THE PERCEIVED NEEDS AND SERVICE EXPERIENCES OF NON-MINOR DEPENDENT YOUTH IN SACRAMENTO COUNTY

A Project

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Division of Social Work
Abstract

of

THE PERCEIVED NEEDS AND SERVICES EXPERIENCES OF NON-MINOR DEPENDENT YOUTH IN SACRAMENTO COUNTY

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Tara Adamski

Until recently there have been few resources for emancipating foster youth once they reached the age of majority. In 2012, California adopted The California Fostering Connections to Success Act. This act gave foster youth the option of remaining in care until the age of 21. Although it is anticipated that youth will experience greater stability with an extended time in care, little research has been done to examine experiences of extended foster care from a youth perspective. This thesis seeks to fill that gap by conducting qualitative interviews, assessing needs and experiences of former non-minor dependents in Sacramento County. Data was gathered through eleven qualitative interviews with former non-minor dependents of Sacramento County child welfare services.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

It is assumed that youth moving into early adulthood will experience moments of hardship and distress. Despite being legally considered an adult at age 18, many young adults choose to live at home with parents or caregivers much longer than previous generations, as the transition to adulthood has become increasingly complex (Avery & Freundlich, 2009). Often, this extended time is utilized to finish high school, consider secondary education, begin to determine career paths, and identify life responsibilities. A successful transition into adulthood requires not only the youth’s own determination, but also the involvement of their primary caretaker. On average, American children moving into adult roles do not accomplish full independence until the age of 26 (AB12 final report, 2012). The median age for typical life milestones like marriage has risen as young adults gather social support from friends and family before launching into adulthood. However, foster youth do not have the luxury of relying on family or other support networks when making the transition to independence and adulthood (Avery, 2010).

While most young adults have the support of community and family, foster youth lose everything once they reach the age of majority. Unprepared for the realities of adulthood, foster youth who “age-out” experience higher rates of poverty, homelessness, and incarceration than their peers. Unlike foster youth, many transitioning adults leave home knowing they can return if needed. They also have the added benefit of receiving valued guidance from parents or other family members. Typical growing pains
experienced by young people can be devastating for those who have grown up in the child welfare system and lack this safety net (Courtney, Cusick, & Keller, 2007).

Many foster children have been subjected to trauma, multiple placements, and interruptions in education. Trauma and systematic factors like placement change dramatically affect a young person's ability to make significant steps toward independence. Placement changes often mean new schools and additional losses for the child, making new attachments difficult. For children who are unable to build support systems or make connections while in care, moving into adulthood offers little safety net and can leave them extremely vulnerable (Day, Dworsky, Fogarty, & Damashek, 2011).

While every adolescent experiences some challenges, youth growing up in foster care are especially vulnerable. Foster youth are two to four times more likely to suffer from trauma-induced mental illness and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and research suggests a high correlation between mental illness, PTSD, and substance abuse (Vaughn, Ollie, McMillen, Scott, & Munson, 2007). Additionally, research reveals that 35% of emancipating foster youth studied reported alcohol or drug dependency, while 45% reported using illicit substances on a regular basis. These risk factors, coupled with a lack of structured supports, places insurmountable barriers for youth striving for stability. Until the Fostering Connections to Success Act of 2008, foster youth had few options after they reached the age of maturity (Vaughn et al., 2007).

California’s foster youth face outcomes far below the national average, and Sacramento County is no exception. Only 45% of Sacramento County foster youth had graduated high school at the time of emancipation, and only 17% had obtained
employment (Sacramento County Children’s Coalition, 2012). Additionally, only 10% of emancipated foster youth reported ongoing employment one year after graduation from foster care (Merdinger, Hines, Osterling, & Wyatt, 2005).

Given the above statistics, is should be no surprise that an estimated, 25% of emancipated youth were homeless one day after exiting care. California’s EFC program is focused on improving stability and increasing positive outcomes. It attempts to improve the transition from foster care to independent adulthood with an emphasis on education, money management, homelessness prevention, workforce skills, and independent living (California Fostering Connections, 2013).

More than 23,000 youth nation-wide emancipated from foster care in 2013 (The Children’s Bureau, 2014). Of these, approximately 5,000 live in California and now have the option of extending their time in foster care until they are 21. Understanding the importance of investing in older youth, California and eight other states utilized an option of a Federal bill known as The Fostering Connections to Success Act of 2008. Taking advantage of matching federal dollars, California legislators developed California’s Fostering Connections to Success Act, also known as AB 12 and currently referred to as extended foster care (EFC)(Kelly, 2014).

Because of EFC, California’s young adults are now allowed to remain in care until the age of 21 (Children’s Bureau, 2014). Although independent living programs had been established, outcomes of former foster youth remained dismal. Legislators and stakeholders rallied for legislation, and on September 20, 2010, The California Fostering Connections to Success Act was signed into law and became effective on January 1,
2012. Primarily, AB 12 sought to address the high rate of homelessness and low rates of high school completion among emancipated foster youth. Other goals include money management, enrollment in higher education, obtaining a driver’s license, and job skills.

Allowing young adults additional time in a supportive environment is not unique to foster care, as many families recognize the benefit of allowing transitioning adults extra time to mature before launching them into independence (Courtney, Foster, & Osgood, 2010). California’s EFC program was developed with the premise that the extension of services to older youth would lead to increased stability and opportunities throughout adulthood. Researchers maintain that allowing youth to remain in care beyond the age of 18 dramatically increases the odds that they will acquire high school diplomas, maintain stable housing, and enroll in college classes (Krinsky & Liebmann, 2011). It is also estimated that providing services beyond age 18 will assist in building supportive community networks and life skills that can support foster youth beyond dependency. While extending foster care until age 21 is thought to dramatically improve outcomes, research has not yet demonstrated whether the program helps youth achieve their goals. In addition, few studies have focused on interviews with foster youth to understand their experience of extended care. This study aims to fill these gaps by examining the following:

1. What are the life goals of non-minor dependent youth in extended foster care in Sacramento County?

2. What resource strengths and barriers do non-minor dependents face in achieving their goals?
Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to understand the experiences of youth who have chosen to opt-in to EFC in Sacramento County and have graduated from the program. Due to recent implementation, little research has assessed the successes and challenges of EFC, and thus far no study has been conducted to determine what barriers youth face while participating in the program. Using qualitative interviewing, this study seeks to expand knowledge and fill in gaps regarding outcomes of foster youth who remain in care until the age of 21 in Sacramento County. Additionally, we will review legislation leading up to California’s Fostering Connections to Success Act and the structure of EFC. We will also discuss how the bill was implemented in Sacramento County and develop suggestions for areas of further research.

Definitions of Key Terms

Listed below are key terms and definitions. These terms will be frequently used throughout this paper.

Adolescence
A term used to describe a developmental period between the ages of 12-18 (Techniques and Guidelines for Social Work Practice)

Advocate
Advocate refers to a person group or organization that speak out on behalf of themselves or others to improve experiences, outcomes, or life situations.

Aging out
A term used to describe the time when a foster youth have reached the age of majority
and are no longer in the care of the state or county.

**BOG Fee Waiver**

Board of Governors Fee Waiver, available to qualified California residents, waives the cost of class units to community colleges (College Financial Resources, 2013).

**Case Plan**

A plan constructed in conjunction with foster youth, family, foster care agency, or caregiver that explains goals and expectations, including services provided to the client. Case plans also document progress toward previously identified objectives.

**Dependency**

This is a term used when a minor is brought into state custody.

**Emancipation**

Emancipation is a term used to describe when a juvenile reaches the age of majority or is considered to be legally independent and is no longer a ward of the state.

(http://www.catawbacountync.gov/dss/f&csvs/CPSdefinitions.pdf)

**Foster Care**

The term foster care is used to describe the status of children who have temporarily been placed in the care of a family or agency other than their own.

**Foster Youth**

A term used for children who are under the care of the state and live with an assigned foster family or community care home.

**Independent Living Program (ILP)**

A program designed to provide services to foster youth transitioning from care and
preparing to live independently. Services focus on job training, education, career development; help with housing, health, and living skills. (Scannapieco, Scannapieco, & Schagrin, 1995).

Non-minor Dependent (NMD)

A non-minor dependent refers to a youth who is passed the age of 18 but less than 21 years old and is under the care of the county.

Supervised Independent Living Plan (SILP)

A supervised independent living plan is an approved placement for youth who pass a readiness assessment and are ready to live independently.

Transitional Independent Living Plan (TILP)

A signed and written description of the services and goals that the youth will engage in while participants of extended foster care.

THP Plus Foster Care (THP+FC)

THP Plus Foster Care refers to a transitional housing program funded through county dollars. Typically used as a step down from group home placement, THP+FC allows the youth to live on their own with weekly case management in addition to their county social worker.

**Theoretical Framework Overview**

For the purpose of this study, we will utilize systems theory, social capital theory, and analytically grounded theory. Systems theory affords the researcher a better understanding of emancipated youth through the analysis of relationships between systems and subsystems. Foster youth are dependent on such systems, and the way in
which these systems are executed directly affects services and quality of care received by dependents. This study will examine the relationship between the system that provides care to non-dependent minors and system effectiveness from the perspective of the youth who participated in the program (Hutchinson, 2013).

Social Capital Theory, according to Coleman (1988), maintains that community cohesion is centered in complex social networks. Civic engagement creates a cohesiveness and solidarity within groups that facilitates trust, communication, inclusion, and the sharing of resources. Social bonds unite individuals for the common good, and Hutchinson (2013) points out that foster youth lack membership within the community and thus lack the social capital to effectively build supports upon emancipation. This marginalized population lacks collective power, and its members often become isolated, making vertical movement within society difficult. Individuals rely heavily on social connections with family or community to progress and achieve their desired status. A lack of these relationships makes forward movement extremely difficult as one lacks the trusting faith of those in power (Coleman, 1988). In addition, persons with influence are often hesitant to facilitate connections with individuals they do not have a relationship with as American culture tends to be suspicious of others, especially those that lack status within the community.

