2014

A phenomenological study: personal criteria for emancipated foster youth entering college

Christina Acoff

Recommended Citation

Acoff, Christina, "A phenomenological study: personal criteria for emancipated foster youth entering college" (2014). *Theses and Dissertations*. 499.
https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/etd/499

Pepperdine University

Graduate School of Education and Psychology

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY:

PERSONAL CRITERIA FOR EMANCIPATED FOSTER YOUTH

ENTERING COLLEGE

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Christina Acoff

October, 2014

June Schmieder-Ramirez, Ph.D., Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

Christina Acoff

under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Doctoral Committee:

June Schmieder-Ramirez, Ph.D., Chairperson

Thelma Day, Ed.D., Committee Member

Leo Mallette, Ed.D., Committee Member

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

DEDICATION

       This dissertation is dedicated to my son Jermaine Rogers II and to my unborn children.

Mommy is thankful to have you in her life. I hope my accomplishing my goals will motivate you

to accomplish and achieve your goals. Mommy received her doctorate degree for you to have a

better life than I had. You have made me stronger, wiser, and more fulfilled than I could have

ever imagined. You truly are a blessing and the greatest gift GOD could have ever given to me. I

pray that you follow through on your dreams and never give up on them. Life is very hard, but if

you stay motivated and focused you can accomplish anything. Just remember mommy will be

here for you always and forever no matter what. I love you boo boo!

I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me.
Philippians 4:13
                                        ~Ruth Harlins

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.
Matthew 6:33

                                      ~Beverly Rogers

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to thank GOD for blessing me with this opportunity to receive my Doctorate Degree. I truly would like to thank my committee members. I appreciate the time and effort that my committee members took to make this dissertation a success. I would like to acknowledge and thank my fellow classmates for keeping me grounded and motivated throughout my studies. I would especially like to thank my amazing friends and family for the love and support that they have shown me over the years. I would like to thank my friends for understanding my time commitment towards this study and not giving up on our friendship. Out of all people, I owe much thanks to my grandmother Ruth Harlins for showing me the love and encouragement and teaching me the value of education. I can't express enough how much I love my grandmother for supporting me throughout my life and believing in me so I could believe in myself. I wouldn't be the woman that I am today without her. I would also like to give thanks to my parents-in-law Beverly Rogers and Bob Rogers for inspiring me to accomplish my goals. I thank you both for allowing me to be a part of your family and providing me with unconditional love. I offer my greatest thanks to my significant other Jermaine Rogers who saw me through the good and bad moments throughout this process. Thank you for supporting me through every twist and turn. It was hard at times, but we did it together, and that is what makes us a strong team. Finally, I would like to acknowledge my mother Crystal Harlins and my oldest sister Latasha Harlins who are deceased and in heaven. Not having you both here with me has been very tough. I wish you were here with me to share this moment. Even though you are not here with me in person, I know you are here with me in spirit. I thank GOD for my big brother Vester Acoff for helping me along the way. We are in this together and nothing can break us apart. Furthermore, I am incredible grateful to have a great support system. I love you all. Thank you!

EDUCATION
Ed.D.   Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership, Pepperdine University
MA   Sociology – focus on Social Work, CSU Dominguez Hills
BA   Human Services – focus on Student Support Services, CSU Dominguez Hills
AA   Interdisciplinary Studies, Los Angeles Southwest College

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

11/13–Present   Program Coordinator of Student Affairs in Freshman Programs
California State University, Fullerton
Supervise and provide leadership to program staff, faculty and students transitioning into college each academic year. Coordinate the curriculum and faculty for University Learning Communities, Freshman Seminars, and Academic Learning Collaborative to include in-service training (e.g. annual convocation and educational field trips) and monitoring course quality and congruence. Work with individual faculty and Department Chairs to develop course combinations and monitor scheduling and success of First Year curricular programs. Work with the Dean of Students, Student Outreach and Orientation Directors and Marketing team to develop and implement district-wide marketing and recruitment strategies for Freshman Programs emphasizing the value of college success courses. Assess and evaluate program quality to include faculty, students, courses, and programmatic evaluations utilizing learning outcomes and freshman programmatic goals. In collaboration with Institutional Effectiveness, track student enrollment and retention statistics, gathers data, and write annual reports regarding program successes and challenges, including retention and graduation data. Collaborate with the Academic Coordinator in promotion of the Freshman Peer Mentor Program and other student success projects. Collaborate with other campus offices and programs devoted to student success including Community Engagement Center, University Outreach, Writing Center, EOP, the Center for Teaching and Learning, Graduation Initiative and Student Organizations and Leadership, and other appropriate stakeholders to coordinate services to new and returning students. Utilize database systems including PeopleSoft, CMS and Banner to manage and keep track of student records and program data. Identify and pursue internal and external grant funding and maintain and supervise program budget. Attend conferences and program events to enhance freshman programs growth. Perform other related work duties as assigned.

12/10–11/13 Coordinator of Transfer & Career, Foster Care and Outreach Programs
El Camino College Compton Center
Responsible for the coordination and implementation of several Student Services Programs including Outreach of Enrollment Management, First Year Experience, Transfer and Career Center, Foster Care Education, Student Welcome Center and participate in several leadership clubs and organizations on and off campus. Assisted students through the matriculation process including applying, assessing, interviewing, counseling, advising, and assisting students with college enrollment and academic programs. Assisted high school students and college students with residency issues and concurrent enrollment process. Worked with first-generation and low-income students to promote transfer success to universities. Coordinated and developed career development activities on and off campus. Conducted career workshops and new student

orientations for both fall and spring terms. Hired, trained and supervised staff and student ambassadors. Acted as the lead person in the absence of the Student Services Director. Assisted in developing and monitoring operational budget and allocation of expenditures. Prepared cost estimates and justifications for budget item recommendations. Administered program policies and procedures and staying abreast with college legislations. Prepared training manuals, materials, flyers and memos for on and off campus programs. Utilized database systems including PeopleSoft, Banner, ASSIST, and Datatel to manage and keep track of student records. Also, utilized plan builder to update program data and utilized OU-Campus software to create and make changes to campus programs webpage. Responsible for conducting, developing, implementing and evaluating program plans, program reviews, end-year reports, student learning outcomes (SLOs) and other management reports and program files to achieve department goals. In addition, worked with the Institutional Research Department with compiling and analyzing data to measure and evaluate program effectiveness. Coordinated student services activities including New Student Orientation, Welcome Week, Transfer and Career Day, EOPS/CARE presentations, Commencement Ceremony, Student Appreciation Day, etc. Served on several committees on and off campus. Performed other related work duties as assigned.

2/11–8/11   Faculty Educational Leadership Instructor (Doctoral Intern)
Riverside Community College District, Norco Campus
Provided leadership for academic and co-curricular student development through service learning and community service programs. Assisted campus programs with developing Student Learning Outcomes and integrating campus strategic initiatives into program plan. Developed and presented workshops campus wide, conducted lectures, created lesson plans, provided one-on-one counseling sessions, and job training skills and performed other academic related activities. Provided support to faculty incorporating service learning in courses throughout the curriculum. Worked collaboratively with campus programs and advised college students on available resources and other educational services on and off campus. Coordinated and implemented program activities on campus including college fairs and career events. Developed strong relationships with community college and university staff and faculty to provide support services and resources to students.

8/08-6/10   Academic Counselor/Instructor (Graduate Intern)
Los Angeles Southwest Community College
Assisted students with their individualized educational plans and career goals. Taught human development courses which consisted of career planning, strategies for success, intro to college, life skills, goal setting, and money management skills. Designed and implemented course curriculums, agendas, class syllabus and managed attendance roster. Assisted current and first year college students with the registration process, provided mentors, tutors, campus tours and college and university field trips. Monitored students' enrollment and developed intervention strategies for students on academic probation. Evaluated students' transcripts and assisted students in the completion of petitions (e.g., financial aid, graduation, academic renewal and determining which courses are transferable to a university). Participated in honor ceremonies for students who earned outstanding scholastic achievements and held college activities and other events on campus. Served on the senior leadership team for the Division of Counseling, Student Life, and Student Services.

9/07-6/10   Program Supervisor/Mentor Coordinator
Shields for Families Incorporation
Managed and operated the program and workflow of staff, tutors, mentors, student workers, and student interns. Interviewed and evaluated work performance of employees in the program. Coordinated and matched the needs of each foster student with the specialization of specific tutors and mentors to ensure a good match. Develop and monitor quality assessments of tutoring services. Developed and monitored program plan. Provided leadership to staff in providing academic support and guidance to students. Maintained records of student needs, student progress, and student outcome. Developed and established mentoring programs, fundraising events, study groups, child care assistance, and conducted weekly meetings with all staffs. Researched, developed and implemented student curriculum and learning outcomes. Analyzed, planned and coordinated activities for families to achieve their goals by providing developmental and enrichment activities, therapeutic services, family support groups, and career planning assistance.

6/02 –4/06   Social Worker
Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services - Foster Care Agency
Interviewed and assessed the placement of children from birth to the age of 18 in foster homes, group homes, schools, and mental health facilities. Assisted families with reunification, ensured foster youth attend mandated court appearances, and oversee foster youth medical, dental and psychotherapy treatments. Assisted foster children with enrollment into school and college and student support programs such as pre-schools, children care facilities and resource learning centers. Developed educational plans, provided academic counseling, housing assistance, and independent living referrals. Developed and managed programs that counsel and advise children and parents regarding existing educational opportunities within the community. Developed summer programs for children and youth, ages 2 to 18. Performed individual assessments on children in the foster care system and completed Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) services. Interacted with head start programs, elementary schools, junior high schools, high schools, colleges and universities to maintain contact with student's progress.

AWARDS/TRAINING/ASSOCIATION/PUBLICATIONS

- January 2013, Conducted Workshops/Seminar on **First Year Experience College Students** for El Camino Community College District.
- May 2012, Traveled to Washington, DC – **Educational laws, regulations, policies, and procedures training on education** at Howard University & Pepperdine University.
- February 2011, **Conducted various workshops on college and career planning** for new and returning students at Riverside Community College District, Norco Campus.
- May 2010, Participated in an **International Leadership Training** in Beijing, China on Effective Education with Pepperdine University Graduate School of Education and Psychology Program.
- August 2009, Selected to participate in the **Educational Leadership Academy** at Pepperdine University.
- December 2009, **Certificate of Appreciation**, Shields for Families, Inc.
- October 2008, **Thesis Publication on Pro Quest,** First Hand Step for Foster Youth Aging Out of Foster Care (Copyright).

- July 2008, Attended the **North American Council on Adoptable Children Conference** in Ottawa, Canada.
- March 2006, **Certificate of Completion**, Multi-Disciplinary Team Training.
- May 2005, **Certificate of Participation**, CSUDH 39th Annual Commencement.
- May 2003, **Certificate of Accomplishment**, 10th Annual Frederick Douglass and Mary McLeod Bethune Graduation Celebration.
- December 2002, **Honor Roll Award**, Los Angeles Southwest Community College
- June 2000, **Certification of Appreciation**, University of California, Los Angeles – UCLA Intensive Transfer Experiences.
- Featured on several **Community College Districts, Cal State Universities, and Unified School Districts Advisory Board meetings, etc**.

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examined 4 emancipated foster youth who are attending college in California. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the personal criteria of 2 male and 2 female emancipated foster youths entering college and determine what factors they perceived helped them to attend college. The researcher recruited a total of 4 participants, 1 male from El Camino College Compton Center, 1 female from El Camino College, and 1 male 1 one female from CSU Dominguez Hills. The research question for this study was, What motivates emancipated foster youths to attend college? The phenomenon of being a foster youth was told through the participants' narratives including: their experiences growing up in the foster care system, relationships with biological and foster families, experiences in school as foster youths, who motivated or sparked their interest in attending college, who assisted them in applying for college, their experience being emancipated, and where they see themselves in the near future. Towards the end of the interview, participants were given an opportunity to provide and share additional information with the researcher including any artifacts that they brought with them, such as school projects, graded papers, awards received, and or unofficial college transcripts. The data collection and analysis was carried out using Miles and Huberman's (1994) conception and definition of qualitative data analysis, which constitutes three main activities for data analysis: (a) data reduction, (b) data display, and (c) conclusion drawing and participation. Constant comparative methods were utilized to form a conceptualization of the participants' experience. This study will give voice to a community of emancipated foster youth students who not only survived various forms of abuse and or neglect during their childhood, but also transitioned to college. This study has the potential to give knowledge about emancipated foster youth students' life experiences before and after emancipation to many emancipated foster youth

students, foster parents, adoptive parents, social workers, college counselors, probation officers, and other community leaders who serve this population. Information gathered in this study will be compiled and shared in an aggregated form as a report or executive summary with emancipated foster youth programs throughout the county and state of California. Additionally, the findings of this study will help society and policymakers improve the quality of services that are being provided to emancipated foster youth students.

Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

In the early 1900s, Charles Brace and Henry Chapin introduced foster care as a temporary placement for children in orphanages. They believed that children could be saved and adopted by caring families who could provide loving, stable environments. Orphanages are a place for children who have no parents or relatives to care for them. The number of children in orphanages continued to grow during the late 19th century, and by 1910, more than 100,000 children were living in orphanages in the United States (Myers, 2004). By 1930, the orphanage population had swelled to 144,000, the highest capacity ever (Askeland, 2006). There are currently 401,000 children in foster care in the U.S. (―Child Welfare Policy Manual,‖ 2011). According to Rovnak (2011), the first White House Conference occurred in 1909 and was convened by President Roosevelt. Its aim was to focus on children in orphanages and make recommendations to improve the foster care system. According to Burger (2010), the group made many decisions, including the establishment of the Foster Care Program, the formation of the Federal Children's Bureau, regular inspection of foster care homes by the state, and education and medical care for foster children. The difference between an orphanage and a foster home is that orphanages are more like an institutional setting whereas a foster home is more like a family. An orphanage is an institution where children live and are cared for by adult staff. Orphanages were institutions that cared for children who were abandoned or orphaned by their parents. The foster care is a system that is used in the U.S. to house children temporarily due to emergency situations with their family. Foster children with no adult relatives to care for them are also often placed in foster homes.

Orphanages have been replaced by foster care programs and residential treatment facilities for foster children who are emotionally or behaviorally unstable. The government

recommended foster care over orphanages because foster care was moving towards a system to better children's lives. The government becomes responsible for children's well-being while in the foster care system. Traditionally in the U.S., children are placed in foster care because of poverty, parental illness, or family death. In the 21st century, however, the majority of children are placed in foster care because of parental abuse or neglects (Kerker & Dore, 2006). Abuse or neglect by a biological family member or friend can affect a child's life tremendously.

The main mission of the foster care system is to protect children who have been neglected or physically abused. These children are usually taken away from their biological parents by the court system and placed with relatives, in a foster home, or in a group home. Foster children who have been separated from their birth families frequently experience feelings of rejection, guilt, abandonment, and shame (Kerker & Dore, 2006), often creating mental health problems. Therefore, once a youth ends up in the hands of the child welfare system, his/her future becomes unpredictable and unstable (Blome, 1997).

Statement of the Problem

In the U.S., the Child Welfare System oversees the care of over 401,000 children (―Child Welfare Policy Manual,‖ 2011). In California alone, approximately 83,000 children are in the foster care system, one of the highest statewide foster care rates in the nation, and of these youth, over 4,000 emancipate from the system each year (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [DHHS], 2010). Emancipation is defined as freeing someone from someone else's control or power (―Emancipate,‖ n.d.). In 2002, 65% of youth who left foster care in California did so without a place to live (George et al., 2002), and in 2005, 50% of foster youth in Los Angeles County alone were homeless within 6 months of their emancipation (Viner & Taylor, 2005). The problem is that incredibly high rates of emancipated foster youth are not properly

transitioning out of the foster care system and onto college. Based on the research, nationally, only 40-50% of foster youth graduate from high school; of those, less than three percent will actually graduate from college and receive a degree (NCBAA, n.d.). There is a lack of substantial documentation or tracking to determine what happens to these youths once they emancipate. Without the proper guidance and support, these youths are generally unprepared for college, unequipped to find gainful employment, and likely to live in poverty or become homeless (Viner & Taylor, 2005). Surprisingly, however, a small of these youths not only avoid homelessness, but also go on to attend college. Nonetheless, no existing research has tracked emancipated foster youth or determined what variables appear to motivate them to attend college.

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the personal criteria of two male and two female emancipated foster youths entering college and determine what factors they perceived helped them to attend college. This study addresses major gaps in the literature on emancipated foster youth college students. There is little research on this topic, especially from their perspectives. The study is relevant because it identifies the need for additional assistance for emancipated foster youth students. The information obtained was analyzed to generate recommendations for future studies on emancipated foster youth students. Additionally, further participation in this study will help society and policymakers improve the quality of services for emancipated foster youth students.

Research Question

A phenomenological study was determined to be the most appropriate method to answer this study's defined research question. The research question geared this study towards

emancipated foster youth students because of the lack of research and data on this population. The research question for this study was, What motivates emancipated foster youths to attend college? The phenomenon of being a foster youth was told through the participants' narratives, which conveyed stories about their experiences growing up in the foster care system, relationships with biological family and foster family, experiences in school as a foster youth, what motivated or sparked their interest in attending college, experiences applying for college, experiences being emancipated, and where they see themselves in the near future. Towards the end of the interview, participants were given an opportunity to provide and share additional information, including any artifacts they brought with them, such as school projects, graded papers, awards received, and or unofficial college transcripts. This study gives voice to a community of foster youth students that not only survived various forms of abuse and or neglect during their childhood, but also transitioned to college in spite of their trials and tribulations in the foster care system.

Significance of the Study

This study may inform emancipated foster youth students about the struggles they could encounter as college students and how they can overcome those barriers. Moreover, the findings from this study may also inform stakeholders such as foster and adoptive parents, social workers, college counselors, and probation officers who serve this population. Stakeholders may learn and gain knowledge about emancipated foster youth students' life experiences before and after emancipation. This study will give voice to a community of emancipated foster youth students who not only survived abuse and or neglect during their childhoods, but also transitioned to college. The foster care system has a growing concern based in scientific evidence that foster youth students are emancipating out of the system with limited resources to help them thrive as

adults. It is hoped that this study will enable emancipated foster youth students to be heard, ideally helping policymakers to improve the services provided to emancipated foster youth students.

Phenomenology

A phenomenological study describes the meaning of a shared or common experience, event, or phenomenon for several individuals. Phenomenology is a system used to explore and describe the meaning of a unique lived experience (Lee, 2010). This study explored the personal criteria for emancipated foster youths entering college and determine what factors they perceived helped them to attend college.

This study utilized the process of bracketing to reduce the potential effects of researcher bias or preconceived notions on the study. According to Creswell (2007), bracketing allows the researcher to set aside his/her own personal beliefs and values in order to better focus on participants' experiences rather than his/her own. People tell stories to help categorize and make sense of their lives. In phenomenology, it is important for the researcher to understand the participant's lived experiences to get a clear understanding of their lives. The researcher's job is not to question what happened; rather, the purpose of phenomenology is for the person to relate the story (Lee, 2010). Phenomenological research does not involve the creation of theory, but it does create insight to bring researchers closer to the living world (van Manen, 1990). The lived experiences gathered through phenomenological research can make a difference on a personal and societal level (Creswell, 2007). Understanding another person's lived experience can help others put themselves in his/her world. Solving problems is not the goal of phenomenological research, but rather understanding people's lived experience. This phenomenological study will benefit not only other emancipated foster care students in college, but also younger foster care

students in the K-12 school setting as well. As a researcher, being self-critical ensures that the purpose and methods are continuously re-evaluated to understand what works.

Definition of Terms

For this purpose of the study, the following terms are defined:

- *Bracketing:* Phenomenological studies use bracketing to suspend one's beliefs, including theories, personal experiences, and expectations of reality or someone else's reality to understand fully the meaning of an experience. In other words, bracketing means being aware of one's bias and setting aside preconceived notions to *experience the experience* in more than just a superficial way (van Manen, 1990).

- *Child Abuse:* Any physical, sexual, emotional and or other maltreatment or exploitation of a child. For legal purposes, the term *abuse* is defined specifically in both Federal and State legislation. The Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) legislation provides a foundation for states by identifying a minimum set of acts or behaviors that characterize maltreatment of a child. This legislation also defines what acts are considered to constitute physical or sexual abuse of a child (Adoption Media, LLC, 1995).

- *Child Neglect:* Any recent act, or failure to act, that results in the death of a child, endangerment of a child, the creation of an imminent risk, the death or serious physical or emotional harm, or sexual abuse of a child. The term *neglect* is defined in both Federal and State legislation, and can vary to some degree from state to state. CAPTA provides a definitional foundation for states by identifying a minimum set of acts or behaviors that characterize neglect or maltreatment of a child (Adoption Media, LLC, 1995).

- *Child and Youth:* A person between the ages of 0-14. The term youth refers to a person between ages of 15 to 24. This study will use these two terms interchangeably to identify a person between the ages of 0-18 (California Department of Social Services, 2000).

- *Emancipated Foster Youth:* Once a foster youth reaches 18 and sometimes up to the age of 21, the state releases legal guardianship. This stage in a foster youth's life is called *aging-out* or *emancipation*, where he/she is left to his/her own resources for survival. Services are available to help emancipating youths transition into adulthood. These services vary from state to state (California Department of Social Services, 2000).

- *Extended Family:* The relatives of an individual, both by blood and by marriage, other than immediate family, such as aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins (Adoption Media, LLC, 1995).

- *Family Foster Care:* In family foster care, children live with non-relative adults who have been trained, assessed, and licensed or certified to provide shelter and care (Foster Care in Massachusetts, 2005).

- *Foster Care:* Placing a child in the temporary care of a family other than his/her own as the result of problems or challenges that are taking place within the birth family, or while critical elements of an adoption are being completed (Adoption Media, LLC, 1995).

- *Foster Children:* Children that are in the legal guardianship or custody of a state, county, or private adoption or foster care agency, yet are cared for by foster parents in their own homes, under some kind of short-term or long-term foster care arrangement

with the custodial agency. These children will generally remain in foster care until they are reunited with their parents, until their parents voluntarily consent to their adoption by another family, or until the court involuntarily terminates or severs the parental rights of their biological parents so they can become available to be adopted by another family. Therefore, the parental rights of the parents of these children may or may not have been terminated or severed, and the children may or may not be legally available for adoption (Adoption Media, LLC, 1995).

- *Foster/Adoption Placement:* A child is placed with the foster/adoption family before the parental rights of the birth parents have been legally terminated, so there is still a possibility that the child may eventually be reunited with his/her birth family. If the parental rights of the child's birth parents are terminated, the foster/adoptive family will be given preference to adopt the child (Adoption Media, LLC, 1995).

- *Foster Parents:* Although this term has a wide variety of possible definitions, it is generally used to refer to adults who are licensed by the state or county to provide a temporary home for children whose birth parents are unable to care for them. These services may be provided with or without compensation, and can often continue for several months or even years, depending on the circumstances of the child and the foster parents (Adoption Media, LLC, 1995).

- *Foster Youth:* From the point of birth to the age of 18, the state can take a child away from his/her parents because of abuse and neglect. The state uses the term foster youth to designate a child the court has placed into the custody of child protective services (California Department of Social Services, 2000).

- *Group Home:* An alternative to traditional in-home foster care for children, in which children are housed in an intimate or home-like setting, in which a number of unrelated children live for varying periods of time with a single set of house parents, or with a rotating staff of trained caregivers. More specialized therapeutic or treatment group homes have specially-trained staff to assist children with emotional and behavioral difficulties. The make-up and staffing of the group home can be adapted to meet the unique needs of its residents (Adoption Media, LLC, 1995).

- *Guardian:* A person who fulfills some of the custodial and parenting responsibilities of the legal parents of a child, although the court or biological parents of the child may continue to hold some jurisdiction and decision-making authority over the child. Guardians are subject to ongoing supervision by the court and do not have the same reciprocal rights of inheritance as birth or adoptive parents have with their children. The relationship between the guardian and child ends when it is terminated by the court, or when the child reaches the age of majority (Adoption Media, LLC, 1995).

- *Immediate Family:* A term that is generally used to refer to the smallest unit of a family with whom an individual lives, which usually includes a father, a mother, and siblings (Adoption Media, LLC, 1995).

- *Institutionalization:* The short-term or long-term placement of children in institutions, such as hospitals, group homes, or orphanages. Placement in institutions during early critical developmental periods, and for lengthy periods of time, is often associated with developmental delays due to environmental deprivation, poor staff to child ratios, or lack of early childhood stimulation (Adoption Media, LLC, 1995).

- *Kinship Care:* Youths taken from their immediate family are placed into kinship care over foster care if there is a relative (i.e., grandparents, aunts or uncles) willing to serve as a legal guardian. Kin-GAP is a kinship guardianship assistant program in California created to provide payment and Medi-Cal coverage for the child under care (California Department of Social Services, 2000).

- *Legal Guardian:* A person who has the legal responsibility for providing the care and management of a person who is incapable of administering his/her own affairs, either due to age (very young or even very old), or to some other physical, mental, or emotional impairment. In the case of a minor child, the guardian is charged with the legal responsibility for the care and management of the child and of the minor child's estate. A legal guardian will be under the supervision of the court and will be required to appear in court to give periodic reports about the status of the child and his/her estate (Adoption Media, LLC, 1995).

