



4-27-2016

Transition to Independence: Supportive Relationships with Care Takers and Its Role on Success and Independence with Former Foster Care Youth

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Transition to Independence: Supportive Relationships with Care Takers and Its Role on Success
and Independence with Former Foster Care Youth

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Submitted in Partial Completion of the
Requirements for Departmental Honors in Social Work

Bridgewater State University

April 27, 2016

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and Independence with Former Foster Care Youth

Abstract

According to Geenen & Powers (2007), youth transition into adulthood from foster care with little to no assistance from support systems, including family. Through in-depth qualitative interviews, this study explores the experiences and insights of young adults, ages 18-25 years old, previously in the care of the Massachusetts Department of Children & Families (DCF). The primary goal of this research is to determine the importance of building supportive relationships between social workers and youth in foster care to better equip youth for independence and success after care. The findings revealed five major themes: care takers as support systems, preparedness for independence, other support systems, long lasting relationships and risk behaviors. Youth in this study stress the importance of long lasting relationships as they transition into adulthood, stating it was more important than formal services. Further, they state that they do not feel fully prepared to transition to adulthood, and give recommendations on how social workers can better equip youth aging out of foster care. This study adds to the literature on importance of building long lasting supportive relationships. The study also hopes to guide social workers in how creating long lasting supportive relationships can help youth aging out of the foster system.

Introduction

Each year, approximately 800 youth in Massachusetts turn 18 and "age out" of Department of Children and Families (DCF). In the fourth quarter of the fiscal year 2010, 1,629 18 to 23 year-olds were in Massachusetts DCF custody (Chafee Summary, 2011). Aging out of care means the youth has reached the age of 18 and is released from the custody of the state. Voluntarily signing back in is when youth age out and can go before a panel and be accepted back into care by the state until the age of 21 in some states until the youth is 23 years old. The panel is a group of workers in the foster care system and one youth who were formerly in foster care. They listen to the youth trying to voluntarily sign themselves back in and decide whether they are a good candidate to sign back into care.

Nationally, this population experiences significant challenges in education, housing, employment, health care, and life outcomes. For instance of the young adults ages 23 and 24 years old formally in foster care, 24.4% had no diploma or G.E.D compared to 7.3% of the general population. Fifty-seven percent of young adults who were formally in foster care had health insurance compared to 78% of the general population. More over 81.2% of males formerly in foster care had been arrested compared to 17.4% of the general population (Stein, 2012). Cunningham and Diversi (2012) determined that the young adults previously in foster care stated that they were not well prepared for life after foster care. For instance, they often lacked money, jobs or employment opportunities, housing, guidance, and had many more obstacles. Young adults aging out of foster care are a vulnerable population; they are at a disadvantage due to multiple challenges including homelessness, court-involvement and incarceration, underemployment and unemployment, and lack of family and social support.

Literature Review

Supportive Relationships and Education

Cunningham and Diversi (2012) conducted a qualitative study using semi structured interviews, with a sample of 6 participants ages 18 to 21 years old. The study was used to allow youth to give their descriptions of what aging out of care was like for them, allowing professionals working in the field to better understand. The study suggested young adults lacked skills due to living in group homes and growing up in foster care. If the young adults in the study did not continue their education in some manner (such as job training programs and using other resources), they would not have felt they achieved self sufficiency. According to Scannapieco, Connell-Carrick, & Painter (2007) in their qualitative study using focus groups comprised of 72 participants to better understand what is needed for youth to transition successfully out of care. Youth in this study stated needing more chances where they were able to acquire skills that help support them after care. What little skills they learned from their Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) classes were not usable and foster parents should be equipped to help them achieve use out of said skills. According to Lee & Duerr Berrick (2014) in a study done to address what is needed for youth to transition successfully out of care. They found that not only having basic living skills (cooking, cleaning, finding housing) is important but in a whole do not guarantee success without other factors such as helping relationships (ones that help youth survive after care).

Graham, Schellinger and Vaughn (2015) conducted a qualitative study using a group-level assessment method and snowball sampling to recruit 63 participants aged 16 to 25 years old. This study was done to understand what barriers youth face when transitioning out of care. The study suggested youth who age out of foster care do not obtain a high school education or graduate from a postsecondary education after obtaining a high school education. According to

Carnevale & Desrochers (2003) in Day, Riebschleger, Dworsky, Damashek, & Fogarty (2012) education is influential disadvantage when one does not have it; it can grant benefits on multiple levels such as social and economic status. According to Graham et al., (2015) in a study using a qualitative group level assessment to try and determine what barriers and contextual factors prevent youth from transitioning out of care successfully. They found support during the school years allows youth to see the importance of an education. Supportive relationships give the youth support to succeed and hold higher standards for them when it comes to school so they know they have expectations to meet.

Supportive Relationships and Health

Samuels & Pryce (2008) conducted a study using qualitative research methods involving interviews with 44 youth and quantitative surveys with 3 states. The studies goal was to support independence as they reflect on past experiences, give advice to other foster youth, and identify barriers to achieving their own goals. The study suggested that having support systems not only has been seen as helping youth achieve academic success but it also has been seen to help them with psychological health and healthy self-esteem. It serves purpose in the health of the youth and giving the youth a better outlook on themselves. Although while in foster care the agencies in charge of taking care of the children are held responsible for health care, at times the youth and children are ill managed and do not get the care they are supposed to. A good amount of foster care children are already exposed to things such as trauma or illnesses that have been untreated or lack a strict treatment plan. The study was done to develop a support system that can be utilized to develop quality procedures for those in foster care to better manage health care (Deans et al., 2015). While the law allows states to give coverage until youth are 21 years old, it does not require states to give youth exiting care coverage. This leaves youth at times without

coverage making it hard to get the medical help they may need to sustain their health, mentally and or physically.

Dworksy, Ahrens and Courtney (2013) conducted a qualitative study with 378 young females from the initial 732 youth in the baseline sample (both male and female). Females were chosen for the rest of the study because during the follow up interviews the young females showed up more than the male participants. The study was used to see two requirements in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act could affect health insurance coverage for young women that aged out of foster care. It also explored how allowing young people to continue in foster care until age twenty-one affects their health insurance coverage, use of family planning, and information about birth control. This study suggests that lack of health insurance can also lead to pregnancy in youth. If they are not able to afford prevention methods without insurance youth are at risk for pregnancy. According to Storer et al. (2014) their study was conducted using qualitative design as well as a survey. Three focus groups were put together, before the focus groups took place a brief survey was taken by 63 participants. The aim of this study was to gather insight into lives of the foster youth and the care giver relationships as well as determining what characteristics and experiences youth want from their care givers. Participants stated that when aging out of care they do not know how to do things such as making doctor appointments or have the skills to do such things. Appointments and health care were always provided so when sent out on their own youth do not have the skills necessary to perform these tasks. Participants voiced that having care takers mentor them in such skills would help them be able to perform such task.

