THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT FOR NEWLY EMANCIPATED FOSTER YOUTH

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THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT FOR NEWLY EMANCIPATED FOSTER YOUTH

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Valentina Vela
June 2015
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Approved by:

Dr. Thomas Davis, Faculty Supervisor, Social Work
Dr. Rosemary McCaslin, M.S.W. Research Coordination
ABSTRACT

The Child Welfare system is widely known as the macro system responsible for ensuring the safety of children within particular parameters, which, in some cases, results in the removal of these individuals from their family of origin. Research has explored the short- and long-term effects of this disruption in hopes of improving the ability of services to effectively prevent negative effects. Despite improvements on a macro and micro level, foster youth continue to be unprepared for the transition out of the foster care system, resulting in negative outcomes. According to research, the newly developed theory of emerging adulthood may have implications in terms of the component that is key to the success of this population in the future.

The purpose of the current study was to explore the importance of social support for newly emancipated foster youth. This study utilized a qualitative study design and sought data in the form of self-reports which were captured through an interview that consisted of 14 questions. Participants included 8 administrators working in the counties of San Bernardino and Riverside who possessed at least two years experience working directly with emancipated foster youth or with an agency which provided services to this population. The data collected was conceptualized as a model that highlighted the application of the theory of emerging adulthood as important in terms of service implementation; however, implementation would require the reconsideration of
policy and improvement the utilization of services by foster youth in order to increase permanent placement.

The results of this study implies that future research should determine the benefits of beginning independent living services at a younger age, linking these individuals with informal support systems, transitioning these individuals to a social worker with the knowledge and ability to apply the theory of emerging adulthood, regarding these individuals as active participants in the services provided, and providing foster parents with psychoeducation.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I would also like to thank Susan Culbertson for taking on the role as my community link to provide me access to my sample. This project would not have been possible without the time and energy you so graciously provided to encourage others to participate.

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extreme anxiety and your canning ability to reduce that anxiety minutes after walking into your office.

Please know that each and every one of your contributions is greatly appreciated and is noted as a key component to the success of this project.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to the foster youth, past and present, who have endured unimaginable pain and suffering which has left a wound that will forever have an effect on your lives. My greatest hope for you is to reach a point in which that wound has healed and is used as a source of the strength and hope needed to continue striving for success, whatever that may mean for you, despite the many barriers that block your path.

I also dedicate this project to my amazing group of friends, including my best friend and sister, Mariana Vela, who have been my source of strength before and during this journey. Thank you for providing the support and love needed to rebuild myself, for reminding me that my goals are not only valid but achievable, and for standing by me as I made my dreams a reality. You will never know how truly grateful and greatly indebted I am to each and every one of you.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

It is widely known that developmental theorists conduct studies in order to gather information to either create new or support current theories that explain the natural progression of development regarding cognitive and behavioral abilities as an individual ages. These theories are then applied to the population as a whole, rendering those unable to meet those standards as failing to master a particular stage of life. However, these developmental theories fail to take into account factors that contribute to an individual’s deviation from any of the developmental stages (Munson, Lee, Miller, Cole, & Nedelcu, 2013). There is a lack of knowledge about the populations that deviate from these developmental stages, resulting in the belief that all individuals at a certain age or stage have particular cognitive and behavioral abilities. The belief of a universal developmental progression has a wide range of effects, one that reaches social policy and procedures.

This phenomenon is especially true for newly emancipated foster youth and the services, or lack thereof, provided to them. In the past, many, if not all, of the services provided to foster youth while in foster care were no longer available once emancipated due to the belief that youth are adequately equipped with the skills needed to be a successful young adult at the age of 18 (Oldmixon, 2007). Although there has been various legislation passed in order to increase funding
and extend the age at which services are terminated (e.g. The Foster Care Independence Act and the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Act), this population continues to be afflicted by the negative life outcomes that these services are trying to prevent (Gardner, 2008; Delgado, Draper, Harfeld, Riehl, & Weichel, 2011; Courtney, Dworsky, Brown, Cary, Love, & Vorhies, 2011; Matta Oshima, Narendorf, & McMillen, 2013; Narendorf & McMillen, 2010; Steward, Barth, & Duncan, 2014). The current issue is providing effective services that successfully simulate the support often offered by the family unit, which is absent in the lives of many emancipated foster youth, and to provide these services until individuals within this population are properly equipped with the skills necessary to be successful.

Child Welfare Population

According to the latest data reported, 399,546 children in the U.S. were in foster care, 254,162 of which entered the system in the year 2012 (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013¹). Although these numbers have decreased in recent years, it can be argued that the current foster population is one that experiences a wider range of troubles when compared to past foster populations, particularly in the area of mental health. In order to completely understand the magnitude of the problem, we must first understand the circumstances in which foster children remain in the system for a substantial amount of time, eventually becoming emancipated foster youth.
Characteristics of Children. For emancipated foster youth, navigating through the foster care system is a journey, one that begins with the removal from home. It is widely known that Child Protective Services becomes involved in the welfare of children if a report of physical or sexual abuse or neglect is filed and that the removal of these children is a possibility if these reports are substantiated. The experiencing of abuse or neglect at a young age has detrimental effects on the child’s brain development (“cognitive difficulties”), ability to control emotions and perceive and react appropriately to one’s environment (issues with “mental and emotional health”), and ability to form healthy attachment to others (“social difficulties”) (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2009; Child Welfare Gateway, 2013², p. 5). With that knowledge it is not a surprise that of the 686,000 victims of child abuse, 21,952 suffered from behavior issues and 17,150 suffered from emotional disturbances (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2013)². The emotional and behavioral problems of children entering foster care have consequences in terms of time spent in foster care and placement options.

Goals of Foster Care. The child’s journey continues with the many failed attempts to locate and maintain a permanent placement. It is important to discuss the reasons that prevent children from maintaining permanent placement while in the system. When a child is first removed from the home, the goal of the department is to reunify the child with his/her parents within the amount of time given. If this goal is not successfully met, the plan shifts to involve finding a
permanent placement for the child, whether it occurs through guardianship or adoption. If the involved parties are unable to meet either of those goals, children are then placed in “nonrelative foster homes”, “institutions” or “group homes” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014, p. 4).

Due to the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, there has been an increased incentive to adopt or obtain guardianship over children in foster care, decreasing the amount of children in “foster homes”, “institutions” or “groups homes” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014, p. 4; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2013²). Although this new piece of legislation is credited for the decrease in numbers of emancipated foster youth, it also created a new breed of foster youth who have more needs and require more services than previous individuals. Those who are not adopted or claimed under guardianship are those with emotional and behavioral problems. Eggertsen (2008) found that “the existence of a mental health issue more than doubled the likelihood of experiencing three or more placements” (p. 80). Having multiple placements, either foster or group homes, then further increases the “risk of emotional, behavioral, and academic challenges” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011, p. 1). These children are ensnared in a vicious downward spiral despite legislation and services deemed to assist them in succeeding in life.

This issue is of importance at this time due to the following information: of the 241,254 youth exiting the system, 10% (24,125 youth) were emancipated
(Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013¹). Of those who are currently in foster care, there are approximately 68,000 youth ages 16-19 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014). Although the number of emancipated foster youth has decreased in recent years, the current group of foster youth has proven to be one in need of more services than those in the past. If this trend continues, it has implications for future groups of foster youth in terms of the increasing needs of this population and the nation’s inability to meet those needs.

**Legislation and Independent Living Programs**

According to Osgood, Foster and Courtney (2010), emancipated foster youth are especially vulnerable at this developmental period and a lack of support increases an individual’s susceptibility to negative life outcomes in areas such as homelessness, mental health, education (high school and college), parenthood, substance abuse, and employment (Gardner, 2008; Delgado et al., 2011; Courtney et al., 2011; Matta Oshima et al., 2013; Narendorf & McMillen, 2010; Steward et al., 2014).