- *Life Book:* A pictorial and written representation of the life of a child that is designed to help the child better understand make sense of his/her unique background and history. Although there is no required content for a life book, some information that it might include would be information about birthparents, other members of the extended birth family, birthplace, and date. The life book might be put together by a social worker, foster and or adoptive parents, or even the birthparents or members of the birthparents' extended family (Adoption Media, LLC, 1995).

- *Lived Experience:* Phenomenology is the study of the lived human experience, the past. The term *lived experience* is used to emphasize the past because phenomenology does not study the present nor is it predictive of the future (van Manen, 1990).

- *Long-Term Foster Care:* Historically, this term has been used to refer to the intentional retention of a child in foster care for an extended period of time. In cases of children who were considered to be unadoptable, this could have been the only long-term plan for the child. There is now a growing trend for state child welfare systems to no longer view long-term foster care as an acceptable placement alternative for any child. The acceptability of this growing philosophy has been strengthened by the passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (Adoption Media, LLC, 1995).

- *Orphanage:* An institution or asylum for the care of orphans or a public institution for the care of orphans (―Orphanage,‖ n.d.)

- *Well-being:* Families having the capacity to provide for their children's needs, children having educational opportunities and achievements appropriate to their abilities, and children receiving physical and mental health services adequate to meet their need (Rich, 2010).

Summary

Many emancipated foster youths are not attending college and are not properly transitioning out of the foster care system. A significant gap in the research literature related to this topic needs critical attention by the U.S. The lack of research impacts stakeholders' and policymakers' ability to address the needs for foster youth students. The significance of the study highlights stakeholders' and policymakers' need to promote effective leadership and services provided to emancipated foster youth students. The next chapter reviews the literature that supports the research study.

<center>**Chapter Two: Review of Literature**</center>

Theoretical Framework

      This literature review is organized into three major sections: theoretical framework, transitional theory, and social constructivism. This chapter will cover the theoretical framework that was used in this study and provide an overview of foster care in the United States. The theoretical model that was utilized for this research combined transitional and social constructivist theories. The theoretical framework in this study is grounded by two important theorists, Nancy Schlossberg and John Creswell, who both provide similar frameworks to better understand people point of views. According to Schlossberg (2006), transitional theory focuses on understanding the diversity of individual experiences while going through transitions from adolescence to young adulthood. In addition, according to Creswell (2009), social constructivism theory is concerned with humans and their interaction with the world, and how the theory results in multiple subjective meanings or understandings.

      Transitional theory. The perspective of transitional theory plays an important role in understanding individuals' transitional stage. According to Schlossberg (2006), there are three stages of the transition model: moving-in, moving-through, and moving-out. In the first phase, *moving-in*, the individual is learning about his/her new role, becoming adjusted to the new environment, establishing relationships, developing routines, and trying to move past the life he/she left behind. In the second phase, *moving-through*, the individual enters a period of feeling limited, looking for new roles, relationships, routines, and responsibilities. In this stage, he/she experiences a period of emptiness and confusion and develops a sense of hope. The last stage is the *moving-out* stage, in which the individual experiences separation and disengagement from the current experience or situation and prepares to transition into a new phase, experience, or

<center>12</center>

situation in life. The physical setting such as an individual's living arrangements, the environment, and climate can contribute to the stress, sense of well-being, and ultimately an individual's ability to adjust to a transition (Schlossberg, 1981). When transitional theory is applied to a research study, it may benefit participants and provide structure in transitioning into adulthood and staying connected with supportive figures in one's life.

According to Schlossberg (1981), the following eight characteristics affect the way an individual adapts to a transition:

1. Psychological competence, which includes an individual's attitudes about self, the world, and personal behavior;

2. Sex role identification, meaning how strongly the individual adheres to the prescribed role of a male or female;

3. Age or stage in life, which impacts the ability to respond to certain life changing situations;

4. State of health, which impacts the ability to deal physically or mentally with situations of change, especially if change is physically demanding;

5. Race and ethnicity, which plays a role in a person's value orientation, and certain changes can support or challenge cultural norms;

6. Socioeconomic status, which will impact an individual's ability to access services or tangible goods to alleviate the stresses of a transition;

7. Situations where decisions and or actions contradict one's values and beliefs (similar to race and ethnicity); and

8. Stress or challenges of transition, which can be lessened if the individual had a similar previous experience that provides information about what is ahead in the current transition. (p. 75)

Social constructivism. The theoretical perspective of social constructivism is an appropriate paradigm by which to examine how individuals seek an understanding of the world in which they live and work (Creswell, 2009). Constructivism manifests in two forms: social constructivism and individual constructivism. Social constructivism concerns the formation of communal knowledge of distinct schools and how the process of people's common cognition about the world is conveyed to other individuals of a socio-cultural community (Woolfolk, 2004). Individual constructivist approaches are related to how individuals establish elements respecting their cognition and affection derived from their psychological approach (Phillips, 1997). Thus, individual constructivism is known as psychological constructivism, of which Piaget is a preeminent representative (Paris, Byrnes, & Paris, 2001).

Social constructivism was featured in this study as the researcher explored the personal criteria for emancipated foster youths entering college and determined what factors they perceived helped them to attend college. Social constructivism focuses on specific contexts in which people live and work in order to better understand participants' cultural and historical settings. For example, in discussing constructivism, Crotty (1998) identifies several assumptions:

1. Meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting. Qualitative researchers tend to use open-ended questions so that the participants can share their views.

2. Humans engage with their world and make sense of it based on their historical and social perspectives—people are all born into a world of meaning bestowed upon

14

them by their culture. Thus, qualitative researchers seek to understand the context or setting of the participants through visiting this context and gathering information personally. They also interpret what they find, an interpretation shaped by the researcher's own experiences and background.

3. The basic generation of meaning is always social, arising in and out of interaction with a human community. The process of qualitative research is largely inductive, with the inquirer generating meaning from the data collected in the field.

Social constructivism does suggest that in research where human activities are being studied, there is a relationship between the subjects and the objects under scrutiny, with individuals constructing meaning from their experiences and interactions (Crotty, 1998; Silverman, 2001). Social constructivism maintains various subjective meanings of individuals' experiences directed towards certain objects or things (Creswell, 2009). These meanings are varied and compound, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of participants' viewpoints rather than narrowing down the meanings into few categories or ideas. In doing so, the researcher strongly depended on the participants' viewpoints regarding the situation under investigation in this research study. After formulating the theoretical framework, it was important to develop the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework that was used in this study included strategic thinking, strategic planning, and strategies for implementation that are providing emancipation services for foster youth and improving the foster care system. Each framework provided different perspectives that build a common denominator to address major gaps in this study.

Overview of Foster Care in the United States

In the 1900s, more than 1,150 U.S. institutions and orphanages held over 150,000 children. During this time, about one in four children died by the age of 5 due to health complications. Likewise, a small portion of these children between the ages of 10-17 worked in factories and on farms. According to the National Foster Parent Association (NFPA), the English Poor Laws led to the development and the regulation of family foster care in the United States in 1562. In 1562, the English Poor Laws allowed the placement of poor children into indentured service until they came of age. The United States adopted this practice and began placing children into homes. In the 1900s, social services agencies began supervising foster parents in the homes. Children's needs were considered when placements were made, records were kept, and the federal government began supporting the family foster homes through state inspections. According to the NFPA, services were provided to natural families to enable the child to return home and foster parents were seen as part of a professional team working to find permanency for dependent children (National Foster Parent Association [NFPA], 2011). According to Geenen and Powers (2007), many foster youths feel disconnected, isolated, and report difficulty building caring and stable relationships.

According to Freundlich and Barbell (2001), several key factors and actions over the years have influenced the present form of foster care:

- The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1974 (CAPTA), which provided states with funding to develop child protective services and brought about increased reporting of child abuse and neglect.

- In the 1970s, a decline in social services that addressed poverty, homelessness, and substance abuse increased the number of children that were at risk of child abuse and neglect.

- The role of child welfare and foster care has changed over the past 3 decades, which reflects changing values about the roles these agencies should play in dealing with the issue of long-term and short-term placement, reunification, and acting in the children's best interest.

Federal law requires the court to hold a permanency hearing, which determines the permanent plan for the child, within 12 months after the child enters foster care, and every 12 months thereafter (NFPA, 2011). According to the NFPA (2011), many courts review each case more frequently to ensure that the agency is actively pursuing permanency for the child. In the United States, close to one fifth of all children and youth in foster care reside in group care or institutional settings (DHHS, 2007). In group homes and in institutional settings, many foster youths are not receiving the proper family support. A child needs family support and love in order to thrive. DHHS (2007) reports that approved foster family homes must be held to the same standards as licensed foster family homes and anything less than full licensure or approval is insufficient for meeting Title IV-E eligibility requirements. Most youths in the foster care system are placed with relatives or with a foster parent. When a youth is in foster care, he/she receives medical care and other services as needed. Therefore, foster parents receive financial assistance to provide the support needed for a foster youth.

Child welfare system. The child welfare system is a group of services designed to promote the well-being of children by ensuring safety, achieving permanency, and strengthening families to care for their children successfully (DHHS, 2010). The child welfare system not only

ensures the safety of the children's wellbeing but also makes sure that children are financially secure. In 1980, Congress passed the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act in response to unmet needs and problems in foster care and to promote permanency through adoption (Lee, 2010). In the 1970s, child welfare advocates began voicing concerns about a phenomenon they termed *foster care drift*, in which children were moved from one foster placement to another without efforts to reunite them with their birth families (DHHS, 2010). In California, children enter the foster care system under the auspices of either county child welfare services or probation departments (Needell, Cuccaro-Alamin, & Rookhart, 2002). According to Rich (2010), with child well-being identified as a major goal of child welfare policy, researchers began to question how parental visitation might affect children who have been removed from their homes, often because of neglect or abuse. Rich reports that children who have been placed in the foster care system have not experienced the level of devotion and love found in a nurturing and stable home environment. For many foster youths, a loving and nurturing family is not a given, but should be a priority.

Many researchers contend that continuing contact between children and their biological families seems to be a basic ingredient for maintaining the psychological well-being of those children (Hess, 1988; Osterling & Hines, 2006). Although the primary responsibility for child welfare services rests with the states, the federal government plays a major role in supporting states in the delivery of services through funding of programs and legislative initiatives. Although child welfare systems vary from state to state, child welfare systems typically:

- Receive and investigate reports of possible child abuse or neglect,
- Provide services to families who need assistance in the protection and care of children,

- Arrange for children to live with kin or with foster families when they are not safe at home, and

- Arrange for reunification, adoption, or other permanent family connections for children leaving foster care (DHHS, 2010).

DHHS (2010) reports that most families first become involved with their local child welfare system because of a report of suspected child abuse or neglect (sometimes called *child maltreatment*). CAPTA defines child maltreatment as serious harm (neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse or neglect) caused to children by parents or primary caregivers, such as extended family members or babysitters. According to Kaplan, Pelcovitz, and Labruna (1999), children who have experienced emotional maltreatment show social impairments, low self-esteem, and long-term psychological damage. Child maltreatment is a traumatic experience that can cause emotional problems, such as depression, increased aggression, feelings of guilt or shame about the abuse, problems with interpersonal relationships, and social isolation (Carlson, Furby, Armstrong, & Shlaes, 1997). Maltreatment can not only traumatize a child but also cause them to become mentally unstable, which can lead to serious problems in the future.

Rich (2010) acknowledges that maltreatment, including abuse and neglect, is one of the most common reasons for children to come into the foster care system. Originally passed in 1974, CAPTA brought national attention to the need to protect vulnerable children in the United States. CAPTA provides federal funding to states in support of prevention, assessment, investigation, prosecution, and treatment activities, and also grants to public agencies and nonprofit organizations for demonstration programs and projects (DHHS, 2010). Additionally,

CAPTA plays an important role in support research, data collection, evaluation, and technical assistance by the federal government.

Child maltreatment also can include harm that a caregiver allows to happen or does not prevent from happening to a child. Public agencies, such as departments of social services or child and family services, often contract and collaborate with private child welfare agencies and community-based organizations to provide services to families, such as in-home family preservation services, foster care, residential treatment, mental health care, substance abuse treatment, parenting skills classes, employment assistance, and financial or housing assistance. The primary responsibility for implementing federal child and family legislative mandates rests with the Children's Bureau, within the Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Administration for Children and Families (DHHS, 2010).

The Children's Bureau is a large agency that works with other local agencies and the state of California to implement programs to protect children from abuse and neglect, as well as find permanency for children who cannot return home to their parents. If there is evidence of abuse and or neglect such that the child's safety is determined at risk, a case will be opened and a report will be sent to an emergency response social worker for further investigation (Lee, 2010). Social workers will evaluate and assess the situation and then determine whether to remove the child from the home, provide support services, or allow the child to stay with his/her family. A recent study by Prevent Child Abuse America (PCAA; Wang & Holton, 2007) estimated that the U.S. spends more than $33 billion in direct costs resulting from abuse and neglect (costs associated with immediate needs, such as child welfare and court services, hospitalization, mental health treatment, law enforcement, etc.).

According to Lee (2010), the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) is the primary institution responsible for California's child welfare program. The CDSS is responsible for: (a) allocating federal and other sources of funding to state and county programs, (b) overseeing developing and implementing programs for at risk children and their families, (c) licensing foster care providers and conducting research, (d) supporting counties with adoption services, and (f) evaluating programs and services (Reed & Karpilow, 2002). With the current child welfare system's focus on family reunification and permanency planning, the opportunity to monitor the progress of parents in overcoming problems such as parenting issues and drug and alcohol abuse is critical. Because of these issues, many foster youth never reunite with their biological parents. Foster youths who continue to be involved in their biological parents' lives over time will have emotional and behavioral problems both in foster care and later as adults (Lee, 2010). Haight, Kagle, and Black (2003) point out that the move to foster care and separation from birth parents are stressful and traumatic events for both youths and their parents.

According to the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA, 2010), in 2010, 53% of children in foster care were male and 47% were female (see Figure 1). In addition, in 2010 CWLA reported the race/ethnicity of the children in foster care as: 167,235 White, 127, 821 Black, 86,581 Hispanic, (of any race), 21, 584 of two or more races, and 8,491 Alaska Native/American Indian, 8,118 are unknown/unable to determine, 2,603 Asian, and 792 Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (see Table 2).

Figure 1. Gender in foster care. *Note.* Adapted from ―Quick facts about foster care,‖ by Child Welfare League of America, 2010. Retrieved from http://www.cwla.org/programs/fostercare /factsheet.htm. Copyright 2010 by the author.

Table 1

Age of Children/Youth in Foster Care

Age	Percentage
Younger than 1 year	6%
Age 1-5	26%
Age 6-10 years	20%
Age 11-15 years	28%
Age 16-18 years	18%
Over 18	2%

Note. Adapted from ―Quick facts about foster care,‖ by Child Welfare League of America, 2010. Retrieved from http://www.cwla.org/programs/fostercare/factsheet.htm. Copyright 2010 by the author.

Table 2

Race/Ethnicity

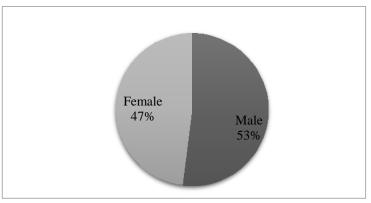| Ethnicity	Out-of-Home Care	General Population
Black, Non-Hispanic	32%	15%
White, Non-Hispanic	41%	61%
Hispanic	18%	17%
American Indian/Alaska Native, Non-Hispanic	2%	1%
Asian/Pacific Islander, Non-Hispanic	1%	3%
Unknown	2%	N/A
Two or More Races, Non-Hispanic	3%	4%

Note. Adapted from ―Quick facts about foster care,‖ by Child Welfare League of America, 2010. Retrieved from http://www.cwla.org/programs/fostercare/factsheet.htm. Copyright 2010 by the author.

Emancipation of Foster Care Youth

Emancipation is a legal term for foster youths who are legally adults and free from the foster care system. When children in the foster care system turn 18, they must support themselves financially with little or no preparation. Most emancipated youths end up homeless, unemployed, or incarcerated because of the lack of support services available before and after emancipation (Chipungu & Bent-Goodley, 2004). In 2009, an estimated 26,547 emancipated foster youths across the nation experienced the following outcomes 12-18 months after emancipation: 51% were unemployed, 30% had no health insurance, 25% had been homeless, 84% became parents, 30% were receiving public assistance, and 54% had graduated from high school (Foster Care Month, 2006). In California alone, roughly 4,000 foster youths emancipate each year (National Foster Care Coalition, 2009). These young people often leave the foster care system at the age of majority, or otherwise become legally emancipated. While legislation continues to move forward in favor of foster youths, the programs still do not provide the necessary and relevant services that aim to promote resilience and success among those emancipating from foster care; outcome statistics continue to show that this group is not faring substantially better than those not involved in Independent Living Programs (Collins, 2001). Independent Living Programs are available to assist foster youths with the proper guidance to transition successfully as adults. According to Collins (2001), there is ―a lack of explicit theory guiding programs and services leads to evaluations that can demonstrate poor outcomes but can provide little guidance for improving program interventions‖ (p. 72).

Social support is a critical factor for foster youths‘ well-being. Youths emancipating from foster care experience disruptions in the level of social support they receive from various people in their lives (Courtney, Terao, & Bost, 2004). After emancipation, foster youths find it difficult

to maintain housing, employment, and family support in society. Post emancipation services such as transitional housing programs are available to foster youths. However, these programs are limited and serve few foster youths due to limited funds. Many foster youths are eligible for transitional housing, but the Los Angeles County only has 244 transitional housing placement program beds available, which leaves 3,746 foster youth unprepared for independent living skills, college readiness, proper hygiene, and money management skills. Foster youths are expected to maintain employment or attend school and support themselves independently, but with supervision by their transitional housing workers.

Many foster youths who age out of the foster care system face many challenges that derail their transition into adulthood. Too many foster youths who are aging out of the foster care system are left with limited resources to thrive as adults. Barriers to their success include homelessness, poor educational outcomes, unemployment, inadequate healthcare, increased incarceration rates, and substance abuse (Berzin, 2008). From January 1, 2004 to December 31, 2004, more than 4,255 children emancipated from foster care in California. Of these 4,255 emancipating youth, 1,402 were located in Los Angeles County (DHHS, 2008).

According to the DHHS (2008), within 2 years of being discharged from foster care, former foster youth face odds stacked against them:

- 25% are homeless
- Almost 40% are on public

assistance • Nearly 50% are

unemployed

- Only about one to three percent of all former foster youth obtain a college degree of any kind.

In addition, research indicates that 28-42% of foster youths become parents within 2.5-4 years after exiting the foster care system (Barth, 1990; Cook, 1992). According to Bonura (2009), females who have experienced foster care are six times more likely than the general population to give birth before the age of 21. Parents with a history of foster care are almost twice as likely to see their own children placed in foster care than parents without this history (Viner & Taylor, 2005).

According to Foster Care in Massachusetts (2005), youth development is an approach to understanding and supporting youths and young adults as they mature, incorporating a positive, multi-dimensional view of their lives. This program includes six main aspects:

- It is youth centered, focusing on young people as resources;

- It encourages meaningful youth participation in arenas that impact their development;

- It is asset-based, versus deficit-focused;

- It focuses on positive youth outcomes;

- It emphasizes and values caring relationships between youth and adults; and

- It involves the whole community.

The cut-off of services at age 18 does not make sense given current knowledge about child and adolescent development, the impact of trauma, and what it takes for youth in the general population (let alone abused and neglected youth) to achieve self-sufficiency (Foster Care in Massachusetts, 2005). It is important to remember that most foster youths come into the foster care system abused and neglected, with no home, no money, and little clothing and food. The foster care system provides permanent and temporary housing, clothing vouchers, free education, and health care until these children emancipate from the foster care system. All foster

youths have the opportunity to obtain a free education at no cost, which will not only provide them with the knowledge base of schooling but also prepare them for career options as well.

Educational outcomes. The United States is considered to offer opportunities for all its inhabitants. However, when it comes to the education of foster youth, this opportunity falls short. Foster youths are not provided with the same educational opportunities due to their background status and funding inequalities. Youths who *age out* are more likely to drop out of high school and graduate at significantly lower rates than their peers in the general school population. In 1998, only 35% of the 20,000 emancipated youth graduated from high school by age 19 and only 11% went on to college in that same time period. Many foster youths have to repeat classes or lose credits because of their records being delayed, lost, or missing, or because of school transfers (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Luderer, 2004). According to the California Foster Youth Education Task Force (2010), for every change in school setting, foster youths fall 3-6 months farther behind their classmates, creating a downward spiral. The collaboration of child welfare agencies, schools, and the courts needs to improve its systems to provide better educational outcomes for foster youth (Havalchak, White, O'Brien, Pecora, & Sepulveda, 2009). Research has shown that 50% of foster youths will change schools at least four times after beginning formal education (Emerson & Lovitt, 2003). They will also attend an average of nine schools by the age of 18 (Kelly, 2000). With all the school changes, foster youths also have to adapt to new teachers, peers, and foster caregivers (Blome, 1997). This lack of exposure can deter foster youths from finishing high school and attending college.

As a result, there is an education gap between foster youth because they have more transfer records, take special education classes, and are less likely to be on a college academic track (Blome, 1997). These challenges need to be addressed because without the proper

education, foster youth can face limited opportunities for upward mobility. Furthermore, foster youths can also underestimate the power and importance of education. The foster care system is supposed to ensure the well-being of all foster youths. The major problem is that currently these youths are not properly prepared for college. Emancipated foster youths not only face many obstacles, but also lack the knowledge of college preparation and transitioning from adulthood to college.

Without post-secondary education, it is increasingly difficult to secure employment that pays enough to cover the full costs of living. If emancipated foster youth students are expected to succeed as adults, greater attention must be given to their educational achievement and educational outcomes (Foster Care in Massachusetts, 2005). They are more likely to be placed in regular classes instead of college preparatory classes, which may not promote the importance of pursuing a 2 or 4 year degree, nor will they prepare youths to pursue an advanced education (Blome, 1997). College preparatory classes are critical for emancipated foster youth students because they prepare them for college and career advancement. Table 3 presents data on foster care students nationally.

Table 3

Student Outcomes

Outcome	National %
Earned a high school diploma	54%
Obtained BA or higher	2%
Become a parent	84%
Were unemployed	51%
Had no health insurance (unable to obtain health care because they lacked health insurance or sufficient money)	30%
Had been homeless	25%
Receiving public assistance	30%

Note. Adapted from ―Quick facts about foster care,‖ by Child Welfare League of America, 2010. Retrieved from http://www.cwla.org/programs/fostercare/factsheet.htm. Copyright 2010 by the author.

Many foster youths struggle to graduate from high school and to go on to college. In 2008, Havalchak et al. (2009) found that only 54% of foster youth in the U.S. had completed high school. In terms of postsecondary education, only 1.8% of foster youth in 2005 were able to complete a bachelor's degree compared to the general population rate of 24% in the U.S. (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2005). In the U.S., the median earnings for individuals with less than a high school diploma ranged from $19,000 to $23,000 compared to over $60,000 for individuals with advanced degrees. High school graduates earned about $27,000, and bachelor graduates earned about $47,000 (U.S Census Bureau, 2007).

The NFPA (2011) is an organization that provides parents, children, and foster youths across the country with educational support to ensure successful educational outcomes. Their mission is to support foster parents to better prepare and provide permanence for the foster child in their care. NFPA reports that collaboration is the key to achieving practice, policy, and cultural changes that support educational stability and achievement for children and youths in their care and for others responsible for their well-being. The NFPA's program priorities are to:

- Advance knowledge of emerging state policies and strategies designed to improve educational outcomes for children and youth in foster care;

- Promote best and promising practices and cross-system collaboration;

- Heighten visibility of the education issues for children and youth in foster care in publications, on the web, at key national conferences, and through trainings and technical assistance; and

- Disseminate members' tools and resources in the field.

NFPA offers great resources to assist foster youths with their overall educational outcomes.

Blome (1997) reports that foster parents are less involved in foster youths' education. To increase school involvement, Blome suggests that foster parents be trained to monitor the youths' daily school performance, expect social workers to track the youths' progress in school, and, facilitate birth parents' involvement in school functions. Zetlin (2009) reports that children in foster care represent one of the most educationally vulnerable populations of students. Trauma of abuse or neglect, frequent moves and school transfers, and the lack of adequate advocacy often result in dismal educational outcomes. Recent studies have shown that foster children are more likely than their classmates to experience academic and behavioral problems in school and to drop out of school before the end of 12th grade. A significant proportion of students in foster care score 15-20% below their peers on statewide achievement tests in reading and mathematics, and they earn lower grades in these subjects as well (Altshuler, 2003).

Postsecondary education is becoming essential for all youths, with recent statistics indicating that the number of college-level jobs will grow faster than the number of jobs for people with less than college education during the years 1998-2008 (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). Zetlin et al. (2004) report that given this range of challenges, improving educational outcomes for foster youths will involve making systemic change in the way these youths are treated by child welfare agencies, school districts, and other agencies responsible for their care, education, and overall well being.

