; Mass, 1969; Fanshel & Shinn, 1978; Harari, 1980; Triseliotis, 1980; Zimmerman, 1982) indicate that roughly 60 to 70 percent of the subjects were living independently inadequate housing. Sizable numbers of items were found to be still living with foster parents or friends or relatives (McDonald et al., 1996). Biological families appear to provide minimal housing support. The correlation between homelessness and foster youth revealed that a disproportionate number of the homeless were once foster youth and had at some point in life spent time in foster care (McDonald et al., 1996). Research has shown spending

time in foster care is a risk factor for homelessness and approximately 12% of all homeless adults and 40% of homeless adults between the ages of 18 and 21 years old were previously in the foster care system (Kushel, Yen, Gee & Courtney, 2007).

Several studies have indicated that foster youth have difficulty securing stable housing. Courtney et al. (2001) interviewed 133 youth over three years and found that approximately 20% of the child transitioning out of foster care experienced homelessness. One of the teens interviewed in the study claimed to possess only \$250 upon aging out of the system and was not prepared to live independently. When questioned 18 months after exiting foster care that youth said, “he had suffered several crises since leaving the system including an episode of homelessness, being seriously beaten on at least one occasion, and being incarcerated for a short time” (Courtney et al., 2001, p. 692). Pecora, Kessler, Williams, O’Brien, Downs, English, White, Hiripi, White, Wiggins and Homes (2005) interviewed 479 former foster youth that had spent at least 12 months in foster care and found 22% had been homeless for at least one night within one year of exiting the foster care system. A recent report from the California legislature found that 25 percent of foster youth are homeless, at a rate of 2.25 times that of peers (Hunter, 2018). If one’s basic needs, such as housing, are not met when transitioning out of foster care, it is difficult to focus on anything else (Pecora et al., 2005). This is why many foster youths are always in survival mode, even after leaving a situation of neglect or abuse (Hunter, 2018). The number of former foster youth amongst the homeless may suggest that efforts fell short of providing transitional services to independence for those who age out of foster care. It may also suggest something else entirely, such as that children sent to foster homes have severe problems that increase vulnerability to homelessness, that the foster care experience is debilitating in a way that leaves these children unable to function independently, or that the children lack family support networks to provide housing in a crisis. The exact link between foster care and homelessness is not known (McDonald et al., 1996).

Outcome studies of short and long-term effects of foster care in adult life must be viewed with caution since some of the findings are based on children who have been in care for the majority of childhood, i.e. (Festinger 1983) compared to studies that examined youth entering care in adolescence, i.e. (Courtney and Barth 1996) or studies that compare outcomes of adopted vs. different types of care (Kerman, Wildfire & Barth, 2002). Findings reflect both insufficiencies in the foster care system, and insufficiencies in parenting and the level of education youth bring into foster care. Teens aging out of foster care have significant difficulties transitioning into independent living and self-sufficiency. The national high school dropout rate in the US ranges between 5% and 11% (US Department of Education 2001). In comparison to the general youth population, fewer foster care adolescents are regularly employed (Alexander and Huberty 1993; Cook 1991; Courtney and Piliavin 1998; Festinger 1983; Jones and Moses 1984; Reilly 2003).

Fewer than half have jobs at the time of discharge (NASW 1999). Higher proportions of youth who have been in foster care receive public aid (Alexander and Huberty 1993; Barth 1990; Cook 1991; Courtney and Piliavin 1998). Forty-seven percent of the adolescents in custody had a disabling condition, and 37% were clinically diagnosed as emotionally disturbed following discharge from foster care (Westat 1988), which is much higher than the 12–15% estimate for the general youth population. Youth living with foster parents are more likely than children living with biological parents to have behavioral and emotional problems, problems in school adjustment, and to be in poor physical and mental health (Kortenkamp and Ehrle 2002; Reilly 2003).

Over the past 20 years, there has been much effort put into program development to assist youth in reaching independence in adulthood. To date, some of these efforts have been found useful (Kerman et al. 2002; Scannapieco and Scannapieco, 1995), but as evidenced by the review

of the empirical research, many youths continue to have tremendous challenges into adulthood. The purpose of this study is to ask the youth as well as the youth's "circle of support" (foster parents and social workers) what experiences were perceived as challenges and what additional services would be helpful. The sample was comprised of participants in the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services foster care program. Six groups were conducted, with a total of 72 participants. Participants were representative of the Texas foster care program. Participants were foster parents, foster youth in care, foster youth who graduated, and child welfare workers. Texas had over 27,000 children in foster care, the majority in nonrelative homes. This represents a 33.5% increase in the number of children in foster care between the years 2000 and 2004. Of those, there were 4,974 children between the ages of 14 and 20 in foster care who were eligible to receive Independent Living Services, 52% being female (TDFPS 2004). This represents the largest age group of children in care, 29%. Children in foster care in Texas represent a diverse group. Hispanics represent the largest group of children in foster care comprising 36%, with African Americans making up 29%, and Caucasians 33% (TDFPS 2004).

The outcomes of this study yielded three themes: youth-focused practice, need for collaboration and better communication with youth, and unmet needs and permanent connections. The implications for this study directly speak to foster youth receiving opportunities as early as possible to practice independent living skills and receive real-world opportunities to help in communicating with others in a self-check/self-balance approach, while having consistent support to rely on as while navigating the path towards self-efficacy.

Youth Focused Practice:

Three of the four groups expressed a lack of respect for the individual foster youth. Social workers did not bring this issue up in focus group discussions. Participants emphasized the lack of involvement of the youth in decision-making. Case plans were decided before the caseworker

meeting with the youth. Plans were not individualized, nor were they discussed with the child. Teens wanted to be involved in determining which individuals would be present in life and not penalized for wanting contact with biological family. Foster youth wanted to be aware of the time-line of events impacting life.

“I want to go my way...I want money, not their (Foster parents) money. Don't want to owe anybody anything. 'I want to have my job and my own money to buy things...hygiene products. I need my products, clothes, makeup...'” (Foster youth)

“I want to practice managing money, get a job, and control the money” (Foster youth)

“I do not have a say in my goals. My caseworker shows up with it (treatment plan)...I just sign it whether I agree with the goals or not.” (Foster youth)

“They (caseworkers) do not care about us. They are not supportive; they treat us like kids.” (Foster youth)

“My caseworker says bad things about my family and blames my mother for things.” (Foster youth)

Transitioning out of foster care is a daunting task. Research is starting to focus on the population who age out of the foster care system without being reunited with the biological family or being adopted (Greeson & Bowen, 2008). At the age of 18, foster youth are expected to find a job or multiple jobs, secure housing, and become independent adults even though research indicates a person at this age is not fully prepared to live independently without a support system like a family (Greeson & Bowen, 2008). When basic needs such as housing, employment, food, medical health, and mental health concerns are unmet, focusing on anything else is a difficult task. Thus many of the youth who enter adulthood from the foster care system lacks the resources and skills to live independently (Montgomery, Donkoh, & Underhill, 2006).

Collaboration and Better Communication:

All participants expressed the challenges faced in communicating. Issues persisted across all subsystems. Child welfare caseworkers experienced problems with talking to the foster parent, as did the foster parent communicating with the caseworker, foster youth communicating with the caseworker, and the foster parent communicating with the foster youth. Communication of information was paramount. All felt there was a lack of accurate knowledge about support and services available under the Chafee Act for youth aging out of care.

A solution to this challenge expressed by most was better coordination among all subsystems. Many showed that there was a need for one single individual to be responsible for facilitating the coordination of planning amongst youth, foster parents, caseworkers, PAL workers, and others. Foster youth, both in care and aged out, along with adoptive parents spoke of a need for collaboration with the youth. Teen wanted to have more control and be seen as a partner in making decisions concerning the future. Interestingly, foster youth expressed sympathy for the caseworker around the challenges of communication and collaboration, showed understanding for the caseworker's large caseloads and lack of experiences. Many youths indicated having five or more caseworkers over 18 months.

“I didn't know about aftercare money. (Alumni)

“I heard of aftercare money but didn't know how to get it. There was a bunch of information in a binder I got in PAL ...I guess it is in there.” (Alumni)

“(Caseworkers) need to stick with us all the way and don't leave us” (Alumni)

“Caseworkers don't care about anything. I have to play mind games with my caseworker to get her attention” (Foster youth)

“(My) foster parent talked to me about PAL, but she didn’t want to help me in the home. She told me I would end up dead or in prison.” (Foster youth)

“When I open up to counselors at school, they talk to CPS—cannot tell anyone anything—I don’t trust anyone” (Foster youth)

“My caseworker has too big a caseload to spend any time with me.” (Foster youth)

“Youth are not informed of the resources available to them to get \$ to pay for GED.”
(Foster parent)

“I call my caseworker and leave a message. She doesn’t call me back for over a month.”
(Foster youth)

“My CPS worker needs to work with my probation officer and return his calls.” (Foster youth)

“I’ve had about five different caseworkers over the past year.” (Foster youth)

“Youth need an overall service plan. One worker who follows through” (Foster parent)

“CPS isn’t proactive...youth have to go to workers to get services” (Foster parent)

According to Barth (1990), one study that included interviews with 55 foster youth who had left the foster care system found that foster youth were struggling with poor health, poor education, housing problems, substance abuse, and criminal behaviors. “People fail to realize that just because you’re 18, 21 or even 25 doesn’t mean you have all your ducks lined up and everything’s all peaches and cream. With more support, we can help foster youth reach their full potential, expand new horizons, and reach for the stars” (Hunter, 2018. p. 3). Without adequate resources, opportunities, experiences, and support, the outcome for self-efficacy at best is bleak.

Unmet Needs and Permanent Connections:

All the participants articulated foster youth needing more skill-building opportunities. Youth were positive about the experience they had with PAL training but indicated there were no opportunities to practice what had been learned in the PAL classrooms. Participants felt foster parents needed developmental work so to assist foster teens in applying the knowledge and skills from PAL programs. Additional PAL resources, such as follow up training and in-vivo training, were suggested as well. All felt that foster youth have tangible and intangible needs going unmet; money, safe housing, bus passes, etc., were some of the concrete examples. A better understanding of personal health and mental health needs was a resounding example for all participants.

Advocacy to ensure youth an appropriate educational setting while in foster care as well as after graduation from care was discussed by all groups as an unmet need. A connection was a further resonant theme. Relationships with a support person or network upon leaving care were seen as a critical unmet need. All subjects felt that youth needed to be connected to support groups, former foster alumni, self-esteem groups, or engaged in on-going therapy after leaving care. A notion from the participants was not that youth needed to achieve independence, but interdependence to successfully navigate through early adulthood. Child mentoring can facilitate and model healthy interactions with one's community and environment while providing for increased community involvement throughout life (Buehler, Orme, Post & Patterson, 2000). The knowledge that there is someone or someplace that one can depend on and seek assistance when needed provides a level of assurance for foster care youth.

“PAL needs more case management. Case managers should show us how to do things.”

(Alumni)

“I need a backbone...support system...something to fall back on in case I mess up.”

(Foster youth)

“I want more people on my contact list because it will help me keep in contact with connections I’ve made. Breaking promises to stay in touch makes you lose friends.”

(Foster youth)

“You’ll make it if you have a long-lasting connection with somebody” (Alumni)

“When I left foster care, I looked for my family, needed closure.” (Alumni)

“I will only have myself to rely on when I leave care”. (Foster youth)

“They (pastors, coaches, and teachers) are too busy. They have their own lives to take care of.” (Foster youth)

“I’m not crazy. I shouldn’t have to take medication. I’m going to quit taking it as soon as I can.” (Foster youth)

“Kids are scared to be on their own and are not ready at 18.” (Foster parent)

“Training sessions are not enough. Need to follow through on the part of PAL programs.” (Foster parent)

“Housing is a HUGE problem.” (Foster parent)

The three major themes emerging from these focus groups parallel the underlying philosophical principles of working with youth who are aging out of care: positive youth development, collaboration and permanent connections. Although being important guiding practice principles, it is clear through this study that these principles are not being integrated into practice (Scannapieco, Connell-Carrick & Painter, 2007). The implications for this study might

reveal that a consistent mentor, adequate resources and mental health support can provide foster care youth with the guidance needed to become self-sufficient

In Dworsky's (2005) study, former foster children reflected that eighty percent of the respondents were employed in at least one of the first eight quarters following discharge (Dworsky, 2005), and there was little deviation from this percentage over time (Dworsky, 2005). There was a statistically significant gender difference in employment at the bivariate level: 82.5% of the females and 78.3% of the males were employed in at least one of the first eight quarters following discharge (Dworsky, 2005). These youth were engaged in a mean of 3.7 of the first eight quarters the following release; excluding the 1702 former foster youth who were never employed increases the mean to 4.7 (Dworsky, 2005). One might think that with each year, an old foster child has been out of care that respective employment history might increase. However, that was not the case: employment did not appear to increase with time since discharge (Dworsky, 2005).

Dworsky (2005) reported that the mean and median earnings for the first eight post-discharge quarters were \$5170 and \$2322, respectively. Excluding former foster youth who were not employed in any of the first eight post-discharge quarters increases mean earnings to \$6463 and median earnings to \$3709, which is still substantially less than a full-time minimum wage worker would have earned over the same eight quarters. In fact, the total earnings for that two year period were below the poverty threshold for a household of one in a single year for every year between 1992, when that threshold was \$7299, to 2000, when that threshold was \$8959 (Dworsky, 2005).

The Homes for the Homeless study (1997) examined 400 homeless individuals. The study found that 20 percent of the homeless considered had lived in foster care as children. Ironically, 20 percent now had one or more children and were currently living in foster care (the

United States General Accounting Office, 1999). The connection between homelessness and foster care should not be ignored. There is a need for more in-depth training and preparation of foster care youth to exit care and not fall victim to homelessness. When one is homeless, employment is often lacking, and mental health conditions are possible in the individuals experiencing this traumatic ordeal. This basic life necessity, now lacking, has an impact on any individual trying to maintain employment to meet basic needs for oneself or a family. Therefore ensuring that foster youth are adequately prepared to become self-sufficient upon discharge will decrease the possibility of that youth becoming homeless.

Family and social support

The study by McDonald et al. (1996) suggests that children who enter foster care at an older age, children who might have behavioral or social problems, children that are placed in a group setting and children that have frequent ambiguous contact with biological parents might have difficulties in forming stable cohabiting situations. These youth might have problems with parenting and in establishing integrated social relationships in the community. These youth are also likely to have more marriages to spouses who fail to provide emotional support, more excellent social isolation than the general population, and have higher numbers of teen pregnancies. Further findings (McDonald et al., 1996) suggest that the risks of these outcomes are reduced through a nurturing and stable foster family care experience and adoption.