There are many individuals within the Social Work community that are concerned for this population due to the high rate of negative outcomes they experience. There are excessive amounts of research aiming to study the many factors that lead to such negative outcomes for this population, as well as how we can intervene to alter those outcomes. Due to the visibility of the detrimental effects a lack of support has on this population and the amount of research conducted, this issue has acquired enough support to influence legislation. The
implementation of said legislation is credited for the expansion of not only the amount of services provided to this population, but also the range of individuals eligible for these services. The important legislation is as follows:

**The Independent Living Initiatives.** The Independent Living Initiatives of 1986 (P.L. 99-272), which was implemented under the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1985, “authorizes a program of services and activities designed to assist eligible children in making the transition from foster care to independent living” from ages 16 to 17, unless the State allows services to continue through the age of 18 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1987, p. 1-2).

**John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program.** The purpose of the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, under the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (P.L. 106-169), was to “amend part E of title IV of the Social Security Act to provide States with more funding and greater flexibility in carrying out programs designed to help children make the transition from foster care to self-sufficiency” (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2012, p. 16). This act allowed Social Work organizations to implement Independent Living Programs, which could provide “education, training, employment services, financial support, room and board” (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2012, p. 16), “training in daily living skills, training in budgeting and financial management skills, substance abuse prevention, preventive health activities…personal and emotional support…through mentors and the promotion of interactions with
dedicated adults and housing” to former foster care youth between the ages of 18 and 21 (U.S. Government Information, 1999, p. 3).

**The Educational and Training Voucher Program.** The Educational and Training Voucher Program, under the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendments of 2001, “authorized a voucher program as part of the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program to provide for education and training, including postsecondary training and education” (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2012, p. 14). Under this legislation, each state is given the power to decide whether or not these services can continue until an individual is 23 years old. Eligibility for these services is based on whether or not the individual has received said services prior to the age of 21 (National Foster Care Coalition, 2005).

**The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008.** This piece of legislation allows

…states to care for and support foster youth until the age of twenty-one provided that the youth are engaged in one of the four activities – completing high school or an equivalency problem, attending post-secondary or vocational school, participating in a vocational program, working for at least eighty hours a month – or are incapable of these activities because of a medical condition. (Osgood et al., 2010, p. 222).
This act also requires “that, 90 days prior to a youth’s emancipation, the caseworker develop a personalized transition plan as directed by the youth” (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2012, p. 9).

**Limitations of Legislation.** States are well aware of the importance of services provided to this population, which is seen through the implementation of new services and the improvement of services offered in the past. However, there continues to be limitations to the services provided. One limitation is in regards to the Fostering Connections Act of 2008. Former foster youth are considered eligible to receive services until the age of twenty-one, granted they are attending school or employed (Osgood et al., 2010), both of which have an unusually low prevalence rate in this population to begin with.

A second limitation is the continual use of an individual’s age to define his/her ability to be successful rather than skill set. By terminating these services at a premature age, this population will continue to be plagued with negative outcomes that not only have detrimental effects on the involved individuals but on society as a whole. Foster youth, who have endured unfavorable circumstances their entire lives, will continually be subjected to factors that prevent them from being successful in several ways, leaving society financially responsible for the consequences.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the importance of social support for newly emancipated foster youth. The following concepts will be addressed in
order to better explore the different aspects that affect the success or failure of newly emancipated youth: the developmental stage known as emerging adulthood and its implications on the policy and procedures of the Child Welfare system, particularly those utilized at the time of emancipation; the effectiveness of support provided by current Independent Living Programs and its implications on the policy and procedures of such programs; the need for additional support for emancipated youth diagnosed with or at risk of developing a mental health disorder and its call for the improvement of current services.

This qualitative study will consist of interviews of 8 administrators who are currently employed at Riverside or San Bernardino County and have past experience or are currently working with emancipated foster youth ages 18-25. Data will be collected over a ten week period at the convenience of the participants. Methods involve administering a questionnaire incorporating questions from multiple studies. Interviews were chosen as the design method due to the abundance of narrative information that can be gathered. This study calls for individuals to explain their understanding of multiple concepts, how those concepts will affect systems that are involved with this population, and the experiences they have encountered. A different methods approach, such as the use of quantitative instrument or a survey, would simply overlook key information that this study wishes to obtain and explore.
Significance of the Project to Social Work

Due to certain legislation, social work’s involvement in the improvement of services provided to this population has increased. The goal of the current study is to address the assessing and evaluating phases of the generalist intervention process: the study seeks to assess the needs of current emancipated foster youth and evaluate the programs provided to this population through the narratives of administrators. If this study discovers that there continues to be a lack of support despite the amount of programs specializing in assisting this population, there is a problem with the efficacy of the programs being provided. My proposed solution involves not only implementing services that provide the support current emancipated foster youth are lacking, but to also provide these services more effectively. Achieving this goal may or may not include extending foster care to a later, more appropriate age, in which former foster youth are better equipped with a solid foundation on which to build on. Foster youth cannot meet developmental stages without support, a component of success that they have lacked their entire lives. This would lead to the reformation of the Child Welfare system in terms of changing policy and procedures revolving around emancipation, as well as the services provided to this population.

The significance of this study for social work practice is to better understand the importance of social support for newly emancipated youth. I hypothesize that administrators will agree that due to the new developmental stage of emerging adulthood, support is more important now than ever as a
component of success for newly emancipated youth; administrators will state that there is a need for continual improvement of current Independent Living Programs and support that statement with their own experiences in the field of Social Work; administrators will agree that this cohort of foster youth is at a greater risk of mental health issues than past cohorts.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

The issues affecting emancipated foster youth are all very complex, motivating those in the field of social work to research and gather information in regards to factors that increase the risk of an individual falling prey to the negative life outcomes that are so prevalent in this population. The motivation behind this study is no different than those of the past. Therefore, this literature review will discuss the following topics: the new developmental stage known as emerging adulthood, which supports the need for an increase in the quantity and quality of services provided to this population; the effectiveness of current Independent Living Programs, including the services provided and the outcomes of those who participate in such programs; emancipated foster youth who are at risk of or currently have a mental health diagnosis and how the characteristics of these youth increase their risk for negative life outcomes; the theoretical perspective that guides this study, as well as an explanation as to why; gaps in literature.

Emerging Adulthood

The idea for a new developmental stage emerged when trends previously experienced by the 18-25 year old population were experienced later on in life (Arnett, 2004). For example, “education had never lasted so long for such a broad proportion of the population, the age of entering marriage had never been
so high, and the age of entering parenthood had never been so late” (Arnett, 2012, p. 232). Reasons for this delay include the change in perspective of what is means to be an adult and the feeling of ambivalence this population has on becoming an adult (Arnett, 2003). According to a study conducted by Arnett (2003), most participants, regardless of ethnicity, viewed adulthood as meeting certain criteria rather than reaching a particular age (18 or 21) or experiencing certain events (marriage, finishing school). These criteria include the following: “accepting responsibility for one’s self, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent” (Arnett, 2011, p. 267). Therefore, reaching adulthood is now seen as a vague concept that is dependent on the individual’s ability to successfully complete these tasks, regardless of age or transition event.

Individuals within this population also express feelings of ambiguity in terms of wanting to become an adult due to the roles and responsibilities that accompany such a transition (Arnett, 2007). Therefore, they use this period as a time to truly determine which paths they would like to follow.

Trends aside, there has also been a great amount of research conducted in order to prove the need for this new developmental stage. One of the main indicators of the need for a new developmental stage is the fact that individuals between the ages of 18 and 25 no longer fall within the adolescent or the young adulthood stage. The stage of adolescence involves the task of identity versus role confusion, in which the individual must assume the roles and responsibilities of their chosen identity (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013). The stage of young
adulthood involves the task of intimacy versus isolation, which revolves around the task of finding love and work (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013). Neither of these stages correctly identifies the development of this population.