Burrell (2003) states that recent efforts to improve the schooling experience and outcomes of foster youth have focused on four areas:

1. Stability of educational placement (i.e., maintaining students in their schools of origin),

2. Educational rights and opportunities (i.e., information and training on educational rights, special education, and college or workforce preparation),

3. Advocacy and cross-system liaisons (i.e., advocacy resources to assist youth and families with enrollment, suspension or expulsion, and special education or other barriers, and

4. Quality of educational programming.

Zetlin et al. (2004) state that even if placement instability were reduced, substantial problems would still adversely affect the education of all foster youth. A number of recent studies describe the barriers to educational achievement that children in foster care experience (Altshuler, 1997). Zetlin et al. report that many of the educational problems foster youths encounter have to do with placement instability and multiple school transfers. In California, new legislation requires that educational passports be maintained for all foster youths with information necessary for monitoring school progress (i.e., grades, attendance, retention, Individualized Education Programs [IEPs], and achievement test scores). In fact, in California, the Foster Youth Services program provides direct educational services such as tutoring, locating school records or transcripts, and mentoring to foster youth residing in group homes to increase academic achievement and graduation rates (Ayasse, 1995). Zetlin et al. state that many children in the foster care system receive no educational advocacy or mentoring. As Kelly (2000) notes, those working with children in foster care need to do more to address and ameliorate these children's educational plight.

Wolanin (2005) estimated the average high school completion rate among foster youths in 2004: 50% compared to a 70% completion rate for all youths. Moreover, a low percentage of foster youth attends college once they emancipate out of the system. In 2010, of the 300,000

30

foster youth between the ages 18 and 25, only 30,000 enter postsecondary education, with a high concentration at the trade school and a community college level. Additional research has found that youths who drop out of high school and are not pursuing a GED are less likely to receive services even though they have the greatest need (Leathers & Testa, 2006). Additionally, youths in foster care who drop out of high school have 46% higher levels of substance abuse problems, experience pregnancy or parenting issues 23% more frequently, and exhibit 37% more delinquent behavior (George et al., 2002). Schools that establish high expectations for all students and give them the support necessary to live up to those expectations have much higher rates of academic success (Benard, 1993). Many legislative bills implemented by lawmakers and school officials are on a working progress towards helping emancipated foster youth students improve academic success, such as SB 1440.

SB 1440 is a proposition for emancipated foster youth students to provide California Community College students to transfer successfully into a California State University. According to Erik Skinner (2009) the Executive Vice Chancellor of Programs in the Chancellor's Office of the California Community Colleges, the key elements of SB 1440 include:

- Creates an associate degree for transfer that guarantees admission with junior standing to the CSU system,
- Defines this degree as having 60 transferrable units that include the IGETC or CSU GE Breadth pattern and 18 units in a major or area of emphasis,
- Provides these students with priority admission to their local CSU campus and to a program or major that is similar to their major or area of emphasis at the community college,

- Prohibits the CSU from requiring students to repeat courses that are similar to courses completed as part of the associate degree for transfer at the community college, and

- Prohibits the CSU from requiring students to take more than 60 units to complete a 120-unit baccalaureate degree.

Its benefits to students include:

- Recognizes the associate degree as the measure of preparation and readiness for transfer to upper-division course work at the CSU, thus shifting the authority for defining lower division major preparation to the community colleges;

- Reduces the need for students to take unnecessary courses, thereby shortening their time to degree completion and reducing costs for students, community colleges and the CSU;

- Eliminates confusion caused by different and shifting major preparation requirements for each CSU campus.

Receiving a college degree will benefit not only the individual but also the national economy (Lee, 2010). It will reduce the numbers of emancipated foster youths becoming homeless in society. The Chancellors Offices and Statewide Academic Senates must continue to work together with administrators at community colleges and universities to implement and improve student success statewide.

Homelessness. Homelessness in the United States has become a problematic issue for emancipated foster youths in general. Foster youths leave the foster care system and often become homeless, incarcerated, or pregnant. The outcomes for these youths are often poor and they frequently fall behind their peers in education, employment, housing, and finances (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006). Research suggests that within 2-4 years of emancipation, 25% of

youth had been homeless for a least 1 night (Cook, 1992; George et al., 2002). In 2001, 65% of youths in California who leave care do so without a place to live (George et al, 2002). In Los Angeles County, 50% of emancipated foster youth will be homeless within 6 months (Viner & Taylor, 2005). A study comparing individuals aged 18-24 in the general population with those discharged from foster care showed that those who had been in foster care experienced significantly more problems than those in the general population (Courtney et al., 2005). According to the California Department of Social Services (2007) statistics show that two out of three foster youths in California face imminent homelessness upon emancipation. Another study estimates that between 20-50% of youth accessing homeless agencies have a history of foster care or have run directly from care (Kurtz, Jarvis, & Kurtz, 1991). Homelessness makes it very hard for emancipated foster youth to obtain educational resources and gain or secure employment, which jeopardizes their ability to make a successful transition to independence.

Employment. Emancipated foster youth students face devastating financial outcomes. George et al. (2002) conducted an outcome study of 2,824 youths who aged out of the foster care system in California. Among those youths, one fourth reported no income after 13 months of leaving care (yet one half had reported employment earnings prior to their 18th birthday). According to George et al., of those youths who reported employment, their mean earnings were $6,235 per year. In one retrospective study, the employment rate for youth emancipated from care was 32% lower than the rates found in non-foster care young adults, and even when they are employed, they still depend on others for financial assistance (Cook, 1992). Oftentimes, these problems begin when youths leave care without securing employment (McMillen & Tucker, 1999). As mentioned before, emancipated foster youth students struggle with minimal incomes to support their educational needs.

Mental and physical health. Mental and physical health are critically important in a youth's development. When foster youth experience multiple placements and inconsistent parenting they are at risk for developing negative coping skills and behaviors that challenge foster parents and child welfare agency professionals (Henry, 1999). Emancipated foster youth who do not speak English and those with physical, cognitive, and mental disabilities need specialized services that are appropriate to their unique needs (Flicker, Turner, Waldron, Brody, & Ozechowski, 2008). Social workers recognize that children in foster care have an increased risk of negative life outcomes, including decreased academic achievement, poorer mental health, and an increase in behavior problems and delinquency (Alltucker, Bullis, Close, & Yovanoff, 2006). Separation from family members and or legal guardians can have a profound affect on a child's livelihood. These untreated mental health issues impact not only the child in foster care, but also society, because when left unaddressed, the untreated children often find themselves homeless, incarcerated, or in inpatient facilities (Kerker & Dore, 2006).

Young adults in poverty are at high risk for experiencing other related problems such as lack of medical coverage and lack of access to care for medical and mental health problems (Barth, 1990). Also, former foster youths from California have high rates of accessing publicly funded mental health services (53%), using Medi-Cal insurance (59%), and becoming pregnant (20% are mothers within 1 year of leaving the system; Needell et al., 2002). Medical coverage is a critical aspect of foster youths aging out of foster care. Almost all youths who age out of the foster care system have difficulty gaining access to appropriate heath care. Only one third of former foster youths have medical insurance within 12 months of emancipation (Brunk, 2002). Although the majority of emancipated foster youths are eligible for medical insurance, most do not know that they qualify for medical insurance, which leaves a communication gap between

the foster youth, social worker, and the community foster care liaison. Provision offered by Title IV-E of federal government provides former foster youths between the ages 18-21 with access to medical coverage. Research indicates that emancipated youth in foster care often need highly intensive and specialized services to prepare them to live independently (Freundlich & Avery, 2006).

Bernstein (2005) reports that young people in the U.S. that are in or transitioning out of the foster care and juvenile justice systems often have serious mental health needs in addition to physical health issues. A recent study found that more than half of the youths who leave foster care have one or more mental disorders; a quarter suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder. Another study found that 15% of foster youths had attempted or contemplated suicide. These issues should not come as any surprise. When foster youths enter the foster care system, most of them have mental health problems that affect their development and intellectual skills.

Foster youths also face separation from their biological parents, which leads to psychological hardship. During this crucial transition, they need additional help. According to Bernstein (2005), many youths in the foster care system have experienced some form of victimization. Moreover, the foster care system brings its own mental health endangerment. The number of placements in family foster homes has declined at least 25% over the past 10 years, meaning that increasing numbers of young people will spend time in institutions instead, putting them at increased risk for mental health problems. In California, researchers determined that youths who experience five or more placements are more than six times as likely as those who stay in one home to receive mental health services for mood, behavior, psychotic, anxiety, and adjustment disorders; practically a third of California's foster youths will experience five or more placements during their time in foster care.

The result is a devastating cycle; children with emotional and behavioral problems are less likely than others to find a permanent home through either reunification or adoption and thus are more vulnerable to continued changes in placement and the related mental health consequences (Bernstein, 2005). Those who provide therapeutic services to youths transitioning out of the foster care system often describe them as lost children that go in and out of the system with inadequate resources. It is worth noting that in California, youths who emancipate from the child welfare system receive a lower amount of mental health services. Bernstein (2005) reports that children in the child welfare system use mental health resources up to 15 times more than other children in the Medicaid system. When foster youth students emancipate from the foster care system it is beneficial for them to continue to receive these services. Bernstein suggests some ideas for improving mental health issues among emancipated foster youths:

- Have young people help set the agenda,

- Address survival needs as well as psychological needs,

- Meet in informal settings,

- Emphasize strengths,

- Support with compassion and consistency;, and

- Reduce stigma.

Health issues can create a major setback for children, and especially for emancipated foster youth students. Health problems can lead to incomplete homework assignments, missed classes, and fatigue, all of which will cause students to fall behind in their academics. Formal mental health intervention including (counseling, therapy, medication, etc.) is very helpful for foster youth. It is important that every foster youth have access to health care services. Mental health issues can be attributed to a combination of biological and environmental factors. One

study examining the mental health needs of foster care children reported that children and adolescents in foster care experience higher rates of mental health issues than those who were never in foster care (Thompson et al., 2007). According to Kerker and Dore (2006) the high estimates of mental health problems among youths in foster care are due to abuse, neglect, being separated from their family, and the absence of a person in their lives who feels responsible for their wellbeing. Mental health concerns can lead to serious problems, one of which is being incarcerated.

Incarceration. Nationwide, an increasing number of youths in state custody are being held in juvenile detention centers and juvenile prisons. The majority of foster youths who spend time in juvenile detention centers will also spend time incarcerated as adults (Karp, 2003). National research has found that youths who age out of the foster care system are highly likely as adults to be unemployed, become homeless, experience mental illness, be incarcerated, experience early parenthood, and or become victims of violent crime, including physical assault and rape. Emancipated foster youths are at a high risk of incarceration (Foster Care in Massachusetts, 2005). According to several studies, 38-64% of adolescents leaving foster care will experience at least one arrest, 30-60% will experience a 1-night stay in jail, and 13-20% will be convicted of a crime (Alltucker et al., 2006). Youths with arrest histories are more likely to be of African American decent, to have lived in more than three foster placements, and to have entered the foster care system sometime between the ages of 12-15 (Barth, 1990). Youths formerly in foster care commonly need legal assistance and report difficulty finding it on their own (Reilly, 2003). According to Reilly (2003), 45% of emancipated foster youths run into trouble with the law. This leads to high rates of incarceration among foster youths, which causes

them to be unprepared for independent living skills and transitional housing programs before emancipating out of foster care.

Independent Living through Transitional Housing

Independent living through transitional housing prepares foster youths for the real world, providing them with the learning tools to be independent self-starters. Upon emancipating from the foster care system, many youths lose access to vital services such as housing, education, and healthcare (Berzin, 2008). Barth (1990) identifies the youths' goals as maintaining independent housing, acquiring entitlement funds, and developing a support network. According to Bonura (2009), pre-emancipation programs help to provide youths with the knowledge and skills necessary to live self-sufficiently. The two emancipation program models that are currently being used in Los Angeles County are the Independent Living Program (ILP) and the Early Start to Emancipation Preparation (ESTEP) Program, which are transitional housing programs that provide independent living services for foster youth aging out of the foster care system (Courtney et al., 2005).

According to the National Foster Care Coalition (2009), under Fostering Connections—a program for youths ages 16 or older who leave foster care for kinship, guardianship, or adoption—youths are eligible for the same independent living services provided by their state to youths in foster care. The independent living services are administered by state child welfare agencies using federal funds available through the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (Chafee Program). According to Courtney and Dworsky (2006) who examined the Midwest study of foster youth transitioning out of care, there is a greater need for attention to ILPs as they are not currently boosting positive outcomes. Specific services available to youths vary by state, but basic independent living services often include life skills preparation classes,

youth conferences, and similar services designed to prepare youths for the transition to adulthood (National Foster Care Coalition, 2009).

Research on outcomes for emancipated foster youths consistently demonstrates that their adjustment is poorer than expected, even when they are involved in ILPs (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006). DHHS (2007) reports that 51% of children leaving foster care were returned to their parents or primary caregivers. Furthermore, to transition or receive independent living services, foster youths are supposed to have the appropriate skills and be self-sufficient when they leave the foster care system between the ages of 18-21. The Whittier Transition Resource Center (TRC) is a public agency that represents a partnership between the Community Resource Center, the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), and the Los Angeles Probation Department. The Whittier TRC was designed to provide Independent Living Services to youth who are preparing to emancipate from the foster care system and to former foster care youth until the age of 21. The Whittier TRC is a drop-in resource center that provides an array of services, including educational, employment, housing, transportation, skill building workshops and group and individual mental health services to anyone ages 14-21 who is in out-of-home placement or has at one time been placed in foster care (Bonura, 2009).

DCFS runs the Bridges to Independence Transitional Housing Program, which provides transitional housing for more than 1,100 former foster youths, ages 18-21, throughout Los Angeles County. Residents maintain their own apartment while participating in the program and receive case management services, counseling, education, and career assistance, and weekly life skills training in areas such as budgeting and meal preparation. The cornerstone of the program is a unique public/private partnership between DCFS, the Community Development Commission

of Los Angeles County, the Weingart Foundation, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (Foster Care in Massachusetts, 2005).

The United Friends of the Children runs the Pathways Transitional Living Program in the Los Angeles area. This 18-month program serves foster youth ages 18-23 that have aged out of foster care and are at risk of homelessness. The program provides foster youths with career and life skills preparation, educational guidance, mental health services, and a furnished apartment; they are required to sustain the apartment and contribute to the rent, depending on their income. The Emancipated Youth Connections Project (EYCP) of the California Permanency for Youth Project (CPYP) is an example of a program designed to provide permanent, lifelong connections and support to youths who have emancipated from foster care (Foster Care in Massachusetts, 2005). The CPYP's major goal is to ensure that in California, no youth leaves the foster care system unprepared and without a permanent connection to a caring adult. The program model addresses the specific needs of emancipated foster youths with available aftercare services and a lifelong family connection.

Adolescents for Young Adulthood Curriculum (PAYA) is a program located in California that is designed to prepare adolescents, beginning at age 14, for adulthood by using a five module curriculum: (a) money, home, and food management; (b) personal care, health, safety and decision making; (c) educational, job seeking and job maintenance; (d) housing, transportation, community resources, laws and recreation; and (e) young parents' guide. The curriculum is intended not only to prepare foster youth for independent living but also to give them the experience and drive to be successful and independent (Foster Care in Massachusetts, 2005).

Outcome: A Need for More Transitional and Independent Living Programs

The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 and the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program doubled previous funds allocated to ILPs, increased the age range of those who were eligible for services, and helped to address the missing services of previous legislation (Collins, 2004). In 2006, the Los Angeles County Transitional and Independent Living services were offered to 8,317 foster youth out of 12,759 (California Department of Social Services [CDSS], 2007). Between 2000 and 2001, approximately 65% of the youths aging out needed affordable housing at the time of emancipation (Needell et al., 2002). Unfortunately, however, a large number of foster youths are still without independent living services. The passage of the Foster Care Independence Act authorized federal funding of $140 million per year for states to provide services to youths in the foster care system who were preparing to emancipate (Collins, 2004; DHHS, 2000). Recognizing the profound need for services for emancipating youth, the Independent Living Initiatives Program (Public Law 99-272) was created to help to improve outcomes for their successful transition into adulthood and provided a framework and funds for these services (Bonura, 2009), especially given that unstable housing can compromise physical and mental health and limited employment can lead to housing instability (Collins, 2004).

DCFS has identified core services to be provided to emancipating foster youth in the ILP and the ESTEP programs including education, career development, daily living skills, financial resources, housing information, referral to mentoring programs, and assistance and referral to promote health and safety skills. Included in the assistance to promote health and safety is a provision to provide mental health services, such as pregnancy prevention, nutrition education, and substance abuse prevention (CDSS, 2007).

The physical setting, such as an individual's living arrangements, the environment, and climate can contribute to the stress, sense of well-being, and ultimately to an individual's ability to adjust to transition (Schlossberg, 1981). The transition from high school to college for the first-time and first-year college students poses various challenges and opportunities (Blome, 1997).

Mentoring for Foster Youth Students

A mentor can be many things to a foster youth student, such as a stable adult, a positive role model, a tutor, a connection to others, a support, as well as a source of happiness. The goal for a mentor is to be a good role model, consistent, reliable, and able to establish a relationship with the youth. Mentorship can help foster youth students identify and experience long lasting relationships. The influence of a positive role model and developmental support is critical for foster youths. Most foster youth students need assistance with college preparation, applying for scholarships, housing, and transportation. Keeping a commitment is important to a youth who is or who has been in foster care. Foster youth students have a hard time committing to others because of their experiences living in the foster care system. In dealing with foster youths, mentors have to be patient and trustworthy. The support of individuals and the connection to a long lasting relationship may be more important to former foster youth than the accessibility of other services (Geenen & Powers, 2007).

A mentoring program has the ability to support foster youths by providing meaningful and healing relationships. Mentors are a great resource for youths, especially for emancipated foster youth students. Having a positive mentor before and after foster care could prepare that youth for the proper transition to adulthood and help him/her have a positive educational outcome. Youths involved in supportive mentoring relationships, those utilizing transitional

42

housing programs paired with mentors, and those who are allowed to remain in care until the age of 21 years appear to be more successful than peers who did not have these advantages (Osterling & Hines, 2006). Youths who have had fewer placements and supportive mentors in their life, do better in their adulthood (Collins, 2001).

Foster youth students often fall behind in school when exposed to the foster care system. A mentor can help them stay focused, motivated, and on target with their academics. Mentor programs are highly beneficial for emancipated foster youth students, increasing their self-concept, increasing their educational attainment, and improving their peer social support. Studies have shown that mentor programs improve the outcomes for at-risk youth (Osterling & Hines, 2006). Mentors can also bring joy and excitement to a foster youth's life.

College Programs and Educational Resources for Foster Youth Students

College programs have been established throughout the United States to link foster youth students with the proper education. Many foster youth do not access or attend college. The legislature passed Assembly Bill (AB) 2463, which was added to Article 5 of the California Education Code in 1996. This bill mandated the California State University (CSU) and the California Community College (CCC) systems to increase college outreach services to foster youths, provide technical resources to aid them with admissions and financial aid, ensure year-round campus housing, and provide campus support and retention services (California Education Code, 1996). The 2003 U.S. Census indicated that the high school completion rate for Blacks (80%) and Latinos (57%) trailed behind Whites (89%) and Asians (87%). With regard to students who earned a Bachelor's degree in 2003, 30% were White, 50% were Asian, 17% were Black, and 11% were Latino. A person with a college degree earns substantially more money and enjoys a better and healthier lifestyle than a person who does not (Wolanin, 2005). According to

Wolanin (2005), foster youths do not attend college for several reasons, many of which result from their lack of social capital and networks. Additional reasons why foster youths do not attend or complete college include the following:

- They often do not take courses that fulfill the 4-year college admission requirements, even when they qualify.

- They simply do not apply to college, even when they do qualify, because of the lack of expectations held by the people around them. People in foster youths' environment generally do not talk about college nor do they encourage them to pursue college.

- They are not aware of college opportunities and they do not have access to information and resources to help them navigate through the application process.

- Lastly, they do not have the financial resources to pay for college.

The following helpful resources can help emancipated foster youth students transition to college:

- Career Ladders Project: The Career Ladders Project for the California Community Colleges works to strengthen the role of community colleges in providing educational and career advancement opportunities for Californians (Foster Youth Transitions Resource, 2009). Website: http://www.careerladdersproject.org/

- Career Advancement Academies: These community college programs are designed to establish pipeline college and high wage careers for underprepared and underemployed youth and adults (Foster Youth Transitions Resource, 2009). Website: http://www.careerladdersproject.org/projects/career.php

- The California College Pathways Project: The California College Pathways Project is partnership of the California State University Chancellor's Office and the John

Burton Foundation with the support of the Stuart Foundation and the Walter S.

Johnson Foundation. The goal of the California College Pathways Project is to

increase the number of foster youths in California who enter higher education and

achieve an academic outcome by expanding access to campus support programs, such

as the Guardian Scholars Program, the Renaissance Scholars Program, and other

successful approaches to supporting former foster youth on campus (Foster Youth

Transitions Resource, 2009). Website: http://www.cacollegepathways.org

- Foster Youth Success Initiative: The California Community Colleges Chancellor's

    Office (CCCCO) has recognized the significant deficit regarding youth from foster

    care attending higher education. Acknowledging this need, they are sponsoring a

    concerted effort called the Foster Youth Success Initiative (FYSI) to bring issues

    affecting these youths to the forefront and to improve their ability to access

    postsecondary education and benefit from the support services that are available but

    are often unknown to them, such as the:

    - o   FYSI Manual

    - o   FYSI Resource Guide

    - o   County Independent Living Program Contacts

    - o   FYSI Liaison

    - o   FYSI Partners

    - o   Transitional Housing-Plus Provider List

    - o   Directory of all college FYSI contacts, listed by college

    - o   Directory of all college FYSI contacts, listed by region. (Foster Youth

        Transitions Resource, 2009). Website: http://www.cccco.edu/

- From Foster Care to College: Making the Transition: For foster care youth, the road to higher education is often the road less traveled. Seven percent to 13% of foster care students enroll in college; about two percent obtain bachelor's degrees, compared to 24% of adults in the general population. *Supporting Success: Improving Higher Education Outcomes for Foster Youth Students* by Casey Family Programs (2010) provides a framework to develop programs and practices that encourage foster care students to prepare for, attend, and complete college (Foster Youth Transitions Resource, 2009). Website: http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications /SupportingSuccess.htm

- Guardian Scholars Program: A program providing support services to former foster youths to assist them with their goals in higher education (Foster Youth Transitions Resource, 2009). Website: http://www.fosteryouthhelp.ca.gov/pdfs /GuardianScholars.pdf

- California College Pathways Helping California's Foster Youth Access Higher Education and Reach Their Educational Goals: A report developed by the John Burton Foundation, the California State University Office of the Chancellor and the California Community College System Office highlights the progress campus support programs have made statewide in their effort to increase access to higher education for California's former foster youths (Foster Youth Transitions Resource, 2009). Website: http://www.cacollegepathways.org/pdfs /011609_CCSPAR_wholeFINAL.pdf

- The Youth Transition Action Team Guidebook: This book serves as a guide for systems change in counties across the state of California. It contains information and

guidance intended to help Youth Transition Action Teams in California, establish

practices to better serve foster youths, and supports their successful transition as they

move from the foster care system to adult life. This how-to guide brings frameworks,

tools, materials, strategies, and approaches to communities as they pursue the

development of a comprehensive, local youth transition system (Foster Youth

Transitions Resource, 2009). Website: http://www.newwaystowork.org

/documents/ytatdocuments/YTATGuidebookmay2008.pdf

- Stages of Building Comprehensive Youth Transition Systems: This framework guides

  the five-stage process of enhancing community capacity to build a comprehensive

  youth transition system for young people emancipating from foster care (Foster Youth

  Transitions Resource, 2009). Website: http://www.newwaystowork.org

  /mastertools/FrameworksandCharts/FosterYouthTransitionalActionTeams/YTATStag

  eschartMarch2006sm.pdf

- California Connected by 25 Initiative: This California Family to Family strategy

  helps public child welfare agencies and their communities to build comprehensive

  supports and services for transitioning foster youths. The goal of the initiative is to

  connect foster youths to the opportunities, experiences, and supports that will enable

  them to succeed throughout adulthood by age 25 (Foster Youth Transitions Resource,

  2009). Website: http://www.f2f.ca.gov/res/CAConnected.pdf

These resources contain helpful information to help foster youths students transition out

of the foster care system into adulthood. Individual independent living plans are ideally tailored

to fit individual interests, strengths, and services recommended to assist youths' transition into

independence (―Child Welfare Policy Manual,‖ 2011). Plans for foster youth students'

development are tailored around setting a series of goals, including life skill training and educational planning needed for their future success. In response to these concerns, transitional and independent living programs are required to provide youths with adequate training and daily living skills to prepare them for adulthood. Doing so brings structure, direction, and approachable tools that allow them to develop a sense of awareness.

Summary

The reviewed literature found that most foster youth students emancipating from the foster care system face many challenges. Most of them are victims of multiple placements, mental and physical health problems, homelessness, and incarceration, and experience problems related to educational needs. Emancipated foster youth students are leaving foster care unprepared for adulthood. Youths that emancipate from the foster care system are somewhat at risk of not retaining stable housing. Financial stability and stable housing are the most important elements of achieving independence. Transitional programs and ILPs provide self-sufficiency skills for foster youth students transitioning out of the foster care system. For many foster youth students, transitional programs and ILPs are their last hope prior to exiting the foster care system (McMillen, 2003). Table 4 shows the results of recent studies on youths aging out of foster care. The next chapter outlines the reasoning for using Phenomenology as a Methodology for this study.