Supportive Relationships and Incarceration or Risk Behaviors

Another challenge faced by young adults transitioning out of foster care is the inability to provide for themselves without breaking the law. Some former foster care youth find themselves in a position of lacking skills required to obtain a decent job. The youth cannot provide shelter and all other basic necessities they need to sustain life on their own. Shirk (2006) in her book used a qualitative design to interview young adults who were formerly or still in the foster care system. The findings suggest that youth would use illegal activities such as drug dealing and robbery as employment to survive after foster care. For some of the youth aging out of foster care illegal activities are the easier route because it makes more money than a minimum wage job since some cannot acquire other jobs due to not having a G.E.D or diploma. Lack of support with boundaries from a caregiver could be seen as a leading factor to youth choosing this lifestyle.

According to Storer et al., (2014) a participant stated youth want boundaries showing consequences. Boundaries are important for youth who have never had such direction in life before. The following statement is from a participant in the study.

Even though we act out and we're bad-ass little kids, [it] doesn't mean that we don't want the good things and don't want boundaries... wanted to be disciplined...get grounded for the first time. I've never been grounded in my life, and I wanted that. That's sad for a child to want to be in their room and be punished because that ain't never happened. I didn't even know what it felt like (Storer et al., 2014, p. 114).

Another study used qualitative methods such as, semi-structured, open-ended interviews to give in depth insight on what youth and their natural mentors' relationships were like. The study revealed since youth aging out of care are facing independence so quickly this leaves this population at risk for negative outcomes opposed to youth who have supportive relationships. It

is important we set up a buffer (supportive relationships) to counter act some of the negative outcomes. Without help it is unusual that youth aging out of care will be at a high functioning level when dealing with the issue of independence by themselves (Greeson & Bowen, 2008).

Supportive Relationships with Care Takers

There are challenges for DCF youth growing up in foster care including being placed in homes other than their own; results in loss from those that they love (Havlicek, 2011). Growing up in this system, young adults have possibly lost relationships that are important to their development growing up. Losing relationships such as the parent and child bond may make it more difficult to form other bonds that may help youth achieve self sufficiency when aging out of foster care. Although abuse and neglect does deteriorate the bond between parents and their children; the loss of parental relationships whether good or bad, can have negative effects on the children. Although the parents parenting style may not be appropriate and cause harm to the child, the loss of the only relationship that has been constant in their lives can be detrimental to later relationships (Stovall and Dozier, 2000 in Oosterman et al., 2007). Twenty- three youth ages 18 to 25 years old participated in semi-structured interviews to help identify what influences and factors allowed youth to have and keep their supportive relationships with non-parental adults. The study revealed that their [youth] past experiences made it hard to reconnect with other people in their lives. Youth stated that biological parents not caring for them caused them to not trust other adults at first. This initial loss with their parents and feeling like the adult who should care for them did not was a strong enough reason to reject those after them. Some youth stated being emotionally hurt again was why they would be hesitant to connect with other adults (Ahrens et al., 2011). Youth that age out of foster care are in need of more support than children who have not. The very limitations they face make support for them more important since they

may have been exposed to things such as maltreatment, parent child separation and lack of stability in placements (Antle, Johnson, Barbee, & Sullivan, 2009).

For over a decade, many youth have aged out of foster care without gaining permanent relationships with family or other critical support systems (Stangler, 2013). Young adults are aware of this limitation they have in life, and the following sentence shows this individuals feelings:

“I don't want to never see nobody go through what I went through... your biological not being with you...that hurts. You just can't go stay with somebody else and wake up to they family...they calling you they family and you know that is not your family. No matter how bad....they...try and help you. You don't see it that way because you know that is not home,” (Samuels and Pryce, 2008, p. 1204).

Care takers can mitigate some of these effects by providing youth with supportive relationships. It is important that before aging out of foster care that the youth and social worker build a supportive helping relationship. According to Antle, Johnson, Barbee, & Sullivan (2009) in their study to look at “interdependent living” foster youth were engaging in relationships with support systems. The study suggests that the child welfare worker can be seen as the most important relationship the youth will have in care. The workers can help model what healthy relationships look like for their clients. They have the ability to teach skills such as effective communication, conflict resolution and boundary setting. They also can help show youth that even though other relationships in the past were not effective this relationship can start anew. Foster parents can play a huge role as well in the life of youth before aging out of care. Youth reported learning a lot of life skills from foster parents they were placed with. This helped with successful transitioning. Together foster parents and workers can join together and help the youth

successfully transition out of care to adulthood. Youth reported that some relationships with foster parents or group homes did not end and were long lasting relationships past aging out of care. There are bridging supportive relationships such as extended relatives, mentors and helping professionals. These could last long term and benefit the youth when transitioning out. Some of these relationships help with finding resources and services. Others provide support in life.

Relationships with care takers can hopefully help youth learn how to gain and sustain other permanent supportive relationships if youth have not already obtained one when aging out occurs. According to Freundlich and Avery (2005), this study took a qualitative approach using 77 respondents where the study examined the outcomes for youth in congregate care. The study revealed professionals feel that getting youth the skills they need to be independent is necessary. They also feel they are not a substitute for permanent connections with a permanent figure. Youth have stated that lasting supportive relationships are important and desired.

Programs and Permanency of Supportive Relationships

According to Antle et al. (2009) policies and programs have focused much of their attention on the permanency of supportive relationships before youth age out of care. Yet somehow many youth still age out without permanent relationships. With the previous research suggesting the importance of supportive relationships and how it links to success and independence after care it would seem more important to provide youth aging out with these relationships or the skills to acquire them. Laws only give the option to further support or offer cash assistance and other means of support to those aging out. The laws do not require states to give that support. Thus leaving youth in care with little to no support in some states when aging out occurs. In previous research by Singer, Cosner Berzin, & Hokanson (2013) where they build on the previous literature about social supports and foster care youth transition to adulthood; they

used a qualitative, semi-structured, open-ended questions approach. The study suggests that there are four types of relational support their participants had that helped them transition successfully. The four forms of support are informational, instrumental, emotional and appraisal support. This support came from people they felt were in a role that helped take care of them and helped them to age out. According to Strolin-Goltzman, Kollar, & Trinkle, (2010) study that had 25 participants in focus groups that also took a small demographic survey to find out about youth experience in foster care and the retention rate of their case workers. Some youth stated that they lacked stability from their caseworkers and lost trust within them. The lack of stability often came from the constant change of caseworkers, and the loss of trust appeared when caseworkers would quit or move onto other jobs. Youth did not know who they could trust because they continued to be left by those they were told they could trust and depend on. The more stability in relationships the more the care taker can accomplish than someone who is there one time and gone another.