It has also been proven that this population has distinct features and psychosocial tasks. For example, Arnett (2004) determined that individuals view autonomy and self-reliance as a psychosocial task unique to their population. He also determined five distinct features that occur during this stage: “age of identity explorations”, “age of instability”, “the self-focused age”, “the age of feeling in-between”, and “the age of possibilities” (Arnett, 2004, p. 8). Due to these features, becoming an adult in terms of the criteria mentioned above is a gradual process.

It can be concluded from the research mentioned above that the concept of emerging adulthood is valid and currently a developmental stage of the general population. However, emancipated foster youth are not given the same privilege as the general population in terms of being allotted time to gradually grow into adulthood. Previous studies have identified where emancipated foster youth differ from the general population in terms of following the emerging adulthood theory, identifying barriers to the successful completion of this developmental stage.

Munson et al. (2013) found that, like the general population, emancipated foster youth identified “independence”, “self-reliance” and “responsibility” as criteria one needs to meet in order to be considered an adult (p. 925). However,
they also found that some foster youth defined adulthood in terms of “adult responsibilities and legal definitions of adulthood” which implies that their view of adulthood has been skewed by their experiences (Munson et al., 2013, p. 926). Some emancipated foster youth see adulthood in terms of “legal definitions” due to the fact that the system deems them adults at the age of 18, regardless of whether or not they consider themselves adults.

Emerging adulthood is supposed to be a time of gradual growth, allowing individuals additional time to come into adulthood. Munson et al. (2013) found that most emancipated foster youth were rushed into adulthood and they were able to identify a particular situation which not only signified, but solidified this transition. One such situation is aging out of the foster system, when all services that were previously provided are abruptly discontinued (Munson et al., 2013). These individuals lack the privileges that others in this age range are given without thought.

Emerging adulthood is also a time in which roles and responsibilities are not solidified, allowing an individual to explore different opportunities. Munson et al. (2013) found that participants had specific roles and responsibilities, most of which would be considered those of an adult (parenting, caregiving, management of own needs). They also found that participants had two concepts in terms of what exploration meant to them: 1) the first involves the individual exploring his/her identity and relationships; 2) the second involves exploring ways in which they were going to survive outside of the system (Munson et al., 2013). The idea
of uncertainty was comparable to the general population in which it revolved around the future: employment, childcare, housing, and managing emotional issues (Munson et al., 2013).

The special circumstances that emancipated foster youth undergo place these individuals at a disadvantage in terms of successfully completing this developmental stage. All of the components needed in order to be successful in reaching adulthood are simply not provided to this population. Unfortunately, once an individual is emancipated from foster care, there are limited services provided to support the proper development of these individuals, leading to the continual oppression of this population. So the question is, how do we solve this problem?

The general population is given the privilege of slowly emerging into adulthood at a later point in life, largely due to the fact that they have parental support in terms of housing, finances, food, education, etc. (Schoeni & Ross, 2005). This parental support also increases the chances that an individual will successfully reach adulthood (Schoeni & Ross, 2005). The importance of support on the successful development of the general population has implications about emancipated foster youth who have lacked parental and peer support throughout their lives. Goodkind, Schelbe, and Shook (2011) reported that one of the main obstacles for emancipated foster youth ages 18-23 is receiving emotional and social support. Osgood et al. (2010) stated that a lack of support during this developmental stage leads to higher rates of homelessness, lack of employment
and mental health disorders. These findings highlight the need for extra support such as extended foster care (Osgood et al., 2010).

However, there is much concern in terms of the type of support needed and whether or not Independent Living Programs are providing such support.

Effectiveness of Independent Living Programs

The experiences of youth in foster care lie on a continuum, both ends being drastically different when compared (Petr, 2008). One end describes a positive experience consisting of a permanent placement, support from foster/adoptive parents, social workers, and community mentors, and Independent Living Program enrollment (Petr, 2008). The other end describes a negative experience, one that lacks all of the components mentioned above (Petr, 2008). Independent Living Programs must be well equipped to work with all emancipated foster youth, especially those who lack support from other individuals.

Barriers to Services

One of the fundamental issues of Independent Living Programs is its inability to provide services to all emancipated foster youth. Although the lack of utilization of services cannot be solely blamed on these programs, it is an important issue that should be addressed. According to Courtney (2005), only 65 percent of eligible emancipated foster youth receive services from Independent Living Programs.
One issue that is prevalent with this population that leads to the unfulfillment of needs is a lack of knowledge. A study conducted by Petr (2008) found that five of the eight participants out of custody “were unemployed, not enrolled in any postsecondary education, and not receiving any postcustody benefits except the medical card” (p. 107). Of those five, three did not have “an independent living coordinator while in custody and did not know about the benefits available to them, except through word of mouth from other foster youths” and “the other two had been told about potential benefits but had lost contact with workers” (Petr, 2008, p. 107). All five participants “seemed confused and unsure about whom to call or what to do to apply” (Petr, 2008, p. 107). Due to the lack of knowledge of services, 26 percent of youths (seven out of the twenty-seven participants) reported a lack of any life skills training (Petr, 2008). This issue stems from the lack of preparation of the caseworker before the emancipation of these youth from foster care.

Another issue that prevents emancipated youth from enrolling in services is the overabundance of those in need and a lack of caseworkers or funds to staff more caseworkers. McCoy, McMillen, and Spitznagel (2008) found that 21.5 percent of their 325 participants actively exited foster care at the age of 19 due to the system’s inability to provide services. Although the system informed youth of Independent Living Programs, the youth’s experience with attempting to contact their caseworker and enroll in services in the past discouraged them from actively pursuing these services (McCoy et al., 2008). Many of the youth
expressed the fact that the system was of no help to them and therefore, could meet their own needs without assistance from the state (McCoy et al., 2008).

Another issue that discourages emancipated foster youth from participating in services is the negative thoughts and feelings the words “foster care” connote with this population (McCoy et al., 2008). McCoy et al. (2008) found that out of 325 participants, 47 percent “stated that they planned to leave foster care at the age of 19”, which coincided with the number of youth who actually exited at the age of 19 (51.7 percent) (McCoy et al., 2008, p. 739). 90.4 percent of this population stated that they wanted to leave (McCoy et al., 2008). Of that 90.4 percent, 39 percent stated that they wanted to leave due to “dislike or frustration with the system” (McCoy et al., 2008, p. 742). The last two problems calls for an improvement of the entire system, which is more complicated due to insufficient funds and the ever increasing population of those in need.

These barriers have a direct connection with the effectiveness of Independent Living Programs. How are these programs supposed to satisfy the needs of emancipated foster youth if they are unable to reach individuals in this population? As long as this gap in transition exists, emancipated foster youth will always lack the skills needed to be successful in life.

**Services**

Testing the effectiveness of services provided by Independent Living Programs is difficult because there are many other factors that can attribute to
the negative outcomes experienced by emancipated foster youth. However, two known methods are: 1) to ask the individuals in this population who receive these services and those that work with this population to evaluate them 2) to evaluate the outcomes of youth who have received services. Programs currently provide the following services:

…life skills training, including how to find employment, appropriate on-the-job behavior, budgeting, household tasks such as cleaning, nutrition and grocery shopping, finding housing, and using community resources and personal development, including effective communication, decision-making, managing anger, and managing interpersonal relationships. (Howard & Berzin, 2011, p. 59).

**Opinions of Emancipated Foster Youth, Caseworkers, and Foster Parents.**

Many emancipated foster youth, as well as those who work with them, describe the process of receiving services as difficult due to the fact that the need for services exceedingly surpasses the services available (Geenen & Powers, 2007). Youth “reported that there is a wait-list for ILP case managers” and “that they only attended a few classes or were not actively participating in the ILP” (Geenen & Powers, 2007, p. 1096).