Table 4

Recent Studies on Youth Aging Out of Foster Care

Outcome Area	Study	Findings
Homelessness	California Department of Social Services (2007)	65% of California youth needed affordable housing at the time of emancipation
	Courtney et al. (2004)	25% of foster youth experienced homeless for at least one night. 14% reported being homeless for at least one night since leaving care.
Employment	Courtney et al. (2004)	47% reported being unemployed at the time of the interview and 84% reported making less than $9.0 hours when they did work.
	George et al. (2002)	23% did not find employment 13 months after leaving care in California. 84% reported being employed full or part-time after leaving care.
Education	Courtney et al. (2004)	36% did not have a high school diploma or GED, 7.9% were enrolled in 2-year college, and 3.8% were enrolled in 4-year college 2 years after leaving care.
Mental Health	Courtney el al. (2005)	54% have a mental health diagnosis after leaving care. 12% and 10% had a lifetime diagnosis of PTSD and Major Depressive Disorder. 62% had received mental service prior to emancipation.
Incarceration	Courtney el al. (2005)	34% had been arrested, 17% had been convicted of a crime, and 24% had spent at night in jail, prison, juvenile hall, or other correctional facility since leaving care for 2 years.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Procedures

Overview of a Phenomenological Approach

This qualitative study examined four emancipated foster youths who were attending college. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the personal criteria for emancipated foster youths entering college and determine what factors they perceived helped them to attend college. A phenomenological approach was used to obtain insight into the perceptions and experiences of emancipated foster youth students. This phenomenological study described the meaning for several individuals of their shared or common experience.

Phenomenology as a Methodology

A phenomenological study allows researchers to look at the lived experiences of others. From the lens of phenomenology, a description of the meaning of lived experience can be accomplished only through an inquiry of the life world as experienced by each individual (Vander Zalm, 2000). The life world experiences of individuals, then, are constituted through consciousness that contributes to the varying meaning of objects by their various modes, styles, and forms (Giorgi, 1997). The phenomenological concept of life comes from an individual's perception because phenomenological research describes the human experience. At the root of phenomenology, ―the intent is to understand the phenomena in their own terms—to provide a description of human experience as it is experienced by the person herself‖ (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 96) and allowing the essence to emerge. Methodology links a particular philosophy to the appropriate research methods and bridges philosophical notions to practical and applicable research strategies (Byrne, 2001).

Phenomenology focuses on the personal knowledge and preconceptions of others. Although there are no prescribed methods to phenomenology, a body of historical work and

knowledge serves as a source and guide to design appropriate research methods, techniques, and procedures to examine a specific question. The method of interviewing may be utilized across disciplines; however, the techniques and procedures are different, reflecting the characteristics of the methodology (van Manen, 1990). The method of reflection that occurs throughout the phenomenological approach provides a logical, systematic, and coherent resource for carrying out the analysis and synthesis needed to arrive at essential descriptions of experience (Moustakas, 1994). In this manner, phenomenology studies experience and seeks to understand, not explain (van Manen, 1997).

This qualitative approach allowed attention to be focused on the individual's perspective and understanding the experience as it specifically related to him/her. Knowles (1984) defines phenomenology as being ―concerned with the study of the progressive development of the mind‖ (p. 23) or person. Stanage (as cited in van Manen, 1990) describes phenomenology as ―a philosophical movement whose primary objective was the direct investigation and description of phenomena, as consciously experienced, without theories about their causal explanation and as free as possible from unexamined preconceptions and presuppositions‖ (p. 68). An important aspect of research using this method of data collection and analysis is that reality is construed as what people imagine or perceive it to be. According to Bogdan and Taylor (1975), the phenomenologist seeks to understand an experience from the participant's point of view. Therefore, this methodology incorporated a strength-based vision for serving emancipated foster youth students.

Research Questions

The research question for this study asked: What motivates emancipated foster youths to attend college? The phenomenon of being a foster youth was told through the participants'

narratives, including their experiences growing up in the foster care system, relationships with biological and foster families, experiences in school as foster youths, who motivated or sparked their interest in attending college, who assisted them in applying for college, their experience being emancipated, and where they see themselves in the near future. Towards the end of the interview, participants were given an opportunity to provide and share additional information, including any artifacts that they brought with them, for example school projects, graded papers, awards received, and or unofficial college transcripts. At any time participants seemed to feel uncomfortable during the interview, they were invited to skip that question and proceed to the next question.

This study will give voice to a community of emancipated foster youth students that survived various forms of abuse and or neglect during their childhood, exploring how they transitioned to college after going through trials and tribulations in the foster care system. A research question in the phenomenological methodology is just that—a question; there is no postulation or hypothesis (Lucia, 2010). Phenomenology is rooted in questions that give a direction and focus to meaning and in themes that sustain an inquiry, awaken further interest and concern, and account for passionate involvement in whatever is being experienced. Every method relates back to the question, is developed solely to illuminate the question, and provides a portrayal of the phenomenon that is vital, rich, and layered in its textures and meaning. In this manner, the researcher engages in the phenomenological approach not only as a way of seeing but also as a way of listening with a conscious and deliberate intention of opening himself/herself to phenomena as phenomena in their own right with their own textures and meanings (Moustakas, 1994).

Participants

A total of four participants—two males and two females—participated in this study. Participants who were interested in participating in this study had to meet the following qualifications: (a) have experienced being a foster youth, (b) have emancipated from the foster care system, (c) be a college student, and (d) be a legal adult (18 years old and above).

Selection Procedure

The primary mode for the selection procedure was to recruit a total of four participants who were college students that had emancipated from the foster care system. After receiving approval from the Pepperdine University Internal Review Board (IRBs; see Consent Form in Appendix A) and approval letters from El Camino College and CSU Dominguez Hills (see Appendix B), the researcher immediately started posting the recruitment letter/flyer at both institutions (see Appendix C). Wertz (2005) suggests that a sample size for phenomenological studies should be determined by the nature of the research question itself, with a single subject being appropriate for some studies. Starks and Brown Trinidad (2007) describe a typical sample size as between one and 10. Therefore, a sample size of four participants was sufficient for this study.

The recruitment process took place in the Foster Care Education Building at El Camino College and on the CSU Dominguez Hills campus. According to the 2012-2013 program data from the El Camino College the financial aid office reports, as of January 9, 2013, 625 students identified themselves as foster youths or having been in the foster care system. According to the El Camino College Compton Center's (2012a, 2012b) 2012-2013 program data from the admissions and records office and the financial aid office reports, as of January 9, 2013, 182 students identified themselves as foster youths or having been in the foster care system. In

addition, the program data from 2011-2012 fiscal year reports that 274 students identified

themselves as foster youths or having been in the foster care system. According to CSU

Dominguez Hills (2012), as of January 3, 2013, 137 registered students identified themselves as

foster youths or having been in the foster care system based on the 2012 end-year report

generated by the admissions and records office. This information confirmed to the researcher that

both institutions had students who were in the foster care system. Both institutions provide

educational opportunities for these students to receive financial support, priority registration to

enroll into classes, participate in campus activities, and receive a college degree and or

certificate.

     With permission from El Camino College and CSU Dominguez Hills, individuals who

were interested in the study emailed the researcher their age, gender, ethnicity, email address,

number of years in the foster care system, length of time being emancipated from foster care, and

whether they were attending a 2 or 4-year institution. Criteria for selection of participants was

based on their responses on a first come, first served basis only if they met the qualifications.

The researcher generated a list of interested participants who met the qualifications and coded

them with an identification number. Participants who did not meet the qualifications received an

email from the researcher stating, ―Thank you for your interest in participating in this study;

however, a number of candidates have already been selected to participate in this study. Thank

you for your time and consideration.‖ According to Creswell (2007), participants in the study

need to be chosen carefully and must have all experienced the phenomenon investigate in the

research question. Participants who met the qualifications received an email (see Appendix C)

from the researcher congratulating them on being selected to participate in the study. An

informed consent form (see Appendix A) was also attached to the email so participants could

review the consent form before the initial interview and available date and time to meet with the researcher. A consent form is a document that formalizes an agreement to participate in a study. The consent form explained the purpose of the study, procedures, potential risks and discomforts, potential benefits to subjects and or society, incentive for participation, confidentiality, participation and withdrawal, and identification of investigator. Each participant brought his/her emancipation letter from DCFS to identify that he/she had emancipated out of the foster care system. Participants had to show their emancipation letter before proceeding with the interview. This confirmed to the researcher that the participants had been in the foster care system and had been emancipated. Before the initial interview, an identification number was assigned to each consent form that was provided to the participants to sign and date. After each participant signed and dated the consent form, the researcher then signed and dated the consent form. A master list of each participant's identification number with his/her personal information was kept in a locked file cabinet accessible only to the researcher. At the beginning of the interview, the researcher asked participants, ―Will it be okay for me to audiotape you during the interview? Yes or No.‖ The researcher then asked participants to submit their emancipation letter. Participants' emancipation letters and any artifacts that they brought to the interview were returned to them at the end of the interview.

In the interview process, participants were asked a series of open-ended questions related to the research literature, their experience before and after emancipating from the foster care system, and their pathway to college (see Appendix D). As participants were given the opportunity to share their real life experiences, they were able to see the importance of gaining trust with the researcher. Recruiting participants from 2-year and 4-year institutions gave the

researcher an opportunity to gain insight on emancipated foster youth students from both institutions in terms of how to better serve this population.

Site Selection

The Foster Care Education Program at El Camino College Compton Center was the selected site at which participant interviews were conducted for this study. The participants were interviewed behind closed doors for privacy. This program was chosen to be the selected site to conduct interviews because it provides quality education and support services for emancipated foster youth students and foster/adoptive/kinship caregivers. This allowed the researcher the opportunity to explain to the participants the purpose of this study in more detail.

Protection of Human Subjects

Before beginning with the study, the researcher submitted an IRB protocol to Pepperdine University IRB and received approval. Along with the IRB protocol, the researcher submitted an informed consent form and interview protocol. All collected data—including written notes, audiotapes, consent forms, electronic files, and master list of identification numbers—were locked in a file cabinet accessible only to the researcher. Three years after the study has been completed, all data—including written notes, audiotapes, consent forms, and master list of identification numbers—will be destroyed using a paper shredder and deleted from the researcher's computer. Confidentiality of records will be maintained in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. Under California law, there are exceptions to confidentiality, including suspicion that a child, elder, or dependent adult is being abused, or if an individual discloses an intent to harm him/herself or others. Prior to conducting the interview, the researcher discussed with the participants her role as a mandated reporter and the need to break confidentiality if they disclosed any danger of themselves. Confidentiality and safety were

requirements for all parties involved throughout this study. Participants experienced some discomfort during their interview while discussing their past experiences or memories as foster youth, such as being removed from their biological parents and placed in a foster home or attending school as a foster youth.

Data Collection Procedures

The intention of this research was to gather data regarding the personal criteria for emancipated foster youth entering college and determine what factors they perceived helped them to attend college. This phenomenological study utilized several methods of data collection including observation, in-depth interviews, documentation, field notes, and artifacts. According to Bailey (1996) the ―informal interview is a conscious attempt by the researcher to find out more information about the setting of the person‖ (p. 72). The interview questions were open-ended, which allowed the participants to shape the content of their narrative for full, rich data. Each participant observation gave more data to the research study, giving the researcher a better understanding of the phenomena.

Typically in the phenomenological investigation, the long interview is the method through which data is collected on the topic and question (Moustakas, 1994). With regard to the qualitative interview, Kvale (1996) remarks that it ―is literally an interview, an interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest,‖ where the researcher attempts to ―understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold meaning of peoples' experiences‖ (pp. 1-2). Therefore, separate interviews with each participant were conducted during the fall of 2013. With participants' permission, each interview was audiotaped and consisted of a series of open-ended questions related to the research literature, his/her experience before and after emancipated from the foster care system, and his/her pathway to

college. In addition, participants had the option to bring one or more artifacts to the interview. Artifacts were used to help interpret, elaborate on, and corroborate data obtained from the participants in this study. The artifacts also added evidence to enrich what other people could learn from their experience. All artifacts provided at the initial interview were returned to them at the end of the interview. At the end of the interview, participants were given a $50 gift card to use at their college bookstore as compensation for participating in the study. After each participant exited the room, the researcher immediately started listening to the tape recorder to transcribe the interview and started taking personal notes reflecting on her experience interviewing the participants. After transcribing the interviews, the researcher filed the following hard copy documents:

- The informed consent form;

- The field notes made subsequent to each interview;

- Audiotape of the interview; and

- A draft transcription and analysis of the participant's interview.

In addition, the transcription of the interviews was stored electronically on a password protected hard drive disk on the computer. The researcher explained to each participant that the information obtained in this study would be kept confidential.

Data Analysis

The data collection was carried out using Miles and Huberman's (1994) conception and definition of qualitative data analysis, which includes three main activities for data analysis: (a) data reduction, (b) data display, and (c) conclusion drawing and participation. The researcher used constant comparative methods to form a conceptualization of the participants' experience. Miles and Huberman describe qualitative data analysis as data reduction, which refers to the

process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written field notes or transcriptions. Data displays organize, compress, and assemble information; the reason for reducing and displaying data is to assist in drawing conclusions. This procedure enabled the researcher to prepare the interview materials from the methods of data collection including observation, in-depth interviews, field notes, and artifacts for data analysis.

The research question for this study asked, What motivates emancipated foster youths to attend college? The phenomenon of being a foster youth was told through participants' narratives with open-ended questions in interviews conducted by the researcher. The following interview questions were used in this study:

1. Tell me as much as possible about your experience growing up in the foster care system.

2. Talk about your relationship with your biological family.

3. Talk about your relationship with your foster family.

4. Please share your experience in school as a foster youth.

5. Who or what motivated or sparked your interest in attending college?

6. Talk about your experience applying for college.

7. Talk about your experience being emancipated from the foster care system.

8. Where do you see yourself in the near future?

9. Is there any additional information that you would like to share including any artifacts that you may have brought with you for example school projects, graded papers, awards received, and or unofficial college transcripts before the conclusion of this interview?

To ensure internal validity, the researcher carefully reviewed all the field notes gathered in this study. Once the researcher transcribed the interviews, the researcher notified each participant to review the transcript of his/her interview through email to validate that it reflected his/her perspectives regarding the phenomenon under investigation. The participants also ensured that their reflections, thoughts, and experiences were reflected accurately in the interview transcripts for reliability. At this point, the researcher gave each participant a week to clarity or add any additional information and confirm the data from the transcript. Once the final approval of the participants' interviews were transcribed, the researcher created a data summary table to help compile words used by each participant to describe his/her experiences. For the data analysis, coding procedures were used for open-ended responses and precautions were taken to ensure valid coding. When codes are applied and reapplied to qualitative data, one is codifying: a process that permits data to be ―segregated, grouped, regrouped and relinked in order to consolidate meaning and explanation‖ (Grbich, 2007, p. 87). With respect to coding, Grbich (2007) describes three key strategies: (a) evaluate for content and context (i.e., What is the image? Why, when, how, and by whom was it produced? What meaning are conveyed?); (b) look for links (i.e., how does the image relate to other aspects of the phenomenon of interest?); and (c) interpret (i.e., what are the dominant reviews of the data? What are alternate reviews of the data?). Hancock (2002) provides a list of steps to guide the data or content analysis while conducting a study.

1. Read the initial transcript and make a note, or code, in the margin for anything that contains important or relevant information.

2. Look through the margins and compile a list of the different types of codes used.

3. Read through the code list and categorize the items by what they are about.

4. Look at the categories and determine whether some of them can be linked in any way.

5. Compare and contrast the categories of data, and re-organize the data as necessary.

6. Repeat stages one through five for the ensuing transcripts.

7. Collect and examine all the collected categories and determine if they bear a relationship with one another.

8. Examine all of the major categories to determine if all the information is in the correct place.

The researcher followed Hancock's (2002) steps to guide the data in the study. This process enabled the researcher to collect and analyze data into categories that share some of the same characteristics from the data summary chart. Then, the researcher began to code the data by using a highlighting pen to create color codes. This helped the researcher achieve a consistent record of findings related to each participant's responses to the interview questions and highlighted the findings that were tied directly to the research question.

Limitations

The researcher noticed various limitations throughout this study. The first limitation in the studies of foster care is the lack of information on foster youths while in foster homes such as placements and behavioral issues (McMillen, 2003). The second limitation was the lack of information on emancipated foster youth students, such as progress in college, independent living programs, and life after emancipating from foster care. The final limitation to the study was the length of time interviewing each participant. Phenomenology merely recognizes these limitations and does not stretch its analysis beyond it. The researcher paid critical attention to her own process to prevent making such assumptions while interviewing the participants. This study

provided an opportunity to learn and gain insight into participants' life experiences before and after emancipation.

Summary

In summary, the study was approved by Pepperdine University IRB and by both institutions from which participants were solicited. This study used a phenomenological approach, concerning itself with the experiences of emancipated foster youth students telling their stories. People tell stories to help organize and make sense of their lives. This phenomenological study will benefit not only other foster youth students in college, but also younger foster youth students in the K-12 school setting. In phenomenology, what happened is not for the researcher to question; rather, the purpose is for the person to relay his/her story (van Manen, 1990). As a researcher, being self-critical ensures that the goals and methods are constantly re-evaluated to understand what works and what does not work. Without a story there is no history that can be left behind for others to appreciate. The next chapter outlines participants' findings from the interviews.

Chapter Four: Findings

Overview

This chapter begins with a brief profile of four participants who are emancipated foster youth students. Participants included one male recruited from El Camino College Compton Center, one female from El Camino College, and one male and one female from CSU Dominguez Hills.

The research question for the study asked, What motivates emancipated foster youths to attend college? The phenomenon of being a foster youth was told through the participants' narratives, including: their experiences growing up in the foster care system, relationships with biological and foster families, experiences in school as foster youths, who motivated or sparked their interest in attending college, who assisted them in applying for college, their experience being emancipated, and where they see themselves in the near future. They were also given an opportunity to provide additional information to the researcher towards the end of the interview. In addition, observations were made during the interviews and existing documents were reviewed including school awards, school projects, unofficial transcripts, a math test, and English papers.

Seven essential themes emerged from the interviews: role model(s), motivated by others, self care, being successful, better living environment, being better than my biological parents, and being emancipated from foster care. Different colors were used to identify the coded words and statements by participants, which were then clustered into themes. Themes were chosen based on the number of times a participant stated or used a similar word or phrase. Interviews were based on questions related to their past experiences growing up in the foster care system and their pathway to college. The main sources of data collection were interviews, observations,

field notes, and artifacts. At the end of the data collection, the researcher began the process of

data analysis by listening to all the interviews on a tape recorder twice; to ensure accuracy, the

transcription process took 62 hours to complete. The data analysis was carried out by using Miles

and Huberman's (1994) conception and definition of qualitative data analysis, which constitutes

three main activities: (a) data reduction, (b) data display, and (c) conclusion drawing and

participation. The constant comparative methods were utilized to form a conceptualization of

participants' experiences.

Participant Profiles

The participants consisted of two males and two females. Their ages ranged from 19-24.

The students self-identified themselves as African American, African American/Mexican, and

Hispanic. The number of years in the foster care system ranged from 11-19 years. Students had

entered the foster care system for many reasons, including: parents being addicted to drugs, use

of alcohol, no money, prostitution, fighting/abusive parents, and being away from home in the

streets. The length of time being emancipated from the foster care system ranged from 1-3 years.

They specified whether they were attending a 2 or 4 year institution. Participants majored in a

variety of fields including Sociology, Child Development, Psychology, and Human Services.

Demographic data on the participants are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5

Participants' Demographic Data

	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4
Age	19 years old	20 years old	24 years old	21 years old
Gender	Male	Female	Female	Male
Race	Hispanic	African American	African American/ Mexican	African American
Years in Foster Care	11 years	14 years	17 years	15 years
Reasons for Entering Foster Care	Mother: Drug addiction, alcoholism, no money to support children	Mother: Alcoholism and prostitution	Mother and Father: Fighting with/ abusive to one another	Mother: Drug use Father: In the streets/never at home
Length of time being emancipated	1 year	1 year	3 years	3 years
Attending a 2 or 4 year Institution	2 year Institution	2 year Institution	4 year Institution	4 year Institution
Major in College	Sociology	Child Development	Psychology	Human Services

Essential Themes that Emerged from Interviews: Participant 1

Role models. Participant 1's foster mother, foster brother, and foster sister are very

important people in his life; they are his role models. They supported him through his ups and

downs and stood by his side no matter what happened. Some of his college courses helped him to

open up to people. Participant 1 encountered many people in his classes who understood him as

an individual, which made him understand other people's viewpoints. Of his foster mother, he

stated,

> She is and always will be my rock, my role model, and someone to lean on to talk to as
> well as my foster brother and foster sister too. I feel like my Psychology and Sociology
> class helped me open up more to people and to better understand their point of views.

Participant 1 always put school first in his life. He felt if he didn't, he would lose focus on his

schooling. His foster mother was a great motivating factor in his life that he looked up to as a

mentor figure. Participant 1 spoke about his foster mother often and felt that she really cared for

him.

> I always put energy towards my school work and my career because if I don't, I will lose
> focus on the important things in life like my future. Like my foster mom would tell me all
> the time ―push for the stars and to don't give up on your dreams.‖ She's just a great
> person who motivates me and that I look up to as a mentor figure.

Participant 1 had a great rapport with the college workers at his school. Since he was

considered a foster youth they provided him with educational resources, information on

receiving extra money for school, and a mentor on campus to assist him throughout college.

> The outreach workers at the college were so helpful to me. Since I was a foster youth, I
> was able to receive extra money to help me with schooling for my book vouchers, food
> vouchers, bus tokens, and a mentor to help me navigate through college.

Participant 1 would like to be a role model to other foster youths so they won't have to

experience some of the things he experienced as a foster youth. He stated, ―I try to be a role

model to other foster youth just like me because I have great role models in my life and you see

how I turned out.‖

Motivated by others. Participant 1's foster mother always valued education; she pushed

him to go to college and get an education. Participant 1 admires and looks up to his foster

mother, especially when he needs someone to talk to.

> My foster mom always pushed education and that's why I decided to go to college. She's
> someone that I look up to and can go to if I need someone to talk too. If it wasn't for my
> foster mom, I wouldn't know where I'll be.

Participant 2's foster family enjoyed having her around. They supported her and showed

her the love a family should show a child, which allowed her to love herself and open up to

people around her. She stated, ―By my foster family showing me love I became to love myself

again which made me open up to others even more.‖

Self-care. Participant 1 always took care of himself when he was growing up. He feels

that staying healthy and taking care of himself help him improve his life both emotionally and

physically.

> Most of the time, I would take care of myself. I feel people don't understand me only if
> they were in my shoes. I told myself I am going to start taking care of me emotionally
> and physically and staying healthy to better myself.

Participant 1 feels that he needs to try harder to work on his nutrition and fitness. He would like

to focus on getting his life together.

> I do try to take care of myself nutritionally and through body fitness and I feel sometimes
> I been neglecting myself. I guess once I get my life under control I will most definitely be
> able to focus more on me and only me.

Being successful. Participant 1 wants to go into the social services field to help youths in

the foster care system, which he feels is a good way of giving back to his community. Participant

1 wants to change people's lives for the better. He stated, ―I always wanted to go into social

work or probation because I want to help foster youth who are in the same situation as me. By

me doing that, I feel as though I'm giving back to my community.‖

> Participant 1 wants to make a difference by giving foster youths a second chance in life.

He wants to show them the positive side of life, not the negative side. Participant 1 wants to be a

positive role model by giving people the guidance and the support they need to succeed in their

educations and careers.

> I just want to make a difference in life by giving people a second chance and them
> knowing that I'm here for them. It was funny because I was just telling some of my old
> friends who were in my situation when I was younger to get an education or a job
> because they're not doing anything but hanging out, just wasting time.

Participant 1 has created goals for his life. He wants to graduate with his Ph.D. and work in the

social services field to help people succeed, especially working with foster youths in his

community. He also plans on having his own business to help foster youth students transition

successfully through their education.

> I can for sure say that I will graduate with my Ph.D., to become a social worker or probation officer in the social service field and have my own business helping foster youth students like me, hopefully making over six figures.

Better living environment. Participant 1 expressed that many nights he didn't know

where he was going to sleep, which made him scared at times. As a child growing up, he wanted

a safe and comfortable living environment where he didn't have to worry about where he was

going to live. Participant 1 just wanted a normal traditional family. He stated, ―As a child just not

knowing where you're going to lay your head for the night was scary. I just want a comfortable

living environment where I won't have to worry anymore.‖

Participant 1 felt that, as a foster youth, he should have known about available services

for emancipating foster youths. He did not learn about services for foster youths until he

emancipated out of the foster care system. He expressed that if all foster youths knew about

available services for them, they would transition more smoothly out of the foster care system as

adults and have better lives.

> I wish I would have known about the independent living programs when I was still in the foster care system. But I didn't learn about that until I was emancipated out of the foster care system. I feel like foster youth should know about all these services that's available to us before we age out so that we could have a better transition into adulthood and a better life for myself.

Participant 1 felt that his foster parents were insincere people who didn't like spending time with

him. Participant 1 did not like his family foster and was ready to leave their care.

> I never went anywhere with my foster parents because they were fake people and half of the time they didn't do nothing or go anywhere anyway so it wasn't that big of a deal. They really didn't want me to come, no way. They would always tell me at the last minute to come, we're about to go in about 10 minutes so go get dressed. It takes me about 30 minutes to get dressed so I was just like, ―No I'm good,‖ and they would just

leave me and go about their merry little way. I was just ready to leave. I didn't want to be there any longer.