Ahrens et al., (2011) conducted a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews. Youth in the study expressed the importance of the constant contact to those they felt supported them. Having set times of contact or an idea of when to contact care takers for support was important to continue as a long lasting relationship. Helpful factors such as doing activities with the youth that was of their interest made it easier to continue seeing and keeping in touch. The stability of the relationship led to youth feeling they learned skills that helped them with independent living. Youth felt more confident in knowing themselves and their worth, as well as connecting them to others and other resources to help them along the way. Some of the youth felt that those they had supportive relationships with provided them with experiences they may have missed out on otherwise and filled that parental void in some ways. Thus leaving researchers to

believe that these supportive relationships led to positive outcomes for the youth; currently and formerly involved with the foster care system.

Supportive Relationships and Trauma

According to Hutchison, (2011) book states that social supports (friends, family) aid in coping with trauma and helps compensate when we are unable to do so on our own. Some of the benefits of social supports are promoting help, providing guidance, assert ones personal identity and gaining material help. There are two models that describe how social supports help with trauma; main effect model and buffering model. Main effect model says support is linked to our overall well being. It also states that it provides stable people in our lives that provide support that gives us stability so we do not take every situation as a threat. Buffering model states that we have support that intervenes between how one reacts to something and the trauma itself. It means we know we have the supports we need so we feel the situation is not much of a threat because we do not have to deal with it by ourselves.

According to Riebschleger, Day, & Damashek, (2015) a qualitative study using forty-three out of 68 youth ages ranging from 15 to 23 years of age. These youth testified in front of legislators, social worker and university educators about their life experiences while in care. They listened to better understand trauma youth experienced before, during and after foster care. Youth spoke about how relationships were important to help with trauma in their lives. Youth stated that having caring adults who could understand them or listen to understand them was important. They wanted caseworkers who did not just act as if this was their job but actually wanted to be there. Youth want adults to give them feedback on how they could deal with their problems. Another theme the study revealed is that youth suggested that long lasting relationships would help them as well. Youth stated being able to have connections with family

still, siblings in particular helped them the most. They stated not being moved around from home to home and different schools. Youth even suggested having the same caseworkers even if they must be moved and continuing help for when they age out of foster care to help them become independent. Youth believed they needed this continuing support system. Meyers (2016) conducted a qualitative study using phenomenological and grounded theory using in-depth interviews with participants of 21 years of age. The study studied how participants who suffered emotional and physical sibling abuse and how they used interpersonal relationships to get through the abuse. The study suggests that supportive relationships helped youth through traumatic experiences. Many youth felt that even though their support system (usually family member) was not able to directly interfere with their traumatic experience, just having them able to acknowledge them and know someone cared was in itself enough support for them to cope with their traumatic experiences. Youth in the study also found other supportive relationships in adults outside of the home (friends, parents) that provided a supportive relationship and that provided an escape from the trauma they were experiencing in their daily lives.

Unlike youth who have family for various forms of support youth aging out of care can no longer depend on the foster care system to help them once they are out on their own. Youth are forced to assume adult responsibilities with no support whether they are ready or not (Avery & Freundlich, 2009). It seems to be that previous literature suggests that supportive relationships with care givers are a key component to success in youth aging out of care. It has been provided in many journal articles that youth state they want and need supportive long lasting relationships with care providers. Numerous articles also provide support of youth who did not receive long lasting supportive relationships with care providers and the negative effects that have been correlated with them not receiving these relationships before aging out. Supportive long lasting

relationships may actually be the answer to helping most of the youth aging out of the foster care system age out successfully and still have the support when they need it after care. Would supportive relationships with care providers be beneficial in helping make the youth successful after care?

Methodology

This qualitative research study examined young adults; ages 18-25 years old that have aged out of the foster care system or that have aged out and signed back into care until 21 years old. The goal of the study is to find out the life experiences of the youth and to determine if long lasting supportive relationships do in fact help you become successful and independent after care. Qualitative research is a method used by researchers when they want in-depth personal answers; it gives great insight to how one perceives experience(s), allowing researchers to understand human behavior through participants' experiences (Jackson, Drummond, & Camara, 2007). Intensive interviewing was a research design used in this study. It involves asking open ended questions to seek in-depth answers. The questions are not structured and there is room to ask questions to further your understanding of the participants experience, feelings and perceptions. This allow for consistency and thoroughness. Reflexive design was used as well in the design of the research. This allowed the study to be continuously modified when needed such as (questions changing to better fit a participants, IRB amendment to change age of participants, coding processes allowing coding definitions to change as more transcripts are read) (Engel et.al, 2010). Grounded Theory was used to model the coding of the data process. In grounded theory themes are not predetermined but rather come from the voices of the participants. In grounded theory as well as how this study was done themes and definitions can change, be altered or stay the same.

Sample

Interviews were held with young adults who are currently receiving services to help them in their transition to adulthood as well as young adults who are not receiving services. Nine participants were recruited. The participant's age ranged from 18 to 25 years old. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling and the Intensive Transition to Independent Living Program in Fall River, MA. Snowball Sampling is when a researcher uses a previous participant to refer another individual who has the same qualities or matches the individual you are working with for the study. Researcher relies on referrals of other participants to find new participants. Due to the recruitment the sample was a non-probability sample. Non-probability means not everyone had an equal chance of being in the sample. The sample was made up of four black and 5 white youth. The ethnicities of participants were Latino, African American, and Caucasian. Although the participants do not represent everyone in the population of former DCF youth, they will provide insight into this population.

Interviews

Before interviews began IRB approval was obtained through Bridgewater State University. Ten open ended qualitative questions were asked (see Appendix A) to get to know these young adults and their experiences. Through the answers to the questions it was assessed whether or not supportive relationships with care providers are important to the success of youth after care. These young adults are an important source to get the extensive knowledge of what their lives are like and the supportive relationships they need to best help them become successful.

In order to learn about the young adults' experiences, interviews were held separately, in private. Each interview took place where the participant lived or in a public location they were

comfortable with. Before the interviews were conducted each participants was given an informed consent form to read and sign. All participants agreed and signed as well as myself as the witness. Each interview was on average an hour long, giving participants the ability to express themselves fully and giving me the ability to get in-depth answers. These interviews allowed me to gain a sense of what life was like in DCF care during their childhood and at the present time in their life.

Interviews started on May 31, 2015 and ended on August 28, 2015. The goal was each week to interview at least 1 or more participants a week. Due to the lack of participants and some canceling or not wanting to participate at all, it was not possible to do 1 or more each week.

Analysis

All interviews were recorded and in-between interviews they were transcribed. The interviews were transcribed verbatim. Verbatim is when what is written in the transcript is what was exactly said in the recording. The data was then coded by reading the transcriptions. After reading the transcriptions thoroughly twice, I then went back and started writing down themes I saw as I read them a third time. I developed a code book to write down all the themes and their definitions as well. After all transcriptions were analyzed I then used my code book to help me find five prominent themes in the transcripts. I then took the codes and made sub categories for the five dominant themes. When writing the results all quotes used were written in a de-natured style. This means parts such as when someone said umm or like it was removed to make the sentence read better.