Grounded theory provides context to qualitative interviewing and allows investigators to understand the participants from a multidimensional perspective. Interviews are coded; themes are determined and assigned typologies, a system that identifies patterns with particular context, offering a deeper understanding than
traditional survey instruments. Data from interviews are analyzed, and relationships between subjects are identified. These relationships allow researchers to theorize common positive experiences and system barriers that youth face, establishing applicable recommendations for resources so that youth can achieve their desired goals (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).
Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Due to the recent implementation of California’s Fostering Connections to Success Act, little research has been done on perceived resource needs and the experiences of youth participating in extended foster care (EFC). Prospectively, it is necessary to understand the origins of EFC, evolving legislation, how it is implemented, and current service provisions. The purpose of this review is to evaluate the history of laws leading up to the passing of California’s Fostering Connections to Success Act of 2010 (also known as AB 12). Also, we will explore historical aspects of child welfare affecting youth outcomes, as they provide valuable context considering the minimal amount of research that has been conducted on participants of EFC.

Historical Review of Child Welfare

Caring for the wellbeing and welfare of children is a relatively new concept in American history. Early settlers had large families in which every member was expected to participate and contribute, even children. The modern concept of childhood only existed in regards to very small children. Infant mortality was extremely high, and most children did not survive beyond their fifth birthdays. Because children in the 17th and 18th century rarely survived, they were highly valued as a commodity to ensure the prosperity of the family. Those who did survive were considered the property of their parents or caretakers and were expected to contribute. The concept of child protection did not exist, and unless children were orphaned, the state had little influence or opinion on how they were treated (McGowen, 2005). In a society heavily influenced by English
Poor Laws, children who received attention from public authorities was separated into two categories: orphans and paupers. In the New World, hard work and rampant disease were harsh realities that left many children orphaned and in need of care (Quigley, 1998). Children of the extremely poor were also considered in need. However, assistance was focused on instilling a strong work ethic and faith in God for both categories. Parents who did not adequately provide for their children were considered morally and ethically corrupt. There was a grave concern that they would pass their wayward behavior on to the children, thus placing a significant burden on society (McGowen, 2005).

The needs of the community were considered primary, and interventions were usually the same for both dependent children and adults. Occasionally, communities would supply a family with a small stipend to maintain them in their home, or community members would intercede, and the family debt was paid in labor. Typically, poor children and adults, especially in urban areas, were housed in institutions known as almshouses, which were run by public authorities. Once the children became old enough, they were farmed out to families and paid for their room and board via indentured servitude. While indentured, children were taught a trade and worked in that trade until the cost of their care was paid off. The primary focus of this system was to instill a work ethic and a strong religious education in children. Little consideration was given to their happiness or best interest (Garrison, 1986).

The 19th century had a dramatic effect on the way dependent children were cared for. The abolition of slavery and the burgeoning middle class decreased the need for labor and indentured servitude of poor children and adults. As family wealth increased,
so did the number of philanthropic organizations that catered to the poor and orphaned. In addition, an increase in social status made it possible for families to focus on educating children, which resulted in new views on child development. This enlightened view on the welfare of children, however, was only extended to those of considerable means (McGowen, 2005). The newfound wealth of the industrial revolution did not result in a decrease in poverty. Instead, poverty increased as massive numbers of immigrants came to America. Often, immigrants were hired to perform low-wage, high-risk jobs that created a huge poverty class and orphaned thousands of children (Jalongo, 2010).

Parentless and poverty-stricken children were still viewed as liabilities for the state. However, outside relief or indentured servitude began to be seen as inhumane. Orphanages or almshouses were considered economical and thought to offer valuable work opportunities that servitude did not. It was also thought that persons who profited from the misfortune of others would treat their wards poorly, ultimately resulting in the creation of a class of miscreants that would be a drain on society. The number of almshouses grew, as did unforeseen consequences of housing children with adults, many of whom were mentally ill. This practice left children vulnerable to abuse. As the poor condition of almshouses became public knowledge, concern grew for children in their care, setting the stage for another major reform (Areen, 1974).

The Children’s Aid Society, founded in 1853, was based on the premise that the only way to save children was to raise them in Christian homes and expose them to hard work. Charles Brace, the founder of The Children’s Aid Society, began recruiting large numbers of homes willing to take in destitute or orphaned children from urban areas and
move them to the country, starting the first foster care movement (Langsam, 1964). Other Protestant organizations began recruiting homes throughout the Midwest and Southern states. Although they were billed as “free foster homes,” children were expected to pay room and board through labor, a system that looked strikingly similar to the indentured servitude of prior decades. During this time, thousands of children were removed from their communities and transferred to rural areas by train (Jalongo, 2010). As almshouses began to close, the practice of placing children in the care of family homes became increasingly common and eventually evolved into the modern foster care system (McGowen, 2005).

Until the early 1900s, the primary focus of aiding dependent children was to ensure that they learn a good work ethic and have a religious upbringing with the ultimate goal of benefitting society. Interceding or investigating child maltreatment was not considered a societal responsibility (Schene, 1998). The case of “Mary Ellen” began a public consciousness that held parents responsible for the care and upbringing of their children. Severely abused by her caretakers, Mary Ellen was removed from their care in a landmark case that cited animal cruelty laws due to the absence of child maltreatment law. This historic case established that children have a fundamental right to safety and should be protected from abuse (Myers, 2008). The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, established in 1874, was the first organization tasked with investigating families who were suspected of abuse, and eventually expanded into providing services for children (Schene, 1998).

As charitable societies expanded, they began sending out “friendly visitors” to
poor homes to determine worthiness and level of need. A precursor to modern-day child welfare workers, friendly visitors offered financial, spiritual, and moral advice to those in need so that the poor could gain the knowledge necessary to better their lives. During these visits, volunteers began to notice that poverty was not necessarily an indication of laziness or ignorance, but was often a result of societal influences. A new theory began to emerge that poverty was a direct result of uncontrollable factors, not an individual choice (Swift, 1995).

Recognizing society’s responsibility to children and families, charitable leaders, women’s advocacy groups, and voluntary social services agencies established a federal agency, known as the U.S. Children’s Bureau, in 1912 (Bradbury & Oettinger, 1962). Led by Jane Addams, the Children’s Bureau received a mandate from the federal government to investigate matters pertaining to the welfare of children. For the first time, the welfare of children became a responsibility of the United States Government, and the Children’s Bureau was tasked with understanding the plight and circumstances affecting infant mortality, poverty, childhood disease, child labor, and ways in which the lives of children could be improved. The Sheppard-Towner Act of 1921 provided grants, set up programs for mothers and children, and introducing the concept of federal funding to improve the lives of children (Almgren, Kemp & Eisinger, 2000).

Over the next three decades, the Children’s Bureau grew, and an increased number of divisions appeared within more states. Eventually, the direct responsibility of child welfare was transferred to counties, while states and the federal government adopted the role of overseer. The federal government became fully vested in the child
welfare arena with the passage of the Social Security Act of 1935, which established aid for dependent children. In addition to providing relief, the Social Security Act expanded governmental roles in the lives of families. With the exception of grants to individual states, federal funding of child welfare did not exist until 1935. This money provided funds to develop the first child welfare system and gave credibility to efforts to protect children and develop a minimum standard of care (Murray & Gesiriech, 2005).

**Modern Developments in Child Welfare**

As the child welfare system has evolved, it has adopted two major approaches and philosophies on how to best care for children removed from the home (Murray & Gesiriech, 2005). Maintenance of the family system and safety of the child are in constant consideration, with one tending to take precedence over the other as the political climate shifts (Garwood, Phillips, Hartman, & Zigler, 1989). Beginning in the 1950s, a shift from institutionalized care, concerns regarding the child welfare system, and rising awareness of research by Bowlby resulted in a new awareness of childhood attachment and the importance of parent-child bonding. Bowlby discovered that without attachments, children in long-term care often develop behavioral problems. This discovery impacted the field, and a reformation began limiting time in foster care. Although time limits in care created permanency for most, little was done for those remaining long-term (Roca, García, Biarnés, & Rodríguez, 2009).

During the 1960s, a concept referred to as “battered child syndrome” led to investigative action and child abuse reporting systems (Newberger, 1983). The awareness of child abuse and prevention measures led to the cornerstone of the child
welfare system, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) of 1974. CAPTA was fundamental in developing laws and regulations that standardized mandated reporting systems. CAPTA led to a significant increase in the number of children in foster care in the 1970s and 1980s, as protection of children became the primary concern (Department of Health and Human Services, 2003). As the number of dependent children increased, concerns began to emerge regarding expanding costs and appropriate foster care placements.

Responding to the substantial number of children in dependency, The Adoption Assistance, and Child Welfare Act (PL 96-272) focused on family preservation. The federal government required that as a condition of receiving federal funds, states must make every reasonable effort to reunite children with their birth families or support adoptive measures (Wells & Tracy, 1996). As the pendulum temporarily swung toward family maintenance, the number of adolescents in long-term foster care continued to rise, and so did their adverse outcomes as adults.

**Today’s Child Welfare System**

Today’s child welfare system has many moving parts. It is made up of several agencies that share the common goal to nurture and promote the well being of children. This goal is accomplished by first considering the safety of children, then preserving families, and finally by promoting permanency in the event that children are removed from their homes (U.S. Children’s Bureau, 2013).