Being better than my biological parents. Participant 1 wished that his family were together again but in a better living environment. He expressed that when he has children, he will be there for them because his parents weren't there for him. Participant 1 spoke about family a lot and felt that family should stick together through the good times and the bad times, stating, ―I wish my family was together but in a better financial and stable living condition. I know when I decide to have kids, I'm going to do things the right way not neglect them like my parents did me.‖

Participant 1 barely saw his biological mother growing up. When he did see his biological mother, she didn't look like herself. His mother used drugs and drank a lot of alcohol around him as a child, which still affects him. He felt that she could have done much better as a mother if she would have put her kids first.

> Well the last time I seen my mom was about 5 years ago and she looked a hot mess. She didn't even look like herself. You could tell that she was using drugs and drinking alcohol because I could smell it all over her breath.

Participant 1 didn't have a relationship with his biological father. He also felt that his father could have been a better man and stood by his family. Participant 1 felt abandoned because his father left and never returned home to his family.

> I don't really know my biological father. He's just nothing to me in my eyes. I just don't understand why people have kids and don't take care of them, it's just sad. When I become a dad, I would never do what my dad did to me and my brothers, leave his family.

Participant 1 wants to be a better person than his parents were to him. He feels that finishing school will help him become a successful person, allowing him to make enough money to take care of his family in the future.

69

Being emancipated from foster care. As an adult now, participant 1 feels that he can make his own decisions and doesn't have to get permission from the foster care system anymore. It seems he is now adjusting to adulthood, especially being in college. He acknowledges that being in college is a big step for him that requires a lot of hard work and dedication.

> As an adult now being in college is a big adjustment for me. It's not like high school when they tell you to go to school or you would get expelled. I wasn't used to the amount of work that was required for college, so this is a big step for me.

Essential Themes that Emerged from Interviews: Participant 2

Role models. Participant 2 and her English teacher had a great connection with one another. Her English teacher was in the foster care system as well. Participant 2 looked up to her English teacher, which made her want to work harder to complete her goals in life. She felt that she finally met someone who understood what she experienced as a foster child.

> I really connected with one of my teachers who was in the foster care system herself. She was someone that I look up to. She really motivated me to finish high school and to go to college. Not only was my English teacher was a motivating factor in my life, she was also someone I could look up to. She herself was in the foster care system so from there we had a good connection.

Participant 2 did very well in her first semester in college. At times, she would get frustrated, but continued to go forward with her education with the help and support of her mentors. Participant 2 has big goals and is determined to reach them.

> I finished my first year with all As, and a C in math of course, that was the frustrating part but I got though it with the help of my mentors. I have great mentors in my life that I look up to that guided me though my career, so that was very helpful and I appreciate them for that. I have big goals and is very determined to reach them. As my mentor would say, —follow your dreams and reach for the star.‖

Just last semester, participant 2 completed a school project on President Barack Obama on which she received an A. Completing this project made her believe she could do anything that she put her mind to do.

Also, I have my Black history project from college that I just did last semester on President Barack Obama which I received an A on. He really makes me believe that I could do anything that I wanna do and don't stop, just get it done.

Motivated by others. Participant 2's English teacher and foster sister motivated her to attend college. Participant 2's teacher always encouraged her to do better for herself. What participant 2 liked about her English teacher is that she would invite different colleges and professionals to the class and spoke about educational and career chooses, which gave participant 2 inspiration about her educational and career goals.

My 11th grade English teacher really motivated me to attend college and also my foster sister. My teacher always encouraged us to do better and rewarded us with books, free lunches, and extra credit on our class assignments. What I like about her is that she would have different colleges and careers at our school to present to the class about educational and career chooses. I really liked that because it gave me a jump start on what I want to do with my career.

Participant 2 also gave her foster mother credit for educating her on how important college is and providing career options to better herself as a person.

I do want to give my foster mom credit too because she also talked about college to me but never forced it on me. My foster mom would always say, ―You're grown now so you better do something productive in life like find a job or go to college.‖ She always gave me options so I chose to focus on college and work at the same time because I know at the end of the day it will make me a better person inside and out.

Participant 2's foster sister emphasized education and constantly reminded her how important education is in their family. Participant 2's foster sister received all As in high school, which was a motivating factor for participant 2 to follow in her foster sister footsteps. She stated, ―My foster sister was a straight A student in high school. She was always big on education and constantly reminds me on how important education is.‖

Participant 2 was so excited when she applied for college, and felt like a huge burden had lifted. She knew that attending college would change her life and people would now look at her

71

differently. She thought about what her foster family would say to her, which motivated her to move forward in life. As a result, she is more focused in school now than she has ever been.

> But once I applied for college, I felt like a huge burden have lifted over me. I mean I couldn't even explain it because I knew I was doing something positive that was going to change my life and people wasn't going to judge me or see me as a foster child with no family and friends…that's just how I felt. I just thought about what my 11th grade English teacher or what my foster mom would say so it really pushed me to move forward in my life.

Participant 2 was thankful of her foster family and mentors for supporting her and making sure that she had necessary items for school and home. Participant 2's foster sister provided her with a famous quote that motivated her to stay focus and to never give up in life.

> I am thankful for my foster mom and my mentors who really took the time out to make sure that not only was my needs being met but my wants as well. They didn't have to but they did anyway. In the famous words of my sister, ―Life is like a bank account, what you put in is what you get out, be sure to make a healthy deposit daily.‖ I think about that statement all the time because it motivates me to stay focus on my career and not to give up.

Self-care. Participant 2 feels that she needs to take better care of herself. She likes to reward herself when she achieves a goal, stating:

> I like to treat myself when I accomplish something that I did. I need to work on taking better care of myself. I know I need to change and hopefully I will. I wish I was in a more relaxing move so I could focus on bettering me.

Participant 2 feels that she needs to balance her life, as she has a great deal to accomplish. She stated, ―Sometimes I be swamped with so much work, worrying how I'm going to keep my life together. It's heard but I'm managing.‖ Participant 2 emphasizes the importance of taking care of herself and not giving up.

> I mean, any advice that I could give to anyone that's in my situation is to not give up and focus on taking care of yourself because what I experience in the foster care system is no joke. I feel if you don't love yourself who will.

Being successful. Participant 2 is studying child development in college because she wants to open her own organization to help foster youths. She wants to get a better understanding of foster youths' life development stages as children through adulthood. Doing so will help her understand how to provide effective services to this population of students since she was in the foster care system herself. She stated, ―I want to own my own organization for youth who were and is still in the foster care system. That's why I'm studying Child Development so I could get a better understanding of youths' developmental stages.‖ Participant 3's college experience taught her to advocate for foster youths who are in the foster care system. She once feared starting new things in life, but has overcome that fear. She feels through her knowledge and experience as a foster child she could help save the lives of others who are in the same situation. Participant 3 acknowledges her faults and has made sure that she stayed focused on her goals.

> My college experience has taught me how I could serve as an advocate for other foster youth and foster youth students and provide the resources and knowledge that's needed to make an impact on their life. I just feared of starting new things in my life because I was in the foster care system for so long and eventually went to live with my aunt.

Better living environment. Participant 2's biological mother was addicted to drugs and ultimately went to jail, for which participant 2 blamed herself. Participant 2 blamed herself for everything that was going wrong in her life, including not having her biological mother around.

> My mother was addicted to any drug you could think of. She used to take me with her to get high in a crack house around the corner from our house. Now looking back at the situation, I felt that it was my fault that my mom went to jail because I took the police to the crack house where she was at. I didn't even know what I was getting myself into. I thought that I was helping the situation.

Participant 2 enjoyed living with her foster mother. Unfortunately, her foster mother began to have health problems, which prevented her from taking care of participant 2 anymore. Participant 2 was very upset that she had to leave. She became acutely aware of her surroundings knowing that she would no longer stay with her foster home. She stated, ―My life was just great

at my foster mom house until her health began to fail her tremendously, and she was no longer

able to take care of me, let alone herself.‖

Participant 2‘s biological mother never followed through on what the judge told her to do

to get her child back. Participant 2 knew that her biological mother did not care about her

because she started prostituting herself and didn‘t get the help that she needed to get participant 2

back in her custody.

> My mom never completed her rehabilitation program, never took parenting classes or
> even got a job like the judge told her to do. She started prostituting her body. Right then,
> I knew she didn‘t care about me because if she did she would have got the help that she
> needed to get me back so we could be a family.

Participant 2 was angry at her family because they left her in the foster care system and didn‘t try

to get her out. They simply left her there, moving from one family to another. Participant 2

wondered why she had a dysfunctional family that didn‘t care about her and love her.

> I was always and still am angry at my family. I felt like they didn‘t care about me or my
> feelings. They just left me in the foster care system. The only thing that was driving me
> crazy was them placing me from one unstable dysfunctional family to another.

Being better than my biological parents. Participant 2 had an off and on relationship

with her biological mother. She was so embarrassed when she invited her biological mother to

her party because ―she came to my party drunk and was very rude to everyone so she was told to

leave. I was so mad.‖ Participant 2 didn‘t like to be around her biological mother because she

was an alcoholic and a prostitute.

> I told her I would never want to be like her, I‘m going to do better with my life and I
> never want to see her again. I just hate her for what she put me through and I don‘t know
> if I could ever forgive her.

Participant 2 was happy about receiving help with her studies during senior year. She even

graduated with perfect attendance, which was a big step for her because she been moved to so

many foster homes throughout her life. She felt that if her biological mother could have gotten

the help she needed, they would have had a better relationship and she would still be alive.

> After receiving the help that I needed, my senior year, I graduated with perfect
> attendance, which was a huge start for me. I always imagined how things would have
> been if my mother wasn't addicted to drugs. I just wished that she would have got the
> help that she needed and maybe she would be alive still till this day.

Participant 2 has been through a lot and wants to do better with her life. She felt that her mother

put her through so much as a child. She felt attending college made her a better person. She just

wants to be proud of herself, showing that she accomplished something in life.

> I been through a lot in my life and being in college made me want to move forward with
> my education. But I know for sure, I don't wanna be like my biological mother. I want to
> be and do better with myself and be pride of myself for a chance. I know when I have
> kids they gonna have everything they need.

Being emancipated from foster care. Participant 2 has a good relationship with her

foster mother. She appreciates her foster mother for still being there for her and helping her

through her adult years being emancipated from the foster care system. Participant 2 enjoys

spending time with her family and friends when she comes home from college on the weekends.

> My foster mom still comes by often and brings me groceries, buys me all types of things
> to help me get through college since I'm no longer a child. Like every other weekend, I
> would go home to spend time with my family and friends.

Participant 2 was happy being emancipated from the foster care system. She felt that her social

worker was not a part of her life and really never took the time out of her schedule to really get

to know her on a one on one level.

> I was just happy that for the first time ever in life being emancipated now people would
> meet me and they would judge me for who I am, not for what a folder that was written by
> my social worker who spent less than an hour with me every other month.

Essential Themes that Emerged from Interviews: Participant 3

      Role models. Participant 3 appreciates her support system for being there throughout her troubled times. She believes that she does not know where she would be without them, stating, ―I just thank my support system for being there for me through my troubled times.‖

      Motivated by others. Participant 3 enjoys singing and is able to express herself through performing arts and by seeing other people around her age become successful in life. She knew that a part of her wanted to sing and pursue other goals as well. She stated, ―I was able to express myself through the exposure of performing arts by seeing other people my age make it. I knew this was something I wanted to do for the rest of my life and that sing too.‖ Participant 3 spoke about her childhood and how hard it was for her to make friends. She described herself as a standoffish person who didn‗t like to be bothered. When she got a little bit older she began to stand up for herself, something that she wasn‗t used to doing. Participant 3 saw her youngest sister start to open up and make friends, which made her start to trust and open up to people too.

      Once I became older, I started to stand up for myself and being more open to people. I just saw how my little sister were and that showed me how to be open and friendly because everybody has a story so I just looked at it like that.

      Participant 3‗s college classes shaped her into the person that she is today. She feels that pursing a degree will help her receive a job that pays well. She stated, ―If you invest into your education you will become a better person and live better.‖ As a result, participant 3 had to focus on her future goals in order to accomplish her dreams to live a better life.

      My classes that I took in college gradually shaped me to become a better person. And another thing that really sparked my interest in college was looking at people pay rates for having a high school diploma versus a degree. I feel like, why not invest into your education to better yourself.

Participant 3 feels as though she is a role model to other people who went through the same experiences she did. Her experience in life made her open up to people more about her feelings.

Her college counselor and her aunt inspired and motivated her to finish college. Participant 3 expressed her feelings about changing the lives of children who are in the foster care system like she was:

> I feel like I am a role model for other people who are going through the same situations as me. It made me open up to people more on how I feel inside. My college counselor motivated me to do better for myself. My college counselor and my aunt inspired me to finish college and do well for myself.

Participant 3 feels that she is a responsible young woman and is blessed to have a family who guided her in the right direction. Participant 3 created a wish list that also helped her grow and become more responsible. Participant 3 stated that she will continue to add more to her wish list until she accomplishes her goals in life.

> I am very responsible but I will say that my family has guided me in the right direction and I will learn how to budget and manage my bills. This will help me grow as a person and handle stress better. I created a wish list that my counselor told me to do and as I get older I will continue to add more and more to it until I get everything I want.

Self-care. Participant 3 takes pleasure in putting other people before her. For example, she sometimes feels guilty if she doesn't provide for her sisters. She wants the best for her family but struggles to put herself first.

> I tend to put other people before me and put myself at the very end. Sometimes I feel guilty for not providing more for my sisters. They all I have in life. I can admit that I struggle with myself for not focusing on me more. I just want the best for my family so I know I have to take care me and figure out some ideas to better me and not be stressful.

Participant 3 has a lot on her plate. She is under a great deal of stress and needs to learn how to balance her work and school life.

> I have so much going on with school and just in life. I need to pay attention to me, especially when I'm under so my stress. I need to learn how to balance school and my everyday life and pampering me so I could be happy with myself.

Being successful. Participant 3 feels she would be a great social worker who will connect with foster youths. She feels proud of where she is today, in spite of all the turmoil in her life.

Participant 3 feel that she understands what foster youths are going through because she was once a foster youth herself. She stated, ―I know as a social worker, I can connect with foster youth because I was once a foster child before leaving the system.‖

Better living environment. Participant 3 and her sisters were placed in the foster care system not knowing where they were going to stay. She didn't understand why she and her sisters ended up in the foster care system in the first place. Participant 3 just wanted a better living environment for her and her sisters.

> When I was younger me and my two sisters was placed in the foster care system not knowing what was going to happen to us. Still to this day, I don't know why we ended up in foster care in the first place. My living situation was not the best and I always prayed for a better living for us.

Participant 3 still communicates with her biological mother. As a child, she didn't understand what was going on in her household. She felt that her family didn't want to tell her and her sisters what was really happening and why they ended up in the foster care system living with people that they didn't know.

> I still talk to my mom here and there but when I do ask her about why we was placed in foster care she tells me that she just needed to get herself together but I think it's more than that. Me and sister shouldn't have to live like this.

Participant 3 was highly knowledgeable about college and didn't have a hard time applying for college. However, participant 3 did state that the paperwork for college was frustrating and it should be an easier process. She stated, ―I didn't have a hard time applying for college, not at all. It was just a lot of paperwork that I wasn't familiar with and had to complete…that was getting on my nerves.‖

Participant 3 felt that her foster mother didn't care about anyone but herself and would lie to her. Participant 3 and her sisters needed help and felt that they were not getting the support they needed from their foster mother.

My foster parent always lied to me saying ―I'm going to buy you this; I'm going to buy you that‖ but never did. She was something else. That's all she worried about was herself. She didn't care about me or my sisters so that's why I didn't want to be there.

Being better than my biological parents. Participant 3's biological parents fought a lot in front of their children and were abusive to each other, which affected their family. This caused participant 3 and her siblings to live in several placements while in the foster care system. Participant 3 felt that her father was a ―low life‖ who only cared about himself. Participant 3 was informed that her father was trying to get custody of her and her sisters, but it never happened. She never got the chance to ask him how they ended up in the foster care system.

I really don't care talking about him; he's irrelevant in my eyes. My aunt had told me and my sisters that my dad tried to get custody of us but that never happen and don't know the story on why it didn't happen. I just didn't care.

Participant 3 felt that she wasn't attractive at all. She felt that, through the absence of her father, she didn't know how to be treated by a man, especially while living in the foster care system. She felt that no one would respect her as a person because of her experiences as a child. She stated, ―I definitely wasn't the prettiest, smartest, best dressed or most popular girl. I didn't know how to be treated by a man due to the absence of my father and past experiences in foster care.‖

Being emancipated from foster care. Participant 3 is attending college to better herself. She doesn't want to be labeled as a foster youth so she continued to accomplish her goals so people wouldn't look at her differently. Participant 3 wanted to be treated the same as everybody else; she does not want people to feel sorry for her.

What really sparked my interest in attending college was just looking at my life and I knew this wasn't it. I knew it was away out for my life to be better since I'm no longer in the foster care system.

Participant 3 feels that, as an adult, she has to be more independent and not depend on her social worker or a judge to make decisions for her well being. Being emancipated now and her

experiences as a child have made her a more responsible person. Participant 3 continues to strive

for success to make a better foundation for herself.

> After emancipating, I didn't have to see a social worker anymore and didn't have to weary about seeing a judge…that was the longest part. I knew once I emancipated I was going to have to become more independent and not depend on the system to take care of me anymore, which helped me to become responsible for myself.

Participant 3 brought unofficial transcripts to show that she is passing her current classes. She

also brought a math quiz that she took recently and on which she earned a 100% grade. She has a

3.2 grade point average overall, which shows that she is a hard worker and is determined to

complete what she starts.

> Ok so I brought with me my unofficial transcripts from college to show that I'm a hard worker and I'm passing all my classes. Right now, I have a grade point average of a 3.2. Also, I brought my graded math quiz. I just studied and studied for this math quiz. Math was not my best subject but I stuck in there and got a 100%.

Essential Themes that Emerged from Interviews: Participant 4

Role models. Participant 4 had a tough time in school while being in the foster care

system. He felt that moving from placement to placement interfered with his education.

Participant 4 continues to seek advice from his ILP Coordinator, someone he admires greatly.

> Schooling was very difficult for me also because I had to continue to separate my unstable life in foster care without letting it interfere with my education. I continued to take advice from my ILP Coordinator, which she's someone that I admire and look up to.

Participant 4 was 16 years old when he met his ILP Coordinator. At that time, he needed

someone to emulate, someone to show him love and guidance. Participant 4 was excited to have

someone in his life that really cared for him.

> When I met my ILP Coordinator, I was 16 years old and at that time, I really needed someone to look up to. She showed me unconditional love since the first day I met her. Although she was my ILP Coordinator, she treated me like I was her son.

Participant 4's ILP Coordinator showed him how to plan for his future. He wanted people to

believe in him, which motivated him to keep going and not give up.

> I had a great person in my life that stood by my side when I really didn't have nothing. I had the best ILP Coordinator. She helped me open up my own bank account and to plan for my future. My ILP Coordinator told me ―I must claw into the darkness and step out into the light.‖ I always reminded myself of that. I kept going because I wanted to be the one person people are saying...―he did it.‖

Motivated by others. Participant 4 had amazing people in his life, but one in particular is

his ILP Coordinator, who he met while living in the foster care system. His ILP Coordinator

motivated him to attend college, which made him want to do more with his life. Participant 4

wants not only to do better with his life but also to motivate others to do the same. He stated,

―During my time in foster care, I met an amazing woman who motivated me to attend college.

She was my ILP Coordinator from the foster care program with DCFS.‖

Participant 4 expressed feelings of gratitude toward the people that helped him with his

schooling. He receives financial assistance from the financial aid office to help him with his

education, as well as through the independent living program to help him obtain supplies for

school. He was happy to be able to receive so much help with his education. Participant 4 felt

that his life was turning in the right direction.

> The people in the financial aid department helped me out a lot with applying for scholarship and the Chafee Grant, which I received both. I successfully graduated from the Independent Living Program, which also assisted me with books, supplies and other college materials.

Self-care. Participant 4 enjoys doing things to improve his life. He feels that he is a

strong person who always puts people first in his life.

> I love doing things to better my life and establishing a foundation so I could take care of myself. I am a strong person that is always here for people, but who's here for me or to take care of me when I'm in need?

81

Participant 4 feels overwhelmed at times and needs to regroup and think about how to make his life a bit simpler. He feels that he needs a to-do list to follow in order to make things easier to him.

> I do be overwhelmed just with so much to do and little time. At times, I do regroup and think about how things should be in my life and how I could start embracing myself and to create a to-do-list to follow. I know if I create a to-do list my, life may be a bit smoother and eventually start doing more things for me.

Being successful. Participant 4 wants to give back and help foster youths just like his ILP Coordinator helped him by becoming an advisor to guide foster youths. He stated, ―Once I‘m done with college, I think I‘m gonna become an advisor. I want to help another foster child out the way that my ILP Coordinator helped me out.‖ Participant 4 hopes to buy many things in life, things that he never had. He would like to start an organization that focuses on services for emancipated foster youth. Participant 4 feels that by him accomplishing his goals will have an impact on other emancipated foster youths as well. He stated, ―I hope to make enough money to buy a house, car and open a nonprofit organization that focuses on providing bridge services to emancipated foster youth.‖

Better living environment. Participant 4 felt that he was getting bounced around from placement to placement and didn‘t understand why. In order for him not to get hurt, he kept his distance by running away. Participant 4 recounted feeling ―like people didn‘t care about my living situation.‖ He stated, ―You‘re not knowing what could happen to you or even get hurt and I didn‘t want to take that chance so I ran away to keep my distance.‖

Participant 4 felt that the foster care system didn‘t have many homes for him as a child. He didn‘t understand why he had to go through so much turmoil in life. He felt unwanted by his biological family and foster family. He never expected his life to be like this, especially as a child. Participant 4 desperately wanted a better living environment for himself.

The foster care placement didn't have many homes for me to stay in. I felt like I wasn't wanted. I didn't understand what was going on as a child. But later on I got the clue ―another needy child.‖ I feel like my childhood and living situation should had been better.

Participant 4 didn't like living in foster homes because there were too many kids living in them. He felt people didn't care about him, and did not understand why he should care about others. He would take an attitude with people that crossed him the wrong way and didn't care if their feelings were hurt.

Being better than my biological parents. Participant 4 would like to have a better relationship with his mother only if she stops using drugs and get the help that she needs for her addiction. He feels that his father forgot about him and his family. He feels like his father's number one priority was running the streets with his friends, not him.

Being emancipated from foster care. Participant 4 decided that when he turned 18 years old, he wanted to emancipate out of the foster care system. Participant 4 feels that he is more independent than ever. He stated, ―I decided when I turn 18, no more foster homes just get me out of the system. Me and one of my friends are roommates now. I just love being independent and on my own.‖ Participant 4 expressed that his relationship with his ILP Coordinator was great. His ILP Coordinator provided him with helpful information to aid his transition towards adulthood. He was inspired by his ILP Coordinator because she always motivated and encouraged him to follow his dreams and to never give up on them.

Due to my relationship with my ILP Coordinator, she helped my time in foster care go by fast and provided me with helpful information as an adult now growing up. She motivated me, she encouraged me, and she inspired me to follow my dreams.

Participant 4's transition to adulthood was better than he expected. When he emancipated, he felt relieved. He wanted to take control of his own life and make decisions for himself.

> My experience being emancipated was better than I thought of. I was 18 years old when I emancipated out of foster care. I wanted to be emancipated because I didn't want to be labeled as a foster youth anymore and I knew that they wouldn't have control of my life anymore.

Participant 4 expressed how he felt being emancipated, stating ―I felt that once he was emancipated from the foster care system he was able to be free and make his own decisions.‖ He felt now he could do whatever he wants to do without getting permission from anyone, not even the foster care system.

> When I emancipated from the foster youth system, I was able to spread my wings and go wherever I wanted to go. Even emancipating out from the foster care system, I knew how to make it on my own, which was and still is hard but I'm making it though.

Summary

This study examined the experiences of emancipated foster youth students. The participants who were interviewed had many of the same characteristics described in the literature review. The data revealed that emancipated foster youth students had many related stories as well. The results gave evidence that these participants still need assistance after emancipating from the foster care system while in college. Youths in the foster care system may be put into a life situation that they cannot control; in spite of this, many young people are able to cope with stressful experiences and lead very successful lives (Rich, 2010). Young people leaving the foster care system via age emancipation are one of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in society. Perhaps because there is limited research on emancipated foster youth, many people are unaware of this population and do not understand what they go through before and after emancipation. The findings gave evidence that youths emancipating from the foster care system experience educational, mental, and physical problems. The obstacles that emancipated foster youth face affect their life tremendously. However, they will experience feelings of separation and rejection if they are not provided with adequate services (Mendes & Moselhuddin, 2006). Table 6 presents

a summary chart of each participant and his/her motivations to attend college. Seven essential

themes emerged from the interviews, showing who or what motivated them to attend college.