Table 1

Demographics of Participants

Participants

Ages:	18-25 years old
Mean:	19.11 years old
Sample Size:	N= 9
Female:	2
Male:	7
Race:	
Black:	4
White:	5
Ethnicities:	
African American:	2
Caucasian:	5
Latino:	2
Time in foster care:	7 months- 16 ½ years
Receiving Services (signed back in):	7 out of 9 participants
Locations:	Falmouth, Wareham, Rochester, Dartmouth, Fall River, Bourne (Massachusetts)

Results

Five major themes emerged in the study; care takers as support systems, preparedness for independence, other support systems, long lasting relationships and risk behaviors. Within the five major themes, each theme has subcategories that explain and go in depth on different aspects of the major themes.

Care Takers as Support Systems

Care takers (care providers) are adults who are in a care-giving role who can also provide support while the youth is in DCF custody, while aging out and even after aging out of care. Care takers as stated by youth were social workers/caseworkers, family members who took them in other than parents, foster parents and adults in programs in which the youth may have lived in. Jared, one of the participants stated “I think relationships with anybody is important. It’s just care providers are more important because those are the people taking care of you directly. ” Samantha also said, “They definitely helped me get through a lot. Without them I wouldn’t be who I am today if it wasn’t for them.” This demonstrated that youth are capable of understanding the importance of those who take care of them in their everyday lives.

Social Workers

There was a strong emphasis that social workers/ case workers are very important to the participants, their importance became more so when youth would be aging out. Most youth feel that their social worker/ case worker should communicate effectively with them and make them feel they are a priority. This can both show the youth how to communicate effectively with others and model how youth should interact with others. Luke a foster care youth stated:

“Wasn’t really the best relationship with them [social workers], really stressful all the time when I was around them. They would always push me back to the end of the month. They’re [social workers] like hey we need to meet with you in two days. You [Luke] need to make room in your schedule for us. If they didn’t push it to the very end before they decide to contact me. If they kind of worked on my time a little bit better.”

This quote displays the exact feeling most of the participants had felt with at least one of their workers. Youth felt they were not important and were not the social workers main priority at times. Another participant Terrence made a statement about how youth test workers,

“Well, I think a lot of the reason why they [youth] test too is because they want to know. They want to know if you’re going to be there and you know what I mean. Right off the bat, because they [youth] are used to hearing I give up on you. So they’re like I want to know If you past the test. If they [social worker] don’t then I don’t see you again.”

This suggests that social workers giving up on youth lead youth to just try and push others who come to work with them away. Most participants stated at one point they did not try hard to make a relationship work with a social worker because they felt they were not really there for them. The study also suggest that having multiple workers does not set youth up in a way that shows them how to create and sustain long lasting relationships. It actually makes it more difficult to do so when they have a worker who does stay and work with them long term.

However some participants had great experiences with some of the social workers they encountered while in care. Participants stated feeling like the person really cared and made an effort to get things done for them. They felt this person gave support and guidance. Jenna States:

“So it was difficult at first, because I didn’t think she [social worker] liked me. It was awkward but afterwards she just became very supportive and encouraging and talking to me. It was more of an open relationship, which helped me feel more comfortable. It became awesome.”

The communication and the relationship they had allowed for a positive experience. Most of the participants stated similar situation in which they felt at least one of their social workers left them with a good experience and feeling supported in their relationship. Chris another participant stated, “I think we [worker and him] really just understand; both understand my situation and where I come from. We just work together to make me the best person I can be, and

be successful.” All of the participants but one suggested that their social workers were or are important to becoming successful.

Foster Parents

Participants also stated that some of their foster parents helped them in their transitions in life as well as aging out of care. Charlie stated that his foster mother would be considerate and do what she could for him when he needed her to. Not only did she do this she provided emotional support for him when he needed that. She [foster mother] made him feel he was important. Luke who has aged out and signed back in stated,

“Yea, they’ve really been here for me a lot, through a lot of things and I’m just really thankful I have them instead of; a lot of foster parents don’t really care as much. Both my foster parents have been really, really helpful with just about everything I’ve done. They’ve helped me do my bills, they’ve help me start a lot of stuff, help me start my portfolio. Helped me get all my school stuff straightened in line.”

All but one participant who had foster parents in this study felt grateful for having good placements. They felt these placements helped them get ready for life. Another participant stated that even though he no longer lives with his foster parents he felt supported from what they did for him. Harry expressed,

“When DCF didn’t send clothing checks and stuff, they [foster parents] would go out of their way and go shopping with me. They spent more then what DCF was giving me. It was 282, they would spend three four hundred dollars on me for clothes and stuff like that.”

This let Harry know these people were invested in him as the other participants felt by the actions of their foster parents.

One participant however did experience a much different occurrence during his time in foster homes. He felt it was a much better placement than the adoptive home he had been in due to abuse. Nevertheless he still felt disadvantaged. Terrence stated,

“It was better in a sense that we weren’t constantly being abused and manipulated. At the same time we obviously were in foster care and in different homes we didn’t know people. Shuffled around, second to other people’s kids you know that sort of thing.

Not all placements for participants were seen as beneficial to them and building relationships to help them age out, become independent and successful.

Harry stated at one point he put his foster family through a lot of trouble and took them for granted and that they still continued to support him and help him. He feels remorseful till this day. Harry stated he distanced himself from his foster parents because he knew he could not stay there much longer [aging out] but he could stay at a program when he signed back in. This suggests that other youth could have felt similar in the foster care population and acted similarly.

Staff Members at Programs

Some participants in the study were also involved with programs that housed them during their involvement with DCF. Those in programs stated finding people in care that they connected with and had supportive relationships with. Participants in programs stressed the importance of those working with them on a daily basis needing to be in the job for the youth and not for a pay check. Jared stated,

“If you’re going work in this field, you got to make sure that it’s for the person because if it’s not then all you’re going to do is just make it so that, that kids feel nothing but stress. It’s going to make them feel unwanted. All I have is the staff here and the kids that I live with.”

Another participant stated similar feeling about how staff should work with youth like him. Erik stated,

“Some staff at the programs; I been at programs often enough to the point where I can tell the difference between staff that are here for helping and care about the residents benefit. And, I can tell the staffs that are there for their own benefit. Because the treatment, the respect, the total aspect, the total feeling of the staff is completely different. Because when you get staffs that are there for you that want to help you and actually care. You know you’re going through a hard time let me know if you just want to talk its ok you know I’m here. And then, there is staff that will be like you know like that will take you out and do stuff. There’s staff that will actually try to make a difference.