Personal Well-being

With the limited numbers of studies on physical health, conclusions are difficult to derive. Several studies suggest that in comparison to the general population, former foster children have poorer physical health, even when income differences are controlled (McDonald et al., 1996). Foster youth were shown to have poorer mental health in comparison to adoptees or

persons in the general population because the psychiatric referral usage of these youth was higher (McDonald et al., 1996). If psychiatric referrals are more top for these youth, additional studies should be conducted to measure the direct outcomes that the integration of social-emotional programs might have on this population.

Foster youth from group settings, particularly whites, scored lower on measures of life satisfaction, possessing less self-esteem, less happiness, and less joy with life as a whole than former foster home residents and persons in the general population. Though foster youth face many challenges along the path of life, these youth do not see life as any less satisfying than individuals who were not separated from family during childhood (McDonald et al., 1996).

Behavioral Adjustment

Foster youth and involvement with the law seem inevitable for some foster care youth. For those who have interaction with the law, arrest rates for males generally fall between 25 and 35 percent. However, it has been reported to be over 35 percent (McDonald et al., 1996). Of those arrested, one-quarter to one-half are subsequently convicted. Arrest rates for women are much lower, at approximately 10 percent. Although the arrests records are higher than one would expect in the general population, these rates may not be different from a comparison group controlled for race and economic status. It is clear, however, that adults who had received foster family care participated in less criminal behavior than those who had been in group care or had been living with relatives. Increased ties with family and community of origin were associated with higher rates of criminal behavior. No consistent relationship was found between the reason for placement (neglect, abuse, etc.) and subsequent criminal behavior. Alcohol and drug abuse do not appear to be particular problems for former foster children, compared to similar groups in the general population (McDonald et al., 1996).

Summary of the Findings

McDonald et al. (1996) state that it appears children who spent their time in family foster homes are functioning better as adults than those spent time in group care or at institutions. The explanation for this could be that children with severe problems are not put into family care (McDonald et al., 1996). The results further showed that children who were placed in foster care because of parental abuse, neglect, or abandonment led to more negative outcomes than those set because of death, mental illness, imprisonment, or physical illness of the caretaker. Children with fewer placements while in care functioned better as adults. However, fewer investments could indicate that the child was stable and adaptable, to begin with (McDonald et al., 1996).

In contrast to current thinking, children who are in foster care for more extended periods of time do better than those returned to biological homes after a short period of time (McDonald et al., 1996). This result clearly depends on the quality of the foster care and whether the needs of the children are met upon returning home. It is worthwhile to note that contact with the biological family of foster youth while in care may be advantageous to the child, or it may be harmful (McDonald et al., 1996). One general conclusion drawn by the authors is that adoption, when available, is a better alternative than long term foster care. Theoretically, adoption can provide children with a second chance for a supportive and loving family (McDonald et al., 1996). But adoption can have its pitfalls. Approximately half the children waiting for adoption must wait two or more years for placement. This is particularly true for older and black children. The number of failed adoptions range widely. McDonald et al. (1996) found that the overall rate is close to 10 percent, with rates as high as 30 percent for subpopulations such as older children and those with special needs and other problems (McDonald et al., 1996).

When adoption is not feasible, long-term foster care, particularly in a stable family setting, can be a desirable alternative to the reunification of a family burdened with problems.

Foster care, in its entirety, does not condemn foster youth to an unproductive and unhappy life as an adult. Many, if not the majority, of these subjects, do survive as adults but often do so precariously (McDonald et al., 1996). There is no clear evidence that foster care experience has detrimental effects. However, it is also clear that it does not adequately mediate the damaging effects of earlier childhood experiences. As a result, foster youth are leaving foster care with a considerably higher risk for adverse outcomes in life (McDonald et al., 1996).

Outcomes

There is a need for better studies of foster care. The authors, McDonald et al., (1996) support the use of more rigorous research designs, which may include random placement assignments of children. Available evidence suggests that the process whereby a placement is determined for an abused or neglected child is all but random anyway. The authors also raise the question of what may be expected from foster care. Is it sufficient that the care doesn't damage children beyond the damage already sustained by the removal from family? Should foster care be rated as successful if it produces outcomes equal to those of adults in a comparable group in the general population? Or should foster responsibility seek to devise a system of caring for these needy children that increases future opportunities? (McDonald et al., 1996).

Dworsky's (2005) study included 8511 former foster youth who were discharged from Wisconsin's out of home care system between 1992 and 1998 and were at least 16 years old at the time of discharge. The purpose of the study was to examine the self-sufficiency of former foster youth who were at least 16 years old when discharged from Wisconsin's out of home care system. Three indicators of autonomy were measured: (1) Employment; (2) Earnings; and (3) Public Assistance Receipt. The research design was based on state administrative data from three different sources: (1) Human Services Reporting System (HSRS); (2) Client Assistance and Re-Employment Support (CARES); and (3) Unemployment Insurance (UI) wage reporting

system. This research sample includes former youth who experienced discharge outcomes other than aging out and reunification (i.e., running away, institutionalization, relative placement or adoption) and it looked not only at labor market outcomes, but also public assistance receipt (Dworsky, 2005). The sample selection based on the Substitute Care Module of the Human Services Reporting System (HSRS) produced 10,183 foster youth who met the selection criteria. However, the results of this study include only the 8511 foster child, or 78.7% of the total sample for whom valid social security numbers could be identified. This restriction was necessary because social security numbers were used to link the HSRS data to both the CARES and UI data.

It is not uncommon for former foster youth to receive means-tested welfare benefits, such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), food stamps and/or Medicaid, (Barth, 1990; Cook et al., 1991; Courtney et al., 2001; Festinger, 1983; Jones & Moses, 1984), or to depend on less formal assistance from friends or family (Cook et al., 1991; Courtney et al., 2001; Jones & Moses, 1984). The utilization of administrative data is less expensive and time-consuming in comparison to conducting interviews, and sample size usually does not become an issue when utilizing administrative data (Dworsky, 2005). Administrative data is also conducive to following former foster youth over time without significant sample attrition. This approach is also consistent with the growing use of administrative data in other child welfare research on out-of-home care (Dworsky, 2005). The caveat with this approach is that organizational data is collected to meet accountability and internal monitoring needs, and hence, maybe less than ideal for answering questions of interest to researchers (Courtney & Collins, 1994; Goerge, 1997).

The demographic characteristics and out-of-home care experiences of the 8511 former foster youth are predominantly white, and males outnumber females by a ratio of nearly three to

two. Although Milwaukee County accounted for a disproportionate share of Wisconsin's out-of-home care caseload throughout the 1990s, only 20 percent of these former foster youths had been in Milwaukee County's care (Dworsky, 2005). The study revealed that the mean age at most recent entry was between 15 and 16 years old, but the distribution was highly skewed. Only 2.6 percent were 12 years old or younger when last entering care in comparison to 89.6 percent who were at least 15 years old. This was also the first entry for a majority of the former foster youth. Forty-nine percent had experienced at least one prior episode of out-of-home care compared to 59 percent who had not (Dworsky, 2005). It should be no surprise then that more than half of the former foster youth had been adjudicated delinquent in comparison to 39 percent who had been settled children in need of protection (CHIPS) due to the age at which the former foster youth entered their most recent out-of-home care (Dworsky, 2005).

Time spent in out-of-home care for these former foster youths since the most recent entry was less than 12 months. Nearly half had spent less than 12 months in aggregate in out-of-home care. The majority experienced only one placement during the most recent time in custody, and two-thirds experienced fewer than three placements when all out-of-home placements were taken into account (Dworsky, 2005). Before turning eighteen, most of these foster youths were discharged, and more than half had been living in a foster home before discharge (Dworsky, 2005). The most common discharge outcomes for these former foster youths were reunification and relative placement, followed by aging out and discharge to independent living (Dworsky, 2005). More than half of these old foster youth reflected higher numbers of employment in at least one of the four quarters before their discharge, and more than one third were employed in the quarter immediately before they left care (Dworsky, 2005).

The Chafee Foster Care Independence Program was created in 1999 when the Foster Care Independence Act amended title IV-E of the Social Security Act (Dworsky, Smithgall &

Courtney, 2014). This amendment doubled the maximum amount of funds available to states for independent living services and gave states more considerable discretion over how the funds could be utilized. The Chafee Foster Care Independence Program was created to provide functions such as daily living skills, education and employment assistance, counseling, case management, and a written transitional independent living plan (Dworksy, Smithgall & Courtney, 2014). Up to 30% of Chafee funds can be utilized for room and board. Recently, a provision in the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 gave states an option to extend eligibility for Title IV-E foster care youth beyond age eighteen until age twenty-one. For countries that have taken this option, young people can receive an additional three years of foster care support to prepare for the transition to adulthood (Dworksy, Smithgall & Courtney, 2014). Programs like the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, if explicitly utilized and strategically for transitioning to adulthood, seem to be a beacon of hope for foster care youth.

Though Chafee dollars can be spent on a wide range of services and support, much of the funding is being spent on services aimed at promoting educational attainment (Baum and Ma, 2007). This probably reflects the relationship between educational attainment and success in other domains. Not only has postsecondary education become increasingly essential to economic self-sufficiency, but besides, higher levels of education are associated with better health, increased civic engagement, and better outcomes for children (Baum and Ma, 2007).

Westat's (1991) federal study of former foster care youth interviewed those youth between 2.5 – 4 years after leaving care. The study found that 46 percent had not finished high school. Similarly, almost 40 percent were found to be a cost to the community through dependence on programs such as Medicaid and public assistance (Westat, 1991). Some of the study's findings were summarized by (1) Status of Discharged Foster Care Youth (2) The Impact

of Receiving Independent Living Services (3) Values, and (4) Overall Sense of Well-Being and Problems Since Discharge.

If the premise of Independent Living Programs (ILP) is to assist foster care youth in transitioning to adulthood, the program has not successfully provided foster care youth with the resources needed to avoid dependence on the programs mentioned above. Some former foster youth were lacking adequate housing (the United States General Accounting Office, 1999). Where the Westat study reported that 25 percent of old foster youth were homeless for at least 1 night. The Westat study further found that 51 percent of foster youth were unemployed, and 42 percent had given birth or fathered a child. Inadequate housing, unstable or lack of employment, and the responsibility to care for a child without the appropriate means becomes a stressful situation. If former foster youth cannot provide for basic individual needs, this places more demands on social services support and often leads to cyclical dependency upon government assistance.

Addressing these deficiencies can have a positive effect on former foster care youth (the United States General Accounting Office, 1999). The Westat study found a connection between particular variables and the youth's ability to live independently (the United States General Accounting Office, 1999). Examples of the relationships found were that completing high school before leaving foster care was related to stable employment, overall self-sufficiency, and not being a cost to the community (Westat, 1991). Additionally, youths who held at least one job during a stay in foster care were more likely to maintain job aftercare (Westat, 1991).

State and local administrators informed the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) that the current ILPs are inadequate and fall short in certain areas (the United States General Accounting Office, 1999). The most crucial area of inadequacy is the: lack of employment opportunities, which would allow foster youth the experience and opportunity to

address and resolve real-world problems while still learning to navigate the world. Some programs lack inability to provide adequate housing for programs and other transitional services to those still in care and those who have left care (United States General Accounting Office, 1999) further exposes the inability of foster care youths to enter adulthood equipped with the tools necessary to lead productive and independent lives.

In previous studies by Cook et al. (1991) and Courtney et al. (2001), it was determined that males had higher earnings than females among former foster youth. However, in Dworsky's study (2005) the females earned significantly more during the first eight post-discharge quarters with a mean of \$5495 and a median of \$2746. The males had a way of \$4945 and a median of \$2026 at the bivariate level. This difference did not persist when the comparison was limited to those who were employed. Among the former foster youth, females earned a mean of \$6663 and a median of \$3985 during the first eight post-discharge quarters, while males earned a mean of \$6043 and a median of \$3484 (Dworsky, 2005). The earnings increased somewhat. However, they remained relatively low. The mean and median earnings were very much below the poverty threshold, even eight years post-discharge (Dworsky, 2005).

Approximately 17% of these former foster youths were recipients of AFDC/TANF cash assistance, and nearly a third were food stamp recipients in at least one of the first eight quarters after discharge (Dworsky, 2005). Single mother families have long comprised the majority of AFDC/TANF caseloads: receipt of AFDC/TANF cash assistance was nearly three times higher among females at 26.9% than among males at 9.5% (Dworsky, 2005). If the receipt of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) by former foster youth with disabilities had also been included in the measure since eligibility for SSI is not limited to those caring for dependent children, it is possible that a smaller gender difference would have been observed (Dworsky, 2005). Though the gender difference was not as significant, the food stamp receipt was 1.7 times

higher among females at 43.4% than among males at 25.2% (Dworksy, 2005). The high percentage of food stamp receipt amongst females is likely reflective of the fact that the rules regarding food stamp receipt are more stringent for able-bodied adults without dependent children (Dworksy, 2005). “The sample mean for months of AFDC/TANF cash assistance receipt during the first eight post-discharge quarters was 1.37; for months of food stamp receipt, it was 2.8. When the analysis is limited to those former foster youths who received benefits, these means an increase to 8.25 and 8.5, respectively (Dworksy, 2005).”

Dworkin's study, (2005)utilized the same multivariate technique to analyze the variation in public assistance receipt among former foster care youth for the difference in labor market outcomes. The parameter estimates from two pairs of Cox proportional hazard models were shown in Table 11 in which the dependent variable was the first post-discharge quarter of public assistance receipt (Dworksy, 2005). The first pair modeled the hazard of food stamp receipt. The two models in each pair are identical except that the second includes a time-varying covariate equal to zero if the quarter preceded the implementation of the state’s TANF program in September 1997 and one if the quarter followed TANF implementation. Former foster youth who did not receive public assistance during the observation period are treated as censored cases (Dworksy, 2005).

Further study results showed that being non-White, receiving services from Milwaukee County, and being discharged from a foster or group home was associated with an increased hazard of receiving AFDC/TANF. On the other hand, being male, being adjudicated CHIPS, being transferred to an institutional setting, being in care longer, being discharged at an older age, and being released after 1993 were associated with a decreased hazard of receiving AFDC/TANF (Dworksy, 2005). Similar relationships were observed for former foster youth who were non-White, receiving services from Milwaukee County, being discharged from a foster

home, and experiencing more placements were associated with an increased hazard of receiving food stamps (Dworsky, 2005). In a similar fashion, being male, being transferred to an institutional setting, aging out or being discharged to independent living, being in care longer, and being released after 1994 were associated with a decreased hazard of receiving food stamps (Dworsky, 2005). Although adding the time-varying covariate to the model did not change these results, the relationship between TANF implementation and food stamp was significant and positive, in contrast to the considerable but negative coefficient in the AFDC/TANF model (Dworsky, 2005). This suggests that the TANF implementation was associated with an increase in the hazard of receiving food stamps (Dworsky, 2005). During the eight quarters that data was collected and reviewed, most were employed in at least one of the eight quarters. However, few had earnings in all eight quarters. The gains were still below the poverty threshold, eight years after discharge. Nearly one third received food stamps, and almost one fifth of the youth received AFDC/TANF support (Dworsky, 2005).