Caseworkers and foster parents also described wait lists for ILP case managers, and felt classes alone were not sufficient as they did not provide the individualized transition support youth needed and were not
relevant enough to the real world setting. (Geenen & Powers, 2007, p. 1096).

Youth, caseworkers, and foster parents agree that simply learning the skills are not sufficient enough for youth to be successful; although opportunities to practice these skills are as equally as important, many programs lack the ability to provide them (Geenen & Powers, 2007; Scannapieco, Connell-Carrick, & Painter, 2007).

One study conducted by Courtney and Zinn (2008) recruited staff of an Independent Living Program in Los Angeles to share issues that decrease the effectiveness of the program. Structurally, they believe that “30 hours of workshop time is not adequate to provide youth with all of the necessary information” (Courtney & Zinn, 2008, p. 31). Staff also reported that “trying to serve a classroom of youths with different skills and abilities is a challenge” (Courtney & Zinn, 2008, p. 31). They found it difficult to provide services properly to such a distinct group of individuals, suggesting that the needs of every individual is unable to be met through services.

Youths out of custody tend “to be less satisfied, expressing that the services they received while in and out of custody had been either inadequate or nonexistent” (Petr, 2008, p. 105). This report reinforces the fact that a major problem in the effectiveness of these programs is the fact that many youth are not being targeted. Those who did receive life skills training (20 out of the 27 participants) reported that they had previous experience with this class through
services offered by other organizations (school, mental health agency, or group home) (Petr, 2008). Those who had previous experience with similar trainings reported that they either gained valuable information or were bored due to the repetitiveness of the information (Petr, 2008). Courtney & Zinn (2008) also found this duplication in services in which many youth reported that “they had received many of the kinds of help that” independent living programs are “supposed to provide before ever having enrolled in the program” (p. 54). Duplication of services highlights the issue of the mismanagement of money, leading to the funding of programs that provide the same services that may or may not be effective.

Research continues to prove that Independent Living Programs are “inadequate to prepare youth for ‘independence’ in any meaningful way” and that “too many youth leave care unconnected to committed adults in their lives who could buffer the challenges they face and serve as safe havens in times of need” (Avery, 2009, p. 399). Petr (2008) found that only eleven of the twenty-seven participants “were able to identify an adult who served as a mentor” (p. 105). When focusing on those other than mentors, one half was able to identify some adult figure in their lives as providing support while the other half was unable to do so (Petr, 2008).

**Outcomes of Youth.** There is a vast amount of research attempting to identify the outcomes of emancipated foster youth and whether or not Independent Living Programs are able to influence the nature of those outcomes.
(positive or negative). A study conducted by Courtney, Hook, and Lee (2012) focused on the outcomes of 584 former foster youth from Iowa, Wisconsin and Illinois at ages 17/18, 19, 21 and 23/24 in order to provide insight in terms of the effectiveness of programs implemented through recent legislative changes regarding this population. Participants were divided into four different groups: “accelerated adults”, “struggling parents”, “emerging adults”, and “troubled/troubling” (Courtney et al., 2012, p. 413-414). This study found that the “Accelerated Adults” (“36.3 percent of the sample”) (Courtney et al., 2012, p. 413) have the best outcomes in terms of education, employment, housing and parenthood, although they may need “concrete assistance from time to time” (Courtney et al., 2012, p. 415). Courtney et al. (2012) believe that allowing the age of eligibility to extend beyond the age of 18, as well as providing educational support, would “provide a policy framework to support effective social work practice with this group” (p. 415).

The “Struggling Parents” (“25.2 percent of the sample”) (Courtney et al., 2012, p. 413) were found to be a concerning group because of the many needs of this subpopulation. This group needs assistance in the areas of child care, support, employment and education (Courtney et al., 2012). Courtney et al. (2012) believe that

…unless states make a serious effort to design programs especially for this group it seems likely that many Struggling parents will find it difficult
to meet the employment or education requirements of the law and may be forced out of care well before their 21st birthday. (p. 416).

The “Emerging Adults” (“21.1 percent of the sample”) (Courtney et al., 2012, p. 414) appear to have positive outcomes in terms of employment, education, housing, and support. Courtney et al. (2012) believe that

...allowing young people to remain in care past age 18 seem generally appropriate for this group, as long as states are able to be flexible in supporting young people who live with their family from time to time after age 18. (p. 416).

The “Troubled and Troubling” (“17.5 percent of the sample”) (Courtney et al., 2012, p. 414) is also of concern since they seem to need the most assistance. This group includes those former foster youth who are plagued with mental and behavioral health problems and experience with the criminal justice system (Courtney et al., 2012). Courtney et al. (2012) believe that the outcomes of this group rely heavily on the definition regulations give in terms of “medical condition”. If these individuals are not considered to have a “medical condition”, then it is likely that they will be denied services after the age of 18 as they will be unable to “meet the employment or education requirements for eligibility under the new law” (Courtney et al., p. 416). Based on this information, the programs implemented by current legislation continue to lack the ability to not only target all emancipated youth but also to target all of the needs of this population. Although
legislation has improved the services provided to this vulnerable population, they continue to be deemed inadequate.

Other studies also support this inadequacy due to the negative outcomes that continue to affect this population. Kroner and Mares (2009) found that “even for the most successful group” in their study, “nearly one-fourth had not completed high school and nearly half were unemployed and did not have an affordable place to live on their own at the time of leaving the program” (p. 568). Research has also found the following: 30 percent of the nation’s homeless population has had previous contact with the child welfare system (Gardner, 2008); “Up to 85% of foster youth experience mental health issues” (Delgado et al., 2011, p. 4); former foster youth are “three times more likely not to have a high school diploma or GED” (Courtney et al., 2011, p. 21); the general population is “six times more likely to have a postsecondary degree (46% vs. 8%) and 9 times more likely to have a degree from a four-year school (36% vs. 4%)” than former foster youth (Courtney et al., 2011, p. 21); “Over 50% of foster care youth” experience pregnancy by the age 19 (Matta Oshima et al., 2013, p. 1763); “rates of substance abuse were generally lower than those found in the general population, while rates of SUDs (Substance Use Disorders) were higher” (Narendorf & McMillen, 2010, p. 117); “Trends over time suggest that rates of employment for working youth who aged out of foster care declined after age 19”, a trend that was not observed in the general population (Steward et al., 2014, p. 226).
Although this information differs from the study conducted by Courtney et al. (2012) and yields somewhat more negative outcomes, all research supports that need for continuous improvement of Independent Living Programs.

**Effectiveness in Providing Support and Skills to Foster Future Support.**

Although the government understands the importance of providing emancipated foster youth with support during the transition from the foster care system to adulthood, individuals in this population continue to have higher rates of negative outcomes than similar aged youth in the general population. Berzin, Singer, and Hokanson (2014) believe that the services provided to older and emancipated foster youth rely too heavily on the skills needed to be “independent”, ignoring the fact that these youth also need support outside of the system. “Helping youth develop and sustain positive relationships with support outside the system becomes critical as they prepare for emancipation” (Berzin et al., 2014, p. 632) especially because of the loss of support that is experienced through this process (Geenen & Powers, 2007).

When we prepare youth for emancipation by relying solely on the services of child welfare agencies and not creating connections for youth to existing community agencies, we deprive youth of the opportunity to develop skills and use resources that may help them throughout their lifetimes. (Howard & Berzin, 2011, p. 24).

These programs essentially handicap this population by not providing them with the information or skills needed to truly be successful.
The model in which services are provided to former and current foster youth affects the perception youth have about independence and receiving help, leading to the underutilization of such services. Berzin et al. (2014) found that “the current policy and practice lens has led young people to identify adulthood as independence, and independence as not needing help” (Berzin et al., 2014, p. 632). This perception is absolutely detrimental to the successful transition from foster care to adulthood. “Results from this study suggest that the practice and policy context must help foster youth to find ways to support broader notions of independence, allowing them to seek help when needed” because all services end sometime (Berzin et al., 2014, p. 632).