The structure and implementation of child welfare services is governed by the Federal Government, while state law controls funding and implementation of legislation
Although family preservation is still considered a priority, parents have a limited amount of time to satisfy the courts and regain custody of their children. Upon detention, most counties utilize concurrent planning, the process of employing two strategies with the primary plan being family reunification while simultaneously preparing an alternative goal of adoption or guardianship (Pelton, 1996). The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), enacted in 1997, reauthorized funding for family reunification and adoption services, instituted time limits for reunification, and heavily emphasized permanency for children in care. While ASFA was designed to limit time spent in foster care, children in long-term care experienced increased placement changes known as foster care drift.

Foster Care Drift

Declining reunification rates and infrequent instances of adoption for older foster youth are due to a phenomenon known as “foster care drift,” which is a major barrier to successful emancipation. Although many children are successfully discharged from care well before they turn 18, children who are unable to find permanency are often the most traumatized and display the most challenging behaviors. As a result, they languish in the system, often experiencing a host of failed placements until emancipation (Wulczyn, 2004). Berzin (2008) contends that in context, given the lack of stability for individual foster youth and the lack of supportive connections, the child welfare system continues to be deficient in achieving appropriate outcomes for children.

Barriers to Successful Outcomes

According to the Child Welfare Information Gateway (2014), former foster youth
have transitioned successfully if they have secured stable housing, graduated high school, and are economically self-sufficient. These goals are especially challenging for foster youth, who often suffer from a lack of social and economic supports that aid other young adults their age in successfully navigating independence. Contributing to their vulnerability, an estimated 30-80% of foster children exhibit emotional and behavioral problems (Greenen & Powers, 2007). These issues are often the result of trauma suffered before they were removed or are caused by the stress of separation from their family of origin (Chipungu & Bent-Goodley, 2004). Bass, Shields, & Behrman (2004) explain that trauma associated with long-term foster care, coupled with a lack of permanent, supportive connections are associated with high rates of poverty and homelessness after emancipation from care. Also, foster youth report increased instances of family instability, neglect, abuse, and mental health issues that were never assessed or inadequately addressed (Courtney, Piliavin, Grogan-Kaylor, & Nesmith, 2001).

Other contributing factors include former foster youths’ considerable involvement with law enforcement. It is reported that 25% of youths emancipating from care have been charged with criminal acts that are primarily due to their being unprepared for the social and economic demands of adulthood (Barth, 1990). The same social and economic demands also leave many foster youths vulnerable to victimization, with 37% reporting instances of sexual assault, battery, physical assault, and other forms of maltreatment (Barth, 1990).

According to Connections for Youth (2014), approximately 5,000 youths will emancipate from foster care in California this year. It is estimated that of those exiting
care, 51% will be unemployed and 46% will drop out of high school. Also, it is estimated that a third of females in foster care will give birth to at least one child by their 21st birthday. While transition outcomes are grim statewide, Sacramento County reports results even farther below the national average. Center for Social Services Research (2016) found that only 45% of Sacramento County foster youth had graduated high school at the time of emancipation, and only 17% had obtained employment (Courtney, Charles, Okpych, Napolitano, Halsted, Courtney, & Hall (2014).

Although the exact numbers for homelessness in emancipating foster youth are unknown, it is estimated that 50% of emancipated foster youth in Sacramento County become homeless within one year of emancipation. Many have shelter but experience a lack of stable housing and find themselves “couch surfing,” relying heavily on friends and acquaintances. Intense safety concerns have made housing, with an emphasis on reducing or eliminating homelessness, the primary concern for youth in extended foster care (Sacramento County Children’s Coalition, 2013).

**History of Laws Designed to Aid Emancipating Youth**

Historically, outcomes for youth exiting out of foster care are dismal, yet there has not been satisfactory legislation to provide these youth with the needed support and resources within the history of child welfare. Poor permanent connections resulting from multiple placements and trauma leave foster youth ill equipped to navigate through adulthood. Traditionally, successful independent living was not seen as a primary goal of the Child Welfare System (Mallon, 1998). Focused on permanency, the Adoptions Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 put all child welfare efforts into moving
children out of care and into permanent homes (Chou, 1993). While well intentioned, the focus on permanency neglected to address the needs of thousands of children growing up in long-term care.

Federal legislation in 2008 prompted state action, with California taking the lead in 2012 with AB 12. Each new law and revision intended to provide aid by linking youth to resources, providing case management, and allocating a monthly stipend. Below is a brief overview of historical content so the reader may gain an understanding of how extended foster care was developed and of the implementation of AB 12 in California. This research will add knowledge from the participant’s point of view and will serve to inform service providers on possible revisions to policies and practices intended to assist non-dependent minors in reaching their emancipation goals.

**Independent Living Initiative**

In 1986, the Independent Living Initiative, or public law 99-272, passed in Congress. The Purpose of the Independent Living Initiative was to allow Title IV-E funds to be spent on creating programs that aided emancipated foster youth in making the transition from state dependency to adulthood. Programs using Title IV-E funds were required to have a range of services and resources for individuals of this population:

- **Housing referral:** Independent Living Programs (ILP) workers could provide information on local homeless shelters and low-income housing.
- **Educational tutoring:** refers to assistance in obtaining a high school diploma or General Education Equivalent, help with registering, and completing secondary education materials.
• Outreach programs: refer youth to mental health services, youth advocates and mentoring programs if requested.

• Food bank/clothes closet: Many ILP offices had supplies of canned food, toiletries, and clothes available upon request.

Independent Living Programs (ILP) were offered to eligible youth starting at 16 years of age and continuing for six months after they aged out of the foster-care system. This act also allowed states the option of assisting youth with independent living services until the age of 21 (Scannapieco, Scannapieco, & Schagrin, 1995).

**Foster Care Independence Act of 1999**

In 1999, the federal government again recognized the needs of foster youth aging out of the system and passed the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (Atkinson 2008). The intention of this act was to revitalize and expand existing ILP programs. The 1999 legislation allotted additional money to the ILP programs and highlighted specific requirements for states to follow when servicing American Indian youth. Compared to previous legislative attempts, the 1999 law provided more flexibility regarding funding options, allowing services and resources to become available to emancipating youth before the age of 16 (Atkinson, 2008).

**Amendment to the Social Security Act**

In 2008, an amendment was added to the Title IV-E Social Security Act, allowing states the option of extending foster care to foster youth until the age of 21 providing youth engaged in one of the four activities required for eligibility. These activities include gainful employment or participation in college courses for at least eighty hours
per month, working towards completing high school or obtaining a high school equivalency, participating in a vocational school, or medical reasons (Courtney, Foster, & Osgood, 2010). If criteria are met, youth are eligible to stay in the program until the age of 21. Should criteria at any time not be met, the assigned social worker can file to remove the youth from the program. If removed from the program, youths have the option of opting back in at any time until the age of 21.

**California’s Extended Foster Care Program (AB 12)**

Until recently, foster care funding traditionally ended on a child’s 18th birthday. At age 18, children were thought to have reached maturity. Eighteen was also the age of majority when children were considered independent; thus, matching federal funding through Title IV-E ceased. The lack of matching funds put a strain on states, resulting in state funding dissolving as well (Mosley & Courtney, 2012). As poor outcomes of former foster youth became harder to ignore, advocates began lobbying for matching federal funds past the age of 18, allowing states to extend their foster care programs and resulting in the formation of the federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (Schelbe, 2011). Signed by President George W. Bush, the Fostering Connections Act offered reimbursement to states through Title IV-E for youth between the ages of 18 and 21 (Mosley, Courtney 2012). Following the federal lead, California enacted Assembly Bill 12 (AB 12): California Fostering Connections to Success Act, which was signed into law by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger on September 30, 2010, and took effect on January 1, 2012 (California Fostering Connections to Success Act, 2012).
The California Fostering Connections to Success Act allowed an extension of foster care funds until the age of 19, beginning in 2012. Subsequent appropriations in 2013 and 2014 provided funding for the extension of benefits to age 21 to all foster youth who were active dependents at age 18 (California Fostering Connections to Success Act, 2010). According to the California Department of Social Services (2011), AB 12 extended benefits payments and transitional support services to foster youth in an attempt to build a safety net of support while moving toward self-sufficiency. Termed “non-minor dependents (NMD),” youth who choose to take part in EFC will be afforded benefits so they may pursue educational or employment opportunities.

**Eligibility Requirements**

Eligibility requirements for extended foster care in California include: 1) Work toward a high-school diploma or equivalent program (e.g. GED); or 2) Enroll in college full-time; work part-time in addition to part-time educational enrollment; or 3) Obtain full-time employment with a minimum of 80 hours per month; or 4) Participate or utilize resources that provide assistance in obtaining employment; or 5) Present a medical condition that inhibits completion of the above requirements (Children’s Advocacy Institute, 2013). A criterion was implemented to placate opponents of the bill, who were concerned that EFC would be another entitlement program. Also, the criteria eased the fear of the Child Welfare Directors Association (CWDA), which expressed concerns that county child welfare departments would be overwhelmed by the number of youth eligible for EFC.

Before entry, the NMD must sign a Transitional Independent Living Case Plan
(TILP) agreeing to meet the above goals to participate in the program. They must also decide to live in an approved placement location, remain in contact with their assigned social worker, and make arrangements to meet once per month with the worker (Children’s Advocacy Institute, 2013). Housing options for non-minor dependents are numerous and must be approved by the assigned social worker. NMDs may remain in the home of a designated guardian or foster placement if the caregivers agree and it does not interfere with licensing. Family arrangements may also be presented as an option, providing the family member is not the offending parent or has a criminal history. Group home placements are considered the highest level of care and are utilized as a short-term option until appropriate accommodations can be arranged or there is a presenting medical or mental health issue circumventing other options.

Youth who would like to live on their own but are in need of additional support may apply for the THP Plus Foster Care (THP+FC). THP+FC placements are arranged and approved by an outside agency, providing support and case management to the NMD. Working with a county social worker, agencies meet with the youth, (often on a weekly basis) providing assistance with bill paying, money management, employment training, and educational support. Additional funds are provided to assist the youth with housing costs, furniture, and living necessities. Each THP+FC provider has separate rules and criteria that youth must follow or risk termination from the program. NMD can only utilize THP+FC programs for 24 months cumulatively (Children’s Advocacy Institute, 2013).