A state survey conducted by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), in collaboration with the California Senate Office of Research (SOR), found significant findings concerning the inmates incarcerated and those who were former foster care youth. The survey was distributed to 2,564 inmates. The inmates who were surveyed were those who were going to be paroled for the first time over the next eight months. The survey was unique in that it specifically focused on inmates pending parole to find out if those inmates had ever been a foster care youth in contrast to most studies, where the researcher asks foster care youth if incarceration has ever been experienced.

The state survey reported the following findings: (1) Types of foster care placements – 52 percent of the males and 45 percent of the females claimed to have resided in group homes. Thirty-one percent of the male inmates and 35 percent of the female inmates had lived with a

foster family. Nearly twice, the percentage of females spent foster care time with relatives, compared to the males at 11 percent (Policy Matters, 2011). (2) Total time in foster care – 74 percent of the males and 75 percent of the females had been in foster care one year or longer. Thirty-three percent of the males and 40 percent of the females reported being in foster care for more than five years. (3) Age when inmates left foster care – most inmates were preteens and teenagers; however, a number of them had been placed in foster care more than once throughout childhood. Seventy percent of the surveyed inmates were between the ages of 13 and 19 when leaving foster care. Those inmates who left foster care at a younger age had a combined total of 8 percent, having left at the age of 6 years of age or younger. Nineteen percent left between the ages of 7 and 12 years old. Half of the male and female inmates left foster care between ages 13 and 17, and 20 percent remained in foster care until aging out at the age of 18. (4) Amount of time between leaving foster care and being sentenced to prison. Nineteen percent claimed to have been sentenced to prison less than two years after leaving foster care. More than half the male and female inmates claimed to have been sentenced to prison more than five years after leaving foster care. (5) Reasons for leaving foster care – Forty-seven percent went to a permanent home, either a relative's home, the home of a family friend, or an adoptive family. Twenty-one percent aged out of foster care upon turning eighteen, or nineteen in some cases. Thirteen percent ran away from the foster care arrangement, and 9 percent left foster care because due to being placed in a juvenile justice program or a similar correctional program. (6) Housing arrangements of foster youth who aged out or ran away – Thirty-eight percent had housing plans that lasted for more than one year. Twenty-six percent were homeless, and 25 percent had housing plans for less than one year. (7) Homelessness in the first year after leaving foster care – Thirty-six percent of the male and female inmates had been homeless at some point during the first year of independent living. Forty-three percent of females in comparison to 35 percent of males reported being without a home during the first year after leaving foster care. (8)

Race/Ethnicity of male inmates with a foster care history – 33 percent were black, 31 percent white, 21 percent Latino and 9 percent were Asian Pacific Islander, Native American, and other races/ethnicities. (9) Race/Ethnicity of male inmates who had lived only in a group-home foster-care arrangement – 33 percent were black, 27 percent were white, 25 percent Latino, 1 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1 percent Native American. The study highlighted the need for several actions. Immediate action was to ensure the inmates who were going to be paroled had the skill sets needed to survive in society to reduce the chances of recidivism. A short term and long term action were to review the types of foster care placements for youth and ensure that placements with better outcomes were the options first afforded to foster care youth. An in-depth review of group homes should be undertaken to identify why foster youth placed in these settings perform at lower rates of expectation. Courtney, Terao, et al. (2004) conducted a longitudinal study of adolescents aging out of foster care, finding that 70% of the sample of youth had primary caregivers living with alcohol abuse, drug abuse, poor parenting skills, spousal abuse, mental illness, or criminal records. As a result of such findings, the parental figures and primary caregivers were not positive role models for the foster care youth. The youth lacked positive role models within the home (Courtney et al., 2007). Most children mimic the environment; thus, if foster care youth are surrounded by negative influences, the outcome for positivity in life is already unfavorable because of the environment.

The support needed among the population of foster care youth was confirmed in a study of 29 young adults aging out of care (Samuels, 2008). The researcher utilized a theoretical framework of loss, and the findings indicated the need for strong supportive interpersonal relationships during the transition period of aging out of foster care. The study approach involved a social-network map in which the participating youth identified these relationships within the inner circles, middle circles, and outer circles regularly interacted with (Samuel, 2008). The study confirmed the importance of positive relationships with adults, including caseworkers,

parents, and other supportive adults, during the period of aging out of foster care. These relationships resulted in improved outcomes for these youth as adults (Samuel, 2008). Without these relationships, the likelihood of risk behavior resulting in incarceration or pregnancy is high due to the frequent inability to adjust to the sudden expectation of independent living (Courtney et al., 2011; Courtney et al., 2005; Courtney et al., 2007; Casey Foundation, 2004, 2007). It is unclear whether foster care, other existing factors, or a combination of factors are at the root of the vulnerability of foster youth to adverse outcomes (Berzin, 2008). Dworsky's 2005 study provides ample reasons to be concerned about the economic well-being of the child being discharged from out-of-home care. Many of the former foster youth earned significantly less during the first eight quarters after discharge than a full-time minimum wage worker would have made over the same period. The foster youth earnings for those two years were below the poverty threshold for a single year (Dworsky, 2005). While some of their earnings increased over time for former foster youth, the earnings increase was not enough to bring those youth out of poverty even eight years after being discharged from care (Dworsky, 2005).

In contrast to prior studies which found either no gender difference in employment (Courtney et al., 2001) or that female former foster youth were less likely to be employed (Cook et al., 1991; Festinger, 1983), the likelihood of being used during the first eight post-discharge quarters was higher for the females (82.5%) than for the males (78.3%) among this sample of former foster youth (Dworsky, 2005). The relationship between gender and employment was also evident at the multivariate level. Being female was associated with an increased hazard of first becoming employed (Dworsky, 2005). The explanation of the gender effect is possibly attributed to the differences in educational attainment, for which Dworsky's study did not control. It is plausible that males were more likely than females to have been engaged in uncovered employment, which the UI data would not have captured. However, it could also be due to higher rates of incarceration amongst male former foster youth, as reported by Courtney et

al., (2001). This study also reflected that regardless of whether or not the measured outcome was employment or earnings, African American and Latino former foster youth fared more poorly than White counterparts (Dworsky, 2005). Finally, it also showed that older former foster children had less trouble finding employment, and employers seemed willing to pay more (Dworsky, 2005). Employers possibly used age as a desirable characteristic that indicated which former foster youth would be hired. Age (the older the foster child) and maturity seemed to align with the employers' perception of being more reliable (Dworsky, 2005).

This research points to the importance of employment/job training and high school diploma or GED attainment. Previous studies have consistently found that much former foster youth do not have a high school diploma or even a GED (Barth, 1990; Cook et al., 1991; Courtney et al., 2001; Festinger, 1983; Jones & Moses, 1984). Foster youth are at a significant disadvantage in many aspects of their life. Those charged with the care of such a child should try to level the playing field by providing resources that will be beneficial to the youth's future success in life. Each foster youth needs a tailored program specifically for each individual, to be reviewed monthly with a caretaker or caseworker.

If Independent Living Programs (ILP) across the nation provided a wide variety of independent living programs to better help foster care youth transition to self-sufficiency, perhaps the percentage of foster youth who leave care unprepared might reduce. To better aid youth, many states offer ILPs in education and employment assistance, training in daily living skills such as personal hygiene, money management, housekeeping, and practiced living (the United States General Accounting Office, 1999). Additionally, ILP services can include counseling and training to enhance necessary living skills as well as interpersonal and social skills (the United States General Accounting Office, 1999). Foster youth can benefit tremendously from these services, as it could reduce dependence on government assistance.

Pettiford (1981) conducted an administrative data study of public assistance receipt among youth discharged to independent living from New York City's child welfare system. Pettiford (1981) compared the September 1980 public assistance rolls for both AFDC and Home Relief cases in New York City to a list of all New York City foster youth discharged to independent living between June 1979 and June 1980 in order to estimate the percentage of former foster youth who had received public assistance since being discharged from care (Pettiford 1981).

The study of Pathways to College for Former Foster Youth: Understanding Factors That Contribute to Educational Success by Merdinger, Hines, Osterling, and Wyatt (2002) examined 216 emancipated foster youth attending a four-year university, and indicated that many of the youth's experiences are characteristic of individuals manifesting resilience in the face of adversity. At the same time, results suggest that although the child is thriving academically, the vulnerability in other areas may exist. This study examined participants' responses, comparing those responses to other surveys to understand the factors that affect the academic performance of former foster youth.

Despite the age at which youth enter foster care, the transition to independent young adulthood is not an easy one. Upon exiting foster care, one is no longer a ward of the state (Dworsky, 2005). Thus all the benefits provided up to that point now cease to exist. Unable to turn to parents or other family members for financial and or emotional support, many of these foster youths must make the transition to young adulthood largely independently (Dworsky, 2005). Dworsky (2005) said it best, "They can no longer count on the state for continuing support once they have been discharged from care." The researcher suggests that every effort should be made to equip foster youth with independent living skills so that said youth may be employable upon discharge from care.

Programs for Independence

On average, most programs do not have an evaluating system that informs those in charge of the work conducted with foster care youth under the program's care is successful or not. Few programs take the time or have the resources to assess this need. Those that do have proven to be some of the programs with better outcomes for foster care youth.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is one organization that has several programs that have helped foster care youth be successful. Founded in 1948 by Jim E. Casey and his siblings, the goal of the foundation, as laid forth by Jim Casey, is to "Improve the lives of children who lack the family support, connections, and opportunities to thrive."

- In 2015 the foundation published "10 Practices: A Child Welfare Leader's Guide to Building a High-Performing Agency." This guide has been helping government agencies to assess relevant programs utilizing evidenced-based data. Evaluating and installing improved practices has not always been a strong suit for government agencies (<http://www.aecf.org/blog/new-desk-guide-for-child-welfare-leaders-provides-improvement-roadmap-for-c/>). However, The Annie E. Casey Foundation has been utilizing this tool to further the successful outcomes of foster care youth through intense support to other agencies.
- The foundation's other program is the Child Welfare Strategy Group, which provides strategic consulting and technical assistance to child welfare agencies to keep children safe, strengthen the connections between children and families, and improve children's long-term success.
- The third program identified is Evidence-Based Practice. This program promotes the child's well-being by investing in the development and use of rigorously evaluated programs that help kids reach critical milestones on the path to adulthood.

Another program is The New York Foundling Transition To Adulthood Support Program. The mission of the organization is this: “In the tradition of openness and compassion of its sponsors, The Sisters of Charity, helps children, youth and adults in need through efforts that strengthen families and communities and support each individual in reaching his or her potential.” Founded in 1869, this program now provides housing and social support to 18-25-year-olds, fosters responsibility in those individuals, and enhances each person’s educational and employment opportunities. The Foundling connects participants with community partners, and a case planner maintains ongoing contact to ensure these adults are matched with the necessary services. Through a balance of individual responsibility and community support, the Foundling better prepares their young adults for the future.

The third program is Graham-Windham. On a mission to provide each child, they serve in New York with a safe, loving family and the tools needed to thrive in school and life. Founded in 1806 by a group of dedicated forward-looking women, including Isabella Graham and Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton, Graham Windham has been meeting the needs of New York City’s most impoverished, most vulnerable children for more than two centuries. This foundation is also the creator of the Graham SLAM program, which focuses on working with foster care youth who have aged out or transitioned out of foster care to be successful in life after leaving care. The premise being that each young adult has a dedicated youth coach assigned to ensure the adult receives the support and skills needed to transition to life beyond care independently successfully. This support is offered up to the age of 25. Four phases of these programs contribute to the success of the young adults participating in the program:

(a) Intensive Phase – Youth coaches meet with young adults between 4-6 times per year.

Two of the meetings must be held in person

(b) Supportive Phase – Youth coaches meet with young adults between 2-3 times per year.

(c) Stability Phase – Young adults, are either enrolled in a program or are employed part-time

(d) Last Phase – Launch or completion of the program. The young adult is on the way to living independently utilizing the tools provided, and are capable of achieving the program's livable wage criteria of earning \$32,000.00 per year.

These programs do not summarize all programs that are successfully working with foster care youth who have aged out or will transition out of care. However, this assessment provides an overview of the types of programs that exist to assist foster care youth in becoming independent and successful.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter describes the participants, research design and purpose, population and sample, protection of human subjects, the justification for the research instrument, data collection strategy, and data presentation and analysis. The chapter also outlines the researchers rationale for the concerns that drive the passion for investigating the factors that contribute to the perceived success of foster care youth.

Participants

A small non-probability purposive sample was utilized to research this study. Purposeful sampling is a technique widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources (Patton, 2002). Following Creswell & Plano Clark (2011), this involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals with specific knowledge or experience of growing up in the foster care system: such individuals would be identified and selected for the study. In addition to education and experience, Bernard (2002) and Spradley (1979) note the importance of availability and willingness to participate, and the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner. On the other hand, Palinkas LA, Horwitz S, Green CA, Wisdom JP, Duan N, and Hoagwood K (2015) identified that probabilistic or random sampling is used to ensure the generalizability of findings by minimizing the potential for bias in selection and to control for the potential influence of known and unknown confounders.

Two former foster care youth between the ages of 18 years old and 28 years old who had participated in a transitional living program were recruited to participate in this study.

Participants resided within the tri-state area and were male and of the same ethnic and racial

group. Education attainment ranged from no high school diploma or general equivalency diploma (GED) to trade certification and college completion. Recruitment of participants occurred through a small purposive sample across an agency that operates a transitional living program. Lastly, recruitment also occurred via referrals from current study participants, who knew other foster care youth whom they felt might be interested in participating in this study.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria respectively required that participants were currently enrolled in a transitional living program or had completed a program within the last two to eight years. Exhibiting signs of mental health concerns due to speaking of one's perceived experiences that led to success was treated with urgency, sensitivity, and care. Participants displaying mental health concerns were referred to their agency, university mental health departments, or hospital mental health departments for emergency mental health support and additional support as needed from mental health counselors.

Participants received the informed consent form upon being identified as an interested participant for the study. This ensured that the participants in the study were provided with all the information to prepare for said participation. The informed consent form also included the names, phone numbers, and locations of mental health providers who could provide adequate care should a participant need to speak with a licensed mental health counselor. This list included university mental health counseling departments and hospital mental health resources. Resources from university mental health departments and hospital mental health departments are often provided at a discounted rate, thus providing the participants with options for these services should they require it.

As an appreciation for willingness to participate, a \$25 gift card was provided to each participant for the time given to this study. This amount was intended to express appreciation for

the contribution to the research and is no way intended to be seen as coercion or bribery to participate in the study.