Although support has been proven to increase the positive outcomes experienced by this population, the services provided lack the ability to emphasize the importance of this support. These programs not only fail to inform them of support systems that could be potentially useful in the future, they also decrease the utilization of such support by distorting perceptions of independence in terms of pursuing and accepting assistance.

Emancipated Foster Youth and Mental Health

Emancipated foster youth experience higher rates of negative outcomes when compared to the general population due to the lack of support offered by the foster care system during the emancipation process, as well as the inadequacy of Independent Living Programs. The presence of a mental health
issue increases the difficulties that youth will experience once emancipated (Keller, Cusick, & Courtney, 2007; Courtney et al., 2012).

A study conducted by Keller et al. (2007) found that emancipated foster youth can be categorized into four distinct subgroups. The subgroup with the poorest outcomes consisted of youth who suffered from emotional and behavioral problems most likely resulting from “psychosocial and adjustment difficulties” (Keller et al., 2007, 470). Due to these problems, this subgroup was more likely to have multiple placements until they were ultimately placed in a “nonfamily setting” (group homes) due to their need for “intensive supervision” (Keller et al., 2007, p. 470). These individuals were less likely to “report receiving various forms of social support and having personal connections within their neighborhoods” (Keller et al., 2007, p. 471).

Courtney et al. (2012) expanded on this study to include outcomes of these four subgroups. The subgroup that included foster youth with behavioral and emotional problems was found to be of concern due to their inability to “meet the employment or education requirements for eligibility” for continued services (Courtney et al., p. 416). However, even if legislation was able to include these individuals in the category of those with a “medical condition”, these individuals will continue to be of concern due to the fact that they tend to leave foster care earlier than those who do not have emotional and behavioral problems (McCoy et al., 2008).
The need for services to assist this population is of utmost importance due to the negative outcomes they experience. As mentioned earlier, current emancipated foster youth are a new breed of individuals in terms of mental health issues. According to the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being, one-half to three-fourths of children who enter foster care show evidence of significant emotional and behavioral problems (Burns et al., 2004). Also, the number of foster children authorized for psychotropic medication increased from 0.2% in 1998 to 12% in 2014 despite the decrease in total number of children in foster care (Needell et al., 2014). This information signifies the increase of behaviors that warrant psychotropic medication.

The influx of children with these problems is alarming. The reason for more concern regarding all foster youth is the fact that individuals who are a dependent of the state for an extended period of time and are then emancipated due to age all have risk factors that have the potential to lead to a mental health diagnosis. According to the World Health Organization (2012), the risk factors for mental health include the following: low socioeconomic status, poor housing/living conditions, parental mental illness, substance use in pregnancy, insecure attachment, malnutrition, trauma or maltreatment, family violence or conflict, difficulties at school, criminal or anti-social behavior, and unemployment.

Every child entering/youth exiting the foster care system possesses one or more of these risk factors, whether they were exposed to the circumstance prior to removal or while in the care of the state. If this population does not already
exhibit emotional or behavioral problems, they are at risk of doing so in the future. Due to the nature of experiences this population encounters, they are in urgent need of effective services.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

My study will utilize the theoretical perspective known as developmental theory, particularly Arnett’s emerging adulthood theory. Arnett (2012; 2011) identifies the need for a new psychosocial stage in Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development due to recent trends followed by those between the ages of 18 and 25. Erikson’s theory “focuses on how personalities evolve throughout life as a result of the interaction between biologically based maturation and the demands of society” (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, p. 313). Erikson believed that individuals are faced with crises (psychic demands) at each developmental stage which forces them to adjust to some type of stress (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013).

According to Erikson’s theory, the stage of adolescence involves the task of identity versus role confusion which then progresses directly to the stage of young adulthood where an individual’s task revolves around intimacy versus isolation (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013). However, Arnett (2004) has discovered that individuals between the ages of 18 and 25 not only identify their stage of development as having distinct features, but they also identify unique psychosocial tasks: autonomy and self-reliance.
Due to the ambiguity and uncertainty during this developmental stage, Arnett’s (2004) emerging adulthood theory emphasizes the need for support in order for individuals to be successful. Although Arnett’s emerging adulthood theory was based on the general population, it would be logical to assume that these same principles apply to similar aged youth in foster care. However, the need for support is greater when discussing foster youth due to the fact that they often lack the connections the general population possesses, and in some ways lack the ability to make those connections.

Although every study involving emancipated foster youth agrees that there is an overwhelming need for support and effective services, the theories that guide each study differ. Some studies see value in exploring the idea of emerging adulthood as a developmental stage and in identifying its implications for emancipated foster youth and the services provided to them. Other studies are guided by social development theories, especially in regards to the transition from dependence to independence, since this is a major theme concerning emancipated foster youth.

“The task of becoming independent involves attaining emotional, social, and economic independence” (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013, p. 356). Emotional independence requires the end of emotional dependence on parents while maintaining the relationship (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013). Social independence requires that an individual become “self-directed rather than other-directed”, emphasizing the need to make one’s own decisions (Zastrow & Kirst-

Those whom are guided by this theory are concerned for emancipated foster youth due to the fact that premature independence from the system leads to negative outcomes. Research guided by this theoretical perspective strives to identify how the transition from dependence to independence can be accomplished without a high rate of negative outcomes later in life.

Gaps in Literature

Review of the literature regarding emancipated foster youth has found that most

…research stems from four types of studies, (a) cross-sectional and longitudinal analysis of youth post-care; (b) secondary analysis of national, representative data sets, (c) administrative data linked to youth in the child welfare system, and (d) qualitative studies of foster youth experience. (Berzin et al., 2014, p. 618).

All of the types of studies mentioned above yield very important information in regards to topics such as the outcomes of emancipated foster youth, the effectiveness of Independent Living Programs, the trends of individuals in the child welfare system (number of entries, exits, etc.), the effects of mental illness on this population, etc.

Few studies, however, have sought after qualitative information regarding emancipated foster youth from administrators. Administrators offer a narrative of
the problems faced by emancipated foster youth from different angles: they have extensive knowledge of the development of individuals at this age and its implications on the foster care system; they understand the macro, mezzo and micro issues that influence the effectiveness of services provided to this population; they have valuable opinions based on experience and knowledge regarding how services can be improved; they also conduct their own research, some of which focuses on emancipated foster youth, allowing them to understand the new needs of this population as the individuals change over time (particularly the recent influx of individuals with mental health issues).

Summary

Despite multiple legislation intended to assist emancipated foster youth in transitioning from foster care to adulthood, these individuals continue to be considered particularly vulnerable at this time in their lives. Emancipation continues to be linked with negative outcomes experienced by this population. Although there is a small portion of this population that is able to make the transition with little assistance from the state, a majority of them continue to lack key components that are deemed necessary in order to be successful in life.

A major theme in the lives of emancipated foster youth is instability. This journey begins with an unstable household, which leads to the notification and intervention of the child welfare system. This journey then continues with the removal from home and multiple placement settings while in foster care depending on the emotional and behavioral tendencies of the particular
individual. With emancipation comes another wave of instability: support systems are not present in the lives of this population; the programs that are intended to assist them are not only failing to target every individual considered to be eligible, but they are also failing in providing effective services that decrease the amount of negative outcomes experienced by these individuals.

The current need for effective services is more urgent due to a couple of elements that seem to differentiate recent emancipated foster youth from those in the past. One element is the amount of support Arnett’s (2004) emerging adulthood theory has gathered in regards to this population and its emphasis on support as a key component to the success of youth ages 18-25. Another element is the increase of mental health issues within this population, which tends to lead to poorer outcomes when compared to those without them. However, it is important to remember that every current and former foster youth has the capacity to develop a mental health issue within their lifetime due to the many risk factors present in the lives.