Participants felt it is extremely important to have staffs that they felt were interested in them and the work they do with the participants. The study suggest that all caretakers especially staff members have to want to take part in their role willingly, instead of as an occupation only.

Some participants suggested that staffs are the people who mentor them as well as a take on a care taking role. Jared and Erik the two participants who had many placements in programs both stated having relationships with staff members that allowed them to mirror how they should behave. Both felt that the staff were who they could count on at some placements and turn to for advice. Jared stated,

“The staff is the most important thing in the program. And...because their interactions with us show us how we should interact with others, because that’s all we see at the end of the day. We live their twenty-four-seven, we don’t leave unless a staff is with us. So, at that program the bonds between some of the kids and some of the staff are so astounding, it’s like you’re a family you could say you know.”

“I think that their important because at the end of the day no matter what you’re going to need some kind of mentor.”

To further expand on this thought, Samantha said a program called the STARR program and the staff there shown her that running away and behaving as she was, was not what she should be doing. She said they are who stopped her from running away, drinking and smoking weed. The study suggests that youth in programs need staff members to be in a mentoring role and not just a person who works in the program.

Only two participants were in a form of alternative care, kinship care is when a relative can foster a child and even adopt. Neither of the kinship placements seemed to have significance on the outcome of the youth; as far as directly linking to how successful or independent they are now. However the staff the other participants encountered did suggest how successful they are or may become. The relationships some of the participants built with the staff members have been great support systems that the participants can count on. They allow them to feel emotionally supported while also knowing they have someone they can rely on for advice when they are unsure about things in life such as finding a job.

Youth however did have staff members at programs that were not great role models or mentors for them. Erik spoke of an assistant director telling to go harm himself because they did not get along very well. Other participants spoke of staff not always being so helpful as well. Participants also stated that at these programs there is so only so much staff can do for them while placed in the programs. There are rules given by DCF and by the programs themselves that limit how much help or extra help can be given. The participants stated that they were not able to be fully supported in certain aspects such as learning life skills like paying your bills, looking for

an appropriate apartment, buying a car, budgeting and learning how to live by themselves. Most of the youth's lives they have been dependent on others for everything.

Preparedness for Independence

Preparedness for independence is if the participants felt they were ready for life after care or not. The majority of participants felt they were lacking in preparedness for independence. Participants felt that they lacked the basic knowledge of the world and how to survive in it. Simple task such as accessing health care, schooling, finding a home, paying bills, doing taxes, budgeting money and whether to sign back into care or not.

Jenna stated that,

“Nobody talks about it. It's not really a known thing. I know a lot of states don't do that, don't have that option to sign in after aging out. It's not really talked about so much. I feel like if social workers sat down with their clients and explained it to them there would be a better communication.”

The option to sign back in is to help youth in the stage of transitioning to independence. The option to sign back in allows youth a support system. Rather than youth being released with nothing or no one to help them become successful and independent they can sign back in. Not knowing this as a participant has stated can hinder youth from taking advantage of a support system. It can give them an extended three years to get on their feet and become an adult. Even more concerning is that none of the youth who were signed back in knew what program funded them being able to sign back into care. This suggest that it is not fully explained to most youth how to or how signing back in works.

Not Ready

All participants stated that while aging out they were not ready for life. Most felt they found it difficult to not have to rely on anyone anymore. Chris stated, “The biggest challenge is just being able to take care of yourself, not having to rely on anyone.” Most youth felt this to be a challenging aspect. Since most of the youth whether a small part or an extensive part of their life have had DCF to rely on partially or completely, this has hindered their ability to fully take on the care of themselves.

Jenna said that she felt at 18 years old the age you exit foster care, youth are still kids. She then stated,

“There are adults that don’t know what they want to do with their lives. As a kid if you are not exactly sure, you’ve never thought of it... Personally I didn’t think of college until senior year rolled around. I was like oh shit I need to figure out what it is that I am going to do. Being a kid you don’t know what you want to do yet.”

Youth who are not in care have the support of parents or family unlike most of their counterparts in the foster care system. Participants suggested this makes the transition of an 18 year old in care to be more difficult than those in the general population. Some participants stated feeling like they were rushed to be on their own, and their age was a factor in feeling rushed. They stated that they felt unprepared in the years leading up to aging out and even the responsibility that comes with signing back into care. Harry stated,

“When you are 18 you got to find a job, do more. More responsibilities when I get home. Their [care takers] are on top of you more when you turn 18. I feel 15, 16 [years old] there was a little bit more slack. But, when you’re 18 their like hey you got to step up now you got to do what you got to do. If they did that when you were 15 or 16 instead of

like oh ok...But, when they hit you at 18 it's like why couldn't I do this when I was younger?"

Jared makes a similar statement reinforcing how youth may feel when aging out occurs. He stated, "As an adult they [care takers] expect you to go from being 17; being able to act like a 17 year old to after turning 18 automatically acting like you are 25." Teaching the youth before aging out occurs as this participant suggested may better prepare youth for the task of transitioning out of care smoothly. Samantha stated that, "It's scary because you're going out in the real world and you don't know what's going to happen." Participants were uncertain about their lives after aging out of foster care, due to the lack of preparedness they felt.

DCF/ Program Responsibilities

All but two participants felt that it was DCF's or their programs responsibility to prepare them for life after care. Participants who did feel it was DCF or their programs job to prepare them for life after care felt they were not doing so at the time. Jared stated,

"So the kids who are 18 to 21 years old they're going to think of a way to make it on their own and that's why kids fail. Because, they think they can make that transition when they can't. There needs to be more services that are specifically implemented to help kids focus on independence, because right now their saying; we're [DCF/Program] helping them get independent, we're helping them clean their room, how to keep it tidy, how to keep it neat...no you're not. Helping me clean my room is not going help me learn how to live, that's what helping me be tidy. What's that got to do with me getting a job? What's that got to do with me learning how to read a bill? Being able to understand what I'm paying for."

He then stated that DCF/ programs need to take youth out into the community and teach them both inside and outside of the house on real life situations such as paying bills. He believes that people learn from doing it, not reading the PAYA book which is set up to help youth learn life skills. He claims this is not sufficient to learning how to live on your own. Jenna another participant however did state that the PAYA book did help her learn some like skills. PAYA stands for preparing adolescents for young adulthood. This program is designed by DCF in MA to teach youth life skills through modules such as balancing a check book and community resources.

Participants spoke about how DCF paid for clothing and other expenses such as school. Due to DCF always supplying financial support some youth found it difficult to budget when they were expected to. Terrence stated,

“I didn’t know how to manage my money because I’m so used to getting clothing money. Sometimes money for assistance when I went to college. I got my associated degree completely for free but every semester I’d get like two grand back sometimes, five hundred back. So, I’m not going to learn money management because I’m getting money.”