Many advocates and stakeholders agree that THP+FC is needed for the majority
of youth in extended foster care. The additional resources, including weekly case management, allow young adults to exert some independence while surrounded by solid support systems. Unfortunately, only a small number of transitioning youth qualify for additional resources like THP+FC. Designed as a tiered down option from a group home setting, THP+FC placements offer the next level of care to youth forced from congregate care who are not yet ready to maintain an independent living arrangement without significant assistance (Children’s Advocacy Institute, 2013).

Supervised Independent Living (SILP) is an option for NMDs who do not require additional support beyond extended foster care. SILP placements allow NMDs total independence in a college dorm, apartment, or house while still receiving monthly case management. Living arrangements must be approved by the social worker and meet minimum safety requirements. In addition to monthly case management, the NMD will be provided a monthly stipend, providing the above conditions are maintained. SILP placements are the most common placements utilized by extended foster care youth in California (Children’s Advocacy Institute, 2013).

Children’s Institute (2013) explains that THP Plus Foster Care was severely underfunded and could not meet the demand. Not having enough THP Plus Foster Care placements negatively impacted housing options on the onset of implementation, resulting in SILP being the most common placement. Within this placement, youth have fewer resources and are required to live more independently than those who are awarded THP Plus Foster Care placements.

While housing is the primary concern for emancipating foster youth, obtaining
life skills, education, and employment training are also heavily addressed (California Department of Social Services, 2013). Living skills like, money management, resume building knowledge, educational goals, and social skills are of primary concern. In addition, the importance of incorporating interpersonal skills like communication and conflict resolution are equally essential components to long-term success. Without proper training and support, it is unlikely that youth will master the above-mentioned life skills, thus severely hampering interpersonal growth (Hook & Courtney, 2011).

**State Comparison of Extended Foster Care**

California is not the only state to implement a support plan beyond the age of 18. As of November 2014, 22 states and the District of Columbia now receive federal reimbursements through Title IV-E, allowing foster youth to remain in care past the age of 18 (National Conference of State Legislators, 2014). Children with continued support beyond the age of 18 reported significantly improved outcomes. Illinois is an example of extended foster care vastly improving results in all areas including education, mental health, poverty prevention, criminality, and pregnancy. Seen as a pioneer in successful emancipation efforts, Illinois does not have a work/education requirement for youth to remain in care until the age of 21. Advocates maintain that work/education requirements are not an indication of successful transition while participating in the program. Instead, Illinois focuses on providing mental health and mentoring services in addition to financial assistance (Hook & Courtney, 2011). Also, states like Arizona and Florida have initiated expanded ILP services to assist higher educational goals and obtain vocational training. The Children’s Action Alliance (2005) highlights the contractual, voluntary program in
Arizona that provides $558 per month to a youth with the understanding that he or she must be actively meeting educational goals or be participating in vocational training. Similarly, Florida provides funding for youth seeking a postsecondary education or special training for a particular vocation.

Initial indications suggest that youth enjoy far better outcomes with additional support beyond age 18, although little research to confirm these improved outcomes has been conducted. Researchers found a positive correlation between extended foster care and long-term employment in Illinois. Furthermore, support offered through extended foster care led to some youth obtaining high school diplomas or pursuing postsecondary education. It is estimated that there is an association between attainment of higher educational goals and better employment outcomes (Hook & Courtney, 2011). In addition to investigating educational achievement, this study will incorporate the youth’s perspective on supportive services and overall satisfaction of the program. Also, investigators will initiate feedback and recommendations from youth on successful practices and needed areas of improvement.

The Children’s Advocacy Institute (2013) received feedback from youth on resources they are looking forward to using while participating in EFC. The popular resources available allow youth to continue their education and help them to secure housing. Youth also expressed that they value the support of their social workers to accomplish their goals past the age of 18, but they did feel that supports should be put in place past the age of 21. This study will investigate the types of services that are the most useful, as well as services they identify were missing. Also, due to the lack of
overall satisfaction, we will address the involvement and support level of the social worker from the youth's point of view and address the quality of services and how they assisted in achieving identified goals.

Children’s Advocacy Institute (2013) identifies the most common concern expressed by youth centers around the lack of preparation for tasks such as paying rent on time and budgeting finances. Youth revealed that they felt ill prepared to complete these tasks. They also revealed that they did not feel as if they knew what was expected of them as AB 12 youth, and did not know what resources were available to them. This study will further examine whether youth felt that the goals of AB 12 were clearly identified and whether program criteria were explained adequately. The theoretical perspectives used in this study, including ecological systems theory, attachment theory, and social capital theory, will be used to provide a framework to facilitate a deeper understanding of outcomes. Also, we will explore recommendations from youth for future practice.

**Theoretical Framework**

The ecological systems perspective views human behavior and actions as the direct result of interactions between social and organizational systems. Systems theory suggests that the way in which a person operates in the world is a product of interactions that occur as influenced by systemic factors. All systems, social and structural, are made up of subsystems that adjust to the environment and each other. As each subsystem can impact an individual, an individual, in turn, can affect a subsystem (Hutchison, 2013).
Ecological Systems Theory

Systems theory applies to youth in extended foster care because these youth spend a great deal of their childhood and early adulthood navigating multiple systems that impact their lives. Family, foster homes, social workers, court, school, advocates, and employers are examples of the added macro (cultural and societal factors that oversee the other systems), meso (the link between micro systems that directly affects the youth), and microsystems (personal and immediate environment). Collectively, these systems affect outcomes for youth exposed to foster care, and in turn systems are affected by foster youth as their outcomes directly impact future services (Hong, Algood, Chiu, & Lee, 2011).

Affected Microsystems. Often, children who spend an extended amount of time in foster care experience interactions between multiple caregivers that affect outcomes as they transition into early adulthood. Ecological systems theory maintains that positive or negative interactions within a child’s microsystem can directly affect other systems, thus affecting the child’s outcome. Multiple placements and loss of biological family contact cause emotional trauma, making attachment difficult. Instability within the microsystem often leaves few options for support, thus making EFC a necessary choice.

Affected Mesosystems. When multiple microsystems are unstable, meso and macrosystems are affected. Although direct relationships with family and caregivers are considered primary in social development, links between systems can also affect developmental outcomes. Examination of mesosystems may provide a context for understanding interactions between microsystems, such as foster parents and social...
workers. These relationships determine the continuity of cultural and social development, which in turn can aid or hinder transition into adulthood. Unstable microsystems create trauma and disruptions to the mesosystem, resulting in feelings of instability and distrust. Achieving a stabilizing mesosystem requires that instability within the microsystems be addressed, as all systems are interconnected. In EFC, this could be done by encouraging youth to identify or recruit support systems, and by supporting solidarity among those systems (Bronfenbrenner, 2006).

**Affected Macrosystems.** Macrosystems encompass policies and laws that directly affect the meso and microsystems in which foster youth operate. California’s Fostering Connections Act was enacted in 2010, directly addressing California’s foster youth and the lack of stability they experience when emancipating from care. Ambitious in its approach, California enacted the Fostering Connections Act (AB 12) in late 2010 and began implementation in January of 2012. The major paradigm shift from dependent minor, to non-dependent minor, changed traditional social worker roles. EFC created a marked change in institutional responsibility that necessitated workers to change both their roles and the way in which they provided services. Social workers, primarily focused on safety and protection, now had to adopt the roles of a mentors and teachers. This paradigm shift proved difficult as many workers reported that they were not properly trained to understand the unique challenges of the population. The macrosystem response to issues related to emancipating foster youth altered the subsystems that provide essential services to youth, while simultaneously changing the culture and goal of child welfare (Courtney, Dworsky, & Napolitano, 2013).
Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory maintains that gaining membership in an organization or community is essential to success. In addition, if a person falls on hard times, the social capital they have acquired will provide a valuable support system and a strong foundation to get back on their feet. Social Capital Theory maintains that children with conscientious parents or caretakers who help facilitate peer relationships and devote time to parent organizations, teacher associations, and sports teams are investing in future social capital for that child. These parents recognize that family and community relationships will insulate the child as they transition into adulthood by providing rich social networks and civic associations that can be called upon in a crisis or leveraged for material gain. For many youths transitioning into adulthood, an abundance of social capital is a major factor in the ability to take advantage of opportunities and combat poverty and vulnerability (Narayan, 1997).

Social networks take an extended amount of time to establish. Acquiring them typically requires the assistance of others with networks of contacts willing to bring forth an outsider. Foster youth often lack these networks and are actively excluded from obtaining the information or resources necessary to obtain decent employment and housing. In addition, numerous placement changes have placed foster youth in a vulnerable position of lacking community ties needed to begin building social capital, as well as the knowledge of how begin those relationships. As a result, emancipating foster youth develop peer relationships with other youth in similar positions who also do not have social capital. This precludes aging foster youth from gaining the social capital
necessary to take advantage of opportunities provided to them, thus trapping them in a system of poverty (Wilson 1996).

**Analytical Grounded Theory**

The purpose of this study was to explore youths’ experiences as non-minor dependents and to identify un-met needs and challenges with the program. Once identified, recommendations would give legislative and county officials a starting point for making improvements to the existing program. Grounded theory allows the investigators to delve deeper into understanding the population through qualitative research. In narrowing our study to experiences within Sacramento County extended foster care program, we can deepen our understanding of perceived needs using comparison analysis within and across interviews.

**Qualitative Approach**

The qualitative approach necessary for grounded theory allows the investigator to connect with the participant in a natural environment, coming into contact with the participant’s lived experience. At times, interactions can bring forth powerful emotions as participants guide the depth of the interview and decide how much they want to disclose. Through personal interactions, further comparisons and phenomena can be found, leading the researcher to understand the full scope of the youth’s perception of needs. Procedural practices for grounded theory include data collection through interviews, providing context to data, and eventually utilizing the above measures to provide analysis and recommendations.