For these reasons, this study will focus on the importance of support for emancipated foster youth and the beliefs of administrators on the effectiveness of current Independent Living Programs. If Arnett’s (2004) emerging adulthood theory continues to gain support through research, it has major implications in terms of the child welfare system, the emancipation process, and the programs that are provided to this population after emancipation; implications that may be
the answer to decreasing the negative outcomes experienced by emancipated foster youth.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

Due to the importance of the issue, it is vital that the different facets of this study be explained. Describing these different facets will allow future studies to either replicate this study or further investigate this issue. Therefore this section will focus on the study design, sampling process, data collection process, instrument, procedures, how human subjects will be protected, and the data analysis process. This section will provide an outline of the specific procedures used, the reasoning for the manner in which it was conducted, and the strengths and limitations of the study and instrument.

Study Design

The purpose of this study was to explore the importance of social support for newly emancipated foster youth. It aspired to provide a comprehensive understanding of administrators’ beliefs about the problems faced by emancipated foster youth and whether current services are adequately meeting the needs of this population, as well as the implications these beliefs have in terms of the reformation of relevant macro systems. Therefore, qualitative interviews were conducted in order to collect information pertaining to this matter.

A qualitative study design was chosen due to the complexity of this issue. The open-ended questions prevalent in qualitative study designs elicit valuable
narrative information without the limits posed in quantitative study designs. Quantitative study designs limit the selection of answers a participant can choose from, forcing them to decide which answer best fits their true beliefs, whereas quantitative study designs allow participants to discuss these issues without similar boundaries. This study wished to gain insight into the true beliefs of administrators; an element that would simply be lost if a quantitative study design was used.

Quantitative study designs also hinder the participant’s ability to provide the rationale behind their answers, once again highlighting the design’s inability to capture valuable information. The rationale behind administrators’ answers is the heart of this study. This study wished to capture the experiences on which these beliefs are built, which forms an important distinction between gathering valid beliefs rather than mere opinions. The utilization of a qualitative study design in this particular study was effective in targeting all of the aspects of this issue.

However, there are also foreseeable limitations when using a qualitative study design for such a complex issue: inability to collect information in a timely manner and collecting an overabundance of information, some of which can be considered useless in terms of this study. Administrators who specialize in this population are very knowledgeable about all of the aspects this study intends to understand. Allowing participants to answer questions without clear limits could
have resulted in lengthy interviews and the collection of a wide range of information.

Conducting concise interviews was preferable due to a number of reasons. One reason was in regards to the time constraint of the study itself. The time allotted to the collection and analysis of data was not conducive to extensive interviews that result in a large amount of information. Another reason was in regards to the fact that lengthy interviews could have potentially resulted in cognitive fatigue, which increases the chances of reporting unreliable information. Time limits allowed information to be collected before this became a relevant issue.

Another reason was in regards to limiting the nature of information collected. Failing to provide limits in terms of information discussed and time provided could have potentially resulted in the collection of insignificant data. Although this study sought to understand the many different facets of this problem, there was a need for limits. As stated above, administrators are one of the most knowledgeable groups of individuals in regards to this population. Without limits, participants could inadvertently discuss information that was of no value to the focus of this study.

Regardless of the limitations, the qualitative study design was the best known design to collect data for the proposed study. This study wished to answer the following question: What are administrators’ beliefs about the importance of support for newly emancipated foster youth? I hypothesize that the answers
provided by administrators will convey the fact that support is an important component for the success of newly emancipated foster youth; administrators will agree that the theory of emerging adulthood has implications in terms of the types of support needed, as well as the need to reform certain macro systems; administrators will state that there is a need for continual improvement of current Independent Living Programs and support that statement with their own experiences with this population; administrators will agree that this cohort of foster youth is at a greater risk of mental health issues than past cohorts.

Sampling

The sample for this study consisted of 8 administrators whom are currently working in the counties of San Bernardino or Riverside. Participants were selected by a community link that had access to a network of administrators in these counties. Administrators participating in this study were required to have at least two years experience working directly with emancipated foster youth or with an agency which provides services to this population. Administrators were chosen because, in regards to the issue at hand, they are the most highly experienced group of individuals and will offer the most valuable data based on that experience. Due to the fact that these individuals were solicited by a community link, this study does not require authorization for access to this sample.

Using a community link to gain access to the sample posed some common dilemmas when compared to gaining access without a community link.
One main dilemma included the difficulty in which it was to contact and interview the participating administrators. Due to a high level of responsibility, the individuals in this sample possess schedules that offer very little time to tend to situations that are not directly related to their work. This resulted in their inability to return phone calls/emails and set aside time for appointments/interviews in a relatively timely manner.

Data Collection and Instruments

Collection Method

The way in which the aspects of a study design are deemed positive or negative relies heavily on the nature of the study itself. For the current study, a qualitative study design was chosen to collect the desired information. Although a qualitative study design appears to be the best method to accurately gather the information, strengths and limitations were present.

Due to the lack of a rigid structure, qualitative studies allow participants to answer questions in a way that illustrates a narrative full of detailed information that would more than likely be overlooked by a quantitative study design. Another strength that qualitative study designs offer is flexibility. Open-ended questions allow participants to answer the question and elaborate on the rationale behind the response, thus gathering information about personal experiences that have laid the foundation for their current beliefs. However, there are also limitations to using a qualitative study design.
As stated previously, qualitative study designs lack the structure and limits of quantitative study designs. By collecting data in an interview-like manner with an instrument based on a qualitative study design, certain limitations are known to be present, such as the inability to collect information in a timely manner and collecting an overabundance of information. Due to the intricacy of the issue, the length of each interview could easily surpass the time allotted, which could result in a collection of an excess amount of information that is not necessarily helpful.

One way in which this limitation could be avoided was to implement boundaries within the instrument used. The questions included in the instrument should be clear in order to prevent participants from providing irrelevant information, as well as flexible to ensure the allowance of a variety of answers and the rationale behind those answers. Those conducting the interviews should be made aware of these boundaries in order to make certain that all information is relevant to the subject matter and that the length of each interview stay within the time allotted.

The boundaries discussed above were implemented in this study in order to prevent certain limitations from occurring. However, collecting information from self-reports poses strengths and limitations as well; limitations that were not so easily preventable.

In terms of the current study, seeking self-reports through an interview allowed investigators to discover the true beliefs about the issue at hand. The participants included those with the most experience with this population and
those who would provide the most valuable information. However, using self-reports could also be a detriment to the study. Ideally, administrators provided answers based on the experiences and situations they have encountered. We should be aware that there are also many other factors that could influence a participant’s response, such as attitudes/beliefs towards the individuals in the population themselves, work satisfaction, amount of stress, etc. These personal views, as well as any strong emotion affecting the individual, could alter the way in which they responded to the questions being asked. There was no known solution to balance the effect these different aspects may have had on the study. Therefore, the reader must be aware of the possibility that these responses may or may not be based on mere opinion rather than past experience.

**Instrument**

This study collected the information that was provided by each administrator in the form of verbal responses. This data was obtained by an instrument consisting of 14 open-ended questions which was distributed in an interview-like manner. The instrument intended to measure administrator’s beliefs about the importance of social support for newly emancipated foster youth. Due to the relatively new development of Arnett’s theory of emerging adulthood, few studies have attempted to use this concept to advocate for services targeting this population. Even fewer studies have focused on administrators’ beliefs regarding this issue. Therefore, there was not an existing instrument to measure this phenomenon. For that reason, an instrument was
constructed of questions believed to elicit the desired information as evidenced by a detailed review of the literature.