Participants felt similar to this participant. They felt they always depended on DCF even after signing back in and this possibly hindered their learning some. Not having people there showing them how to budget and save for when they do leave care has left some participants with little to no knowledge on what to expect when leaving care with little to no money.

Only Terrence mentioned health care coverage when leaving the care of the foster care system. He stated, “Prepping for when you are past all this because we were just s used to getting

clothing money or getting insurance. I wasn't really prepped on how to get that after." Not knowing how to get health coverage can leave youth vulnerable. A few participants have stated that they have mental health issues. If these youth cannot find proper care or insurance to get proper care this could create a problem for these participants.

Two participants felt it was not completely DCFs job to prepare them for certain aspects of life. Luke stated,

"When you're in foster care it's a little more difficult, I want to say because if you don't have somebody there like Christiana [outreach worker] there to help you it could be... You couldn't really ask your social worker for it, they wouldn't... It's not part of their job really to help you with your..."

This suggests that some youth may not ask their workers because they feel it is not their job. If youth are not asking because they feel that this is not in the social workers job duties, they may not be getting information the social worker may have. Social workers may not be able to teach youth but they may be able to introduce them to programs or other resources that can, which is in the job description of a DCF social worker.

Responsibility for Self

The majority of participants in the study agreed that youth need to be willing to take responsibility for themselves. Participants strongly suggested that if you are not willing to take responsibility at some point and receive the help you need then you will not be successful after care. Erik Stated, "Your dreams will come true you're just going to have to put your mind to it."

Participants also stated that when they were not prepared for life after care they had to take responsibility for themselves and learn what was needed to be done on their own.

Most participants spoke about school being something they believe was something that they had to take responsibility for. Chris stated, “They just have to really have it in them. They have to be responsible enough, do good enough in school to make it to a secondary education.” Chris felt that doing well in school to move on to higher education was important part of taking responsibility for himself. Jenna stated that she decided to go to college right after high school. She graduated her first college with her associates and will be going for her bachelors next. Participant found this to be a very big step in taking responsibility for them. The participants suggested that by going to school it helps to set them up for a better future while being somewhat successful by completing or attending a higher education. Terrence stated, “And, try to do school because I knew if I didn’t graduate high school I would be screwed.”

Another step in taking responsibility for themselves participants felt taking steps such as finding a job were important. Participants suggested that you need to have financial stability to be independent after care. Jenna stated, “Getting your license and financial freedom is a great thing. I don’t have any of that, I don’t have my license. I don’t have a job. I think that’s kind of a set-back for me.” This reveals that participants and possibly other youth in the foster care do not feel like they are achieving success or independence for themselves when they do not go to school or have a job. Participants Jared, Erik and Harry used the resources provided to them by their programs to help them gain employment. Even though they had help getting the resources it is ultimately up to the participants to follow through to get the job and maintain their job. The participants took responsibility to show up for the interviews. Jared also has provided his program with a list of job opportunities in the area. He took responsibility and went out and

found information on jobs for himself as well. Participants suggested that to really make it you need the help of care takers and other support systems but you need to ultimately take on responsibility for yourself. This needs to happen for youth to actually accomplish what others have helped them with. Jared stated that youth who do not want the help will not get very far. Youth need to be open and willing to receive help to grow and then be able to do things for themselves.

Some participants suggested that self development was a way to also achieve independence and success. Jenna and Luke are part of a youth advisory board in which they both stated was a way to help them get more involved in doing different things. This board gave them new experiences and allowed them to try new things all while developing a network and stronger self esteem. Terrence decided he would start his own business as a mean of income and taking responsibility for himself. This suggest that to take responsibility for themselves youth need to be involved in doing things that enhance themselves. By enhancing a skill or starting something new like a business youth can increase their chances of independence and success. Participants who did participate in new adventures or programs that expanded their skill sets they reported feeling good about it.

Other Support Systems

Other support systems are people in the youth's life who provide support but are not in direct care of the youth. These people can provide emotional support, advice, motivation and other forms of support. These people are seen as important but not as important as those who directly take care (care takers) of the youth on a day to day basis. They are usually an as needed support system.

Peer Relationships

Majority of participants spoke about peer relationships being of importance when in care. Although they did not deem these relationships important to success and independence after care they did feel they were important. Majority of participants stated the hardest part of being in care was not being able to be like a normal “kid.” Erik stated, “So, I couldn’t call my best friend. He has no way of getting out here so it’s difficult.” Being in care separates youth from friends they may have used as a support systems in the past. Chris stated, “The most challenging for me was just not being able to hang out with all the friends that I had. Not being able to sleep over their houses or go over there without having a CORI on them.” Luke even stated he would hide that he was in DCF so he could not hang out with friends. He felt uncomfortable telling a lot of people. This reveals that youth in care can and do lose peer relationships which can be seen as a support system to the youth and can prevent from making new ones.

Family/ Siblings

Many participants stated that family and specifically siblings being a huge support system for them. Jenna stated that her siblings are the reason she tries to do better all the time. She said they motivate her so that they know if she can become something, they can as well. They also provided her a form of support. They are seen as people who understand what has gone through in her life and not an outsider who can only try to understand. Harry mentioned his brother as his main support at times. He stated that his brother is the reason he signed himself back in and had been trying to do better than he was doing before.

Some participants mentioned other family members as being a support system. Samantha states,

“Seeing who’s around, once I left not a lot of people were there for me. Well I have three people actually. I have my god parents, my dad’s mom. Then I have my god brother who’s my cousin.”

Some participants found they had lost support from some family members while learning whose support they have always had. Jared was in a similar situation which his parents abused and then abandoned him in programs. This suggest that youth in care may lose connections with ones they loved even parents. Despite the relationship before care participants looked at these family members as a form of support and care. This further suggests that youth may be separated from what they know and feel alienated by being in care. Erik stated that his family situations were not ideal and that he has always looked up to his step father and tried to be like him just to have something to talk about. He then stated,

“It helps to know that people where there and wanted to help and that they actually cared because a lot of the time, I do feel like it’s me against the world. I feel like a lot of the time I’m alone and nobody really cares. So it’s just nice to know that there are people who care and there are people to help and want to help. That makes a difference.”

These findings suggest that youth may need the care takers and other support systems to really be in a supportive role to help the youth. This may make the youth not feel alone and feel supported through a time in life that is already difficult. Jared was able to reconnect with his biological mother and created a support system for himself along with discovering he had a sibling as well. This suggests that youth who may have been separated from biological family may try to reconnect to establish a new or rekindle an old support system.

Most of the participants suggested that having a supportive relationship with an adult was important. Along with being a supportive relationship they felt it was important that these

relationships kept them on the right track. Charlie stated, “They keep checking up on me, no matter where you are and what you are doing.” This suggests that youth in foster care like knowing they have support systems in life that follow them. Knowing someone is there even if you do not need them at the time. To further express this idea Jared stated,

“For me to feel supported in my own eyes, I have to understand fully about how to live independent. For me, really only way to do that is to get independent and still have someone to be there to answer my questions when I’m independent.”