Sampling Procedures:

Young adults from foster care agencies who have participated or are participating in an independent living program were the focus of the sample. For those who recently completed a transitional living program, the program must have been completed within the last 8 years. Flyers and an introductory email were distributed to agencies with a transitional living program to inform the agency of the study and to garner interest in the study.

Agencies who expressed interest in the study on behalf of foster care youth who wanted to participate were contacted via email and phone. These independent living agencies were asked to provide between 15 and 20 participants for the study. Three potential participants contacted the researcher and only two participated in interviews. One potential participant did not arrive for the interview. "Given a large enough sample, of all sampling schemes, random sampling offers the best chance for a researcher to obtain a representative sample" (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007, p.242). Random sampling from a purposive sample increases the validity of the study because every participant has an equal opportunity of being selected. Thus the researcher is not biased in the selection of the participants, and those selected will reflect an accurate representation of the population. The limitations of non-probability purposive sampling are that the results cannot be generalized across the entire community of foster care youth due to the small representation of the sample size. Once contact was established with the interested participants. Participants received an email with a description of the study and an explanation of the time commitment for this study.

The seven general principles, according to Kemper EA, Stringfield S, Teddlie C (2003) that govern all forms of sampling, are to be adhered to. These principles are as follows: 1) the

sampling strategy should stem logically from the conceptual framework as well as the research questions being addressed by the study; 2) the sample should be able to generate a thorough database on the type of phenomenon under study; 3) the sample should at least allow the possibility of drawing clear inferences and credible explanations from the data; 4) the sampling strategy must be ethical; 5) the sampling plan should be feasible; 6) the sampling plan should allow the researcher to transfer/generalize the conclusions of the study to other settings or populations and 7) the sampling scheme should be efficient and practical.

There are numerous challenges in identifying and applying the appropriate purposeful sampling strategy in any study. For instance, the range of variation in a sample from which a purposive sample is to be taken is often not known at the outset of the study (Palinkas et al., 2015). To set as the goal, the sampling of information-rich informants that cover the range of variation assumes one knows that range of change. Consequently, an iterative approach of sampling and resampling to draw an appropriate sample is usually recommended to ensure that theoretical saturation occurs (Mile & Huberman, 1994). However, that saturation may be determined a-priori based on an existing theory or conceptual framework, or the congestion may emerge from the data, as in a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Straus, 1967).

Field notes will document and address topics/issues that a tape recorder cannot record or validate, such as body language, the environment, and the setting (Patton, 2002). During the interviews, each participant shared respective demographic information. This demographic information provided data on participants' family history and entry into foster care.

“We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions... We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of the observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people

questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective" (Patton, 1990, p. 196).

Description of Independent Living Programs:

Graham SLAM stands for Support, Lead, Achieve, and Model. It is an innovative strategy developed to provide young people in the foster care system, as well as those at risk for entering foster care, with long-term, consistent and comprehensive support from high school, through college or vocational school, and to a living-wage career. Graham SLAM has committed to sticking with young people until age twenty-five, even after those individuals are no longer in the child welfare system. Graham SLAM provides a continuum of intensive, structured support, centered around a coaching model (<http://www.graham-windham.org/our-programs/family-and-community-support-services/>). This program includes five components of support:

(a) **Ongoing Individual Support and Planning.** Youth coaches work one-on-one with each young person to develop and follow a plan for reaching educational and career goals. Nationally recognized, evidence-supported models, are used to engage and motivate young people, including Motivational Interviewing and Solution-Based Casework, a unifying framework since introduced to New York City and used agency-wide.

(b) **College Readiness and Support.** Help students complete high school, select the right college and program, apply for admissions and financial aid, and stay on track toward college graduation.

(c) **Employment Readiness and Support.** Provide job readiness training and career-focused peer support through a model called Career Club, and help students apply to and succeed in vocational programs, internships, and jobs.

(d) **Family Support.** Engage each young person's family in the process of developing a plan for the young person and supporting the steps along the way.

(e) **Peer Support.** Provide peer support through a weekly support group centered around a model called Network. Leadership training, peer support, and community service opportunities are also provided through the Bengals positive peer group.

Another program is The New York Foundling Transition To Adulthood Support Program. The mission of the organization is this: "In the tradition of openness and compassion of its sponsors, The Sisters of Charity, helps children, youth and adults in need through efforts that strengthen families and communities and support each individual in reaching his or her potential." Founded in 1869, this program now provides housing and social support to adults aged eighteen to twenty-five, fosters responsibility and enhances each person's educational and employment opportunities. The Foundling connects participants with community partners, and a case planner maintains ongoing contact to ensure each individual is matched with the necessary services. Through a balance of individual responsibility and community support, the Foundling better prepares young adults for the future.

Youth Villages, a non-profit social service organization, based in Memphis, Tennessee, provides independent living program services that are expected to last nine months for most youth who complete the program. Transitional living starts with assessments and the development of an individualized treatment plan that takes into account the particular needs and goals of each young person. The bulk of services are then provided during hour-long transitional sessions with a case manager, called a "TL Specialist," and are scheduled once a week. Each TL specialist typically serves only eight youth at a time. The topics covered and the activities that take place during Transitional Living sessions vary depending on the needs and goals of each child, but the TL Specialists are expected to use the methods that are included in the treatment

manual. Three categories cover the methods: evidence-informed tools, counseling, and action-oriented activities. Topics covered include money management and job-seeking skills, alcohol and substance abuse, and access to community college information.

This population is best suited to provide the data needed, having lived the perceived experience or phenomenon of foster care. These young adults, ages eighteen through twenty-eight, maneuvered the journey through foster care, where the unknown was predictable. The perspective self-reports and apt descriptions of personal experiences from these individuals will provide the data for the research.

Research Design and Purpose:

A phenomenological qualitative design that utilizes a small non-probability sample was used to analyze the perceived experiences leading to the success factors of foster care youth who have successfully aged out or transitioned out of the foster care system. The recognized expertise of the foster care youth who participated in the study is explored to inform and identify common themes and approaches that contributed to the perceived success of foster care youth.

The phenomenological qualitative design was used for this study because it allowed the researcher to understand the lived experiences of the participants as shared through the personal perception of those individuals. “A phenomenological study is one that focuses on descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience. One can employ a general phenomenological perspective to elucidate the importance of using methods that capture people’s experience of the world without conducting a phenomenological study that focuses on the essence of the shared experience” (Patton, 1990, p. 71).

According to Patton (1990), the focus of a phenomenological study lies in the “descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience.” The goal is to

identify the essence of the shared experience that underlies all the variations in this particular learning experience. The reality is viewed as commonalities in human experiences. According to Patton (1990), the steps include:

1. Epoche: a phrase in which the researcher eliminates or clarifies about preconception. Researchers need to be aware of “prejudices, viewpoints, or assumptions regarding the phenomenon under investigation” (Katz, 1987).
2. Phenomenological reduction: the researcher brackets out the world and presuppositions to identify the data in pure form, uncontaminated by external intrusions.
3. Bracketing involves the following steps (Denzin, 1989):
 - a. Locate within the persona experience or self-story, key phrases and statements that speak directly to the phenomenon in question
 - b. Interpret the meanings of these phrases, as an informed reader
 - c. Obtain the subject’s interpretations of these phrases, if possible
 - d. Inspect these meanings for what they reveal about the essential recurring features of the phenomenon being studied
 - e. Offer a tentative statement, or definition, of the event in terms of the crucial recurring features, identified
4. The textural portrayal of each theme: a description of an experience
5. Development of structural synthesis: containing the bones of the experience, the true meanings of the knowledge of deeper implications for the individual.

The entire analysis process aims to examine the lived experience from the ones who produced the experience rather than the imposition of other people’s interpretations. It should be the interpretations of the participants in the phenomenon under study that define the

commonalities of the lived experience in the event. It is not the researcher's thinking of the game, or the theoretical descriptions of the phenomenon that are under analysis. The study's purpose of finding out the perceived experiences of foster care youth that helped said youth achieve success mirrors Denzin's guidelines for bracketing.

The phenomenological inquiry is particularly appropriate to address the meanings and perspectives of research participants. The primary concern of phenomenological analysis is to understand "how every day, the inter-subjective world is constituted" (Schwandt, 2000) from the participants' perspective. The underlying philosophical assumption underlying this inquiry has most often been illustrated by Husserl's (1962) statements – "we can only know what we experience." Thus, any investigation cannot engage in 'sciences of facts' because there are no absolute facts; there is only the 'knowledge of essences.' The essence is the central underlying meaning of the experiences shared within the different lived experiences.

The researcher recorded each interview after receiving permission from the participant to do so. The researcher will also provide a transcript to the participant for review. During the meetings, field notes were taken. These field notes captured the demeanor, body language, and other observable nonverbal actions that an audiotape could not record. Field notes include any information about the participant's non-verbal gestures, interpretations, and concerns about the validity of any statements (Patton, 2012). To ensure accuracy, field notes will be recorded within 3 hours of the completion of each interview. The information included the researcher's general observations about each meeting.

The researcher should look first into the individual point of view, such as the realization of subject consciousness perceived in the objects, to understand human phenomena as lived and experienced, which Giorgi (1985) pointed out as the significant characteristics of a phenomenological psychological method. The primary data source for this personal perspective

is interviewing. Patton (1990) stated the purpose of talking specifically as “to find out what is in and on someone else’s mind,” and that is exactly what the target of the phenomenological study focuses on the perception of lived experience. There should be two perspectives of phenomenological analysis of the knowledge of lived experience from people who are living through the phenomenon. From the researcher, who has a great interest in the event ‘Return to things themselves’ (Husserl, 1970), the researcher cannot impose the meanings for the learners, for example, because the learners are the independent sources of separate individual existence living through the learning environment. However, it seems to be impossible to detach personal interpretations from the things that are personally interesting. Thus, the researcher has to be wary of personal experience being infused into both personal engagement in the interviews and the analysis of data.

Protection of Human Subjects:

The proposal for the research was submitted to Long Island University’s Institutional Review Board for approval. Upon approval, data collection began. The interview materials were organized securely and held in a locked location only accessible by the researcher. An inventory log of all materials were created to ensure the security and identity of each participant. A risk associated with participating in a study like this is that it may trigger negative experiences and could foster painful memories. To minimize this possibility, the researcher explained this to each participant before commencing the interview via a script and had the participants sign a consent form, as well as explained that the participants can choose to discontinue participation at any point during the interview if desired. The researcher assigned pseudonyms to the respondents to ensure anonymity for everyone throughout the process. If at any time during the interview process, a subject became distraught due to the recollection or discussion of their past, the interview ceased immediately, and the dissertation committee and the IRB were contacted

and informed immediately. The subject was referred to receive mental health counseling if needed through a local hospital or local mental health office. The researcher assisted in making an appointment for the subject.

Development of Research Instrument and Justification for the Research Instrument:

Few studies focus on the success factors of foster care youth; the lived experiences of those youth and of said individuals ability to rise above life's challenges (Davis, 2006; Hines, Merdinger & Wyatt, 2005; Merdinger, Hines, Lemon & Wyatt 2002; Wolanin, 2005). Wolanin (2005) estimated the average high school completion rate among foster youths is 50% compared to a 70% completion rate for all other youth. There are far too few foster youths that complete high school and even less comprehensive postsecondary education (Wolanin, 2005). According to Hones (1998), life story narratives frequently bring the voices of those who have been silenced, including children, to the attention of policymakers.

The research instrument was developed from a set of seven interview questions for the purposeful sample of study participants. In developing the interview questions, the researcher was mindful not to use language that queried about the participant's relationship with an adult to avoid negative memories or experiences of possible inappropriate relationship with an adult. An example of such a question was: Was there ever a time when your trust was broken by an adult? Each participant will be asked the same set of questions. It was noted when participants went off on a tangent or strayed from the asked question, or when the researcher required further elaboration on a point. Follow up questions were specific to each participant based on the direction of the conversation. Interviewing is necessary when the researcher cannot observe behavior, feeling, or how people interpret the surrounding world. It is also required to talk when the researcher's interest lies in past events that are impossible to replicate (Merriam, 1998).

In determining the perceived experiences that promote self-efficacy in foster care youth who have aged out or transitioned out of care, success must be defined. As defined by dictionary.com, success is the favorable or prosperous termination of attempts or endeavors; the accomplishments of one's goals. The researcher defines success as living an independent and self-sufficient life. Three criteria for this are listed below:

- Being able to financially and emotionally provide for oneself
- The ability to maintain permanent residency and sustain emotional and mental stability [this will be assessed by observation and self-reporting through the interviews]
- The ability to survive, have stable employment, enroll in trade-school or attend college and live independently without public assistance

In justifying the research instrument, question one queried the relationship with mentors. The problem is supported by Scharf et al. (2004), who examined the association between attachment representations and successful coping with developmental tasks of emerging adulthood. The responsibilities included dealing effectively with the home-leaving transition, advancing in the development of the capacity for mature intimacy in friendships and romantic relationships while maintaining close, autonomous relationships with parents and developing a sense of efficacy and individuation. The study found that although these developmental tasks begin to evolve before late adolescence, the jobs are a more central and salient part of emerging adulthood functioning during the third decade of life (Scharf et al. 2004). The researcher found that foster care youth who are developing adults will have a void in these developmental tasks.

Questions number two and three were designed around defining moments of changing one's life for the better and defying the odds for success and independence. Wade and Dixon (2006) recorded a correlation between time spent in foster care and lower levels of educational

attainment. Foster care youth must make purposeful and meaningful decisions not to fall into the categories of meeting the stereotypes of no education to achieve success and independence. Few programs that promote significant gains in knowledge for foster youth exist. This, in turn, leads to the array of adverse outcomes that have been documented for youth exiting the foster care system (Ryan et al., 2007).

The definition of success for foster care youth varies. Many think of success as being able to live without outside assistance independently. Question four discussed defining success as to the current circumstances of where a foster care youth is in this phase of life. Salazar (2013) notes that university graduates with experience in foster care were compared with graduates in the general population. This study concluded that both groups had a similar rate of employment at a livable wage but differed in that the group of foster care alumni was less likely to have attained homeownership and more likely to have a combined household income below the poverty line.

Question five asked how the foster care system could have better-prepared foster care youth to leave the system. Christian (2003) shares that in many ways, the foster care system curtails foster youths' growth due to lack of independence, life skills, and a consistent positive adult to advocate on behalf of the youth. Some foster care youth are caught in a vicious cycle unable to aid said youth in becoming self-sufficient and independent. Many lack functional and life skills such as money management, self-regulation, and decision-making skills. Newtown et al. (2000), Roy et al. (2000), Redding et al. (2000), Vuchinich et al. (2002), Sullivan & Van-Zyl (2005) & Vacca (2008) discuss foster care youth aging out of care with no stable and permanent plan. In addressing question number six, foster care youth need a viable exit plan and support pieces in place well in advance of leaving care to provide the best opportunities for self-sufficiency and independent living. Question number seven queried the advice that former foster

care youth would provide to current foster care youth regarding autonomy and living independently. Hearing advice from those who have lived the experience of being an old foster care youth should be relevant and authentic.