**Finding Themes.** While qualitative research encompasses multiple aspects of a
person’s story, grounded theory presents the findings from a multidimensional perspective, establishing patterns that are context-specific. The descriptive data is analyzed and assigned themes in an organized system that identifies similarities and classifies them. Themes are essential in understanding normative responses versus exceptions. Without themes, a researcher could make broad assumptions based on one participant’s account of their time in EFC.

Similar to process recordings, grounded theory emphasizes a comprehensive picture of youth and their experiences. Although a hypothesis is developed and utilized as a starting point, it is fluid and can be modified to fit new circumstances. While traditional research uses a rigid approach, grounded theory employs context of the research to develop a theory. The fluidity of grounded theory is based on the understanding that participants are inextricably part of a larger system that influences their experiences. Often, researchers make the research fit the hypothesis, rather than developing the theory fit to the research results. Utilizing the grounded theory approach allows the research to be practice-focused and applicable to a social work and policy setting. Although there is flexibility when using grounded theory, researchers must remain focused and not lose their analytical stance. Participants often share compelling information, and it has been difficult at times to remain exclusively focused on EFC program experiences.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

To understand the experiences of youth participating in extended foster care (EFC) in Sacramento County, semi-structured, qualitative interviews were conducted. To gain a better understanding of the youths’ baseline when entering the program, initial focus was placed on youths’ identified goals when entering EFC. Questions were then transitioned to ascertain whether youth felt supported in obtaining goals and services they received while in the program along with the challenges to obtaining services. The interview ended with youth recommendations for better program implementation in the future. Questions were designed specifically for foster youth who had participated in EFC, with the goal of obtaining firsthand information about their experiences in the program. Youth were asked to provide input on the utilization of services and resources, identification and completion of goals identified within the plan, an opinion of the program, and recommendations for improvement of extended foster care.

Population and Sample

The survey was administered to 11 former foster youth and participants of the extended foster care program in Sacramento County. Youth were recruited from Adolfo Services, a permanent supportive housing program in Sacramento County that serves emancipated foster youth who are homeless or have aged out of EFC. Youth were also recruited from Wind Youth Services, an organization providing supportive services and opportunities to youth experiencing homelessness. The above programs work directly with transitioning foster youth with a primary goal of providing support services. Staff
coordinators from both organizations, including youth advocates, assisted in distributing flyers for interview recruitment. Each flyer explained the focus of the study and offered a small financial incentive in the form of a $10 gift card to Subway. Approximately 25 former foster youth from Adolfo and 25 youth from Wind Services were given flyers by staff members informing youth of the option to participate in the study. Recruitment numbers are a rough estimate, as the population is often transient, and workers were unsure of how many youth were given recruitment materials more than once. Of the estimated 50 youth invited to participate, 18 youth made contact with researchers and 11 youth agreed to participate, resulting in a 22% response rate.

**Research Design**

Using qualitative and grounded theory methodology, researchers conducted interviews utilizing research instruments consisting of semi-structured, open-ended questions. This narrative approach allowed participants to convey their experiences to the investigator. Through this interaction the researcher will begin to understand emerging themes present throughout the interviews (Gilgun, 2004). The goal of this study was to understand the experiences, perceptions, and needs of youth who completed extended foster care in Sacramento County. Participants were asked to volunteer for a 30-45 minute interview, conducted face to face, with one of the participating researchers. Brief demographic questions were asked to identify gender, ethnicity, and age.

**Sampling Procedures**

The study population was limited to youth who had completed extended foster care in Sacramento County. Researchers indicated the study requirements on recruitment
material and confirmed via telephone or email that participants met these criteria. The confidentiality of youth in foster care was a barrier to recruitment, as participants could not be solicited directly. Flyers with the investigators’ contact information were distributed, allowing participants to contact investigators directly. A non-probability sampling method, also known as convenience sampling, was used as the sampling type. Convenience sampling relies on members from the population who are willing and conveniently able to participate in a study. To participate in the study, youth must have participated in extended foster care in Sacramento County, be over the age of 18, and not currently be participants in the EFC program.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Data was collected through face-to-face interviews at locations convenient to the participants, such as coffee houses, restaurants, and community outreach centers. Before agreeing to a meeting area, participants were informed of the sensitive nature of the study so that they could pick a location that assured confidentiality. The researchers had no prior relationship with the participants, nor did they have any prior knowledge of the participants’ case history with child welfare. Each participant was verbally informed that his or her participation was entirely voluntary and confidential and that they could stop the interview at any time. An informed consent form was presented and signed by each participant. Researchers provided a copy of the informed consent along with local resources to mental health agencies should the interview trigger past traumatic experiences.

Interviews took approximately 30-45 minutes to complete, and each interview
was digitally recorded. Recorded interviews were only available to researchers and were transcribed, creating a Microsoft Word document upon completion. Once interviews were transcribed, all audio recordings were deleted. Transcribed copies were stored on password-protected files, on computers to which only researchers had access. After interviews had been conducted, recorded, and transcribed, documents were downloaded and coded for analysis. Researchers, looking for themes and keywords, coded each transcribed interview. Commonalities were highlighted, allowing for comparison between subjects, which enabled investigators to draw conclusions and determine recommendations. All transcribed interviews were deleted after they were coded and analyzed.

Protection of Human Subjects

The researchers completed an application for the Protection of Human Subjects in October of 2015 under the supervision of our thesis advisor, Dr. Jennifer Price-Wolf. The application was reviewed and approved by Dr. Price-Wolf, then submitted to the California State University of Sacramento, Division of Social Work Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects. An approval email dated November 10, 2015, confirmed that the application for this study was granted exempt status. Protocol number 15-16-012 was given as the human subjects reference protocol number for this study. Exempt status was given due to the fact that the study presented no physical risk, as participants only provided verbal feedback through a short interview process.

A minimal psychological risk was present due to possible stress or trauma resulting from recounting experiences in care. Talking about goals, successes, and
failures while in extended foster care could bring up anxiety. However, the investigators were sensitive to possible signs of trauma, which minimized risk. Precautions included allowing participants to exit the interview at any time and pausing or stopping the discussion if participants demonstrated signs of stress, anxiety, or any change of demeanor that could be detrimental. Local resources for mental health practitioners were provided to all participants in the event that they felt traumatized or stressed as a result of the interview.

**Risk of Privacy**

The risk of a violation of privacy was considered minimal, and investigators took every precaution to assure confidentiality. Researchers collected only vague demographic information without names or any identifying information to further minimize risk. Also, any demographic information was kept separate from interview data and was entered into different systems, without any ability to link the information together. No identifiable information such as social security numbers, names, occupations, addresses, or places of employment was asked for or recorded. Maintaining confidentiality was critical, and all recordings and data were stored in a locked cabinet at a researcher’s residence until they had been appropriately coded and analyzed. Once analysis was complete, all recordings and transcriptions were destroyed.

**Limitations of the Study**

Limitations of this study include a small, limited sample size, only from Sacramento County. Such a small sample size cannot adequately represent all of the experiences of youth who participated in extended foster care. Ideally, every graduate of
extended foster care in Sacramento County would have been interviewed to gather a comprehensive view of perceived needs of the youth. Additionally, the lack of comparison data detailing youth experiences in other counties limits reliability. Another limitation exists due to a lack of historical data regarding outcomes of youth graduating from extended foster care. The lack of data makes the determination of long-term outcomes difficult and reduces the youth’s ability to retrospectively identify needs as time progresses. Furthermore, a lack of EFC data hinders the scope of analysis and presents a significant obstacle to finding meaningful trends and comparisons between emancipated foster youth who left the system at age 18 and young people who emancipated after participating in extended foster care. Lastly, this study relies solely on self-reported data. Self-reported data is limited in reliability, as it is subject to the participant’s bias and cannot be independently verified. The researchers addressed the above limitations by asking every participant the same questions and looking for trends within the responses. The overall findings of the qualitative interviews, combined with the literature review, provided a thorough examination of extended foster care in Sacramento County and the role of the program in providing favorable outcomes for foster youth.
Chapter 4

RESULTS

For the purposes of this study, basic demographic information was collected through a three-question demographic survey. All participants in this study were former foster youth of Sacramento County. These former foster youth entered extended foster care at the age of 18 and emancipated at the age of 21. Former foster youth were asked to disclose their age along with the ethnicity and gender they identify with.

Eight out of 11 (73%) former foster youth interviewed identified as female, and three out of 11 (27%) identified as male. Five out of 11 (45%) identified as African American, two out of 11 (18%) identified as mixed race, one out of 11 (.09%) identified as Japanese, one out of 11 (.09%) identified as Chinese, one out of 11 (.09%) identified as Hispanic, and one out of 11 (.09%) identified as Latina. Eight out of 11 (73%) reported being 21 years old; three out of 11 (27%) reported being 22 years old.

Qualitative Interviews

Qualitative interviews were conducted with 11 former foster youth of Sacramento County for the purpose of better understanding the goals these youth had when they entered the program, perceptions of support throughout the program, resource needs while in the program, perception of personal success, and what changes these youth would like to see to the program. Participants were asked a series of six questions that were intended to answer these questions. Throughout the interviews, several themes were found. For example, the major goals youth identified were education, employment, housing, and transportation. The main challenges youth experienced within the program
were inconsistency with social workers, variation of services and resources offered, and an all-around lack of life skills offered or learned by the youth. The next theme that was found was assets, including self-motivation and social connections that improved success. Additionally, every participant interviewed offered recommendations for changes and also stated that they would encourage other foster youth to participate in this program.