Some participants also stated a teacher or coach being a support system, someone who kept them on the right track. Chris stated,

“Like my teachers at school, my coaches, my friends; I have a good group supporting me. I think they keep me on the right track and staying out of trouble. Making sure I have everything done that needs to be done.”

Other participants had a teacher that made sure they were and continue on the “right track” as Chris stated. This further suggests that an adult who youth may have a supportive relationship with is important. This suggests that youth in care may connect with adults in the school system that can provide them a supportive relationship. Since teachers and coaches see children the most throughout the day this suggest youth may use these adults as a resource and someone who can keep them on track for school success.

Long Lasting Supportive Relationships

The fourth themed that emerged from the participants interviews was long lasting relationships. Long lasting relationships are a relationship with no planned ending, lasting a year or more. Most of the youth felt long lasting relationships were important to them. Jenna stated,

“No, relationship for the moment is never a good thing. I think long lasting support, whether it’s lifelong or not. You need a good lasting relationship, especially through the hard part.”

Participants felt that having someone there for them that was not a short lived relationship and added support is beneficial. Some participants felt that long lasting relationships were beneficial because they allowed youth to talk to people who have known them for a long time. They feel these people understand how they work and can relate to their issues old or new. Terrence stated,

“I think keeping those connections help you grow because they understand you a little more. Whereas someone else who doesn’t really know you from the past is like whoa, what the hell is your problem?”

Having these supports seemed to be of extreme importance to most of the participants. This suggested that youth in foster care need long lasting supportive relationships because they provide a sense of understanding newer people cannot give the youth. This emphasizes the importance of these relationships because youth in foster care do lose a lot of relationships they once had. It is important to keep the ones that have been there the longest providing positive support.

Another importance of long lasting relationships the participants brought up was that these relationships can provide a support in the form of therapy. Erik stated that staff from previous programs he had been in he has stayed in touch with. The staff members are people he calls in times of crisis. They are able to calm him down and relate to him on levels others cannot. Terrence also stated,

“There is not too many people that I can talk about my past with. Completely moved. She’s wicked important because she, she brings me down to earth sometimes. Because, sometimes you know I’m pretty ungrateful sometimes.”

Participants seemed to need these people when life was getting tough for them. This suggests youth in foster care need people who have known them for a long period of time when they need to open up about the past or difficult situations. Erik stated,

“ I think those [long lasting relationships] are important, more important to anybody in general because at that point you can tell that those people are actually true friends, true supporters. If they weren’t you wouldn’t still talk to them. You wouldn’t go to them for help and things like that. But, the fact that these people have been there that help and are still there to help shows and helps prove to you that those are people you should be surrounded by.”

Risk Behaviors

Risk behavior was a theme that emerged from most of the participants. Risk behaviors are when a youth engages in an activity that puts them at risk of a bad outcome. Most participants spoke of engaging in behaviors that put them at risk for bad outcomes. Jenna and another participant spoke about briefly being involved in inappropriate relationships. Jenna stated that she wasn’t letting DCF or anyone help her with these issues at first. This suggests other young girls in care may be experiencing inappropriate relationships suggesting that supportive relationships may help these youth and make a change to stop. Jenna was able to end her inappropriate relationships with help later on.

Jared another participant was involved with criminal behaviors. He would rob people’s houses, engaged in fighting and destruction of property. At these times Jared was in difficult

periods of his life with little support or trying to regain supportive relationships. He also used criminal activities to gain things that he did not have due to abuse and neglect he endured by his adoptive parents. This suggests that youth in care may resort to criminal activities when little support is around for them. This suggests that youth in foster care need supportive relationships to possibly deter them away from criminal activities they may engage in.

Other participants spoke of risk behaviors such as drug use, drinking and encounters with the law. Samantha stated she was always running away and drinking. She stated that what helped her was the staff in the STARR Program. Erik stated he smoked weed and told police to put a bullet in his head. He now finds it better to call staff that he can count on from previous placements to help him stay calm. All of the participants who dealt with their risk behaviors mentioned long lasting relationships that helped them to stop or work towards stopping these behaviors. This suggests that youth involved in risk behaviors can work towards stopping or stopping with the help of supportive relationships.

Discussion

The youth I spoke with throughout the interviews made it prominent that long lasting supportive relationships were most important to them. Resembling Antle, Johnson, Barbee, & Sullivan (2009) study, youth described relationships with care takers as being of the most important to them. They described care takers particularly social workers as people who are supposed to show them how they are supposed to interact with other people. Similar to Ahrens et al., (2011) study, youth also stated that having something in common (hobby) with their social worker or a common factor (reminded them of someone, similar background) made it easier to connect with their social worker. Youth however described times where they were unwilling to get close to social workers in fear of being left or hurt. Unlike Ahrens et al., (2011) study, youth

suggested that social workers pushing them to the end of the month and lack of communication also kept them from becoming close. Similar to Strolin-Goltzman, Kollar, & Trinkle, (2010) study, youth created a barrier between them and the social workers to establish if the workers were really there because they cared or not. Many of the youth said they had multiple workers and having multiple workers especially after becoming close to one worker would prevent them from becoming close to another.

Like Antle, Johnson, Barbee, & Sullivan (2009) study, youth who had been placed with foster families felt they were important to them. The foster parents provided support and were a resource of knowledge. Youth described what it was like to have been treated well, bought clothes, gave emotional support and taught life skills. Youth stated that relationships with some of the foster families did not end and they are still currently in contact with them. Foster parents even introduced some youth to people and peers they are still in contact with till this day. This allowed youth to make long lasting connections with other people who could help them age out of care successfully through supportive relationships. Some foster families the youth came into contact with however did not treat them as well as others had. Some mentioned feeling second to other people's children.

Comparable to Ahrens et al., (2011) study, many of the youth I spoke with described programs and the staff at these program as good experiences. Youth have long lasting relationships with many of the people working at the programs. Staff members were seen as being very important in role modeling how youth should act. Since most of the youth's interactions with people are with the staff in the programs. Staffs were also seen as two kinds of staff, ones who are there for work and those who actually care. Youth described how it was very important that staff working in the homes should be there for the youth first. They stated that

staff that actually cared treated them better and did more to help. Other adults that were important such as teachers and coaches were seen as important. These adults provided a supportive relationship that gave youth support to stay on the “right track” while in care and trying to get to a secondary education.

Resembling Desrochers (2003) in Day, Riebschleger, Dworsky, Damashek, & Fogarty (2012) study, youth stated education to be important. Most youth described education as a form of success. They described education as being something that could help them achieve a better vantage point in life. Similar to Graham et al., (2015) study youth made it clear that having people support them along the way through school made it easier to stay on the “right track.” Contrasting to Graham, Schellinger, & Vaughn, (2015) study, all of the youth in the study had obtained a high school diploma or were just less than a year away from obtaining one. These youth also had support systems that pushed them to go to school and find jobs.