Table 6

Chart Describing Each Participant and Summarizing His/Her Motivations

Themes	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4
Role Models	Foster mother, foster brother and foster sister	English teacher	Mentors and family support system	ILP coordinator
Motivated by Others	Foster mother, outreach workers at the college	English teacher, foster mother and foster sister	College counselor and biological aunt	ILP coordinator and financial aid office staff
Self-Care	Take care of self nutritionally and physically	Balance life, stress and taking care of self	Balance work, school, self, and everyday life	Better life, overwhelmed, and establish a foundation to better self
Being Successful	Social services field, giving back to the community, and change people's lives	Establish own organization, study child development, and help foster youth	Social worker and help save lives	Give back, become an advisor and open a nonprofit organization
Better Living Environment	Scared at night, wondered where to sleep, and wanted a safe and comfortable living environment	Dysfunctional family, left in foster care, and moving from one home to another	Not knowing where to live and wanted a better living environment	Bounced around from placement to placement and wanted a better living environment for self.
Being Better than My Biological Parents	Neglected, mother used drugs and alcohol	Biological mother is an alcoholic and a prostitute	Mother and father fighting with/ abusive to one another	Mother on drugs and father abandoned family /never at home
Being Emancipated from Foster Care	Make own decisions and doesn't need permission from the foster care system anymore	Don't need permission from Social Worker anymore and spend time with positive people like family and friends	A social worker or judge can't make life decisions for me anymore and being more independent	No more living in foster homes and being self-sufficient

85

Chapter Five: Discussion

Overview

This phenomenological study explored the personal criteria of two male and two female emancipated foster youths entering college and determined what factors they perceived helped them to attend college. All participants in this study met the following criteria: (a) experienced being a foster youth, (b) emancipated from the foster care system, (c) a college student, and (d) a legal adult (18 years old and above).

A phenomenological study was determined to be the most appropriate method to use for answering the defined research question. The research question geared this study towards emancipated foster youth students because of the lack of research and data on this population. The phenomenological approach allowed the researcher to look at their experiences and compare them to the existing research data. The research question for this study asked, What motivates emancipated foster youths to attend college? The phenomenon of being a foster youth was described through the participants' narratives. The narratives conveyed stories about their experiences growing up in the foster care system, relationships with biological family and foster family, experiences in school as foster youths, what motivated or sparked their interest in attending college, experiences applying for college, experiences being emancipated, and where they see themselves in the near future. They were given an opportunity to provide additional information to the researcher towards the end of the interview.

Interviews were based on questions related to their past experiences growing up in the foster care system and their pathways to college. The main sources of data collection were based on participant interviews, observations, field notes, and artifacts. At the end of the data collection, the researcher began the process of analysis by listening to all the interviews on a tape

recorder twice, which took 62 hours. The data collection was carried out by using Miles and Huberman's (1994) conception and definition of qualitative data analysis, which includes three main activities for data analysis: (a) data reduction, (b) data display, and (c) conclusion drawing and participation. Constant comparative methods were utilized to form a conceptualization of participants' experiences.

The findings of the research study were categorized around themes related to participants' stories. The study discovered that emancipated foster youth students' motivation to attend college was related to: role models, motivated by others, self-care, being successful, better living environment, being better than their biological parents, and being emancipated from foster care. The interviews revealed several common denominators, but one in particular was that all participants wanted to finish college and be successful in life. Participant 1 wants to finish college, become a social worker or probation officer, and own a business to help foster youth students like him. Participant 2 wants to finish college and become the CEO of her own group home in California to help at risk children in the foster care system. Participant 3 wants to finish college and become a social worker and start her own organization. Participant 4 wants to finish college and open a nonprofit organization that provides bridge services to emancipated foster youths.

The participants that were interviewed had many of the same characteristics described in the literature review. Each participant felt a sense of loneliness and stress as a result of being moved from one foster care placement to another. For example, they all moved from placement to placement more than three times while being in the foster care system. They all struggled at one point in their lives with schooling, finding housing, employment, not being loved, and most importantly being away from their biological family. Participants 1, 2, 3, and 4 indicated that

their high school/college counselors, teachers, mentors, and or foster parents helped them to apply for college and financial aid, which was a motivating factor in their lives. Some participants noted that it was very important to have somebody on whom to rely while being in the foster care system. Since they emancipated from the foster care system, it is hard not having someone on whom to rely as an adult. Phrases that described this theme included: ―I feel that nobody loves me,‖ ―I feel alone,‖ ―I need a family to call my own,‖ and ―I wish I had someone to talk to.‖ Having a supportive person on whom they can rely allows them to trust people, feel loved, and have a positive role model in their lives.

The next theme was one of the most described and most talked about issues in the interview: being better than their biological parents. Each participant identified at least three or more situations where they he/she uncomfortable with or embarrassed of his/her biological parents, for example, participant 1 stated,

> I just felt uncomfortable even talking about my parents because I seen the other kids happy so I was jealous. So my so call friends teased me all the time because I was the only kid in the class who didn‘t have my parents in my life.

Participant 1 also stated, ―my biological mom acted like she didn‘t care about my where about or nothing. Nobody didn‘t even want to hear what I had to say.‖

Participant 2 stated ―I told my biological mom, if you are interested in seeing me you are more than welcome to come to my house, because I feel embarrassed being at school and everybody seeing us together and you looking like that.‖ Participant 2 stated

> I feel like my biological mom should have played at least a part of my transitional experience in college but no she didn‘t. Maybe I wouldn‘t had to struggle as much if she was in my life.

Participant 3 stated,

> My biological mom and my foster mom made me feel like I couldn't do anything, which made me uncomfortable with myself. I said I wanted to sing. I remember my foster mom saying, ―Girl you know you can't sing,‖ so little things like that.

Participant 4 stated ―I felt embarrassed and uncomfortable in those foster homes and at school when my social worker would come up there; I just wish sometimes my biological parents were around.‖ Participant 4 also stated ―my biological parents are just a mess and I won't ever end up like them, never.‖

Participant 2 voiced her frustration about not receiving her financial aid from school in a timely matter. She needed her money because she was moving into her own apartment. Since she was a ward of the court, the school expedited her financial aid and soon after she received her money for college. Participants 1, 3, and 4 had a great experience accessing college resources on campus. They took advantage of the opportunities on campus, which helped them through their transition to college.

Based on the interviews, all participants felt like decisions were made for them throughout their lives, from what foster home they would be placed in to what school they would have to attend. Their motivation was to attend college and create a better life for themselves. It was inspiring for the researcher to see how they talked about their life experiences and desire to do better in life. This knowledge regarding emancipated foster youth students offers a clear understanding of their life situations and what is needed to improve the foster care system.

Based on the findings in this study, the researcher developed a model for foster care community partners to help sustain emancipated foster youth students in college:

- A college mentor should work with emancipated foster youth students one-on-one and in group settings to help them create goals that will lead toward their success, including educational guidance and career development.

- A transitional housing liaison should work directly with emancipated foster youth students towards independent living. Transitional housing liaisons work one-on-one and in groups to help them learn how to determine the best housing situation, locate housing, and build skills to retain housing.

- A foster care employment liaison should work directly with employment agencies to help emancipated foster youth students find employment within their field.

- An emancipated foster youth college representative should work directly with other peers to teach and build team development plans, teach leadership strategies, lead support groups, participate in emancipation meetings, establish committee members, and work with community partners on donations and fundraising events.

- Emancipation meetings should be led by emancipated foster youth students. These meetings will provide an opportunity for them to discuss their feelings about what will happen after their emancipation with social workers, caregivers, counselors, therapists, foster care employment liaisons, transitional housing liaisons, college mentors, college administrators, and many foster care organizations. They will also address their living arrangements, educational pathways, career plans, and support systems.

Hopefully this model will help foster care community partners to sustain emancipated foster youth students in college and help them become more self-sufficient as adults. These youths need to have social and family support that will facilitate their transition to adulthood.

Limitations

This study had several limitations. The first limitation in the study is the lack of information on foster youths while in foster homes, such as placements and behavioral issues (McMillen, 2003).

The second limitation is the lack of information on emancipated foster youth students such as progress in college, independent living programs, and life after emancipating from foster care. Extensive research had to be conducted to find relevant data, issues, and concerns on the lack of services being provided to this population of students.

The third limitation is the lack of data on emancipated foster youth students' success rates in college. This limitation is the primary reason why many lawmakers and stakeholders do not understand the needs of emancipated foster youth students when it comes to decision making.

The fourth limitation is the potential feelings of the participants answering the interview questions. Although phenomenology is the study of one individual, the researcher chose to highlight four individual experiences to provide the readers with more than one individual perspective on the phenomena.

The final limitation to the study is the length of time spent with each participant. Some researchers follow individuals for 10 years, some for months, some for weeks, and some for a day, depending on the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). For the initial purpose of this study, interviews extended over a minimum period of 4 weeks and each interview was a minimum of 90 minutes per participant.

Implications for Future Research

The information obtained in this research study has been analyzed and was used to generate implications and recommendations for future research on emancipated foster care youth

students. This study explored the issues and specific themes that emerged from the data collection. One major implication of this study is to improve how services can be accessed easily and delivered appropriately to emancipated foster care youth students and ensure that they have a role model in their lives before and after emancipation. Further study is needed to determine whether foster care programs are effective on college campuses. Future studies should look deeper into how foster care programs on college campuses are changing foster youth students' lives. Giving more emancipated foster youth students the opportunity to share their stories would have given this study more data to use for future research studies.

Conclusions

With this phenomenological research study, the researcher was able to interview four emancipated foster youth students in college. The researcher determined the following themes that emerged from the interviews: role models, motivated by others, self-care, being successful, better living environment, being better than their biological parents, and being emancipated from foster care. These students have struggled and overcome many obstacles in their lives. Half of all foster youths are not transitioning successfully out of the foster care system, and many have a hard time finding positive people on which to rely. This issue needs to be addressed because without the proper guidance and support from other public and private sectors, these emancipated foster youths could be living on the streets or in poverty, unprepared for college, and unequipped for adult lives. It is essential that emancipated foster youth students are provided with a sense of stability, guidance, and support if they want to succeed in life. They also need the proper resources to thrive as adults. If emancipated foster youth students are expected to succeed as adults, more attention must be given to their educational needs and having the proper foundation. Sadly, the U.S. has not adequately measured the well being of youths leaving the

child welfare system (Brunk, 2002), which leaves limited research and data on emancipated foster youth students' success in college.

To ensure that these youths succeed in life, more effort should be made to support them before and after they emancipate from the foster care system. Ongoing support may provide these youths with the proper education and life skills to thrive as adults. Opportunities exist to provide effective independent living trainings as a form of early intervention for emancipated foster youth students. These trainings will serve the students when they become independent. Emancipated foster youth students' social workers should give them a resource with emancipation services, scholarships, and foster care grant programs. If students receive these resources consistently, they will have a better understanding of services available to them and have an educational plan in place. Little research has been done on how this population succeeds through life challenges and makes it to college. There is still much to learn about emancipated foster youth students; however, it is clear that emancipated foster youth students are still struggling to survive independently and do not do as well as other students in the general population, which impacts the economy negatively.

Recommendations

This researcher offers various recommendations that are pertinent to this vulnerable population.

Housing. Housing is one of the most critical needs for emancipated foster youth students. Cities, states, and counties can help address this critical need by ensuring the availability of affordable transitional housing for youth aging out of care and keeping data on their transition and demographics status once they emancipate out of the foster care system. Federal and state

legislators should establish policies to give priority government housing and education to emancipated foster youth students.

Education. Improving educational outcomes for these students requires time and effort. Cities, states, and counties can start by assessing each student's needs before he/she enters college in order to obtain a basic idea on what is needed for improvement. These students' progress should be monitored throughout college each semester, and college campuses should partner with community-based organizations who serve this population and enable them to access resources, such as tutoring and mentoring programs, and provide educational workshops based on their individual needs.

Employment. It is clear that these youths are among the most disadvantaged and underrepresented students in California. Many of these students do not have much or any work experience, which will make it hard for them to get a job. For these students to obtain the proper job skills before leaving college, institutions should provide paid internships on campus and develop programs with local businesses, school districts, and higher education sectors to hire these students.

Mental health. Many emancipated foster youth students suffer serious emotional and behavior problems throughout their lives. Foster youths have higher rates of mental health issues than any other youth group, which continues once they emancipate out of the foster care system. This population needs help learning how to identity and manage their behavior. Mental health resources should be allocated for emancipated foster youth students; mental health services should be offered to these students on campus for easy access, and mental health services should be extended to all emancipated foster youths until the age of 25.

Permanency. It is critical for these students to have a permanent adult in their lives before emancipating because such a person will help them to transition successfully as adults. Also, it is important that all colleges establish a tracking system to identify foster youth students on campus. Then, colleges should create a formalized club to connect students with supportive mentors and adults to ensure that every student has a supportive person in his/her life throughout his/her college experience.

Working directly with state legislators to assist the 4,000 foster youths who age out of the foster care system in California each year will reduce rates of homelessness, crime, and incarceration. Hopefully, the state of California is aware of the issues faced by emancipated foster youth students and take action to improve the outcomes of this population. Local government and institutions should work together to help these students immediately. It is time to act now, before it is too late.

Final Thoughts

First and foremost, the researcher would like to thank the participants for participating in this study. This study not only gave them a voice but also power to share their stories. The researcher's *aha moment* came when she saw how motivated the participants are to finish college in spite of the many challenges they have faced during their lives. For this study, the researcher utilized the process of bracketing to reduce the potential effects of the researcher bias and any preconceived notions related to the study. Therefore, the researcher had set aside all thoughts, feelings, and preconceptions about emancipated foster youth students. The researcher has never been placed in the foster care system and has over 10 years of experience working with foster youth students. By utilizing bracketing, the researcher did not allow any biases to impact the data

analysis and only focused on the participants' experiences from the interviews without judging or assuming.

After conducting this study, it became clear that many emancipated foster youth students still need support and guidance. They need positive role models before and after emancipating from the foster care system to help them thrive through college and through life. There are many areas of critical need for emancipated foster youth students including housing, education, employment, mental health, and permanency. As a foster care liaison, this researcher feels that the foster care system must ensure that these youths emancipate with these essential assets: an adult that will remain connected with them throughout their lives, a safe and stable place to live, a high school diploma, work experience, college assistance, and knowledge of access to support when needed. College is a critical component that can lead people to a bright and successful future. It is the responsibility of the foster care system to see that emancipated youths receive the proper support and guidance they need to be self-sufficient. These students are not prepared for the real world when they leave the system, and may not have the opportunity to enhance and or develop the skills they need to transition from college through adulthood.

The need exists for community-based organizations to support mentors for children and youths who are in the foster care system, as well as to connect these students with agencies that provide services to this population. There is a further need for ongoing support even when they emancipate from the foster care system. It is tragic that many foster children are set up for failure because of the limited support services and role models in their lives. More than half of all foster youth end up homeless, incarcerated, and or on drugs. Preventing this outcome will improve not only their lives, but also the foster care system as a whole. Foster children, youths, and their families need special attention and guidance in order to end the cycle of family abuse, drugs,

alcohol, and living in poverty. Having a better understanding of this population could indicate the appropriate intervention needed to thrive and decrease poverty in the community. Many of these youths have a difficult time understanding their identity and establishing relationships with others. It is important to be aware of foster youths' development stages and understand how their self-esteem and self-worth can be impacted by society. Working with foster youths in the community made this researcher realize that she wanted to devote her time and effort helping youth overcome their challenges. The researcher's role as a foster youth advocate is to assess the needs of foster youths and make sure that they are being met. In doing so, the researcher maintains an open line of communication with the foster youths, teachers, social workers, and foster mothers and fathers to assure that goals are being addressed. In this researcher's opinion, it is important that social workers be careful when helping foster youths identify their needs because each individual has a different life situation. Based on the findings of this study, the researcher can better empathize with what they have experienced in their lives and work to improve the foster care system. The researcher plans to present the findings of study to foster care programs, college campuses, conferences, and seminars to educate others to make a difference. Also, information gathered in this study will be compiled and shared in an aggregated form as a report or executive summary with emancipated foster care programs throughout Los Angeles county and state of California. Also, the researcher plans to write books on foster youth students' life stories as well. Furthermore, this study will help society and policymakers improve the quality of services that are being provided to emancipated foster youth students.

Summary

Based on the researcher's personal impressions of the foster care system, many people do not know or understand what foster youth students have been through in their life, which inspired

97

the researcher to advocate for and provide support to this population of students. Giving four emancipated foster youth students the opportunity to share their stories to the public will encourage other emancipated foster youth students to speak out and have a voice for change. Having more of this population of students speak out about implementing change will inform lawmakers and stakeholders that the foster care system needs to improve the way services are being provided. Hopefully, this study will inform many foster youth organizations, school districts, colleges, and universities, as well as DCFS, probation departments, and many other community-based organizations who serve this population. Doing so will give society a broader perspective on how to better serve emancipated foster youth students and ensure their success.

REFERENCES

Adoption Media, LLC. (1995). *Adoption glossary*. Retrieved from http://glossary.adoption.com /child-abuse.html

Alltucker, K. W., Bullis, M., Close, D., & Yovanoff, P. (2006). Different pathways to juvenile delinquency: Characteristics of early and late starters in a sample of previously incarcerated youth. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 15*(4), 479-492. doi:10.1007/s10826-006-9032-2

Altshuler, S. (1997). A reveille for school social workers: Children in foster care need our help! *Social Work in Education, 19*, 121-128. Retrieved from http://www.cswe.org /Publications/JSWE.aspx

Altshuler, S. (2003). From barriers to successful collaboration: Public schools and child welfare working together. *Social Work, 48*(1), 52-63. doi:10.1093/sw/48.1.52

Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2005). *Improving family foster care: Findings from the Northwest foster care alumni study.* Retrieved from http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications /pdf/ImprovingFamilyFosterCare_ES.pdf

Askeland, L. (2006). *Children and youth in adoption, orphanages and foster care*: *A historical handbook and guide*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Ayasse, R. H. (1995). Addressing the needs of foster children: The foster youth services program. *Social Work in Education*, *17*, 207-216. Retrieved from http://www.cswe.org /Publications/JSWE.aspx

Bailey, C. A. (1996). *A guide to field research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge.

Barth, R. (1990). On their own: The experience of youth after foster care. *Children and Adolescent Social Work, 7*(5), 419-440. doi:10.1007/BF00756380

Benard, B. (1993). Fostering resiliency in kids. *Educational Leadership, 51*(3), 44-48. Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership.aspx

Bentz, V. M., & Shapiro, J. J. (1998). *Mindful enquiry in social research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Bernstein. N. (2005). *Helping those who need it most: Meeting the mental health care needs of youth in the foster care and juvenile justice system*. Retrieved from http://www.library.ca.gov/crb/05/04/05-004.pdf

Berzin, S. C. (2008). Difficulties in the transition to adulthood: Using propensity scoring to understand what makes foster youth vulnerable. *Social Service Review, 82*(2), 171-196. doi:10.1086/588417

Blome, W. W. (1997). What happens to foster kids: Educational experiences of a random sample of foster care youth and a matched group of non-foster care youth. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 14*(1), 41-53. doi:10.1023/A:1024592813809

Bogdan, R., & Taylor, S. J. (1975). *Introduction to quantitative research methods*. New York, NY: John Wiley.

Bonura, A. N. (2009). *Substance abuse prevention for emancipating youth: A grant proposal project* (Masters thesis). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertation & Theses. (AAT No. 1466089)

Brunk, G. (2002). *Best interest of the child: Special report for the U.S. Department of Education*. Retrieved from http://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/fed/10facts/index.html

Burger, S. (2010). *What is an orphanage & its functions*. Retrieved from http://www.ehow.com/about_6611848_orphanage-its function_.html#ixzz1G8YOb2SL

Burrell, S. (2003). *Getting out of the "Red Zone:" Youth from the juvenile justice and child welfare systems speak out about the obstacles to completing their education, and what could help.* San Francisco, CA: Youth Law Center.

Byrne, M. M. (2001). Evaluating the findings of qualitative research. *AORN Journal, 23*, 593-603. Retrieved from http://www.aorn.org/AORNJournal/

California Department of Social Services. (2000). *CDSS glossary*. Retrieved from http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/cdssweb/default.htm

California Department of Social Services. (2007). *Independent living program annual statistical report federal fiscal year October 1, 2005 through September 30, 2006.* Retrieved from http://dss.cahwnet.gov/research/soc405aOct05-Sep06.pdf

California Education Code. (1996). *Higher education outreach and assistance act for emancipated foster youth.* Retrieved from http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/cgi-bin/displaycode?section=edc&group=89001- 90000&file=89340-89347

California Foster Youth Education Task Force. (2010). *California foster care education law factsheets.* Retrieved from http://www.cfyetf.org/publications_5_1692470168.pdf

California State University Dominguez Hills. (2012). *Admissions and records office statistics report.* Retrieved from http://www.csudh.edu.

Carlson, E. B., Furby, L., Armstrong, J., & Shlaes, J. (1997). A conceptual framework for the long-term psychological effects of traumatic childhood abuse. *Child Maltreatment, 2*(3), 272-295. doi:10.1177/1077559597002003009

Casey Family Programs. (2010). *Supporting success: Improving higher education outcomes for students from foster care.* Retrieved from http://www.casey.org/Resources /Publications/SupportingSuccess.htm

Child Welfare League of America. (2010). *Quick facts about foster care.* Retrieved from
    http://www.cwla.org/programs/fostercare/factsheet.htm

Child Welfare Policy Manual. (2011)*.* Retrieved from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs
    /cb/laws/cwpm/policy_dsp_pf.jsp

Chipungu, S. S., & Bent-Goodley, T. B. (2004). Meeting the challenges of contemporary foster
    care. *The Future of Children: Children, Families, and Foster Care*, *4*(1), 74-93.
    Retrieved from http://futureofchildren.org/publications/journals/article
    /index.xml?journalid=40&articleid=135

Collins, M. (2001). Transition to adulthood for vulnerable youth: A review of research and
    Implications for policy. *The Social Service Review, 75*(2), 271-291. doi:10.1086/322209

Collins, M. (2004). Enhancing service to youths leaving foster care: Analysis of recent
    legislation and it potential impact. *Children and Youth Services Review, 26,* 151-165.
    doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2004.08.005

Cook, R. (1992). *A national evaluation of Title TV-E foster care: Independent living programs
    for youth phase 2 final report.* Rockville, MD: Westat.

Courtney, M. E., & Dworsky, A. (2006). Early outcomes for young adults transitioning from out-
    of-care in the USA. *Child & Family Social Work, 11*(3), 209-219. doi:10.1111/j.1365-
    2206.2006.00433.x

Courtney, M. E., Dworsky, A., Ruth, G, Keller, T., Havileck, J., & Bost, N. (2005). *Midwest
    evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Outcomes at age 19.* Chicago,
    IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children.

Courtney, M. E., Terao, S., & Bost, N. (2004). *Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of
    former foster youth: Conditions of the youth preparing to leave state care.* Retrieved
    from http://www.chapinhall.org/research/report/midwest-evaluation-adult-functioning-
    former-foster-youth

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative research and design: Choosing among the five approaches*.
    Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Qualitative inquiry and research design.* London, UK: Sage.

Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research
    process*. London, UK: Sage.

El Camino College Compton Center. (2012a). *Admissions and records office and financial aid
    fiscal year report.* Retrieved from http://www.compton.edu.

El Camino College Compton Center. (2012b). *Financial aid fiscal year report.* Retrieved from
    http://www.elcamino.edu.

Emancipate. (n.d.). In *Definitions.net.* Retrieved from http://www.definitions.net/definition /emancipate

Emerson, J., & Lovitt, T. (2003). The educational plight of foster children in schools and what can be done about it. *Remedial & Special Education, 24*(4), 199-203. doi:10.1177 /07419325030240040301

Flicker, S. M., Turner, C.W., Waldron, H. B., Brody, J. L., & Ozechowski, T. J. (2008). Ethnic background, therapeutic alliance, and treatment retention in functional family therapy with adolescents who abuse substances. *Journal of Family Psychology, 22*(1), 167-170. doi:10.1037/0893-3200.22.1.167

Foster Care in Massachusetts. (2005). *18 and out: Life after foster care in Massachusetts.* Retrieved from http://www.chapa.org/pdf/18andOut.pdf

Foster Care Month. (2006). *Facts about children in foster care in California.* Retrieved from http://www.fostercaremonth.org/AboutFosterCare/StatisticsAndData/Documents/CA-Facts-FCM07.pdf

Foster Youth Transitions Resource. (2009). A compilation of resource documents, web links, publications, and tools for use by: *Foster youth, caregivers, social workers, education liaisons, independent living programs, and other human service professionals.* Retrieved on from: http://www.newwaystowork.org/initiatives/ytat.html

Freundlich, M., & Avery, R. J. (2006). Transitioning from congregate care: Preparation and outcomes. *Journal of Child & Family Studies, 15,* 507-518. doi:10.1007/s10826-006-9023-3

Freundlich, M., & Barbell, K. (2001). *Foster care today.* Retrieved from http://www.casey.org/Resources/Archive/Publications/FosterCareToday.htm

Geenen, S., & Powers, L. (2007). Tomorrow is another problem: The experiences of youth in foster care during their transition to adulthood. *Children and Youth Services Review, 29*(8), 1085-1101. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2007.04.008

George, R. M, Bilaver, L., Lee B. J., Needell, B., Brookhart, A., & Jackman, W. (2002). *Employment outcomes for youth aging out of foster care final report.* Retrieved from http://aspe.hhs.gov/nsp/fostercare_agingout02

Giorgi, A. (1997). The theory, practice and evaluation of the phenomenological method as a qualitative research procedure. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology, 28,* 235-60. doi:10.1163/156916297X00103

Grbich, C. (2007). *Qualitative data analysis: An introduction.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Haight, W. L., Kagle, J. D., & Black, J. E. (2003). Understanding and supporting parent/child relationships during foster care visits: Attachment theory and research. *Social Work, 48*(2), 195-207. doi:10.1093/sw/48.2.195

Hancock, B. (2002). *An introduction to qualitative research and development in primary health care.* Retrieved from http://www.trentfocus.org.uk/Resouces/Qualitative.pdf

Havalchak, A., White, C., O'Brien, K., Pecora, P., & Sepulveda, M. (2009). Foster care experiences and educational outcomes of young adults formerly placed in foster care. *School Social Work Journal, 34*(1), 1-27. Retrieved from http://lyceumbooks.com /sswjournal.htm

Henry, D. L. (1999). Resilience in maltreated children: Implicated for special needs adoption. *Child Welfare, 78*, 519-540. Retrieved from https://www.cwla.org/articles /cwjabstracts.htm

Hess, P. (1988). Case and context: Determinants of planned visit frequency in foster family care. *Child Welfare, 67*(4), 311-326. Retrieved from https://www.cwla.org/articles /cwjabstracts.htm

Kaplan, S. J., Pelcovitz, D., & Labruna, V. (1999). Child and adolescent abuse and neglect research: A review of the past 10 Years. Part I: Physical and emotional abuse and neglect. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 35*(10), 1214-1222. doi:10.1097/00004583-199910000-00009

Karp, S (2003, February 1). More foster children landing in jail. *The Chicago Reporter.* Retrieved from https://www.chicagoreporter.com

Kelly, K. (2000). The education crisis for children in the California juvenile court system. *Hastings Constitutional Law Quarterly, 27,* 757-774. Retrieved from http://www.hastingsconlawquarterly.org

Kerker, B. D., & Dore, M. M. (2006). Mental health needs and treatment of foster youth: Barriers and opportunities. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 76*(1), 138-147. doi:10.1037/0002-9432.76.1.138

Knowles, M. (1984). *The adult learner: A neglected species* (3rd ed.). Houston, TX: Gulf.