**Identified Goals**

All 11 participants were able to identify what goals that had when they entered the program. Although goals amongst the youth varied, there was overlap within goals, and throughout all 11 interviews only five separate goals were identified. All 11 youth interviewed identified a goal of completing or continuing their education. Many youth completed the goal of graduating high school but later ended up dropping out of college due to feeling overwhelmed with being on their own and not being able to maintain their finances.

**Education**

All 11 youth interviewed identified that they had a goal of either finishing high school or beginning college. Seven out of 11 youth (64%) identified the goal of completing high school. Interviewee number two stated, “I needed to graduate high school. I was way behind; like I was technically a senior but really a junior, like beginning of junior year.” This statement showed the researchers that this youth valued education and felt that a high school degree was needed to gain success as an adult. Interviewee number one stated, “My main goal was to graduate high school. It was my senior year and I was in and out of jail. I actually went to jail and graduated while I was
in jail.” Again, the information from this youth showed the researchers that no matter the struggles these youth face, graduating high school is a priority and is valued. Eleven out of 11 youth (100%) reported that they completed their goal of high school education and either received their high school diploma or their General Education Degree (GED).

When it came to a college education, five out of 11 (45%) identified beginning college as a goal. However, several youth reported that they were unable to complete this goal due to the lack of motivation and financial support. Interviewee number six explained, “It was weird before I turned 18. I had to grow up fast. Once I turned 18, I wanted to be a kid because I never had the ability to do it before. So I dropped out of college. I just needed a break.” Interviewee number three stated, “I couldn’t finish college because of my work schedule. Basically I had to work to pay bills ya know, and school was getting me nowhere. I wish I had stayed in school though cuz it’s really hard now that I don’t get any financial help other than grants and stuff.” This showed the researchers that no matter how much these youth value continuing their education, they lack the financial support necessary to accomplish the goal of completing college.

**Employment**

Nine out of 11 youth (81%) reported having the goal of gaining employment. Being in the foster care system, most of these youth do not have families to fall back on; therefore, employment is a crucial part of their survival. Some youth explained that their social workers were able to provide resources to help them search for employment. Interviewee number six shared, “They connected me with a one-stop shop to get employment.” Interviewee number two shared that experience and stated, “She hooked
me up with resume people.” This showed the researchers that both the youth and the social workers saw employment as necessary for establishing self-sufficiency as an adult. While employment was a primary goal, even those who obtained jobs did not necessarily keep them over a long period of time. Interviewee number nine shared her struggle of survival as she stated, “I was able to fulfill my goals. I ended up losing my job and everything went downhill after that.” This showed the researchers that no matter how pertinent to survival a goal may be, the youths’ lack of support and life skills still interferes with their ability to maintain goals such as employment.

**Housing**

When asked what their goals were, only seven out of 11 youth (64%) identified finding housing as one of their primary goals. Throughout the interviews, 11 out of 11 youth (100%) described housing as a goal. Interviewee number seven explained, “My first goal was to find an apartment because I had recently got kicked out of my group home. I had a really close friend whose mom let me live there, but it was really awkward. I needed my own place.” She went on to explain, “Being a foster kid living in someone else’s house your whole life, you feel like you’re always tippy-toeing around feeling like you’re on pins and needles because if you do something wrong you might get kicked out. And then what?” Although establishing housing was a goal that all 11 youth (100%) shared, all of the youth ran into some kind of challenge when trying to establish housing. Interviewee number eight stated, “My social worker would pick me up and take me to look at apartments, but nothing was doable with my income.” Interviewee number five stated, “I had no credit and not much of an income so I basically settled for an
apartment that wasn’t in a good neighborhood.” Interviewee number seven shared, “I was freshly 18, fresh credit, no proof that I was responsible, so I was getting declined left and right.” This showed researchers that housing was a particularly difficult goal, with substantial barriers that prevented youth from obtaining safe and secure housing that they could maintain while participants in the program and after they graduated from the program.

**Transportation**

Six out of 11 youth (55%) identified the goal of obtaining a drivers license and/or a vehicle for transportation. This showed the researchers that transportation is something that these youth value. As explained by interviewee number five, “Jobs require transportation. How I would be employable without my license? How would I get to work? The buses are not reliable, and I can’t depend on someone for a ride. That is just not realistic. But my social worker didn’t help me do this. I was just on my own trying to figure out how to get my license and a car.” Interviewee number eight also stated, “I never got my license.” What the researchers learned from this is that only two out of the six youth (33%) who identified transportation-related goals were able to fulfill them. We can also link the barriers to obtaining housing and employment to the youths’ lack of transportation resources.

**Challenges Youth Experience While in the Program**

Unfortunately, a major theme that was seen throughout all of the interviews was challenges that the youth experience. These challenges arose from various things, but the three most prominent contributions to these challenges were inconsistency with social
workers, varied resources offered, and an overall lack of sustainable life skills that these youth had by the time they emancipated from extended foster care at the age of 21 years old.

**Inconsistency with social workers**

Discussing his social worker, interviewee number one stated, “I would have to pressure him into working with me or helping me. I would have to show up at the office. I would have to hunt him down for real. If he wasn’t at the office I would walk straight down to the courtroom cuz I knew he would be there. I would sit out there until he was out of court. I would be like so what’s up I thought we were meeting today. He would always forget about our dates we would set up.” Interviewee number one stated, “You know I was still in high school trying to learn, obviously my mom wasn’t there to teach me and when they give you a social worker, you think they would spend more time, especially because you know there is no one else. But in all reality it’s not like that.”

Interviewee number three stated, “It’s not like they tell you how to do anything. They just expect you to have everything already done even if you don’t know what you’re doing. See I would have to ask other people. My social worker would visit sometimes but would mostly call. It wasn’t like she cared; they just needed something to put in the system for themselves.” Seven out of 11 youth (64%) reported not feeling supported by their social worker. In reality, if youth perception dictates that their social worker is inconsistent or too busy to help, they are not fully benefiting from extended foster care.

**Variation on services and resources offered**

Another challenge that was reported was that youth felt they were not benefiting
from all of the resources they were entitled to as extended foster care youth. Many youth even explained that no one ever told them what resources they had available to them, but that they heard stories of other youth benefiting from things such as bus passes and other services that they personally were not offered or were told they were not allowed to receive. For example, interviewee number five stated, “I needed a bus pass and supposedly we were supposed to be able to get those. I asked for it at first and she told me that since I had aged out and that I was an adult that is what adults do. Transportation is on you is what she said. And so I worked on that you know but it was hard. I needed the bus pass to get to school and to get groceries. Those things became difficult because I could not always afford it with my budget.” Interviewee number nine stated, “I heard stories of people getting help with getting their license but that never happened for me.”

**Lack of life skills**

Life skills are not only an important aspect of one’s everyday life; they’re also a key part of advancing and reaching goals and self-sufficiency as an adult. Throughout most interviews, the researchers were confronted with the unfortunate fact that these youth felt that they lacked the life skills needed to be self-sufficient adults. Many youth reported not feeling like there were opportunities to learn basic adult life skills, or that they were too embarrassed to ask for assistance with everyday life skills such as budgeting, filling out applications, and time management. Interviewee number eight shared, “I didn’t really need any resources—I think it was mostly that I needed her to help me get to my goals. I didn’t need her to do it for me but help me get to them, but I don’t want to sound like a baby.” She continued by stating, “It was hard when I first
moved into my apartment. I didn’t know how to pay bills. I had to learn that by myself, and it would have been nice to have more support.” This showed the researchers that sometimes what’s needed by the youth isn’t services or resources; sometimes what’s needed is just a helping hand to teach skills that some youth just don’t have due to growing up in the foster care system. Interviewee number five stated, “I was still in high school. I had to enroll myself. I asked her to come with me and help me and she was not trying to do that and I really needed help with paperwork. I don’t know why but paperwork really frustrates me.” This is another example of a struggle that these youth face, not having family members to teach and support them once they exit their foster home at the age of 18.

**Assets That Improved Success**

Throughout the interviews, researchers were presented with information that showed that some youth had certain assets in their lives that improved their success in reaching goals and feeling self-sufficient. Those assets included youth being self-motivated and having supportive connections in their lives.

**Self-motivation**

Interviewee number nine shared, “Yeah I had a little push but overall it was me wanting to do those things and getting them done. So yeah I got established. I felt pretty good afterwards, you know. I set goals and met them.” Youth that shared this type of self-motivation were more likely to achieve the goals that they set. On the other side, youth who were not self-motivated were not as successful in reaching their goals. Interviewee number five stated, “No matter how hard they pushed me, I just wasn’t
ready. I still wanted to be a kid. I didn’t want to work. I wanted to stay home and be a kid.”

**Social connections**

Interviewee number four stated, “My goals were to graduate high school and college. I lived with my foster parents until I was 20, so they really helped me to finish high school and enroll in college. I am still currently taking classes.” This resonated with the researchers that feelings supported with social connections helped youth succeed in accomplishing their goals. Another youth stated, “I lived with my auntie. I still saw my mom. I still saw my family, so my situation wasn’t as deep as some of the other ones. I already had support. I already had everything I needed.” This youth was able to complete all of her goals and is currently in her senior year at a university. This demonstrates that with social supports, youth are much more likely to succeed. On the opposite side of this, we see that the lack of social support makes it much harder for youth to feel supported and motivated to accomplish goals. This is evident by the statements of interviewee number one, who explained; “There was no one to show me how to sign up for college when I was done. I think I had one meeting with my social worker and he just gave me a bunch of paperwork. I couldn’t make it out. He just told me to fill it out and I was just like that’s it? I have no one.” Even among former foster youth there were disparities in social resources, which impacted their ability to feel supported and accomplish goals.