Like Storer et al. (2014) study, only one youth I spoke to mentioned obtaining health care, due to the fact he was 25 years old and had a family. These factors may indicate why he seen this to be of importance to him. It was stated that he did not know how to obtain his health care information. He was unsure of how to make appointments because these things were always done for him before aging out of care. Dissimilar to Dworsky, Ahrens, & Courtney, (2013) study, due to the number of participants it is unknown if lack of health care or understanding on how to get it would have caused early pregnancies. There were only two females out of the study and only one was having inappropriate relationships as a youth in care. Similar to Deans et al., (2015) study, some youth described times of trauma and ill managed mental health while in care. Some were misdiagnosed or had been on pills to manage their mental health from a very early age. The medications due to length of time on them now do not

work properly. This leaves these youth at critical risk if they get out of care and cannot access proper care and health insurance due to lack of knowledge.

Comparable to Shirk, (2006) book, some youth spoke about risk behaviors that they engaged in during care and after signing back into care. One youth described robbing to make ends meet when he was hungry and wanted things he was not given by his adoptive parents. Other youth described situation that involved drug use, drinking alcohol and skipping school. Some youth due to their mental health status have engaged in reckless behavior towards police. Youth I spoke with however all have or had a form of support that allowed them to be supported and no longer continue in these risk behaviors.

Like Riebschleger, Day, & Damashek, (2015) study, throughout the interviews the majority of the youth spoke of trauma they had endured while in the foster care system. Two of the youth spoke of abusive adoptive homes. This left youth very vulnerable and uncertain. When entered back into foster care youth encountered numerous support systems that were able to give the youth the supportive relationships they longed for. These supports helped shape them as individuals and give feedback and advice for life situations. Some of these relationships have been long lasting relationships still occurring today. Which in turn gives youth the advantage of having someone who understands them from their past. Youth who experienced trauma needed even more help to cope with the trauma. Growing up in the foster care system can leave youth with little help due to the lack of support systems. It is also important for youth who have experienced trauma to have supportive relationships because with little help youth are hindered in the process of learning life skills they need to survive. Some trauma could also be the reason youth are behind. This makes it that much more important to have people that provide these long lasting supportive relationships.

Future Research

Future research on this subject should include a broader range of participants. The lack of participants due to my non-probability study did not allow for a diversity and equal opportunity for anyone in this population to participate. For this research in the future there needs to be a process of getting to know the participants before interviewing them. The process of developing relationships with the participants provides trust and participants will be more willing to give information about themselves as done by Cunningham and Diversi (2012). Another suggestion for future research is to find programs that work to help youth become successful. They should then be analyzed with the help of foster youth to find which ones work the best to help support them to become independent and successful. Researchers should also be mindful to the relationships participants acquired and what roles they played for the participants and the help they provided while participants were in these programs. For future research participants should be 21 to 25 years old. This allows more in depth information regarding the aging out process and what is important to become successful and independent. Youth in the study who were still in care and had signed themselves back in generally did not have great insight into the aging out process. This weakness in the study left gaps when it came to knowing what is most helpful to becoming successful and independent after care.

Conclusion

Youth in care need long lasting supportive relationships. For youth to be successful they need to have people in their lives that provide support. Support could be emotional, informational and helping develop skills. Most important supportive relationships are those with adults in the care taking role. Adults in the care taking role provide a parental and mentoring role for the youth in foster care. Supportive relationships worked best when they are long lasting,

they provide more benefits. Youth need these relationships because they allow youth to feel understood and someone who is trusted and provides a great deal of information. Youth felt siblings were equally important when it came to support and motivation. Siblings can be seen as supportive relationships that help youth develop and become successful, or motivation that makes youth want to show them if they can make it their siblings can to.

Youth are not ready for independence after care. With lack of knowledge and skills youth are at a disadvantage with leaving care when aging out occurs. Youth who sign themselves back in are still not completely ready for life after care. Many youth do not know how to obtain a place to live, pay bills, find jobs on their own, manage money and feel they cannot be independent and still need someone to fall back on when they have issues arise. Yet however youth do feel some of this burden is for them to be responsible for. Youth feel that those who do not want to be independent and successful won't no matter how much help they have.

Youth need supportive relationships when engaging in risk behaviors. These supportive relationships can act as a buffer against these behaviors. Youth need these relationships because they can demonstrate proper behavior. These relationships can help youth stop engaging in risk behaviors. Youth in foster care need long lasting supportive relationships overall for all aspects of their lives. These relationships are an essential part of aging out and becoming successful and independent. Youth make it clear that long lasting supportive relationships are the most important piece of aging out successfully; when youth have taken the responsibility for them to want to be successful and independent.

Funding

This study was funded by the Adrian Tinley Program Grant (ATP Grant). This is a grant awarded to undergraduate student who want to conduct their own research over a 10 week period during the summer. The grant bought all supplies for the study and paid the researcher for the 10 weeks of work.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Dr. Beverly Lovett for mentoring me through writing my thesis paper. Thank you to Dr. Laura Boutwell for mentoring me through the ATP Research Grant which led to my thesis paper. Thank you to Tom Dunse for allowing me access to the group homes in which some participants lived so I could recruit participants.

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Appendix A

Semi Structured Interview Questions

Interview Questions:
1. Tell me a little about yourself and how long you've been in foster care. You don't have to tell me anything you don't feel comfortable with: I just want to get a sense of how long you've been in foster care and what it has been like for you.
2. What were the most challenging aspects of being in foster care as a teenager?
a. (For those still in care at 18-21) What about after turning 18?
b. (For those not in care still at 18-21) What are the most challenging aspects after aging out of Foster Care?
3. What were the best aspects of being in foster care as a teenager?
a. (For those still in care at 18-21) What about after turning 18?
b. (For those not in care at 18-21) What are the best aspects about aging out of care after 18?
4. Were supportive relationships important to you as a teenager in foster care? Why?
5. What supportive relationships with care providers did you have that helped you as a teenager in foster care? Describe them. How did they help?
6. Are supportive relationships with care providers important to you now? Why? What supportive relationships do you have now that helps you as a young adult?
7. What kinds of a relationship did you have with your caseworker or social worker? If it was a good relationship, what made it a good relationship? If it wasn't a good relationship, why not? What would have made it better?
8. What programs best helped you prior to turning 18 in foster care? How did they help? What programs best help you now? How do they help? (if applicable)
9. What are the biggest challenges faced by 18-21 year olds who have or who will be aging out of the foster care system?
10. What do you think 18-21 year olds who have been in the foster care system need to feel supported? Be successful and independent?