The open-ended questions included in this instrument are as follows:

Please describe your experience with emancipated foster youth and the services provided to them, including the length of time; Please describe your understanding of Jeffrey Arnett’s theory of Emerging Adulthood: a) How do you believe it applies to current emancipated foster youth, b) What implications do you believe it has on the services provided to emancipated foster youth, c) What implications do you believe it has on legislation concerning emancipated foster youth; What do you perceive as the most important issues/tasks/needs in emancipated foster youth’s transition to adulthood? What are they keys to their success: a) What independent living services have been provided relative to those issues/tasks/needs identified, b) Based on your experience, how well do you believe these services have prepared emancipated foster youth for adulthood, c) Based on the above, what do you believe are the implications for changes in program components and services that may be needed to assist foster care youth in becoming successful adults (Taken from: Petr, C. G. (2008). Foster care independent living services: Youth perspectives. *Families in Society, 89*(1), 100-108); Many children enter the system and stay there for a very long time. What do you think gets in the way of placing them in a permanent home? (Taken from: Zell, M. C. (2006). Child welfare workers: Who they are and how they view the child welfare system. *Child Welfare, 85*(1), 83-103); What do you
believe are the differences between past and current population of foster care; How do you believe those with a mental health diagnosis or at risk of a mental health diagnosis are affected by this transition: a) Do you believe that current services are meeting the needs of this sub-group? Why or why not, b) What types of support do you believe these services are lacking?

A known strength of this instrument is the fact that it was tailored to elicit the information needed to completely understand the specific aspects of the population being studied. There was a risk of gathering irrelevant information by using a preexisting instrument due to the fact that its focus may have been too wide or too narrow depending on the aspects of the issue we wished to uncover. The instrument may have included questions that elicited information that is unnecessary or it may have lacked the questions needed to elicit the appropriate information. Tailoring an instrument allowed the investigator to gather information pertaining to the focus of the current study.

This instrument had one major foreseeable limitation. It was questionable whether this instrument would elicit and obtain the desired information due to the fact that it had never been used. There was little that could be done in order to guarantee its validity, especially because of the lack of literature in terms of an instrument. However, one way to increase the validity was to review the literature, which was done extensively for this study.
Procedures

Participation in this study was initially solicited by a community link that had access to a network of administrators. Those who expressed a desire to partake in the study were then contacted by the individual conducting the interviews via email or phone. Each potential participant was notified of the $5 Starbucks gift card that would be awarded as compensation at the end of the interview. Those who agreed to participate in the study were asked to sign an informed consent form as well as audio recording consent form before continuing.

Individuals were asked 14 open-ended questions in an interview-like manner by a Master of Social Work student. Due to the nature of participants’ schedules, interviews took place at the time and location convenient for each individual. Each interview lasted between 20 and 50 minutes, depending on the answers of the individual participants. A recorder was used to collect the responses of each individual in order to ensure the accurate transcribing of information at a later time.

The gathering and analyzing of data lasted approximately over a four month period.

Protection of Human Subjects

Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured through a multitude of different ways. The instrument itself did not ask for any identifying information. However, when asked about his/her experience with this population, some
participants did disclose their position, excluding the agency in which this position was held. After the collection of information, the auditory records containing data were secured in a lock-box. Although all answers required transcription, each was stored on and protected by a personal password protected computer. Due to the fact that there may be unforeseeable risks or benefits of participation, each individual was asked to sign an informed consent form before beginning the interview and partake in a debriefing statement at the conclusion of the interview. At the end of the four month period previously mentioned, all information was discarded.

Data Analysis

The current study utilized a qualitative study design to explore administrator’s beliefs about the importance of social support for newly emancipated foster youth. This study explored people, places, things and ideas as revealed in thematic qualitative clusters. These thematic qualitative clusters were discovered by collecting and analyzing transcripts of each individual’s responses.

This study wished to determine whether or not there were commonalities between administrator’s beliefs about the importance of social support during and after emancipation including their beliefs on emerging adulthood theory, the effectiveness of Independent Living Programs, the rate of mental health diagnoses in this population, and the implications each of these aspects have on relevant macro systems.
Summary

The current study wished to explore the importance of social support for newly emancipated foster youth while utilizing a qualitative study design in the form of interviews. The sample was one of convenience in which administrators were chosen by a community link who had a large network of administrators. Data analysis included the discovery of thematic clusters in terms of the issue being targeted. The use of a qualitative study design, as well as the instrument chosen, had both strengths and limitations that the reader should be aware of when interpreting the following results.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

Chapter four will display the five key factors located in this data in themes. The five factors include theory, implementation, policy, utilization, and permanent placement.

Presentation of Findings

The first factor identified was theory, which is displayed below in Table 1, including quotations from participants.

Table 1. Theory

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<tr>
<th>Theory: The Need for Support</th>
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<td>“So they can learn these independent skills by being told it in a classroom setting or whatever, but it’d be really great for them to have that experience with a cushion of the person behind them saying ‘that’s ok, it doesn’t always work that first time, I’m here to catch you’” (Participant 2, personal communication, February 2015).</td>
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<td>“The need to connect them, humanly, to a person, I think is one of the most important things because I think that supplies you with so much in life from your motivation to go to school and better yourself, the motivation to go to work every day, to please somebody, to be- have someone be proud of you. You know, a lot of us get a lot of our satisfaction in life over people telling us we’re doing a good job or being proud of us and if they don’t have that connection to that somebody, then their motivation could very well be, you know, a lot less” (Participant 2, personal communication, February 2015).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“They have a lot more kids staying in extended foster care than they ever thought we had probably based on this, you know, wanting to stay, you know, this, this theory” (Participant 3, personal communication, February 2015).</td>
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</table>
**Theory: The Need for Support (Continued)**

| “Because in our natural supports of our parents, they’re always there and we give them artificial support in a sense here, where they are but one day, your case will close and we’re not going to be. So that’s part of the challenges of them with support” (Participant 4, personal communication, March 2015). |
| “They have to find a balance of providing support and maybe it’s reconnecting them to healthier people who can be there in the long-term. I don’t know if more services deeper in is the answer, but it’s building a better support system or a network of them” (Participant 4, personal communication, March 2015). |
| “I think our youth really need honest, caring people in their lives and I think when we look back at our own lives and see the success, it’s usually because someone cared about us, encouraged us, supported us in moving forward and far too often, our kids don’t” (Participant 4, personal communication, March 2015). |
| “We still have kids that, uh, don’t have enough of a support system to allow for them to make that transition into adulthood on their own comfortably. And not just at 18, but all the way to 21” (Participant 5, personal communication, March 2015). |
| “I think there is a, um, it’s not a standing knowledge even by our social work staff frankly of, um, treating adults differently by virtue of the fact that they’re adults nor is it automatic that we treat youth as they go towards adulthood in a way that is as empowering as it needs to be to prepare them. So, um, what do I think the implications are? I think that it needs to be, um, that the people who are advocating on the behalf of youth have an awareness and understanding of the theory and, um, and the people in decision-making have access to that information as well” (Participant 5, personal communication, March 2015). |
| “They don’t know the different systems that are in place, they don’t know how to utilize certain services, and they’ve never been taught these things. So with that being said, without having that support network or someone to guide them and teach them these things, I think they’re at a disadvantage, you know, they’re not going to learn at the rate of other individuals who have the supporting parents or aunts or uncles who are there” (Participant 6, personal communication, March 2015). |
| “We know that even though the law says at 18 you’re legally an adult, we know-studies have shown- yeah, like you said, 18 to 25, you’re still trying to figure all that stuff out. You’re not just going to instantly become independent and I’m an adult now and I know how to get a job, I know how to budget” (Participant 7, personal communication, March 2015). |
| “So not having someone to walk them through it, then they do it and then they have all these problems and now it’s kind of like an emergency situation, um, just because they don’t have someone in their corner to kind of go through those things with them” (Participant 8, personal communication, April 2015). |
The second factor identified is implementation, which is displayed below in Table 2, including quotations from participants.