**Recommended Changes**

The last question that was posed to the youth was: Are there any changes you
would like to make to the extended foster care program? Eleven out of 11 (100%) of youth said yes and gave examples of the changes they would make. Many youth identified changes to similar areas within the program, such as: social workers providing more support. Interviewee number one stated, “They need someone to walk us through a lot of this stuff. A lot of these young adults aren’t really ready for a grand going into their accounts once a month. We need to have life-skill classes offered that are mandatory once a week, and we need to have the caseworker drive around and show us how to apply. We need stuff like that, like what a parent would do, because all of us young adults are missing our parents.” Interviewee number eight simply stated, “Just more support from the social workers, like some people don’t know how to do certain things, we just need more help.” Interviewee number nine stated, “I didn’t feel prepared enough to live on my own at 18. I needed more help. I would want them to offer more help.” Interviewee number three stated, “Kids that age need time to figure some stuff out on their own. If they ask you for help it’s because they need it, they aren’t asking just for the fun of it. People don’t understand how hard it is. We struggle with issues, and being completely independent is just not realistic.” Overall, these suggested changes especially relate to the youth feeling unsupported and not prepared for living independently once they have emancipated from the program.

Lastly, the major theme found within the recommended changes that youth identified for extended foster care was that extended foster care make changes in the financial assistance that is provided from the program. Throughout the interviews, many youth described struggling with not having the life skills needed to manage their money,
or with the allotted stipend not being a realistic amount. Interviewee number five stated, “I think we should have gotten some sort of a clothing allowance. Getting $1,000 monthly is not enough to pay bills and live.” Interviewee number six shared, “If I could change the AB 12 program in any way, to be honest I would make it so they don’t give the money away so easy because like me I used the program in ways it wasn’t supposed to be used I abused it.” This showed the researchers that these recommended changes are not just selfish suggestions, but changes they believe will help youth become better prepared to live independently once they emancipate from this program.

Although all of the youth identified changes they would want to make and identified shortcomings they experienced while in the program, 11 out of 11 youth (100%) stated they would recommend participating in extended foster care to other youth. Interviewee number six stated, “Yes, yes, it is one thing to be in foster care without AB 12 and age out and have nothing. They at least provide a little bit of cash, help you get a job and get into school.” Interviewee number seven stated, “Yeah, without a doubt I would encourage other youth to participate.” This tells the researchers that while there are flaws in the system, these youth are benefiting to some extent from the services they are receiving as non-minor dependents in Sacramento County.
Chapter 5

CONCLUSIONS AND FINDINGS

Eleven face-to-face qualitative interviews were conducted with former non-minor dependents of Sacramento County in order to better understand the perceived experiences and resource needs of this population. After analyzing the data, researchers compared the findings with existing literature in order to better understand what future research should be conducted. Although the literature is limited, some similarities were found between the interviews and literature, such as: the youth’s current life situation; the lack of support connections youth had in their lives; rate of homelessness of former foster youth; and some benefits of Assembly Bill 12. Additionally, there were discrepancies between the literature and the interviews. For example, the literature explained that this policy had been put into place with one of the primary purposes being to teach youth life skills in order to gain success. However, some youth interviewed noted that they did not receive effective life-skills training while they were non-minor dependents.

Analysis of Data

Research indicated a general lack of life skills that surprised researchers due to the intent of Assembly Bill 12 and prior legislation dating back to 1986 that emphasized teaching life skills to transitioning youth so they may gain independence (Scannapieco, Scannapieco, & Schagrin, 1995). Additionally, living skills are a primary concern, as long-term success is dependent on mastering such skills. Without mastering them, youth will severely struggle in adulthood (Hook & Courtney, 2011). Further research is needed due to the obvious gap in youths’ experiences and the intentions of the policy and could
be used to address inconsistencies. The following findings may provide insight into avenues for further research examining the experiences of non-minor dependents, as well as potential implications for social work practice and policy efforts in this area.

**Goals for Self-Sufficiency**

Through qualitative interviews, researchers found that most participants identified their primary goals as education, housing, and transportation. Youth identified these goals with the belief that once they were met, the youth would be closer to self-sufficiency and living an independent life as an adult. The fact that these former foster youth identified these goals was not surprising to the researchers, as literature notes that former foster youth transition successfully if they have secured housing, graduated high school, and are economically self-sufficient. The link between the literature and the interviews shows us that youth also identify these goals as the foundation to their future. From a strengths-based approach, it is a positive attribute that they can identify their top needs, as it indicates that these needs will be prioritized while the youth are receiving services (Sacramento County Children’s Coalition, 2013).

As literature indicates, many former foster youth had little or no family support to return to after receiving services (Courtney et al., 2001). This suggests that these youth, despite an extended time in care, are a particularly vulnerable population, with diminished access to resources in comparison to peers who were not involved in the foster care system. It is consequently not surprising that many of those in our sample struggled with homelessness after the age of 21. The experience of our population was not unique, as literature revealed that trauma exposure and a lack of supportive
connections attributes to a high rate of poverty and homelessness after emancipation (Bass, Shields, & Behrman, 2004). Most of the youth interviewed identified that at some point in their adulthood they did not have permanent housing. In addition, almost all participants were still struggling, and, despite services, were unable to secure stable housing. Unfortunately, this was not surprising, as the literature estimates that 50% of emancipated youth in Sacramento County will become homeless within one year (Sacramento County Children’s Coalition, 2013).

Unfortunately, our findings also suggest that not all of the youth receiving services felt that their social workers supported them in accomplishing their goals. This was surprising to the researchers, given that literature found that California’s intention of implementing Assembly Bill 12 was to provide aid by linking youth to resources, providing case management, and allocating a monthly stipend (California Fostering Connections to Success Act of 2010, 2011). Future research should emphasize what skills social workers should utilize for improved engagement and assessment in order to pinpoint what can be done to help youth become successful in accomplishing identified goals. With further research, these researchers believe that the gap in services and support can be filled and a higher percentage of youth will feel as if they have support.

**Challenges Youth Experienced**

Through these qualitative interviews, youth shared several challenges throughout their experiences as non-minor dependents of Sacramento County. Most participants shared at least one challenge they experienced as a non-minor dependent. Youth shared stories of inconsistency with social workers, variation of services offered, and an overall
lack of life skills taught and learned. These youth struggled not only with the scars and life lessons they carried from being in the foster care system, but now too with the challenges of being adults and with the barriers to success within the extended foster care system. Research findings were consistent with literature explaining that youth often lack social and life skills that assist in overcoming obstacles to a successful transition into adulthood (Courtney, Piliavin, Grogan-Kaylor, & Nesmith, 2001). Poor problem-solving skills increase the lack of stability. Add to that foster youths’ lack of supportive connections, and the child welfare system continues to be deficient in achieving appropriate outcome for children (Berzin, 2008). Further research should begin to address the readiness of foster youth and provide recommendations on best practices to adequately provide services that encourage independence without overwhelming transitioning youth.

In addition to not always feeling supported in reaching their goals, many youth reported problems in their relationships with their social workers, including most youth not feeling connected with their social workers or not feeling like they could ask them anything at any time. Also, many participants identified feelings of not wanting to ask their social workers certain questions because of being embarrassed or ashamed that they did not know how to do something. Participants reported that they were not comfortable asking for help with tasks like filling out job and housing applications and balancing finances. Many youth identified a time when they felt that their social workers were rushed in doing their jobs, and felt as if they were a burden. Several youth identified feelings of confusion as they witnessed other participants in EFC obtain services and
resources that they themselves were not offered. Also, youth reported being told at times, without explanation, that they were not allowed to obtain particular resources. The discrepancy in service provision surprised researchers. Nowhere in the literature, other than housing, was anything specifically stated about eligibility criteria for resources like bus passes, furniture stipends, or emancipation baskets, which include pots and pans and other household items. Legislative review stated that youth who choose to take part in extended foster care services would be afforded benefits to assist in educational or employment opportunities (California Department of Social Services, 2011). It is unclear why service provision varied so much between participants, as they were all from the same county. It is possible that service provision varies due to the varying styles of different social workers or the culture of different supervisors. It is also possible that some social workers may not have been adequately educated on services and resources available to youth. Other possibilities include youth not fully participating in services, leading to social workers not extending further resources. Further research is needed to assess variables in service provisions between clients to determine if certain youth are not receiving adequate case management, or if the variation exists due to youth participation.

**Attributes that Lead to Successful Outcomes**

Our findings suggest that youth attributed personal assets, such as determination and perseverance, to factors that helped facilitate their success in EFC. Many youth shared that they did not have family or supportive connections that could have been assets to gaining independence as adults. Instances of frustration, not only with their social workers, but also with themselves, were expressed due to feelings that they lacked
the necessary tools or knowledge to know what they were supposed to do. They reported that often their social workers just “handed” them papers and told them to do things; however, they lacked the skills to complete those tasks. Several interviewees shared that they felt lost and didn’t have family members or friends who they could ask for help if they needed transportation or information on how to pay bills. This was not surprising, as literature highlights that youth who have grown up in the foster care system have poor permanent connections as a result of multiple placements and past traumas and are ill equipped to navigate adulthood (Mallon, 1998). Although literature suggests that emancipated youth lack supportive influences, researchers were surprised that a lack of support or help was the primary concern of participants as they reflected on their time in EFC. Future research should explore how social workers view their roles in non-minor dependents’ lives. For example, some social workers may take an active role in helping youth, while others may view their role as a backup if additional support is needed.

Theoretical Framework

Systems theory maintains that human behavior is affected by the systems that individuals come in contact with. Children who have been exposed to the foster care system have far more interactions with larger macrosystems than their peers and have generally acquired insight on how to navigate larger system changes. For example, the youth in our study noted how quickly extended foster care was implemented and were also aware that quick implementation directly affected the service provided. Many also mentioned understanding the intention behind AB 12, including helping transitioning youth achieve financial independence and secure stable housing. Although many
understood the intention, few felt that Sacramento County did a sufficient job in making sure they were meeting the goals of the program as indicated in the legislation. They attributed poor implementation to a lack of appropriate services available, mainly affordable housing, job attainment assistance, help with educational goals, and mentor support.