Data Collection Strategy:

Interviews were conducted in person in a public setting. They were conducted at the independent living transition program headquarters. The decision of where interviews occurred was at the discretion and ease of accessibility of each participant. In utilizing purposive non-sampling, the essence of the phenomenon will be detailed through the experience of the participants in the study. “The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those that one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (Patton, 1990. p. 230).

The interviews were tape-recorded with advanced permission of each subject. Meticulous notes were taken before, during, and after the interview process. The advantages of interviewing as a qualitative data collection method are primarily related to naturalness and spontaneity, flexibility, and control of the environment. Interviews usually create a natural situation for respondents to present information. Furthermore, it is easier and more natural for many to respond to questions orally than in writing, and a casual, relaxed setting leads to more spontaneous answers. Combined with a high response rate, these advantages provide a good argument for the use of interviews, as opposed to survey questionnaires. An interview allows for a more productive, more detailed, and complex set of questions than is possible in single statement survey questionnaires (Gochros, 1988). Meetings permit far more flexibility than survey questionnaires. Interviewers can use probes to enrich responses and explore in greater depth. The sequencing and timing of questions, the way items are phrased, and the elimination

of irrelevant questions can all be adapted according to the characteristics of the individual respondent. Also, by merit of being present, interviewers can make use of any unanticipated data interviewees offer. Spontaneous content that is generated can provide useful data for the study and perhaps subsequent inquiries. The nonverbal responses and behaviors of respondents also provide meaningful data in interviews. The tone of voice, eye contact, and facial expressions as it accompanies verbal responses may reflect areas where the interviewer can further probe for an explanation (Gochros, 1988).

The open-ended questions interview, also known as the semi-structured interview (Gochros, 1988; Fontana & Frey, 1994), was chosen as the data collection strategy for this study. Meetings were limited in time and occur only once, as it was necessary to have the same information from each participant interviewed. This is the most efficient and cost-effective of the interview types. However, this format does require that the interviewer develop the discipline necessary to construct questions that are clear, unambiguous, and neutral. The semi-standardized interview format leaves no dimension of inquiry to chance. The same interview questions were asked of each respondent in roughly the same order so that consistent and systematic data can be gathered from every respondent.

There are two perceived advantages to the standardization of questions for these open-ended interviews: the instrument or guide is available for inspection by the program in which the research is being performed, and the interview is focused so that interviewee and interviewer time is carefully used (Patton, 1990). This interview type format is highly concentrated, and the scope of inquiry is significantly narrowed. The format may also be considered the least politically objectionable of the qualitative methods to a program whose processes are under scrutiny. When using qualitative data collection processes that include an examination of program processes, it can be helpful to minimize issues of legitimacy and credibility by

collecting the same information from everyone who is interviewed. Each interview was recorded to protect the validity of the data. Each interview required approximately 60 minutes of each participants time.

Limitations of the Interview Approach:

Research that depends on participants' self-reports always poses, defects, and problems, whether data comes from an interview or survey questionnaire. Interview research requires a considerable amount of time and is expensive to conduct. Transcribing data from interview notes adds an extra time-sensitive and costly step in the research process that is not necessary with mailed surveys. The number of interviews a researcher can conduct in one day is quite limited as a result of the physical and emotional strains. Time constraints become further intensified when respondents are hard to reach, fail to keep appointments, or do not complete the interviews because of outside distractions or other commitments. Perhaps most critical is the rationale for selecting study participants that is linked with the aims of the investigation (i.e., why recruit these individuals for this particular study? What qualifies these individuals to address the purposes of the survey?) (Patton, 2002). This research study utilizes a small sample. However, the population of foster care youth being studied is not easy to gain access to. With a small sample, generalization cannot be applied to the community at large. However, the rich history of information gathered from the study participants should allow for central themes to emerge.

Data Analysis:

The researcher collected data from the semi-standardized interview responses provided by participants who provided a personal perspective on the perceptions of experiences that promote self-efficacy in foster youth. The researcher recorded all interviews barring the

permission of the participant. Interviews were transcribed. Beginning with the first interview, analysis is paramount. According to Merriam (1998), the right way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it simultaneously with data collection. “At the outset of a qualitative study, the investigator knows what the problem is and has selected a sample to collect data to address the problem” (Merriam, 1998, p. 162).

After completion of each interview, the researcher provided a 10-minute interlude, so the notes and audiotapes could be reviewed rapidly by the researcher to allow for summarization to the participant. This summarization by the researcher enabled the participant to confirm the accuracy of the notes taken, thus ensuring the validity of the information gathered. The researcher decided to check the validity of the data by this mechanism rather than sending participants the transcript to be reviewed and returned to the researcher with respective comments. The population being studied posed a legitimate concern by the researcher that most participants will not replace the transcript to the researcher. The researcher did not think that participants would give additional time from their daily schedules to review a transcript, provide feedback, and return it by the requested date.

For this qualitative study, the responses from the participants were coded. Coding is the process of organizing chunks of material (sentences, paragraphs, text data, and categories). Qualitative studies in education generally generate 80-100 codes that are then organized into 15-20 categories and synthesized into five to seven significant concepts (Saldana, 2009).

Coding occurred at two levels. The first level of coding identified units of meaning that emerged out of the data, with the smallest scales of concepts or ideas. The researcher is looking for distinct concepts and categories in the data. These units of meaning are then grouped into content categories. The second level of coding showed the similarities in content between categories. This then allowed for the generating of themes.

Two interviews were conducted by the researcher. The raw data from the audiotapes were transcribed manually from the completion of the first interview by the researcher, and data analysis began through the examination of reading the raw data. The researcher then compared interview transcripts to the interview recordings to ensure accuracy. The researcher also reviewed each of the transcripts to look for common themes or phrases. Each interview was then coded into themes, patterns, and commonalities using the constant comparative method. Open coding identified initial issues and designs, which were then grouped to develop common themes among the interviews. This allowed the researcher to see similarities, differences, and any anomalies across the meetings (Kolb, 2012). The four stages of the constant comparative methodology include: comparing incidents, integrating categories, and the properties of those categories, delimiting the theory, and writing the hypothesis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Utilizing a constant comparative methodology allows the researcher to look at the raw data provided and continually sort and code the data to develop a theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This study will shed light on the perceptions of experiences that promote self-efficacy in foster care youth.

Chapter 4:**Findings**

This chapter presents the significant findings in this phenomenological study. This study was designed to explore perceptions of experiences that promote self-efficacy in foster care youth. The participants shared personal experiences in foster care and discussed in depth own thoughts, feelings, and emotions on these experiences. The participants expressed the individual perceptions of experiences believed to promote self-efficacy within this population. Majority of the literature that focuses on foster care youth informs the negative impacts of foster care; limited research discusses the success of foster care youth. Thus, the researcher's specific interest in investigating the perceptions of experiences that promote self-efficacy in foster care youth. The theoretical frameworks of Erikson, Vygotsky, and Self Determination theory supported this study in exploring the self-efficacy of foster care youth.

In specifying the outlines and outcomes of this study, the MAXQDA 2020 software was utilized to present the visual representation of data, thus providing the reader with precise visual results. Furthermore, anecdotes from data collected are being used in this chapter to portray to the reader the phenomena of the subjects as foster care youth.

Data Analysis Process

Two former foster care youth were interviewed. The interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed into a Word document. Interviews were transcribed over eight weeks and meticulously open-coded four times to allow for interpretation of data. Open coding was conducted by hand. Throughout the process, major words, expressions, and statements were identified and emphasized via underlining and highlighting the information. Commonalities, categories, units of meaning, and themes began to emerge. In following the phenomenological

approach of study, the analysis follows the sequential steps to understanding the data. Data were analyzed using the Constant Comparative Method (CCM). Glaser & Strauss (1967) suggest that when used to generate theory, the comparative analytical method described can be applied to social units of any size. As this is a phenomenological study, the researcher examined the experience and how the subjects experienced the same (Creswell, 2008). The two transcripts were uploaded into MAXQDA 2020. The results were 352 categories as each sentence was coded. Upon additional review of the categories, the results were 148 categories. As previously shared, data analysis began upon completion of the interviews. The codes were guided by the theoretical framework and literature research. Participant interviews were audio-recorded, then transcribed into a Word document. The documents were carefully open-coded five times over eight weeks. Open coding occurred by hand, where the documents were underlined and highlighted. The materials were then uploaded into MAXQDA 2020, allowing for significant words and statements to be placed into categories. Comments and expressions were reviewed again, along with the groups, to ensure accuracy. The commonalities among the participants now showed, bringing forth the emergence of themes. Four themes were finalized, which presented the phenomena and perceived experiences amongst the participants.

Subject Profiles

The researcher interviewed two participants. A third interview was scheduled, however, that participant did not appear for the interview. Bernard (2002) and Spradley (1979) previously stated that, in addition to knowledge and experience, note the importance of availability and willingness to participate, as well as the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner. Recruiting and interviewing foster care youth proved challenging. Once interviewed, the stories were in-depth, powerful, authentic, and rich. Both participants were male, African American, and twenty-four years of age. The average

number of years spent in foster care between the participants was fifteen years. One participant spent the entirety of life in foster care and also has a disability. The other participant initially had intermittent stays in foster care, and eventually resided permanently in care after growing older. Both participants were adamant about graduating from high school with a Regents Diploma. Neither wanted a GED. One participant even stated that failure to earn a Regents Diploma would lead the participant to accept no other high school credential, i.e., General Equivalency Diploma (GED). That would not suffice for the participant, as it was felt that was the easy way out. Earning a high school diploma meant that the participants had both accomplished something many people believed would never be achieved. The participants overcame an obstacle: both have aspirations of earning a college degree and are working towards that goal.

Table 4.1

Subjects

Demographics

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Graduated HS (Type of Diploma)</i>	<i>College or Trade School Graduate</i>	<i>Residential Status</i>	<i>Years in Foster Care</i>	<i>Employment Status</i>
<i>Blake</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>African American</i>	<i>Yes - Regents Diploma</i>	<i>No – Completed 1 semester of college</i>	<i>Living independently in own apartment</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>Employed</i>
<i>John</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>African American</i>	<i>Yes - Local Diploma</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Living independently in own apartment</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>Employed</i>

Table 4.1 shows that both subjects are living independently in independently rented apartments, earned High School diplomas, are employed, and identified as African American.

Themes

Upon completion of the analysis of the data, four themes emerged: (1) interpersonal relationships, (2) growth, (3) leadership, and (4) interpersonal skills. Several units of meaning and categories formed under each theme based on the participants' responses to the interview questions. Starting with the smallest levels of meaning and ensuring all are accounted for through developing an extensive category system. The extensive category system therefore describes all units of meaning. Remaining true to the texts that is being analysed, is important in the development of the category system (Burnard, 1994). Following are examples of units of meanings and categories formed under respective themes.

Interpersonal relationships included categories such as mentors, interconnectedness, respect and trust. Examples of units of meaning were: "Whoever thought to pair us together, really understood who I was, okay, understood what I was capable of. Do you know about getting to appointments on time?" The growth theme involved categories such as determination, resilience, focused and ambition. Examples of units of meaning under this category were: "You know, finally, I got my own apartment and I wake up and do as I like." "I went on to college, August of 2016."

Leadership categories entailed developing skills for the future, problem solving, job preparedness and cultivating leadership qualities. An example of a unit of meaning under this category was: "What can I do tomorrow to make my day more efficient or to make myself more successful or push me in the direction of what I measure to be success based on me and my short-term and long-term goals." Interpersonal skills categories included transition, ask for help, build relationships and articulate one's self. Examples of units of meaning under this category were: "Don't look at everybody in foster care like they're out to hurt you. You know it's essentially a place to help you because you know they felt that's what your parents lacked, the

ability to help you and keep you safe. So embrace it and I know it's a dark place. It's a thousand reasons not to want to like anyone but you know what find someone that you do like and establish a relationship with that person.” “Learn how to ask for help.”

Throughout this process, each participant articulated personal perceptions of experiences as a foster care youth. There were some similarities amongst experiences, and others where no similarities existed. When similarities occurred, it allowed for a further cross-functional look at the data. Thus, subjects sharing each experience as individuals provided rich, meaningful data (see figures 4.1 and 4.2).

Figure 4.1. Visual Representation of Themes and Categories

Code System	John	Blake	SUM
Defining Success	1	1	2
I'm not satisfied at all, but		1	1
I think I didn't celebrate th		1	1
High,Challenging points on jo		1	1
I got this code I been tryin		1	1
I got to college I was no lc		1	1
When I got my first bills ye		1	1
I'm not done you know wh		1	1
Writing down in my book,		1	1
I'm talkin about success I'm		1	1
Interpersonal Skills 2		1	1
I didn't know what success cor		1	1
To be real out of everything I/v		1	1
Independence		1	1
Ever since I got this apartn		1	1
I swear to god, I remembe		1	1
you know god is really, go		1	1
I lived in programs that tol		1	1
Growth		1	1
I went on to college, Augu		1	1
Interpersonal Relationships 2		1	1
my point of view with my j		1	1

Figure 4.1 represents the categories and themes shared by the subject Blake. The categories and themes are shown by a variety of color indicators.

Figure 4.2. Visual Representation of Themes and Categories

Code System	John	Blake	SUM
Interpersonal Skills			
I've come across the menti			
That's one of the most imp			
I've learned this this was or			
One of the second things t			
A lot of young people if th			
Learn how to ask for help			
Growth			
I think developing that app			
I wouldn't say so much me			
Interpersonal Skills 2			
Success should be measur			
I would say success is one			
Decision Making Skills			
My challenge is would hav			
somebody that I didn't me			
a few of the high points w			
Growth			
I'm walking around campu			
I was in a hospital for like			
You know and it was I still			
I went to Brooklyn to visit			

Figure 4.2 represents the categories and themes shared by the subject John. The categories and themes are shown by a variety of color indicators.

The four major themes will be discussed below. These themes were derived from the in-depth interviews conducted with both subjects as they shared their lived experience. One subject shared his life story, with memories of how he got involved with the Child Welfare System. Notably sharing that his mother suffered from mental health concerns, primarily, Schizophrenia. The other subject shared his life story as the Child Welfare System was always involved in his life. He never knew his birth mother and had always been a ward of the state, thus the Child Welfare System was all he knew. As the purpose of phenomenology is not to generalize, the subjects life stories are meant to provide a comprehensive understanding of their experiences in foster care and their perceptions of experiences that promote self-efficacy as foster care youth.