Kurtz, D. P., Jarvis, S. V., & Kurtz, G. L. (1991). Problems of homeless youths: Empirical findings and human services issues. *Social Work, 36*(4), 309-314. Retrieved from http://scholar.google.com

Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Leathers, S. J., & Testa, M. F. (2006). Foster youth emancipating from care: Case workers' reports on needs and services. *Child Welfare, 135*(3), 463-474. Retrieved from https://www.cwla.org/articles/cwjabstracts.htm

Lee, D. (2010). *A phenomenological study: The lived experience of former foster youth attending a four-year college in Southern California.* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertation & Theses. (AAT No. 3403733)

Lucia, D. (2010). *Experiences of followers in the development of the leader-follower relationship in long-term health care: A phenomenological study* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertation & Theses. (AAT No. 3418349)

McMillen, C. (2003). Educational experiences and aspirations of older youth in foster care. *Child Welfare, 82*(4), 475-495. Retrieved from https://www.cwla.org/articles/cwjabstracts.htm

McMillen, C. J., & Tucker, J. (1999). The status of older adolescents at exit from out-of-home care. *Child Welfare, 78,* 339-362. Retrieved from https://www.cwla.org/articles/cwjabstracts.htm

Mendes, P., & Moslehuddin, B. (2006). From dependence to interdependence: Towards better outcomes for young people leaving state care. *Child Abuse Review, 15*(1), 110-128. doi:10.1002/car.932

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis* (2nd ed.) Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods.* Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Myers, J. E. (2004). *A history of child protection in America.* Bloomington, IN: Xlibris.

National Foster Care Coalition. (2009). *Fostering connections to success and increasing adoptions act.* Retrieved from http://www.nfpainc.org/uploads/NFCC-FAQ-olderyouth-2009.pdf

National Foster Parent Association. (2011). *The national voice of foster parents.* Retrieved from http://www.nfpainc.org/

NCBAA. (n.d.). *Foster youth alumni success initiative.* Retrieved from http://www.ncbaa-international.org/CONTACT/foster-initiative.htm

Needell, B., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Rookhart, A.,(2002). *Youth emancipating from foster care in California: Findings using linked administrative data.* Berkeley, CA: Center for Social Services Research, University of California at Berkeley.

Orphanage. (n.d.). In *Hyperdictionary.* Retrieved from http://www.hyperdictionary.com/dictionary/orphanage

Osterling, K., & Hines, A. (2006). Mentoring adolescent foster youth: Promoting resilience during development transition. *Child & Family Social Work, 11*(3), 242-253. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2206.2006.00427.x

Paris, S. G., Byrnes, J. P., & Paris, A. H. (2001). Constructing theories, identities, and actions of self-regulated learners. In B. J. Zimmerman & D. H. Schunk (Eds.), *Self- regulated learning and academic achievement: Theoretical perspectives* (2nd ed., pp. 252-287). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Phillips, D. C. (1997). Coming to terms with radical social constructivism. *Science & Education*, *6*(1-2), 85-104. doi:10.1023/A:1008658528097

Reed, D. F., & Karpilow, K. A. (2002). *Understanding the child welfare system in California: A primer for service providers and policymakers*. Retrieved from http://www.ccrwf.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/ccrwf-calworks-primer-2nd-edition.pdf

Reilly, T. (2003). Transitions from care: Status and outcomes of youth who age out foster care. *Child Welfare, 32*(6), 727-741. Retrieved from https://www.cwla.org/articles/cwjabstracts.htm

Rich, C. (2010). The effect of parental visitation on the emotional and behavioral stability of foster children. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertation & Theses. (AAT 3431385)

Rovnak, T. (2011). *Buffalo orphanage studies*. Retrieved from http://buffalo-orphanage-studies.com/Improvements3.html

Schlossberg, N. K. (1981). A model for analyzing human adaptation to transition. *The Counseling Psychologist, 9*(2), 2-18. doi:10.1177/001100008100900202

Schlossberg, N. K. (2006). *Counseling adults in transition* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Springer.

Senate Bill 1440. (2009). *The Student Transfer Achievement Reform Act*. Retrieved from http://www.ijournalccc/articles/issues_27/content/senate- bill-1440-student-transfer-achievement-reform-act

Skinner, E. (2009). *Senate Bill 1440: The Student Transfer Achievement Reform Act.* Retrieved from http://www.ijournalccc.com/articles/issue_27/content/senate-bill-1440-student-transfer-achievement-reform-act

Silverman, D. (2001). *Interpreting qualitative data: Methods for analyzing talk, text and interaction* (2nd ed.). London, UK: Sage.

Starks, H., & Brown Trinidad, S. (2007). Choose your method: A comparison of phenomenology, discourse analysis, and grounded theory. *Qualitative Health Research, 17*(10), 1372-1380. doi:10.1177/1049732307307031

Thompson, R., Lindsey, M. A., English, D. J., Hewley, K. M., Lambert, S., & Browne, D. C. (2007). The influence of family environment on mental health needs and service sure among vulnerable children. *Child Welfare, Sept/Oct*(Special Issue), 103-127. Retrieved from https://www.cwla.org/articles/cwjabstracts.htm

U.S Census Bureau. (2007). *Fact sheet.* Retrieved from http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ACSSAFFFacts?_submenuId=factsheet_0-&_sse=on

U.S. Department of Education. (2000). *Getting ready pays off.* Retrieved from http://www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/News/collegeweek/collegeweekpdf.pdf

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2000). *ACYF-CB-IM-00- 03: Information on Public Law (P.L.) 106-109, The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999.* Retrieved from http//:www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws_policies/policy/im/im0003.htm

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2007). *State plan for Title IV- E of the Social Security Act foster care and adoption assistance.* Retrieved from http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/cdssweb/entres/pdf/2009StatePlan.pdf

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2008). *The AFCARS report preliminary FY 2006 estimates as of January 2008.* Retrieved from http://www.acf.hhs.gov.programs.cb /stas_reearch/afcars/tar/reportl4.htm

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2010). *The AFCARS report: Preliminary FY 2009 estimates as of July 2010.* Retrieved from http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs /factsheets/cpswork.cfm

van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience*. London, Ontario, Canada: Althouse Press.

van Manen, M. (1997). *Researching lived experience* (2nd ed.). London, Ontario, Canada: Althouse Press.

Vander Zalm, J. E. (2000). Hermeneutic-phenomenology: Providing living knowledge for nursing practice. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 31*, 211-218. doi:10.1046/j.1365-2648.2000.01244.x

Viner, R. M., & Taylor, B. (2005). Adult health and social outcomes of children who have been in public care: A population-based study. *Pediatrics, 115*(4), 893-899. doi:10.1542 /peds.2004-1311

Wang, C.-T., & Holton, J. (2007). *Total estimated cost of child abuse and neglect in the United States 2007: Economic impact study*. Chicago, IL: Prevent Child Abuse America.

Wertz, F. J. (2005). Phenomenological research methods for counseling psychology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 52*(2), 167-177. Retrieved from http://www.apa.org/pubs /journals/cou/index.aspx

Wolanin, T. R. (2005). *Higher education opportunities for foster youth: A primer for policymakers.* Retrieved from http://www.ihep.org/assets/files/publications/m-r/OpportunitiesFosterYouth.pdf

Woolfolk, A. E. (2004). *Educational psychology* (9th ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Zetlin, A. (2009). The experiences of foster children and youth in special education. *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability, 31*(3), 161-165. doi:10.1080 /13668250600847039

Zetlin, A., Weinberg, L., & Kimm C. (2004). Improving education outcomes for children in foster care: Intervention by an education liaison. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 9*(4), 421-429. doi:10.1207/s15327671espr0904_5

Zetlin, A., Weinberg, L., & Luderer, J. (2004). Problems and solutions to improving education services for children in foster care. *Preventing School Failure, 45*(1), 1-7. Retrieved from http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/vpsf20/current

Informed Consent

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY:
PERSONAL CRITERIA FOR EMANCIPATED FOSTER YOUTH
ENTERING COLLEGE

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Christina Acoff, a Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership candidate at Pepperdine University. This study will contribute towards a doctoral dissertation. A total of two males and two females will participate in this study. You must: (1) have experienced being a foster youth, (2) have emancipated from the foster care system, (3) be a college student, and (4) be a legal adult (18 years old and above). Your identity will remain confidential. Your participation is voluntary. Please read the information below and ask any questions about the study before deciding whether or not to participate. You will be given a copy of this informed consent form through email.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore the personal criteria for emancipated foster youth entering college and determine what factors they perceived helped them to attend college. There are limited resources and understanding of what a foster youth student experiences before and after emancipation. This study addresses major gaps in the literature about emancipated foster youth students. There is little research on this topic, especially from their perspectives. This study is relevant because it identifies the need for additional assistance for emancipated foster youth students.

PROCEDURES

If you consent to volunteer in this study, you will be asked to participate in a 90-minute in-depth interview with the researcher. You must bring your emancipation letter from the Department of Children and Family Services to identify that you have emancipated from the foster care system. You must have your emancipation letter before proceeding on with the interview. This will confirm to the researcher that you were in the foster care system at one point in your life and have emancipated. In addition, you have the option to bring 1 or more artifacts to the interview. An artifact can be a school project, graded papers, awards received and or unofficial college transcripts. The artifacts will be used to help interpret, elaborate on, and corroborate data obtained from you in this study. The artifacts will also add evidence to enrich what other people could learn from your experience. All artifacts provided at the initial interview will be returned to you at the end of the interview.

Before the initial interview, an identification number will be assigned on the consent form and provided to you to sign and date. After you sign and date the consent form, the researcher will then sign and date the consent form. A master list of your identification number along with your personal information will be kept in a locked file cabinet accessible only to the researcher. At the beginning of the interview, the researcher will ask you ―will it be okay for me to audiotape you during the interview?‖ Yes or No. The researcher will then ask you to submit your

emancipation letter to confirm to the researcher that you have emancipated from the foster care system.

In the interview, you will be asked a series of open-ended questions related to the research literature and your experience before and after emancipating from the foster care system and your pathway to college. All interviews will be audiotaped with your permission and note taking will take place during the interviews. With permission from the Dean of Student Services, the interviews will take place in the Foster Care Education Building at El Camino College Compton Center behind closed doors for privacy.

Once the researcher transcribes the interview, the researcher will notify you to review the transcript of your interview through email to validate that it reflects your perspectives regarding the phenomenon that will be studied. You will be given a week to modify and approve the final transcript for reliability. To ensure internal validity, the researcher will carefully review all of the field notes. Data will be collected in the fall of 2013. The researcher will finalize and report the data collection in spring 2014.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS
You may experience some possibility of discomfort during the interview while discussing your past experiences or memories as a foster youth such as being removed from your biological parents and placed in a foster home or attending school as a foster youth. You are not required to answer all the questions in the interview. You may skip any questions or you may discontinue your participation at any time. You will be provided at the end of the interview with counseling services and other helpful resources on campus if necessary.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND OR TO SOCIETY
You will not directly benefit from your participation. However, your participation in this study has the potential to give other emancipated foster youth students the opportunity to voice their life stories on how they transitioned into college despite their trials and tribulations in the foster care system. The study has the potential to give foster parents, adoptive parents, social workers, foster care liaisons, teachers, counselors, and community-based organizations knowledge on emancipated foster youth student's life experiences before and after emancipation. Information gathered in this study will be compiled and shared in an aggregated form as a report or executive summary with emancipated foster care programs throughout the county and state of California. Additionally, further participation in this study will help society and policy makers improve the quality of services that are being provided amongst emancipated foster youth students.

INCENTIVE FOR PARTICIPATION
You will be given a $50.00 gift card to use towards your college bookstore as compensation for participating in the study. Payment is not contingent upon your completion of the interview.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential. For example, confidentially of written notes, audiotapes, and master list of identification numbers will be maintained throughout this study by keeping them locked in a file cabinet that is accessible only to the researcher. Three years after the study has been

completed, all data including written notes, audiotapes, consent form and master list of identification numbers will be destroyed by using a paper shredder and will also be deleted from the computer. The confidentiality of my records will be maintained in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. Under California law, there are exceptions to confidentiality, including suspicion that a child, elder, or dependent adult is being abused, or if an individual discloses an intent to harm him/herself or others. Prior to conducting the interview, the researcher will inform you about her role as a mandated reporter and the need to break confidentiality if you disclose any danger of yourself.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL
If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study.

IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS
If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please email or call Christina Acoff (researcher) at christina.acoff@pepperdine.edu or (323) 385-7921 or/and June Schmieder-Ramirez, Ph.D. (faculty supervisor) at June.Schmieder@pepperdine.edu or (310) 568-2308. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Dr. Thema Bryant-Davis (GPS IRB chairperson) at thema.bryant-davis@pepperdine.edu or (818) 501-1632.

Signed Consent
I have explained and defined in detail the research procedure in which the subject has consented to participate. Having explained this and answered any questions, I am cosigning this form and accepting this person's consent.

_____
Name of Subject (Print)

_____ _____
Name of Subject (Signature) Date

_____
Principal Investigator Name (Print)

_____ _____
Principal Investigator (Signature) Date

Approval Letters

EL CAMINO COLLEGE

16007 Crenshaw Boulevard, Torrance, California 90506-0001
Telephone (310) 532-3670 or 1-866-ELCAMINO

March 25, 2013

Dear Pepperdine University IRB,

Christina Acoff, a Pepperdine University doctoral student, has our permission and support to recruit participants for her dissertation study. We understand that her project entitled "*Personal Criteria for Emancipated Foster Youth Entering College*" is a phenomenological study consisting of maximum 90-minute interviews with no more than two students from El Camino College. Ms. Acoff may recruit these students at either Compton Center or the main Torrance campus. The Co-Chairs of the El Camino College IRB have reviewed and approved the research proposal and consent form designed for this study.

I confirm that I have authority to grant such permission on behalf of El Camino College. Research activities may begin once Ms. Acoff has obtained Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and provided my office with a copy of the IRB approval letter.

The El Camino College IRB requires that all associated data be collected, handled and stored securely as specified in the proposal, and that neither El Camino College nor Compton Center will be identified in any report of findings or in the published dissertation. As a condition of approval for conducting research at El Camino College, Ms. Acoff has agreed to provide my office with a copy of the aggregate results from the study. If the Pepperdine IRB has any questions about the permission being granted by this letter, please contact me at the phone number or email address listed below.

Research activity within the scope originally described in her proposal and in this letter is permitted for a period of one year from March 4, 2013. We require that Ms. Acoff contact us in the case of any unforeseen events or if she wishes to continue her research beyond the approved year.

Sincerely,

Irene Graff
Director, Institutional Research
Chair, ECC Institutional Research Board
(310) 660-3593, ext. 3515
igraff@elcamino.edu

cc: Cynthia Mosqueda, Co-Chair, El Camino College IRB

Date: 18th December 2012

Pepperdine University
Institutional Review Board (IRB) /Protection of Human Subjects
6100 Center Drive 5th Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90045
(310) 568-2305

To whom it may concern:

I hereby grant permission to Christina Acoff, to recruit students at California State University,
Dominguez Hills; Social Work Department who have emancipated from the foster care system
for her doctoral dissertation. Fliers will be posted on campus (Social Work Department) if
students are interested in participating.

Please feel free to email me if you have any questions regarding this matter.

Sincerely,

Mekada J. Graham-Gallegan, PhD MSW
Associate Professor/Chair
Department of Social Work
Email: mgraham@csudh.edu
Telephone: 310 243 2521

APPENDIX C

Recruitment Letter

Dear Potential Participant

My name is Christina Acoff. I am a Doctor of Education in Organization Leadership student from the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University. I am searching for two males and two females who are emancipated foster youth students to participate in my research study.

The purpose of this study is to explore the personal criteria of two male and two female emancipated foster youth entering El Camino College or CSU Dominguez Hills. This will allow the researcher to recruit a total of four participants, two from each campus.

There are limited resources and understanding of what a foster youth student experiences before and after emancipation. This study addresses major gaps in the literature about emancipated foster youth students. This research study will give voice to a community of emancipated foster youth students who not only survived various forms of neglect during their childhood, but transitioned into college during their trials and tribulations in the foster care system. Your participation would inform many foster care organizations, school districts, college and university programs, departments of children and family services, probation departments, and many other community-based organizations that serve this population.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a 90-minute in-depth interview. The interview will take place in the Foster Care Education Building at El Camino College Compton Center behind closed doors for privacy. I will ask you questions about your experiences before and after emancipating from the foster care system and your pathway to college. All interviews will be audiotaped with your permission and note taking will take place during the interviews. You have the option of bringing 1 or more artifacts to the interview such as a school project, graded papers, awards received and or unofficial college transcripts. These artifacts will be used to help interpret, elaborate on, and corroborate data obtained during your interview. The artifacts will also add evidence to enrich what other people could learn from your experiences. Your emancipation letter and any artifacts that you bring to the interview will be returned to you at the end of the interview. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential. There will be an incentive of a *$50.00 gift card* to use towards your college bookstore if you do choose to participate. Payment is not contingent upon your completion of the interview.

To be eligible to participate in this study you must meet the following criteria:
- **Experienced being a foster youth**
- **Emancipated from the foster care system**
- **College student**
- **Must be a legal adult (18 years old and above)**

If you meet the qualifications, you will receive an email from the researcher congratulating you on being selected to participate in the study. If you don't meet the qualifications, you will receive email from the researcher stating ―Thank you for your interest in participating in this study; however, a number of candidates have already been selected to participate in this student. Thank you for your time and consideration.‖

If interested in participating in this study, please email me your age, gender, ethnicity, email address, number of years in the foster care system, length of time being emancipated from foster care and specify if you are attending a 2 or 4 year institution.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best Regards,

Christina Acoff, Ed.D. Candidate
chistina.acoff@pepperdine.edu

Interview Protocol

Participant identification number: _____

Introduction: Thank you for participating in this study. Within the next 90 minutes you will have the opportunity to share with me in the interview your personal experience as a foster youth and your pathway to college. Your identity will remain confidential so feel free to speak openly about your experience. Will it be okay for me to audiotape you during the interview? Yes or No. As a mandated reporter, if suspected of any danger, I will need to break confidentiality and file a suspected child abuse report to the California Department of Social Services. Once the interview is completed, I will immediately start listening to the audiotape to transcribe the interview and start taking personal notes reflecting on your experience during the interview. To ensure internal validity, once I transcribe the interview, I would like to have you review it for accuracy once completed. Would you be willing to do that for me? Yes or No. Do you have your emancipation letter with you? Yes or No. The research question for this study ask: What motivates emancipated foster youth to attend college?

Interview: (90 minutes)

Date:
Location:
Researcher:
Time of Start Interview:
Time of End Interview:

Demographical Questions:
1. Identification number:
2. Age:
3. Gender:
4. Ethnicity:
5. Email address:
6. Number of years in the foster care system:
7. How long have you been Emancipated from the Foster Care System:
8. Are you attending a 2 or 4 year institution:

Open-ended Questions:
1. Tell me as much as possible about your experience growing up in the foster care system?
2. Talk about your relationship with your biological family?
3. Talk about your relationship with your foster family?
4. Please share your experience in school as a foster youth?

5. Who or what motivated or sparked your interest in attending college?
6. Talk about your experience applying for college?
7. Talk about your experience being emancipated from the foster care system?
8. Where do you see yourself in the near future?
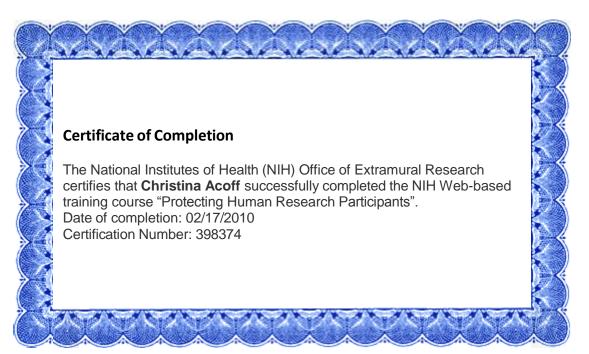9. Is there any additional information that you would like to share including any artifacts
 that you have brought with you for example school projects, graded papers, awards
 received and or unofficial college transcripts before the conclusion of this interview?

At this time, I want to thank you for your time in participating in this research study and you will
be notified once I transcribe the interview.
Once again, thank you.

Human Subjects Credential

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Christina Acoff** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants".
Date of completion: 02/17/2010
Certification Number: 398374

APPENDIX F

Other Essential Themes that Emerged From Interviews that Relate to the Literature Review and

Interview Questions in this Study

Overview of Additional Themes

There were seven other essential themes emerged from the interviews with the

participants that relates to the literature review and interview questions in this study: being

uncomfortable, feeling lonely, social worker(s), acting out, growing up to fast, not knowing, and

feeling unwanted.

Participant 1

Being Uncomfortable. Participant 1 felt uncomfortable talking about his biological

parents and felt jealous of his other classmates because their parents were in their lives.

Participant 1's used to tease him because of that. Participant 1 seemed truly hurt because of the

way people use to treat him.

> I just felt uncomfortable even talking about my parents because I seen other kids happy
> so I was jealous. So my so called friends teased me all the time because I was the only
> kid in the class that didn't have my parents in my life.

While living in the foster care system, participant 1 used to have anxiety attacks because of his

unstable living condition. He was bounced around in many foster care placements throughout his

life, which made him become uncomfortable with his living environment. He stated, ―When I

was younger, I use to have anxiety issues when I first got to the foster home because I was afraid

of moving to another placement.‖

Participant 1 did not want to go to school because he didn't have what other students had:

―a family to call his own.‖ His classmates used to talk about him being in the foster care system.

As a child growing up, he felt ashamed of his status as a foster child and used to cry a lot because

of it. Participant 1 did not feel connected with the other students in the class because of his living

condition, so he kept his distance from his classmates. He stated, ―I didn‘t have what other

people had so I didn‘t want to go to school. I cried sometimes and other students would talk

about me in front of the class because I was in the foster care system.‖

Participant 1 always got picked on in school by other students. One day he informed his

teacher about an incident that occurred at school and his teacher did not do anything about the

situation, so he decided to go to the principal‘s office. The principal suspended his teacher for

not handling the situation with the other students picking on him.

> One day, I told my teacher that I was getting picked on by another student and she didn‘t
> believe me so I went to the principal‘s office and my teacher got suspended because she
> didn‘t do anything about it. I told them that I was getting bullied every day by students
> that I don‘t even know.

Participant 1 felt uncomfortable at his school, which was a mess. The school was not organized

and he knew that it was time for him to leave before he got hurt. He stated, ―I mean the hallways

were dirty, gum under the table, walls cracked, it was just a mess and not organized.‖

Feeling Lonely. Participant 1 felt neglected by his family. He felt alone and didn‘t know

where he was headed. He just knew that his family separated from each other and never reunited.

Participant 1 was devastated, stating, ―It really got bad when my family the only family that I

had had to separated from each other. It was sad for me because I was alone and as a child, I

didn‘t know where to go.‖ Participant 1 feels empty without his mother in his life. He feels a part

of him is missing at night and wishes that he didn‘t have to go through this devastation,

especially by himself. He stated, ―I feel like a part of me is missing and some nights I feel alone

because she‘s not around like I would like her to be, so I just wish I didn‘t have this emptiness in

my heart, it‘s just devastating.‖ Participant 1 felt alone throughout his childhood, especially not

having his biological family in the same household. Now he feels blessed to have his biological brothers back in his life and his foster family who showed him love and support.

> Being without my biological parents in the same household as me was hurtful to me then and now. I felt alone…that no child should experience at all. There were just a lot of rough times throughout my life and I'm just blessed to have both of my biological brothers around and my foster family around to help me.