Previous research seems to support this view, as there seems to be a lack of congruency of program implementation by individual social workers (Children’s Advocacy Institute, 2013). In our interviews, only a few youth described acquiring significant independent living skills through the program. Seven youth maintained that they were not supplied or not told about extended services that would improve living skills, while one youth disclosed that a social worker actively kept them from acquiring basic services. According to systems theory, inconsistencies in program implementation directly affect outcomes for consumers. This is demonstrated by the lack of knowledge of services and how to access needed services, as social workers often are the only agents that provide much needed information. For example, youth identified barriers to acquiring transportation or bus passes needed to get to work and school. Although such passes are readily available, many youth were told by social workers that they were not eligible, or they were not allowed to receive them. Without transportation, youth could not apply for jobs or attend classes as required to stay in the program. This example demonstrates how system failures can directly affect outcomes for transitioning youth. Those youth who were provided monthly bus passes and other services related to acquiring independent living skills reported increased achievements in attaining
employment and educational goals and had a better overall view of EFC.

The structured requirements of EFC were identified as the leading causes for academic success among the participants. All participants graduated high school and disclosed that they remained in school primarily because doing so met the requirements of EFC. Seven participants doubted that they would have finished high school if doing so was not a primary factor in eligibility for the program. Although many identified graduating high school as their “main goal,” many doubted that they would have been able to accomplish such a task without EFC. This demonstrates that larger systems policies can increase positive outcomes in certain areas despite implementation problems, given the participants are prepared to accomplish the goal.

**Systems Theory**

All but one youth interviewed reported a strained relationship with their microsystem. Multiple placement changes in adolescence were attributed to poor micro connections, resulting in youth feeling disconnected from immediate support systems. This was consistent with literature and suggests a need for an increase in mentor relationships (Wulcyzn, 2004). In fact, seven youth identified the lack of a mentor as a primary barrier to achieving desired life skills and recommended such services in future service provision. In addition, only four youth reported a relationship with their family of origin. Without strong system relationships, these youth will not enjoy the comfort of having a safe person or family to fall back on in times of crisis. As a result, 10 of the 11 youth interviewed disclosed that they did not feel their housing situation was “secure” and worried about stable housing in the future. Our findings consequently support
systems theory by illustrating how individuals are impacted by both macro and microsystems.

**Social Capital Theory**

Social Capital theory presumes that membership within a community will facilitate goal achievement and provide a strong support system in times of need. Only three of the youth interviewed could identify strong support systems in their lives outside of community organizations. This suggests that former foster youth do not enjoy the benefits of relationships that their peers enjoy, nor are they able to capitalize on such relationships.

Due to system involvement, former foster youth have greater access to community supports like mental health and housing services, adding to their social capital. Despite access, many research participants reported that they were not aware of resources or did not know how to properly access them. Seven participants stated that they lacked the ability to enroll in secondary education or had difficulty filling out credit applications, despite having access to grants and subsidized housing. This demonstrates that although they had resources not available to those outside of foster care, the lack of individual support hindered goal achievement.

As expected, nine of 11 participants recommended having mentors as an integral part of EFC. Research suggests that human capital and extensive social networks are the foundation for goal achievement (Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001). This study supports such research, as findings indicate that although extensive resources were available, the lack of strong personal relationships to social workers or peer mentors dramatically
affected the youths’ ability to capitalize on available resources. In addition, without supportive persons, research participants disclosed that they felt disconnected from their community. Four participants felt unprepared for a crisis like losing a job.

**Policy Implications**

Extended foster care is now the primary option for Sacramento foster youth emancipating from care. Independent Living Programs, once the preferred option, are currently limited due to EFC caseloads. Typically, changes to macrosystems are slow, providing adjustment time for those affected. That was not the case in California, as change and implementation happened swiftly. As a result, many county agencies found themselves simultaneously refining services while providing them (Courtney et al., 2013).

The lack of time between implementation and practice may have unknown implications that have yet to be identified. For example, for the state to receive federal funding, youth may not reside with an offending parent. Foster youth often return to their family of origin and re-establish relationships once court mandates have been lifted. EFC effectively cuts out biological parents as optional support systems regardless of their current life situation. This requirement can hinder already limited placement options. Our study found that 100% of participants lacked relationships with their family of origin, and only one participant identified a strong relationship with their foster family. The lack of supportive connections appears to be a major barrier to participants achieving their goals. Policy changes could be necessary to remove barriers so youth can reconnect with their family of origin or other supportive networks, regardless of prior child welfare
history. Additionally, although there is a financial benefit to EFC, $842 per month is not an adequate amount of money to secure housing in the Sacramento area without roommates or living with family. Not allowing NMD to live with biological parents can remove some of the stabilizing factors needed within subsystems (Courtney et al., 2013). Additionally, literature suggests that many children, regardless of foster care involvement, do not fully become independent until well into their twenties (Narayan, 1997). Future research should determine if three years is an adequate amount of time to provide services, and future policy changes might focus on extending the program time to facilitate stability. Also, because participants of this study reported varying access to services within the same county, it can be assumed that services also widely vary across counties. Policy changes in the future should consider inequities in service provision and make changes to assure that all youth are given equitable access to services.

**Practice Implications**

Our research indicates a need for further training for social workers that work with non-minor dependents, as the needs of non-minor dependents are different from those of traditional dependent foster youth. Social workers must recognize that, although they are adults, transitional age youth who have been in the foster care system have been subjected to trauma, which can severely impact their ability to make sound life decisions. Furthermore, former foster youth lack the social skills and supportive networks to take advantage of services provided through the EFC program. Social workers must assess individual strengths and weaknesses and adjust case plans accordingly. In addition, youth indicated that more time spent developing daily skills such as budgeting; shopping,
and cooking would assist in lessening their fears about independence. While all youth reported that they would recommend EFC, most continued to struggle to maintain stable housing and employment. This could be attributed to youth being placed in individual SILP placements before they were ready. Moving into an independent living arrangement too soon was often met with disastrous consequences. Over half of participants lost housing due to financial difficulties from employment loss or poor money management skills. It is imperative that social workers consider each individual’s readiness before recommending independent housing, as evictions and poor credit can negatively impact future stability.

**Limitations of Study**

In 2013, there were 402,378 children in foster care nationally. In California specifically, there were 58,699 children in foster care with 2,570 reported living in Sacramento County (Needell, 2014). Out of that 2,570, a convenience sample of only 11 former foster youth were interviewed for this study. Our results are consequently not generalizable to the larger population of non-minor dependent youth. Furthermore, it is estimated that the foster care system is comprised of 52% males and 48% females. Interviews for this study were primarily conducted with females, with only three interviewees being male. Ten out of 11 youth interviewed were participants in housing programs or shelters for homeless former foster youth. This presents a limitation, as the sample represented only those who lack stable housing, which could impact their view of EFC. Further research is necessary to encompass a broader range of experiences and outcomes of EFC to accurately assess for program effectiveness.
Due to the limited recruiting methods and number of participants, different results may occur with a larger sample size. In addition, focusing exclusively on Sacramento County alleviates input from other programs that can offer valuable insight on experiences of those in EFC. The experiences of the 11 participants may not be representative of all youth participating in EFC throughout the state, as every county varies in social worker training and the services offered. Additionally, this study focused on experiences from the youth point of view without input from social workers, offering only one point of reference. It would be helpful in future studies to examine experiences from both the youth and social worker perspective to provide a greater depth of data. Lastly, both researchers have experience in the field of child welfare, and it is possible that past experiences could have influenced how the data was interpreted.

**Conclusion**

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 allowed states to expend Title IV-E funds to aid transitional age youth as they move forward into adulthood (Fostering Connections to Success Act, 2008). California, with the largest number of children in foster care nationwide, chose to extend foster care until the age of 21. It is now possible for youth to remain in care and have access to resources and funding for an extended period of time with continued case management.

Overall, all youth interviewed reported that they would recommend other foster youth opt-in to EFC, as it did provide some financial stability as they transitioned. They also reported that they thought the requirements to remain in EFC were not unreasonable. Some even suggested additional requirements to motivate youth to stay on track and
decrease dependence on the system after the age of 21. All youth felt that they shared common goals with their social workers: to graduate high school, find stable housing, obtain drivers licenses, and find employment. In fact, 100% of youth interviewed graduated high school or obtained their General Education Degree (GED).

Despite the common goals of successful emancipation, quick program implementation without specialized training for social workers has created discrepancies in the quality of case management and services provided to this vulnerable population. More effort must be made to adequately train social workers on resources available to learn basic life skills like applying for grants, securing housing, and money management. In addition, social workers must be aware of services that are available to youth and take the time to help them access available resources. Youth reported that they were often afraid or embarrassed to request help. This indicates a lack of empathy or understanding on the part of the social worker. Although non-minor dependents are chronologically considered adults, they often lack the social skills or knowledge to complete complicated tasks on their own. Training must focus on meeting the client where they are, and on considering the fact that clients may have never made an appointment for themselves or filled out medical records or job applications. While many youth of the same age have been taught some independent living skills, foster youth may not have had the opportunity to gain these skills.

Interviews revealed that 64% of youth recommend the opportunity to be paired with a mentor. A mentor would assist and demonstrate how to apply life skills while providing a close, personal connection with a youth who otherwise lacks stable social
relationships within the community. Researchers recommend that a youth advocate, preferably a former foster youth, be available as a mentor. Youth advocates are relatable, as they understand challenges of the foster care system and provide valuable insight that is not punitive, but supportive. Lastly, it is important to remember that all youth transitioning into adulthood are going to meet challenges. Adults who have been through the foster care system face additional challenges, and the social work field must continually adapt to meet the needs of this population.
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