Background of Blake:

Blake is a 24 year old African American male from the inner city of New York. Blake was born into the foster care system and aged out of care at the age of 21. He was also a foster care youth with a disability, which at times made it harder to place children like him. His story begins as never knowing his birth mother and always being in foster care. He was adopted by the person he calls mom and that was the only foster home he knew and lived in until she died

when he was 10 years old. He recounts never knowing what it was like to be in a foster home while being raised by his mom. She never made him to feel that he was not her son or that their home was different than a child who was living with and being raised by his/her biological parents. She treated him well, fed him and clothed him (though she did not allow them to eat sugar), was strict but fair, had rules to live by, insisted on him receiving an education and learning, while providing him with love. She fostered several children and he felt proud and lucky to be one of the children adopted by her.

After his mother died, then began the countless placements and transiency throughout the foster care system. In total, he lived in 18 foster homes before aging out. He went from having a mother, to having no one and left to navigate a child welfare system which he did not feel treated him well. “Foster care is a game that we didn’t ask to play with, but we gotta play the game.” He remembers having a hard time adjusting to foster homes led by married couples, because he was not accustomed to men, he had never been exposed to men as it was just his mother and siblings growing up. He found that he had a hard time adjusting to men and often that relationship proved challenging or was nonexistent. “Me not growing up with a father, not ever grow up with men in my house was always intimidated by men, always, always. I just don’t get the right vibe. I respect a woman in 3.5 seconds, but a man, I mean you gotta work three months, I just don’t deal with men the same.” He did not have positive relationships with men. If you wanted him to do something, it was best to have a woman tell him, you had a better chance of him complying with a female versus a male. As he got older and continued to be moved around the system because of his challenging behaviors as well as having a disability. He was finally placed in a group home. The group home he felt was a place where he found peers that he could hang with and who understood him because they were all in a similar situation. No one was better than the other, they were all facing the same struggles and battles.

After getting in trouble with the law, getting arrested and being bailed out by Administration for Children Services (ACS). He remembers praying to God asking him to place him with a rich family and remove him from the inner city. His prayers were answered. He had begun playing sports and became a part of a sports team. The coach of his team noticed him and his abilities. The coach and his wife took Blake into their home in a wealthy suburb after learning that he was in foster care. Blake describes this part of his life as literally watching the movie, *The Blind Side*. As Blake was older and close to the age of 21, the wealthy school district in which the family resided also took an interest in him. In particular, one of Blake's team mates mother worked with Blake and the school district to ensure that Blake would earn his high school diploma. The mother tutored Blake daily to prepare him for the 5 Regents exams he would need to take and pass as he previously had not taken any Regents exams.

In the state of New York, students must pass a minimum of 5 Regents exams to earn their local high school diploma. Blake worked hard, studied and practiced and successfully earned his high school diploma. The relationship with his coaches family did not work out. As he shared the family started to be annoyed that Blake was gaining more attention in sports than their biological son. The family would provide Blake with fifty dollars allowance monthly, which he felt was unfair. He started to feel that he was simply a cash cow for this family and that they didn't really care about him. They collected the monthly stipend of \$1200 from the child welfare system, but only gave him \$50 allowance. In the suburbs, the children hang out at Applebee's and talk with their friends, they are not smoking marijuana and hanging out on the corner. Blake wanted to hang out at Applebee's with his new friends as well, but he needed money to do so. On the day of Blake's high school graduation, the family returned Blakes things to the foster care agency he came from and did not attend his high school graduation. That ended the relationship between the two. Blake started college, however he dropped out after his first semester. He had

no support and things got bad. “I aged out of care, I dropped out of college. I didn’t have anything to do with foster care anymore. Nobody from foster care felt for me, they saw me as trouble, every time I came to the building, it was like, oh, him again!” Blake aged out of foster care and lived in a homeless shelter for two years before obtaining his own apartment and working towards his independence.

Background of John

John is a 24 year old African American male from the inner city of New York. John entered the child welfare system when he was twelve. He remained in the child welfare system for 10 years. He entered the child welfare system through the Office for Children Family Services (OCFS) due to his consistent offenses with the law. His actions led to him being reprimanded to several stays in juvenile hall. Upon his last release from juvenile hall, he was a ward of the state and could not return home to live with his grandparents. He had always resided with his grandparents since he was a child. His mother had schizophrenia. In residing with his grandparents, he had formed a special bond with his grandmother and had a significant amount of respect for her.

Within a year of his last occurrence with the juvenile hall justice system, he had another interaction with the law. “I got incarcerated at a young age. I got incarcerated multiple times. I think the first one, I was 15 and got sent to juvenile hall. I did a short stay in juvenile hall. The second time, I was 17 and got sent to Rikers Island, there I did a longer stay. That experience changed my life.” He served one year on Rikers Island before being transferred to a state prison to serve an additional 2.5 years. Upon his release from prison, his grandmother told him that she did not have the resources he needed to help him. Thus he needed to return to the child welfare agency that was helping him before he went to prison. Trusting and respecting his grandmother,

he took her advice and returned to the child welfare agency that was responsible for him prior to his incarceration.

With his return to the agency, he had a new focus of wanting to get his life on the right path. He decided he would study for and obtain his high school diploma, he did not want a GED. As he adjusted to his freedom as a convicted felon, he took advantage of opportunities provided to him through the agency. He earned his high school diploma and became an advocate within his agency for other foster care youth. During this time, John became sick and was diagnosed with an inoperable form of cancer. Doctors told him to go home and prepare to die, there was nothing they could do for him. He believed in his heart, that the doctors were wrong. He had not gone through all these challenging situations in life and survived to be told that he would die of cancer. He sought other opinions.

He had a relative who worked for a major hospital and had him seen by the head of the department that specialized in his diagnosis of cancer. No promises were made but the doctor felt he could save his life. It would be a risky surgery and a brutal recovery process, but John wanted to take the chance so he could overcome this and be on the path to positive outcomes in his life. Facing surgery, John prayed and asked god to save his life and he promised he would make good of his life. Surgery was successful and he recovered after a few months. John vowed nothing could persuade him to go down the wrong path and become involved with the justice system ever again. He was done, he had enough. Focusing on his future and what he can accomplish, given the stigma of being a felon. He has secured his own apartment and continues to advocate for foster care youth.

In conducting interviews with the former foster care youth, the goal was to understand their lived experience, their phenomenon. From the conversations, identify their commonalities, (units of meaning) and pull out as many categories within the themes. The researcher does not

interject personal thoughts or feelings into the process. Let the data speak for itself. The themes were systematically organized to provide the reader with a structure that illustrates the phenomenon of being a foster care youth (van Manen, 1990). Thus giving insight into the perceptions of experiences that promote self-efficacy in foster care youth.

Theme One: Interpersonal Relationships

The first and most influential theme is the interpersonal relationships. This is defined as social associations or connections. The relationship between two or more people. The data showed that foster care youth often lack trust of others, making it difficult to form associations, relationships or connections with others.

Some of the categories under this theme were mentors, trust, family, feeling connected, respect and the ease of talking to a person. Mentors were discussed as a significant aspect of positive outcomes for foster care youth. A mentor is someone who can teach foster youth different things and from different perspectives. Implications of this proved to be the most important attribute for foster care youth, the ability to connect with someone else and establish a healthy, respectful relationship. Given that creating and forming relationships was often a significant challenge for foster care youth. Units of meanings were reflected through the perspectives and experiences of the participants in relation to the empathy of mentors, which could drive the mentor/mentee relationship.

John reflected on his experience with a mentor.

“An entrepreneur took me on as his mentee. I was blown away like blown away. He’s a black man, and I feel like there’s something special about a black man teaching a young black man. It’s lessons, skills, views, and perspectives that you can get from nobody

else.” “For foster care youth, interpersonal relationships are not always a natural part of life: these relationships do not come easy.” “It takes a bit of persuasion to get somebody to become your Mentor. Okay, you have to be a little bit. You have to Market yourself in a way. You have to understand assess who this person is assess what they can offer you, assess your own needs and then you know pop the question, straight up ask somebody. Hey, can you be my mentor? You'll be surprised how many people say yes.”

A trusting relationship allowed youth to feel a connection to someone, trust that the person was invested in their well-being and that foster youth were not belittled because they were foster care youth.

Blake discussed his thoughts on foster youth creating interpersonal relationships.

“Don't hate everybody in foster care. Find one person you like and develop a relationship. Let the person guide you to who you will one day become.”

The connections provided a feeling of family, especially when foster youth don't have family of their own. It gave a sense of belonging and a sense of feeling connected. An implication of this theme is that the perspectives and experiences of mentors help drive mentor and mentee relationships. Forming and creating those relationships impact the lives of foster youth well after they have left care. For many, if this was the only time they had a positive relationship, it remained engrained in their memories forever. For foster care youth, interpersonal relationships are not always a natural part of life. These relationships do not come easy. Some foster youth feel a sense of abandonment, loneliness, lack of social connections, lack of family, lack of trust, inability to create relationships, and a lack of respect. These feelings often stay with foster youth

through adulthood and are woven into the very fabric that helps shape those individuals into adults. The longer these feelings exist without a careful examination, positive assistance, and the opportunity to express said feelings in a safe environment, the more challenging interpersonal relationships become for foster youth. Allowing oneself to trust others, create connections, and establish boundaries to assist in developing interpersonal relationships is challenging for foster care youth. Despite these challenges, some foster care youth create interpersonal relationships and utilize it as a catalyst to move forward in life. As the subjects in this study showed, developing interpersonal relationships is crucial, powerful and can be lasting.

Theme Two: Growth

The second substantial theme was growth. Subjects discussed growth as the ability to accomplish goals and overcome adversity. They explained this as situations don't stay the same, life evolves. When in foster care, it is only for a defined period of time. At some point, you will leave the system, be it to return to family, being adopted, or aging out of care. At the specific time, what will foster youth show for their growth?

Categories of growth were determination, resilience, ambition, accomplishment, achievement, focused, self-determination and self-reflection. The subjects data proved these categories to be the most important under this theme. Units of meanings were explicitly expressed by the participants as there are consequences for every action, positive or negative. Implications of this theme, was that foster care youth should accept who they are, own it and be confident. Make choices in life and understand that your decisions have implications on your future. Werner and Smith (1992) suggest applying the concept of resilience in foster care provides us with a way to counteract and build awareness so that we may be able to assist children achieve normal adult development under the most challenging circumstances. Despite

your current circumstances, have a positive outlook on life and strive for the best. Lead by example.

Blake shared a sentiment on growth.

“One day, you’ll be 24 like me and it won’t matter what ACS didn’t do for you like 10 years ago. It’s either you going to get an apartment or you going to stay in a shelter or on a couch. You choose, you know none of this will matter at some point.” “Set goals for yourself. If you got a caseworker, set up progress reports with her. Hey, this is the goal you set for me this week, and this is the goal I set for you this week.”

John reflected: “I graduated from high school at age 21, with a Regents diploma.

Perseverance, hard work, and determination allowed me to accomplish this goal. I’ll carry this with me for the rest of my life.”

John further reflected, “I am a convicted felon, okay. It is something that comes up.

This is a result of my past actions. I live with this forever.”

The underlining categories of growth were powerful especially as it related to achievement. Both subjects understood the importance of a high school diploma as a requirement to assist in applying for a minimum wage job. They understood that it led to better job possibilities and higher income in comparison to someone who did not have a high school diploma. “Obtaining a high school diploma has become an increasingly important prerequisite for economic and social mobility in the United States.” (Davis, Ajzen, Sanders & Williams, 2014, p. 810). The high school diploma is the most commonly held credential in the United States (Clark & Martorell,

2014). There is a decline in the value of a high school diploma relative to a college degree.

However, the most vulnerable workers are those without a diploma (McDaniel & Kuehn, 2012).

Blake's poignant quote:

“Don't become dependent on the government. I did a year in the shelter, and it wasn't easy. The shelter was like another foster care. I started to realize that all these government programs are set up in the same way. Cash cows, you know some people have compassion, and others are there just to get paid.”

Hampton (2014) suggested that research on achievement highlights that personality or nurturing environments drives individuals to strive for success. Foster care youth often lack nurturing environments, thus they would need to rely heavily on their own personalities to achieve their growth of success.

Theme Three: Leadership

This third theme of leadership was generated because the subjects discussed the critical need for developing leadership skills amongst foster care youth. Both subjects considered themselves leaders, albeit in different ways. Both shared that their peers found them to be leaders and would often seek the participants out in such roles. Subjects felt that given their own personal experiences within the various social service systems (foster care, homelessness and the justice system). They had unique perspectives on leadership, how it is viewed, and utilized internally and externally.

Categories within this theme were expressed as developing skills for the future, cultivating leadership qualities, job preparedness, problem solving, changing your frame of mind and independence. Units of meanings were expressed by the participants concerns and

frustrations of all decisions being made for them, in contrast to involving them in the decision making which pertained to their life. Subjects shared that for most foster care youth, once you enter care, all decisions are made for you. The social workers, judges, foster parents and lawyers all act on your behalf. Rarely do they ever ask for your input or if they ask for your input, do they actually listen to what you have to say. Thus foster care youth become accustomed to not making decisions on their own. Implications of this is that when foster care youth do make decisions, often times they are not thought out because foster youth were not provided the opportunity to develop logical thinking skills or struggle with a problem to come up with solutions to the problem. Further implications is a person's existential need for shelter, food and safety. The basic requirements for surviving in life, the basic needs to live.

Blake voiced his opinions on foster care youth being catered to and not allowed to make leadership decisions or take leadership actions on their own.

“Instead of being catered to and tasks always being done for us, assist us with tasks, show us how to do the tasks, help us to do the tasks if necessary and then let us do the tasks. Don't always do the work for us, let us learn and grow. Let us develop our leadership skills.”

Their sense of self, including leadership skills and processes are deficit in that confidence and their state of being might not be aligned. When confidence and mental outlook are strained, it can impede upon foster youth and their future. Additional implications are that foster youth should be trained in a variety of skill sets which can then be fostered into long term job opportunities that can help secure their futures financially and independently.

John shared his perspective of his leadership skills:

“I became a leader on Rikers Island and not in the way that a leader will become a leader on Rikers Island, via muscle – fighting a lot, doing violent things, having a reputation from the outside or being in a gang. I used my brain and associated myself with certain individuals. I played mental chess-like being able to avoid certain situations. I created the right atmosphere around me so that I didn’t encounter some of the issues that a lot of other people encountered around me.”

Blake discussed his leadership experiences as:

“Everything it’s been mental for me. Once I got that confidence and like started to cut people off, I no longer felt I had to be around you. Even if that meant you were my friend, and we got up every day, and we were together every day. All we ever did was smoke pot, chase chicks, and shit (sic) like that. It was when I was able to identify that I no longer wanted to be around that energy. I wanted to be something different. I was able to confidently tell people that I never thought I would be able to detach from, like yo, I’m good, I’m good, I’m good! I have no offense towards who you want to pursue to be, but we’re going after two different things in this life.”