Social Workers. Participant 1 felt that he was placed with a social worker that didn't care about him. He felt like his social worker just wanted to get her visits in with him because it was required for her to do so. He felt that nobody wanted to hear what he had to say because he was a kid. Participant 1 felt that he should have had some say in the decisions regarding the planning of his living transition. He stated, —My social worker acted like she didn't care about my whereabouts or nothing. I felt like she got her two visits in per month and that was that. Nobody didn't even want to hear what I had to say.‖

Participant 1 felt that the foster care system as a whole needs to improve its independent living programs for foster youth who are in the process of emancipating. He also felt that foster youths should have social workers that enjoy helping foster youths succeed. Participant 1 expressed that he had many social workers throughout his life that didn't care about him and that's why he ended up in several placements living from foster home to foster home. Participant 1 feels if the foster care system would improve in these areas the next foster youth wouldn't have to go through what he went through as a child. Participant 1 did report that his social worker gave him a laptop for school. He stated, —My social worker was kind enough to give me a laptop. I guess she felt guilty for all the mess she put me through.‖ Participant 2 felt that her foster mother didn't like her because she was very outspoken. If she sees anything creepy, she would let her social worker know. One day participant 1 noticed that her foster mother's friend was staying in the house and told her social worker because that person was not supposed to be living

119

with them. Participant 1 felt by living with her foster mother she was going to get into more trouble, so she was ready to leave. So soon after, the social worker had placed her in another foster home.

> I remember one day exposing my foster parents to my social worker, but not intentionally and was in a lot of trouble with my foster mother for doing that. She was supposed to only have us there nobody else. I was happy when I left there because none of the social workers believed me when I would tell them what happened to me.

Acting Out. Participant 1 felt that he didn't have to clean or do anything in his foster mother's home. He felt that he didn't have to listen to his foster mother because she wasn't his biological mother.

> It was some days that I would get punished because I wouldn't clean up my room or the bathroom. I told my foster mom —I didn't have to clean my house while living with my mom so why do I have to clean up your house so I didn't.‖

Growing up too fast. Participant 1 had a difficult childhood, and he felt like he learned a lot on his own. He felt ashamed of his mother because people knew she was an alcoholic and a drug addict. His father was never around to see him grow up to be a man, which still affects him.

> I had to learn the hard way of growing up and it wasn't easy. I just felt like I grew up too fast for my age. It was horrible as a child, people knowing your mom is an alcoholic and uses drugs and your dad is nowhere to be found. That wasn't cool at all.

As an adult now, participant 1 feels that many doors have opened up for him in his life. He feels that he could not have made it this far in life if it wasn't for his true friends and his foster family's support. They supported him through the good and bad times, and that's why he loves them dearly.

> I feel that many doors have opened up for me. I'm receiving tutoring services, I have a job, I receive extra cash for school, I have cool friends that likes me for me and most of all I have my foster family support.

Participant 1 brought both of his awards with him to show what he have accomplished so far in life. It makes him want to work harder and harder to accomplish his goals.

So I brought my citizenship award and my academic achievement award here that I received this year because every time I share my accomplishments with someone it motivates me to work harder at what I'm doing. So that's what I have to share today.

Not Knowing. Participant 1 found many programs on campus that helps foster youths through college. When he started college, he utilized these resources because former or current foster youths are able to receive first priority of these services for free. Participant 1 acknowledged that these services helped him maneuver through college.

When I started college, I found out so much about the different programs that helps foster youth on campus including Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS), Cooperative Agencies Resources for Education (CARE) program, Youth Empowerment Strategies for Success (YESS) program, First-Year Experience (FYE) program, Resource Learning Center and Financial Aid for the Chaffee grants.

Feeling Unwanted. Participant 1 was fed up with his biological side of the family. He felt that they didn't want him or his brothers around them, so he gave up trying to build a relationship with them and didn't care if he never spoke to them again.

Participant 2

Being Uncomfortable. Participant 2 was very young when she entered into the foster care system. Her first foster parents smoked marijuana and stayed in the streets all the time. Participant 2 hated being with her foster mother because it reminded her of being with her biological mother with all the fighting, smoking, and playing loud music. She felt unhappy about her living situation and wanted to be comfortable and safe. She was so scared of being there so she began to wet the bed, which led her to distance herself from people.

So I was placed into my first foster home at the age of 5. I hated being there. It reminded me of all the experiences I had in the streets while with my biological mother. My foster parents fought all the time and smoked a lot of weed. My foster parent's house was right by the alley where I spent a lot of time at. They played extremely loud music that would wake up the block. So I began to wet the bed a lot because I was scared of them.

Participant 2 didn't want to live with her foster mother anymore because she felt uncomfortable living there. One of the other foster youths in the foster home use to try to touch on her in inappropriate areas. She would tell the foster youth to stop before she told her foster mother. Eventually, the foster youth ended up leaving the foster home.

> While being there, I was just at my wits ends. The other foster boy there who was older than me, I think he was around 14 or so but he used to try to touch on my legs, my shoulders, and my hands…I just use to feel uncomfortable. I would always tell him to stop…eventually he did. He just didn't want to go to another foster home, which he ended up leaving anyway.

Participant 2 last foster home was better than her first foster home. She felt uncomfortable for a few days until the other foster youths in the foster home started to open up to her. She realized that all the foster youths in the foster home came from the same place: ―the foster care system,‖ but in different situations. Participant 2 felt surprised about her living condition because her previous experience living in the foster care system made her feel nervous about being around other people.

> They had a bond like never before, and I thought it would be hard for me to fit in; however, to my surprise I was wrong. I did feel uncomfortable for a couple of days so they started to open up to me. Some of them even came from foster homes and group homes too, and although our situations were all different we still ended up in the same place.

Participant 2's current foster mother treated her like her daughter, looking past her faults and helping her overcome all the hurt and pain that she went through. Participant 2 had low self-esteem because of what her biological mother and her first foster parent put her through. Her experience as a foster child allowed her to open up to her foster mother, which forced her to become more mature, especially for her age. She stated, ―My foster mom looked past all my faults. My pervious and current foster family helped me get past all the hurt, pain, nightmares, wetting in the bed, and my low self-esteem. I really had low self-esteem then.‖

Participant 2 felt really uncomfortable when her social worker used to come to her school to visit her. She recommended that her social worker come visit her at her house where she felt safe and comfortable. Participant 2 didn't want anyone noticing that she had a social worker because the other students would begin to talk about her being in the foster care system. She stated, ―I told my social worker, ‗If you are interested in seeing me you are more than welcome to come to my house because I feel uncomfortable being at school and everybody seeing us together.‘‖

Feeling Lonely. Participant 2 felt alone as a child. She was placed in many foster care homes throughout her life, and she felt that no one loved her enough to take care of her. Participant 2 felt a sense of relief once she left the foster care system.

> I felt lonely as a child because I was placed in and out of foster care homes throughout my entire life that I can remember. It felt good to know that I no longer had to be considered state property and what I mean by that is I'm no longer in the foster care system because that is exactly how I felt like at times seeing that there was a folder and a picture explaining who I was supposed to be, that really made me feel like I was up for auction, the highest bidder wins.

Social Workers. Participant 2 noticed that many people were angry at her foster mother. Participant 2 was taking a lot of medications while living with her foster mother but once she left her foster home, she stopped taking the medications and felt normal for once.

> My social worker and case manager was mad at my foster mom but she didn't care. I could say that I did feel normal once I stopped taking the meds. I just looked at the fact that my foster mom was trying to look after me and for my age I felt like I was taking too many meds anyway.

Participant 2 felt that her social worker didn't play a part in her life especially through her transitional years in college. She expressed, ―if social workers start playing a more positive part in foster children lives and start placing them with foster parents who cares for foster youth, these youth would have a better outcome in life.‖ She went on to say,

I feel like my social worker should have played at least a part of my transitional experience in college but no she didn't. I just think that social workers should start playing a part of our transitional experience and placing us with foster parents who cares and love children.

Acting Out. Participant 2 didn't have a great relationship with her biological mother and felt like she affected her life. She felt that when her biological mother would come around she would ruin her mood, especially when she acted out in public. Participant 2 social worker stopped her biological mother's visitation rights.

Just by me seeing my biological mom, I felt like her being there affected my whole mood. I felt like it affected my grades in school and at home. I was just acting out completely so my social worker stop visitation rights for her coming around me.

Participant 2 felt like her biological mother used to compete with her foster mother. She felt embarrassed of her biological mother because of the way she would act around people. Participant 2 felt like her life was upside down and didn't have to listen to anyone.

My biological mom always tried to compete with my foster mom. She would show up to church sometimes or to my school for no reason. She would just come up there looking all drunk and stuff. I was so embarrassed. I would say ―that's not my mom.‖ I was often in trouble with my teachers or my foster parents for being hard headed and just didn't want to listen to nobody.

Participant 2 felt like people didn't like her because the school labeled her as having attention deficit disorder and was on medication. She used to act out in public just to get people to notice her.

The school labeled me as having attention deficit disorder and so then I was placed on meds. At that time, people didn't too much care for me, so to get attention; I use to act out in school, home and in public. I just didn't care at that time.

Growing Up Too Fast. Participant 2 felt she had to protect herself from other people. She was very mature for her age and felt like her mother only cared about hanging out with her friends.

My mom had a friend who use to get high with her all the time who had a son. Her son was my friend and at a very young age we learned to protect one another. I felt like I was way more mature than my age. I damn near had to watch over myself.

Participant 2 had a great relationship with her teacher. They both grew up in the foster care system without their parents, which made their relationship even closer. There were many nights when she didn't know where she was going to sleep. Participant 2 didn't have her parents in her life, which she felt made her a stronger person.

Knowing that my 11th grade teacher was in foster care made me open up to her. She really understands what a child in the foster care system goes through just moving from one house to another house being on my own. It made me believe not having our parents in our life and not knowing where you're going to sleep at night is scary.

Participant 2 felt depressed and scared after leaving high school. She felt that, as an adult, she could have received better guidance and support from her foster parents, especially from the foster care system. She felt year after year kelp passing her by and she was still not happy with her life. Participant 2 plans on making her life better.

Not Knowing. Participant 2 expressed that college was somewhat frustrating for her at times because she didn't know how to register on her own. Her foster parent and social worker would help her out with getting items that she need for college. Participant 2 felt that she definitely had help with her college transition but struggled with understanding the college process.

Applying for college was somewhat frustrating and scary at the same time for me. I just wanted to stop going at one point because you have to do everything on your own and I wasn't used to registering myself for school. Most of the time, it would be a foster parent or my social worker who would do all of that so I was just clueless about all that.

Participant 2 was very upset about the ―whole financial aid process and what was needed for her to complete the process.‖ She felt that the financial aid staff didn't give her the correct information about her financial aid and what was needed for her to receive her funds. She felt

that the financial aid staff should have told her at the beginning what she needed in order to receive her financial aid money in a timely matter.

> I was waiting in the financial aid line for about 4 hours to see if my financial aid had been processed and then to find out I needed an award of the court letter from my social worker to show proof that I was in the foster care system. I was so mad because they didn't tell me anything like that when I applied.

Feeling Unwanted. Participant 2's biological mother was arrested and put in jail, which led to her daughter being placed in the foster care system. Participant 2's biological family could not care for her because they didn't meet state requirements to have a child in their home. Participant 2 felt that they didn't want to care for her anyway, so she never discussed it.

> My mom and her friends was arrested and I was placed into a foster home. No one in my mom family met state requirements to care for me from what I heard. All of them had felonies and was addicted to drugs or had some type of problem or should I say excuse on why they couldn't take me in.

Participant 2 felt that people really didn't know who she was or took the time to get to know her as a person, only through her case files. Participant 2 wished that people should have gotten to know her for her, not from what her social worker or the court system would put in her case files. She stated, ―Many times, people would read my case file and thought that they knew who I was but they had no clue.‖

Participant 3

Being Uncomfortable. Participant 3's foster mother made her feel like she couldn't do anything in life, most of all believe in herself. Participant 3 informed her foster mother that she enjoyed singing. Her foster mother didn't support her at all and told her that she couldn't sing. Participant 3 felt unhappy with herself and felt like she didn't have enough support to follow through with her goals in life. She stated, ―My foster mom made me feel like I couldn't do anything. I said I wanted to sing. She said girl you know you can't sing so little things like that.‖

126

Participant 3 had a hard time trusting people around her. She was too embarrassed to talk to anyone about how she was feeling and her living situation. Participant 3 did not want people in her life because she was afraid that everyone would talk about her being in the foster care system.

> I was just too embarrassed to talk about my situation to anybody. I had a lot to talk about but just had a hard time trusting people especially about my feelings. I was just too afraid to get close to people because they might talk about me being in the foster care system.

Participant 3 was not comfortable with herself at all. She did not participate in any sports or activities because she didn't want people to say anything about her. She wished that she would have participated in a sport or activity at school to get her mind off of everything that was going on in her life. Participant 3 felt like she needed to work on building relationships with people so she could feel comfortable with herself again. She stated, —I didn't participate in any sport, clubs, debates at school or any activities. I didn't want to but I wish I should had tried out for something. I just wasn't comfortable with myself.‖

Acting Out. Participant 3 felt that her aunt was too strict towards her, so she used to sneak out of the house and play with her friends. She felt that her aunt took good care of her and her sisters.

> I will admit that I used to sneak out the house and go next door to play with my friends while my aunt was a sleep. So one night I got caught and I was on punishment for 2 weeks straight. I was mad so I told her I was leaving, then I thought twice, I didn't want to go back to the foster care system so I stayed. But we were well tooken care of and I have no complaints.

Growing Up Too Fast. Participant 3 felt that she had to watch over her sisters because they are her life and she would do anything for them. She stated, —I felt like I had to step in and be the bigger person out of my sisters because I was always self-sufficient and felt like I was grown already just because what I was going through.‖

Not Knowing. Participant 3 didn't know what was going on at first with her living situation. She knew that phone calls were made to the DCFS office and the courts were involved too. She felt that this was a chance to find out why her and her sister's ended up in the foster care system. She stated, ―I was excited to move with my aunt. I didn't know what was going on. From what I heard, my aunt made some phone calls to DCFS, went to court and now where here.‖

Participant 4 started to build a relationship with her biological father's side of the family. At first, she did not know why he was there. He told himself that he was going to give this a try and see how things work out. Participant 4 was ready for this new chapter in his life but also was ready to leave if he felt any kind of discomfort.

> My aunt who is my dad's sister invited me to her house. So we started to build a relationship from there. But at first, I was like ―what's the purpose for me even being here, they haven't been in my life all these years.‖ But I told myself ―I'm going to give this a try and if it doesn't work out, I'm gone.

Feeling Unwanted. Participant 3 felt that as long as her foster mother was receiving a check for her and her sisters, that's was that mattered. She really never stood up for herself and got pushed around by people, especially at school. Participant 3 felt that her worst experiences in life pushed her to believe in herself and not to have people bully her again.

> It almost felt like my foster mom didn't care what happened to me and my sisters as long as she was getting a check. That's kind of crazy but true. I felt like we was just a paycheck ready to be cashed. I was picked on as well because I didn't stand up for myself and I let people push me around. I didn't have a good experience in high school neither.

Participant 4

Being Uncomfortable. Participant 4 felt uncomfortable being at his foster parent's house. He was removed from his current foster home to another foster home for a long period of time. Participant 4 was frightened at times and wondered where he would be placed next. He stated, ―After 9 months of feeling uncomfortable there, I was removed from my foster parent's

home and placed into another foster home for a long time.‖ Participant 4's foster mother brought

him things from the Goodwill clothing store because he complained a lot about not wanting to be

there in her home. He was very unhappy about his living situation and was ready to leave his

foster parent's home for good. He never knew why his foster mother didn't provide for him like

she should have. Participant 4 just wanted a normal life with a family who cares and loves him

for who he was.

> So I guess since I was complaining she went to the Goodwill handy store and brought me
> some stuff like I suppose to be happy. No I wasn't happy. It looked like she gave me
> somebody else's stuff. I was just ready to leave her home and didn't want to be there
> anymore.

> Participant 4 felt embarrassed and uncomfortable living in his foster homes, especially

when his social worker used to come to his school. He use to feel ashamed of himself because

people used to call him names at school that would hurt his feelings. When he got home, he

would cry himself to sleep. Participant 4 felt that he was hurt by many people as a child, which

made him a stronger person today.

> I felt embarrassed and uncomfortable in those homes and at school when my social
> worker would come up there I remember I used to cry myself to sleep every night
> because people at my school would say that I'm fat and call me names like fat boy or
> jelly belly, names that would try to hurt my feelings.

Participant 4 did not feel the need to keep in contact with his previous foster parents because he

felt like they betrayed him. He felt that either he was mistreated by the foster care system and or

his foster family. He doesn't recall ever speaking positively about his foster parents or the foster

care system. Participant 4 just wanted an opportunity to be a part of a family that cares for him

and treats him with respect.

> Well, I have no contact with none of my previous foster parents because I felt like I was
> betrayed by the foster care system. I was just not interested in keeping in contact with
> them because either I was mistreated by my foster parents or by one of their family
> members.

Participate 4 was very protective of his feeling and wouldn't let anyone come near him. He didn't feel loved by either of his foster parents, which made him question his love for himself. Participant 4 wondered about his relationships with his foster parents and why he felt so distant from them, stating, ―When my foster parents started talking about love I would run away. I ran away to protect my feelings because I felt that it was impossible to love someone that you don't even know.‖

Participant 4 had a tough time in school and noticed that he needed help in some of his subjects. At first, he was ashamed to ask for help because he didn't want people to call him names like stupid or dummy. He would get frustrated at times when he couldn't complete his school work, which caused him to shut down. He eventually sought help from the tutoring staff at the center. Participant 4 knew that, in order to pass his classes, he needed to stay focused and committed to his class assignments.

> I can admit that some of my coursework was very hard and frustrating and I was ashamed to even go ask for help. I didn't want to ask for help because I didn't want people to say that I was stupid so after I notice I wasn't doing good in some of my classes I took my butt to the tutoring center and got the help that I needed.

Feeling Lonely. Participant 4 really felt alone and nobody to turn to for help. He felt that he was tossed around in the foster care system with strangers that he didn't even know. He stated, ―People just don't know what it's like to live with strangers that you don't even know, like you really feel alone and no one to turn to.‖ He stated, ―I really didn't have a relationship with my mom or dad. I blamed them for me being in the foster care system in the first place.‖ Participant 4 had a hard time in school as a child. He felt separated from the other kids at the school because he was in foster care. He really didn't have a lot of friends and had a hard time

making friends. Participant 4 was angry because of his living condition and wanted better for

himself.

> School for me as a foster child was also very difficult because I was a heavy kid. I was known as the foster kid and didn't really have a lot of friends. I had a hard time making friends because I was filled with so much anger.

Social Workers. Participant 4 felt that his social worker in the past didn't want to go the

extra mile and find him a good foster family, so he ran away. He felt that he didn't have a voice

in his decision making.

> My social worker at that time did not want to find me another foster home so I ran away. My words to people especially my social worker didn't mean anything because I was young and felt like I didn't have a voice.

Participant 4 felt that his social worker was just too lazy and didn't care where he was being

placed. Participant 4 felt that if he was part of the decision making, he would know which foster

homes were suitable for him. Participant 4 wishes that his social worker would have played a

part in his life as a child and now as an adult.

> My social worker was just lazy, just placing me in foster homes after foster home. I wish that I could have been a part in the decisions that were made in my life. Not once did my social worker ask me what I wanted to be when I grow up or even asked me what are my career goals.

> Participant 4 feels that social workers are not doing their job properly because if they

were, foster youth wouldn't be going through the adjustments of living in different foster homes

and not finding a permanent family to call their own. Participant 4 feels like he still can't trust

people because of what he had to go through as a foster child.

> My social workers that I had just wanted to put me in a house so they could go home. They feel like they did their job but no they didn't because I am still to this day feel like I can't trust certain people.

Acting Out. Participant 4 used to act out in school and in his foster homes because he

didn't want to listen to anyone. He used to act out to get his way, especially with his social

131

worker, so he would be moved to another placement. Participant 4 had a hard time on focusing

on school because he didn't know where he would be living next. It was a lot for him to handle

as a child. He acted out in public a lot when he was a child, and it began to get worse when he

became a teenager.

I couldn't stay focus on school because I was worried about the next home I was going to next. It was just too much for me to handle. I continued to have issues in school not listening to adults, leaving school when I wasn't supposed to until like in middle school.

Not Knowing. Participant 4 had many friends who were bad influence on him.

Participant 4's school teacher informed him that he could do better and stop hanging out with

students that didn't want to do anything with their life. Soon after, participant 4 realized that his

friends were not loyal, so he knew that he had to distance himself from that crowd. Instead,

participant 4 started hanging around people who were doing something positive with their life.

One of my teachers asked me why do I hang out with those students that don't want to do nothing with their life, you're better than that. I told my teacher because these friends that I have, have my back but to find out they didn't. One of my so call friend lied on me saying that I stole my teacher's jacket out of the room. So I knew that I was there alone.

Feeling Unwanted. Participant 4 was placed in many foster homes which eventually led

him to be placed in a group home. He felt bad about his living situation and not having a family

to support him. He felt unwanted by others in the group home because he was very outspoken

and was very protective about his feeling and surroundings. Until this day, participant 4 feels that

nothing could change how he feels inside because the damage has all ready been done.

Participant 4 described feeling ashamed of his life and what he had to witness as a child growing

up in the foster care system.

For 7 years, I was bounced from foster home to foster home and eventually was placed in a group home where there was no limitations. It was no joke living there. I still felt ashamed and disliked because I didn't have any family by my side until I became a teenager and somewhat for me that was too late. I felt like I was already damaged inside.

Below is a summary chart of each participant and the amount of times they mentioned each theme. Themes were chosen based on the number of times a participant stated or used a similar word or phrase. There were seven additional themes that emerged from the interviews with the participants that relate to the literature review and interview questions. (Please see chart below)

Table 7

Additional Themes That Emerged From the Interview With Participants

Themes	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4
Being Uncomfortable	10	12	9	10
Feeling Lonely	7	10	11	19
Social Worker(s)	14	9	16	12
Acting Out	11	8	14	15
Growing up to Fast	16	7	9	13
Not Knowing	8	5	10	3
Feeling Unwanted	15	9	14	8

APPENDIX G

Motivational Poem for Students

Life is a blessing; GOD controls it.
Life is good; pray on it.
Life is success; live by it.
Life is a promise; realize it.
Life is a dream, fulfill it.
Life is a goal; achieve it.
Life is a game; play it.
Life is luck; make it.
Life is a responsibility; complete it.
Life is an opportunity; benefit from it.
Life is appreciated; value it.
Life is strong; acknowledge it.
Life is an adventure; get on it.
Life is motivation; admire it.
Life is a song, listen to it.
Life is a highway, stay on it.
Life is a challenge; face it.
Life is a struggle; overcome it.
Life is life; be ready for it.

***TEAM WORK makes the DREAM WORK. Never give up on your dreams.
Continue to work hard and thrive for the best. I did it and so can you.***

By: Dr. Christina Acoff

IRB Approval Notice

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board

October 1, 2013

Christina Acoff
14523 S B dl   A   #E

Protocol #: E0413D08
Project Title: A Phenomenological Study: Personal Criteria for Emancipated Foster Youth
Entering College

Dear Ms. Acoff:

Thank you for submitting your application, *A Phenomenological Study: Personal Criteria for Emancipated Foster Youth Entering College*, for expedited review to Pepperdine University's Graduate and Professional Schools Institutional Review Board (GPS IRB). The IRB appreciates the work you and your advisor, Dr. June Schmieder-Ramirez, completed on the proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. As the nature of the research met the requirements for expedited review under provision Title 45 CFR 46.110 (Research Categories 6 and 7) of the federal Protection of Human Subjects Act, the IRB conducted a formal, but expedited, review of your application materials.

I am pleased to inform you that your application for your study was granted **Full Approval.** The IRB approval begins today, **October 1, 2013**, and terminates on **September 30, 2014**.

Your final consent form has been stamped by the IRB to indicate the expiration date of study approval. One copy of the consent form is enclosed with this letter and one copy will be retained for our records. **You can only use copies of the consent that have been stamped with the GPS IRB expiration date to obtain consent from your participants.**

Please note that your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the GPS IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For *any* proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit a Request for Modification form to the GPS IRB. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for expedited review and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the GPS IRB. If contact with subjects will extend beyond **September 30, 2014**, a **Continuation or Completion of Review Form** must be submitted at least one month prior to the expiration date of study approval to avoid a lapse in approval.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite our best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the GPS IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete explanation of the event and your response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the GPS IRB and the

appropriate form to be used to report this information can be found in the *Pepperdine Unilersiltj Protection of Human Parlic;>ants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manua/(see* ink to "policy material" at httn+/\MM(l(peppftrdjne ftduJlrh!grndunteO.

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all further communication or correspondence related to this approval. Should you have additional questions, please contact me. On behalf of the GPS IRB, I Wsh you success in this scholarly pursut.

Sincerely,

L -–/ r, . „

Thema Bryant-Davis, Ph.D.
Chair, Graduate and Professional Schools IRB
Pepperdne University

cc: Dr. Lee Kats, Vice Provost for Research and Strategic Intiatives
         Ms. Alexandra Roosa, Director Research and Sponsored Programs
         Dr. June Schmieder amirez, Graduate School of Education and Psychology