Theme Four: Interpersonal Skills

The fourth theme, interpersonal skills can be defined as the behaviors and tactics a person uses to interact with others effectively. Most foster care youth face challenges within this theme due to lack of support and positive interactions with others. Research has shown that even in the

toughest conditions, having the support from loved ones, family and friends can increase a person's desire to survive and adapt (Fiske & Weiss, 1977). Units of meanings depicted lack of trust of others, ability to self regulate emotions and inability to ask for help. Categories expressed under this theme were, ask for help, transition, articulate one's self, build relationships and internal vs. external perspectives. Within this theme, both subjects discussed transition as having profound impact on foster care youth. It was described as an event that every foster youth encounters. The moment you enter the child welfare system, you will encounter some form of transition.

By definition, a transition is an "event or non event that results in a change in assumption about self and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behavior and relationships" (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 5). Individuals experience transitions differently depending on their ability to cope and adapt to the stresses that come with change or new events in life. The subjects shared the challenges and difficulties that various forms of transition could resonate. Implications of this theme: "Don't make excuses, excuses won't matter when you age out of care." "Inform foster care youth that only 4% of the population graduate college. Informing youth about their future and the challenges that potentially lie ahead is responsible and what should be done with all foster care youth."

John discussed his transition from Rikers Island to an upstate prison.

"I did a lot of writing. Man, I can't even say I've written a lot, you know just free writing things my thoughts, you know, what was on my mind, what was in my heart. Writing became a form of expression. I'm to help me get rid of some of that anger and the fear and the doubts and settle into my situation and understand that it was only temporary and as long as my mind was free, my body could be here, but I'll be fine as long as I can

think outside my circumstance, so I get sentenced I go upstate.”

Blake voiced his opinions on asking for help.

“Learn how to ask for help. A lot of young people if they don't know something, they'll avoid it or they get frustrated and they throw tantrum.”

However, both felt that positivity, expressing one's feelings, and elevating one's life to a higher standard allowed the subjects to utilize interpersonal skills, highlighting the need for continuous growth in this area, as the area should never become stagnant.

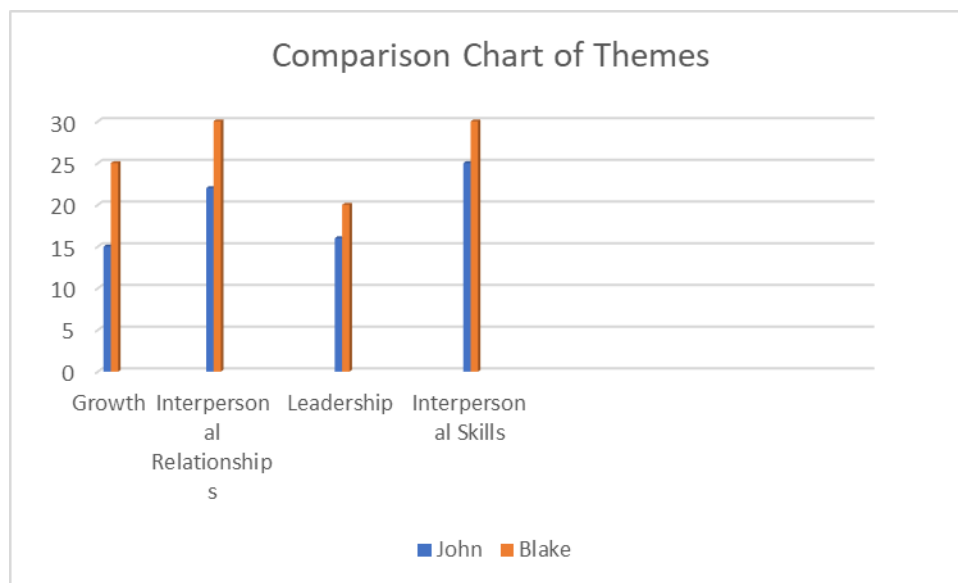
Blake recollected on time in high school and foster care. “Ask ten foster kids how many of them wanted to not go to school. I bet you only two of them would tell you no. That doesn't mean eight of them were going to school to be good students four of them might have been a social aspect cause that's when things changed for me.” Blake got straight A's in school in the past, however when his foster mother died, and he no longer had a mother. He was placed in a new foster home; the school became the place for family. “I'm going to school for a family; now I'm going to school for friends, connection, a bond you know.”

Figure 4.3. Code System

<u>Themes</u>	<u>Sum</u>
Interpersonal Relationships	52
Growth	40
Leadership	20
Interpersonal Skills	36
Sum (Σ)	148
Number of Documents	2

Code system illustrates the number of times each theme occurred with both subjects. The four themes resulted in the sum of 148 codes. Interpersonal relationship theme occurred more often and leadership theme occurred least often of the four themes.

Figure 4.4. Comparison Chart of Themes



This figure presents the visualization of how often each subject discussed the relevant themes.

Summary Chapter of the Participants

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of experiences that promote self-efficacy in foster care youth using the frameworks of Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development Theory, Vygotsky's Environmental Theory and Self Determination Theory. Data analysis generated the resulting four themes: (a)interpersonal relationships, (b) growth, (c) leadership, and (d) interpersonal skills. Amongst the subjects, themes were mutual. However, despite the mutuality between participants, each participant's experience was unique and shared in a multitude of ways.

Both participants discussed the quest for earning a high school diploma, not a GED, and the process of doing so. Though challenging and with a close age restriction, both were able to accomplish this task. Participants shared the challenges of not taking school seriously when first entering high school. Losing one's own way in large part due to social problems, mainly viewing school as a social place/hang out spot, was commonplace for both. After both participants became involved with the legal system, the importance of earning, a high school diploma became paramount. With an internal drive and a goal of graduating with a degree instead of a GED, both participants set a goal to earn high school diplomas, and both accomplished that goal. One participant had some help from a tutor within the new high school he attended. The other participant studied independently.

The interpersonal relationships were a critical aspect for the participants. This was a significant piece of the puzzle towards self-efficacy. It impacted almost all areas of each participant's life. For one participant, not having a biological family to lean on for support, meant that help would be garnered from strangers/non-biological relationships or those within the foster care system. For the other participant, there was one family member initially providing support. However, that family member was unable to continue to do so consistently. The family member felt the resources the participant needed were not within their scope of support. With this limitation, the family member ensured the support would be provided through the Administration for Children's Services (ACS). This did not mean the family member would disappear from the participant's life, quite the opposite. The family member wanted to ensure that the participant would receive the services needed to ensure a productive life.

Both participants realized that to ensure the attainment of self-sufficiency and the ability to maintain that self-sufficiency throughout life, more education/credentials were needed. One participant started college. However, the participant did not complete college. This participant

plans to complete college to ensure that a career can be furthered and provide a better wage to adjust with the cost of living. The other participant, given the respective legal outcomes within the judicial system, wants to pursue higher education, however, that will require the ability to finance the expense without financial aid. When individuals are unable to utilize federal funding for post secondary education, the options for financing becomes more challenging, however, it is not impossible to overcome.

In summarizing Chapter four, the setting was described in detail. Data collection and the data analysis process were detailed, four themes were identified and defined, and the background and demographics of the participants were provided. The information shared gave way to the voices of former foster care youth and their perceived perceptions of experiences that promote self-efficacy in foster care youth. Chapter five will address the researcher's question, the limitations and further research, while summarizing the relationship between the themes and Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development Theory, Vygotsky's Environmental Theory, and Self-Determination Theory.

Chapter 5:**Discussion****Summary**

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of experiences that promote self-efficacy in foster care youth. I interviewed two former foster care youth. Sample size was kept small to capture their lived experiences in as much detail as possible. I specifically focused on former foster care youth who had participated in an Independent Living Program (ILP) to develop an understanding of their transition to adulthood.

This chapter will detail five sections: addressing the findings on the research question, analyzing the relationship between the themes and the theoretical framework; Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development, Vygotsky's Environmental Theory and Self-Determination Theory, limitation on the research, implications of this study, recommendations for the child welfare system and recommendations for future studies. This study gives voice to foster care youth and their experiences in foster care. What inspired them to achieve self-efficacy as a former foster care youth? What challenges or growths did they face to do so?

From the interviews, I captured from the subjects' their own interpretation, perspective and reflection of what happened to them during and after foster care. In staying true to a phenomenological study, I had to remind myself not to focus too much on facts and details about what happened. It was not my job to determine whether something happened or not. "In phenomenological research the emphasis is always on the meaning of the lived experience. The point of phenomenological research is to borrow other people's experiences and their reflections on their experience in order to better be able to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning

or significance of an aspect of human experience, in the context of the whole of human experience” (van Manen, 1990, p. 62).

In addressing the research question, the participants had some distinguishing characteristics and traits. The subjects wanted current foster care youth to know they can survive the system, it is not your forever home. They portrayed a genuine feeling of care in expressing their concerns for foster care youth. They were extremely proud of having earned their high school diplomas and noted that as one of their highest accomplishments. They also expressed genuine gratitude and a sense of growth for the interpersonal relationships built with mentors or individuals who provided a support system to them.

Research Question Discovery of Answers

In conducting a total of two in-depth interviews on the perceptions of experiences that promote self-efficacy in foster care youth, four themes emerged: (a) interpersonal relationships, (b) growth, (c) leadership and (d) interpersonal skills. These themes were developed by thoroughly reading the interview transcripts repeatedly for clarity and also using the MAXQDA 2020 software. In reviewing the transcripts, I derived answers to the research question:

RQ1: To what events or experiences do foster care youth attribute personal success?

Both subjects through their stories resonated the following three themes closely: interpersonal relationships, growth and interpersonal skills. Interpersonal relationships occurred 52 times, Growth occurred 40 times and Interpersonal skills occurred 36 times (see figure 4.3). The subjects in the study have experienced incarceration and homelessness as former foster care youth. Not wanting to repeat those mistakes, they earned their high school diplomas which represented independence and the ability to fulfill their desire for self-efficacy.

The subjects shared how they overcame obstacles and secured their first apartments. They acknowledged that the high school diploma was the first step towards the path of self-efficacy. Additionally, pursuing higher education or professional certification to obtain permanent self-efficacy is imminent. The subjects stated that they don't allow them self to become complacent or celebrate where they currently are in life, because there is more to accomplish.

The relationship with mentors was a positive attribute in the subjects quest for self-efficacy. Learning from someone who is in a position to teach you and assist you along the way, was paramount for both subjects. John expressed his views on mentoring as followed, "One of the things that I would tell young people is it takes a bit of persuasion to get somebody to become your Mentor. Okay, you have to be a little bit. You have to Market yourself in a way. You have to understand, assess who this person is, assess what they can offer you, assess your own needs. And then you know pop the question straight up, ask somebody. Hey! can you be my mentor? You'll be surprised how many people say Yes! This was one of the most amazing things that I learned all because your mentor is doing a specific something and they may have you doing that something with them. The skills and lessons that I learned along the way is something I could never take back."

Analyzing The Relationship Between the Themes and The Theoretical Frameworks:

The table below outlines the relationships between the themes: (a) interpersonal relationships, (b) growth, (c) leadership and (d) interpersonal skills and the theoretical frameworks of Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development Theory, Vygotsky's Environmental Theory and Self Determination Theory. The subjects had lived experiences within each framework that validated their lived experience.

Table 5.1.

Relationship between Themes and Theoretical Frameworks

THE SELF-EFFICACY OF FOSTER CARE YOUTH

Subjects	Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development Theory	Vygotsky's Environmental Theory	Self Determination Theory
Blake	I'm the peer that they kinda like looked up to. Yeah, honestly, I was always that peer, even now. Some of the kids that come back to the agency, they see me working and they like yo Blake what's up, man. Like yo, its crazy how much you grow up. Cause you know, they always, I always told them, like man foster care is a game that we didn't ask to play with, but we gotta play the game.	Not only does the kid (foster care youth) start out in some rough circumstances, but he doesn't even shoot for the stars, because he don't even know what the stars is.	I graduate high school with a local diploma. I did that! I went on to college, August of 2016.
	Me personally, not having a father, not ever growing up with men in my house. Ahmm, I was always, I was always, I wouldn't say intimidated, always, always. I just don't get the right, I, I, I, I.....respect woman 3.5 seconds, but a man, I mean you gotta work 3 months I, I just don't deal with men the same...	Foster care shaped me to where I don't want to be loved by anyone.	Yesterday made my fist month of independence in my whole 24 years of life. You know... finally got my own apartment.
	And you know that'd be the one thing I'da change: Is How They Perceive Us! How they put us down on paper. You know what I mean? I get it, you gotta document incidents, you gotta document ahh behaviors, but don't ever make a kid a youth at that you know what I mean just seem like such a dark person. Man take off your shoes and tie and come live in a foster home for a week.	I have come to that conclusion throughout being a foster kid, that's really hard to get anyone to genuinely love you.	When I was eating lunch they all popped out of this room and was like congratulations the lowest test score you got on your Regents was a 79. I got a 98 on US History it was crazy I was like how the hell yo I didn't study for a year and it was dope I carry that for the rest of my life. I passed all my Regents. I would graudtae high school with a diploma...
John	I was the one that was seeing potential in people and I'm having a desire to communicate with these individuals and bring that positivity to the forefront.	I got incarcerated at a young age. I got incarcerated multiple times. Okay. I think the first one was I was 15. Okay got into a fight and it ended really badly ahhm and I went to juvenile hall for that.	I did better than I expected. I ended up getting the Regents diploma, I took extra Regents.
	I would say I was the that positive force that was able to see positivity within others and inspire.	I was with individuals who were drunk and they decided to do some dumb stuff. I was there with them. We all went down. Okay, and of course, you're young you're dumb you hold onto the I'm not a snitch. I'm not going to say anything. Okay prosecutors love that I can wrap all of ya'll up, whatever. So that's what happened. They wrapped everybody up because nobody wanted to say anything and everybody went down. I regret it. I regret it man the things that I went through and had to see I probably would have disobeyed that no snitching policy. I didn't do it you know what I'm saying you go ahead and do your time. But um, and that's the stupidity that's instilled within our society, ahhm you know from the cultures the rap culture the gang culture, all these things that ahhm conditioned us to accept things that are wicked. So during my stay I just seen a lot of things.	Being asked to speak at the gala awards ceremony, you know, I've done a number of panel discussions a number of different groups have been a part of all of it, honing different skills different leadership qualities.
	I would say I was in foster care for maybe about at least 10 years. Okay, and then during that time I've probably had about I don't know maybe about 15 different caseworkers. You know some have left, some came some went, some got promoted, some	Okay, like I always found this fight within myself, you know, dancing on the line between good and evil and you know having the influences in the street and that being so tantalizing in some ways but also in my heart knowing that I was going	Lee is another dynamic individual that just saw something in me from very young and he took a liking to me and ahhm the relationship I would say grew over time as well. Like, you know, you know, we would have conversations about like building resumes and different things like that and you know, and then like maybe a year or so after that we were talking about like, you know how to create your own brand how to brand yourself, you know, because I do a lot of advocacy work like me being a part of foster care kind of triggered me to want to do something about all the things that are

Limitation of This Study

Foster care youth are a sensitive population to study. A small number of positive research exists for this population of youth. However, a plethora of negative research outcomes exists for this population.

Several limitations existed for this study. The first limitation to this study was the sample size. A sample size of $n=2$, is not a significant number to represent the population. The second limitation was that this study cannot be generalized due to the small sample size. The third limitation is that the subjects are from the same geographical area and were representatives of the same agency which limits diversity. The fourth limitation was that the subjects are of the same age, gender and ethnicity, thus further limiting diversity in the subject group. Recruiting foster care youth for this study proved more challenging than initially thought it would be. The inability to gain access to a larger number of former foster care youth was evident in the number of subject participants for this study.

Implications of This Study

Understanding the perceived experiences that promote self-efficacy in foster care youth is a surmountable task. The interviews captured the subjects reflection, perspective and interpretation of their lived experiences. The four themes that emerged in relation to the theoretical frameworks of Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development Theory, Vygotsky's Environmental Theory and Self-Determination Theory aligned to each of the frameworks underlining meanings. Foster care youth who have not successfully developed within each stage of Erikson's development theory face daunting challenges as they continue to navigate the social dynamics of the world. With each underdevelopment, the more the gap widens for achievement of interpersonal relations, growth, leadership and interpersonal skills.

Vygotsky's theory of appropriate social interactions in this study was appropriate for the subjects. At this juncture in their life, they have navigated choppy waters and have adjusted to expectations and appropriateness across social settings. They have been steadfast in trying to ensure the further enhancement of their cognitive development. Self-Determination theory has evolved with both subjects. Their continued quest for positive outcomes, independence and self-efficacy was the pinnacle for them aspiring to be better and achieve more. As inner city African American former foster care youth, their resources are not abundant, however they are aware of the resources they require and how to go about obtaining them.

Recommendations for the Child Welfare System

The child welfare systems primary goal is meant to protect children from abuse and neglect. The system is also meant to provide support and resources to youth to have a stable and productive life. From the interviews I conducted with the two subjects that participated in this study, they had specific feedback pertaining to the totality of the foster care system.

1. Coaches in comparison to mentors make a significant difference in the lives of foster care youth. Social Workers come and go and don't always form relationships with youth so they may advocate in the best interest of the youth. Social Workers mainly operate from a checklist of To Do's to ensure compliance with the job. Youth feel as if they are a task to be completed. Social Workers identify the problem and often find the resolution to the problem, so it can be resolved and then move on to the next youth. Social Workers don't often involve youth in addressing the problem nor do they teach them problem solving skills.

Coaches are more stable in their roles and remain active in youths lives for lengthier periods of time. Coaches are there to help youth identify, resolve and address issues. Coaches don't speak for youth, they teach, train and mentor youth to speak for themselves. They assist them through the different phases of life, always giving them a voice. A coach doesn't treat

youth like a checklist. The relationship with the coach is more of a partnership. More coaches should be employed and deployed throughout the child welfare system to work with youth over the long term to ensure the appropriate development and outcomes for youth. Coaches also remain in their roles for longer periods of time thus establishing less turnover and building lasting relationships with youth.

2. Inform foster care youth at an early age about the small percentage of youth who obtain higher education and graduate from college or a professional certified training program. Stress the importance of receiving an education at all levels within the foster care system. This should be a mantra embedded in every individual working within the foster care system. Every foster care youth should be informed of the importance of receiving an education from every individual they interact with within the foster care system.

3. Create an effective life skills and post secondary program for youth, to equip them with the tools necessary to successfully navigate the world. Teach them daily, in small increments the various skills required to navigate an independent world. Teach them about earning a salary. Teach them about what it means to pay taxes. Educate them about taxes. Explain to them, how much of their salary will go towards paying taxes. Teach them about the adjusted cost of living. Teach them about inflation. Teach them about a budget. Teach them about the importance of living a healthy lifestyle. Teach them what it means to be healthy, both physically and mentally. Teach them how to have a healthy diet. Teach them how to manage stress. Ensure they have doctors in place whom they can see for regular checkups or at a minimum, ensure they know how to identify a variety of doctors to be utilized when they need it. Teach them that for every decision, there is a consequence. Some decisions they make in life can have adverse effects on them. At minimum, foster care youth should have a primary care physician. Lastly, teach them about the resources available to help them should they need it, but

most of all teach them not to become dependent on a government system. Always relying on a government system, the subjects felt is crippling to many foster care youth. It becomes a crutch.

4. Involve foster care youth in the decision making process regarding their care. Instead of making all the decisions for them, involve them in the process. This is their life and they should have a voice to advocate for them self and assist in making decisions on their behalf. Educate them on the different matters pertaining to the outcomes in their life and create a plan that includes them in the process. At some point they either are going to age out of the system or become imancipated, at which point they won't be able to depend on the child welfare system. Equip them with the skill sets necessary to independently make sound decisions on their own.

5. The child welfare system should provide financial support to obtain post secondary education and or professional certification beyond the age of 21. Though most states have started to provide additional funding beyond the age of 21 through Independent Living Programs (ILP) or other federal funding. Not every foster care youth is informed and aware of this information. Some foster youth do not know what steps need to be taken to ensure they can access these funds. Often times, youth do not access these funds and it becomes a lost opportunity for them to increase positive outcomes for their life.

6. Implement an effective job readiness program for foster care youth. Provide opportunities for youth to be trained in a variety of skills according to current and future forecasting of potential career opportunities. Assess youths' skills and interest, then embed in their daily life the opportunity to learn job readiness skills. Teach them how to interview for jobs, how to dress appropriately for a job interview. How to dress once you obtain a job. Teach them proper job etiquette. Inform youth about the variety of skills required for respective careers and how they can obtain the skills or further advance their skills especially after they leave care.

The subjects felt that providing information to youth in a timely, creative and sensical manner can help increase their outcomes for self-efficacy.

7. Train and select foster care parents in a structured cohesive and designed practice. Foster parents should know and understand what it means to be a family. Ensure foster parents are not taking youth into their homes solely for the money. The money does not compensate for the love, care and guidance these youth require. Adopt better screening tools, create and implement better training programs for foster care parents. Inform foster parents of the traumas that foster youth have endured and ensure that they are equipped and prepared to help such a child. Foster parents should become pillars of strength for foster care youth, keep them safe and help them develop. They should not further abuse them nor should they expect the worst of foster care youth, simply because of their circumstance of being a foster care youth. They are human beings with feelings and should be treated as such. Most foster care youth saw themselves as cash cows to their foster parents. Foster parents they felt, were in it for the money and did not care about the youth.

Recommendations for Future Research

Though this phenomenological study has limitations, it has laid the groundwork for a future empirical study to further expand upon the themes that emerged from this study. Future researchers may also want to conduct a cross analysis of the frameworks and themes across variable demographics. Two questions the researcher had before commencing the study, was what makes former foster care youth want to be self-efficient? What is the difference between foster care youth A and foster care youth B as it relates to self-efficacy? In conversation with the two participants, the researcher identified two outliers, a mentor who they looked up to or inspired them and an innate drive to improve their adult lives so they will not have to depend upon government assistance. Further research is required to determine whether or not it was the

mentor or the drive to be independent of government assistance that impacted their decision to be on the path to self-efficacy. A future research question, can be what tools do former foster care youth require to be self-efficient? Although this study only captured the perceptions of experiences that promote self-efficacy amongst two subjects. The findings can serve as an important tool for current practitioners to assess and review the work they are conducting at their agencies or institutions.

Conclusion

This phenomenological study focused on Exploring perceptions of experiences that promote self-efficacy in foster care youth. Through the interviews, the study's participants emerged with four themes that impacted their ability to be self-efficient. A repeated message was "do not become complacent and do not depend on the government. Always look forward and strive for the best."

Both subjects earned their high school diplomas, neither one was interested in a GED. The high school diploma represented a path to self-efficacy. Blake shared, "I never wanted to get a GED. That's why I was a dropout! I said if I don't get my diploma, I don't want nothing at all. That was my way of thinking like if it's not a HS diploma, I don't want a GED."

While the subjects earned their high school diplomas, neither one completed college. One subject started college and dropped out after one semester due to personal challenges. The other subject never attended college. Both are adamant that they will attend college and earn their degrees. If the approach of earning their high school diploma is applied to earning their college degree, an additional accomplishment towards self-efficacy should be attained.

The goal of this study was to understand the perceived experiences that promote self-efficacy in foster care youth. The four themes that emerged, provided the lens to further assess

the needs of former foster care youth and how they fair on the road to self-efficacy. The results support the three theoretical frameworks and indicates social and cognitive development as imperative development tools for this population.

In conclusion the study presented a thorough lens of two former foster care youth who transitioned into adulthood and are securing their path to self-efficacy. The results showed that the frameworks support this population and could be of value for future research and for those actively working with this population. It also showed that resiliency might be a factor that has contributed to the participants' ability to attain self-efficacy despite their challenges. Continuing research on this population would be of immense value to several fields working with the population. As this is a small study, the interpretation of the results must be treated as such and cannot be generalized. If we can determine what increases self-efficacy, then we can better prepare foster care youth for the multi-faceted challenges they will face in the Child Welfare System, in school, in life after foster care and as adults. We can better prepare them for their futures.

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Appendix A. – Recruitment Letter to Participate in Study

A Study of Exploring Perceptions of Experiences that promote Self-Efficacy in Foster Care
Youth: A Phenomenological Study

Researcher: Keishea Allen, Doctoral Student, Long Island University CW Post Campus,
College of Education, Information and Technology.

Dear Foster Youth:

You are invited to participate in a research study about the perceived experiences of foster care youth that promote self-efficacy. I am seeking 15-20 current or previous foster care youth who have been involved in an Independent Living Program within the last eight years to understand better your perceptions of experiences that promoted your self-efficacy. In this study, you, as a participant, will be asked to share your experiences as a foster care youth. The interview will be audiotaped and secured in the researcher's locked cabinet. No one will have access to the interview tape, other than the researcher. You will have the option to review the transcript for accuracy. Your name will never be used in the study. Instead, a pseudonym will be assigned to ensure confidentiality. Any identifying information shared during the interview will also be assigned an alias so you will never be identified as having provided information. No one will know that you participated in this study.

In the event participating in this study causes you to require mental health assistance, you will be provided with the contact information for local hospitals mental health clinics and Long Island University, CW Post Campus mental health clinic. These entities often provide counseling services at a discounted rate.

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time, before, during, or after the study. There is no cost associated with participating in this study. As

a show of appreciation for participating in the study, each participant will receive a \$25.00 gift card. If you are interested in participating in this study, please complete the attached consent form.

Appendix B. – Participant Consent Letter

LOND ISLAND UNIVERSITY/C.W. Post Campus

Informed Consent Form for Human Research Subjects

Dear Foster Youth:

You have agreed to participate in a research study called, “Exploring Perceptions of Experiences that Promote Self-Efficacy in Foster Care Youth: A Phenomenological Study,” conducted by Keishea Allen, who is currently a doctoral student from Long Island University, CW Post Campus, College of Education, Information and Technology. The aim of the research study is to understand the perceptions of experiences that promote self-efficacy in foster care youth.

As a participant, you will be asked seven interview questions. The interview will last for approximately 60 minutes. The meeting will be audiotaped and then transcribed into a written document. The purpose of the audiotape will allow the researcher to identify themes among the participants. Additionally, a \$25.00 gift card will be provided for participating in this study as a token of appreciation. There is no direct or immediate benefit for participating in this study. However, it is possible that the results may yield information of value for the field of education and social services.

Your identity as a participant will remain confidential. The consent form is the only document that will identify you as a participant in this study. This signed consent form will be stored securely in the researcher's locked cabinet and only available to the researcher. All information collected will be destroyed at the end of 3 years. Upon conclusion of the study, if you are ever interested in seeing the study's findings, you may contact me, the principal investigator, directly. If you have questions about the research you may contact me, Keishea

Allen, at 631-375-3337 or my dissertation chair, Dr. June Ann Smith, at 516-299-2244. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a human subject, you may contact the administrator of the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Lacey Sischo, at 516-299-3591.

You understand that participation in this research is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, and you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Sincerely,

Keishea Allen

For the Participant (Please read and sign if you agree to participate in the study above):

I have fully read the above text and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the purposes of this study. My signature acknowledges receipt of a copy of the consent form as well as my willingness to participate. I am over the age of 18.

Printed Name of Participant _____

Date _____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____

Keishea Allen, Investigator _____

Date _____

Appendix C. – Interview Script

A Study of Exploring Perceptions of Experiences that Promote Self-Efficacy in Foster Care

Youth: A Phenomenological Study

Long Island University, CW Post Campus

Hello (Participant Name),

My name is Keishea Allen, and I am conducting a study about the perceptions of experiences that promote self-efficacy in foster care youth. I am a doctoral candidate at Long Island University, CW Post Campus, College of Education, Information, and Technology.

My study is titled “Exploring Perceptions of Experiences that promote Self-Efficacy in Foster Care Youth: A phenomenological study. According to research, every year, there are approximately 20,000 – 25,000 youth in the United States who turn 18-21 in the foster care system and must navigate the transition to adulthood. The purpose of my study is to understand better the perceptions of experiences that promote self-efficacy in foster care youth.

Thank you for agreeing to be part of my study. Once we review and sign the informed consent we will begin the interview. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes. All information will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by Federal and State laws.

Do you have any questions, comments, or concerns before we get started?

Appendix D. - Interview Questions:

1. Did you have a mentor or someone who assisted you while you were in foster care?
(Probe: Was there a specific person who was consistently there for you to provide support, i.e., mentor, teacher, social worker, caseworker, etc.? Tell me about this person? How was this person helpful to you?)
2. What was your experience with positive peer relationships as a foster care youth?
(Probe: Did you view any of your peers as role models or individuals who, despite their circumstance, remained positive and had set goals for themselves?)
3. What was the defining moment for you when you decided you wanted to achieve a positive outcome in your life? (Probe: What roadblocks kept you from moving forward? What helped you move ahead? When did you decide that you wanted to live an independent life that would allow you to not depend upon others?)
4. What were the highpoints on your journey to independence and success? What has been your challenging points on your journey to freedom and success?
5. How do you define success as it relates to where you currently are in life? (Probe: “Are you where you want to be, and if not, what would get you there?”)
6. What could the foster care system have done differently to help you better succeed when you left? (Probe: Is there anything that you would like to see changed in the foster care system?)
7. What advice would you give to other foster care youth today regarding self-sufficiency and living independently?