Table 2. Implementation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Implementation: Beginning Independent Living Programs at a Younger Age</th>
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<tr>
<td>“We have some pre-ILP services which we offer various workshops but, you know, to really ingrain into our youth that, you know, these services are available, you can, at the age of, you know, like I said 8 to 13, much younger we need to really be working with those youth” (Participant 1, personal communication, February 2015).</td>
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<td>“If we can even capture them much earlier, 13, that would be great. I am always a firm believe when we talk about college that it shouldn’t start at your Sophomore year in high school. It needs to be ingrained probably, I mean, all the way, I know for me, I was probably 5 years old, talking about college” (Participant 1, personal communication, February 2015).</td>
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<td>“Of course then, we’re still those old people just telling them what they should do and that’s really annoying when you’re a teenager, it’s just really annoying, none of us liked it then” (Participant 2, personal communication, February 2015).</td>
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<tr>
<td>“We start too late…… Independent Living isn’t about what you do at 16. Independent living is about what you teach at 8, 9, 10” (Participant 3, personal communication, February 2015).</td>
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<tr>
<td>“What they need is opportunities to practice, uh, the, the act of choosing so that they’re better equipped to choose wisely in the future. And, um, so that’s the, you know, the 16 to 18 range, they need, um, services that promote independent, um, living so all the way from, you know, how to feed yourself and cloth yourself and support yourself and, um, further your, um, path towards whatever your goal is whether that’s education or a particular field of study or a field of work, um, and that, um, they participate in the decision-making at all areas” (Participant 5, personal communication, March 2015).</td>
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<td>“You know, there’s no excuse for a kid not being part of ILP whether it’s minimal standards or not, there’s no way a kid shouldn’t be in ILP at age 16. And for them not to know- like some kids came here and they’re from different counties…..like we have a bunch of different counties represented in the kids that come through the program here….Some never even participated in it” (Participant 8, personal communication, April 2015).</td>
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The third factor identified is policy, which is displayed below in Table 3, including quotations from participants.

Table 3. Policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy: The Need for a Balance Between Dependency and Independence</th>
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<tr>
<td>“But the true thing is, to foster your independence, not just to maintain you on our dependence for that many more years so that you’re at the same square one at the age 21 as you were at 18. You’re supposed to move across the spectrum, but that’s an awfully short spectrum, isn’t it? It really is” (Participant 2, personal communication, February 2015).</td>
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<td>“…..what we did before is we took unprepared youth and threw them out on the street when they were 18 or 19 and all we’ve done is push the bar out to 21 and now we’re pushing 21 year old, unprepared youth out on the street. I have not done them a service. I don’t think that what is actually happening with these kids is what they intended it to be” (Participant 3, personal communication, February 2015). [AB12: Extended Foster Care]</td>
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<td>“….how much is enough and then how much is enabling? I mean because I’ve heard statements- well why don’t we extend foster care to 30? Where does it end and how much is enough and maybe we went over the line in giving too much now” (Participant 4, personal communication, March 2015). [AB12: Extended Foster Care]</td>
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<tr>
<td>“One of the things that we have found is that when the youth remain with their originally assigned social worker, that more often than not they are continued to be treated as a dependent child just like the other dependent children on the social worker’s caseload and that when we are more successful with youth when we transition them to a caseload with a social worker who is working with emancipating youth through, um, through the Extended Foster Care Units and that…..those social workers….have a better understanding of, you know, Emerging Adult Theory or behaving in a way that helps, um, the youth have a voice and decision instead of being treated as one of many kids on a caseload and their kids and the social workers making choices for them” (Participant 5, personal communication, March 2015).</td>
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<td>“We didn’t make them more independent, we just extended the dependency piece….We’ve got to figure out a better match between the social work services that are offered to this age group and our outcomes indicates to me that that still happens, where we just extend that dependence” (Participant 5, personal communication, March 2015).</td>
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**Policy: The Need for a Balance Between Dependency and Independence (Continued)**

“It was the first cohort of students that were just now technically emancipating from AB12. So they no longer qualify for it, so they’re 21 coming out of it, um, and they’re in a worse position than when they first entered…. So, most of the kids, I want to say probably about 75% of those out of that first cohort coming out, bad positions” (Participant 8, personal communication, April 2015).
The fourth factor identified is utilization, which is displayed below in Table 4, including quotations from participants.

Table 4. Utilization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Utilization: Success is Based on Youth Involvement</th>
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<tr>
<td>“So as opposed to people like myself, you know, going in and saying this is what’s needed, um, I think in order for them to be successful is to have them involved and have them kind of articulate and state what’s working, what’s not working” (Participant 1, personal communication, February 2015).</td>
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<td>“Sometimes I think it’s just hard to connect them wanting them as much as we like to give them” (Participant 2, personal communication, February 2015).</td>
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<td>“We have that spectrum...there’s those quick learners that pick things up and they’re highly motivated and then there’s folks that are just not very motivated and not really wanting, willing or able for whatever reason in their current circumstance you know? And obviously, on the hierarchy of needs, if you’re just emotionally exhausted it’s hard to learn all of that stuff and be where you need, be where you kind of should be” (Participant 2, personal communication, February 2015).</td>
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<td>“My biggest problem with the ILP class, it doesn’t come timely in the way that it’s used. So some of these skills that we teach them, ok, isn’t at the point in time when they need it. And we are structured and boring and have contracts and it’s not fluid enough for the kids” (Participant 3, personal communication, February 2015).</td>
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<td>“So the whole how finances play into this and making smart financial judgments….The parents don’t understand finances and how you work finances, and neither do the foster parents….So that fiscal education, I think, is huge” (Participant 3, personal communication, February 2015).</td>
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<td>“Ok, how many of my foster parents don’t have a college education? Huge amounts. Huge amounts. How are they supposed to spout the importance of finishing your math if they don’t know the importance of education? So maybe some of the classes- and here’s another side- some of the classes need to go to the foster parents” (Participant 3, personal communication, February 2015).</td>
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“A lot of our what we call our after care providers-the people who provide services from 18 and on, they will come to our ILP events and try to meet our youth and start building relationships so that when they get to 18 they know who our providers are. But, you know, when you’re 16 you don’t think ahead to where you’re 19. Well I should meet these people now, I should build a relationship so that when I’m 19 I’ll know who everyone is. They’re not quite that far down the road, and none of us were” (Participant 4, personal communication, March 2015).

“So I think what we have in place is working ok. It’s just helping our youth to understand the importance of them and that we get out of an education what we put in. If we put nothing in, we get nothing out” (Participant 4, personal communication, March 2015).

“We can….artificially put in classes and things like that to try to help them to understand but I think so much of it is time and the healing. If we study Erickson, it’s the very first stage trust versus mistrust and when your care provider, your mother or your father, has violated that one, how do you go forward trusting other people? The person who was supposed to be here for me, that I could count on, failed. And it’s just a lot of hard work of rebuilding those relationships and allowing them to understand that people can be trustworthy and they can be dependable” (Participant 4, personal communication, March 2015).

“I think that those who take part, that they, um, are-they-it benefits them, that they do learn something, that it is being offered. The question is whether or not they’re taking part and, you know, some of that is within their control and some of that is not. Some of that is the, um, caregiving adults in their life who don’t find it to be important or whatever, support that, um, that need” (Participant 5, personal communication, March 2015).

“Once they get situated in one household, you know, they’re uprooted and moved again and so, I’ve actually experienced where some foster parents don’t allow the young adults to utilize the washing machine, to cook in the kitchen, or you know, and so they don’t know how” (Participant 6, personal communication, March 2015).

“Sometimes they don’t know about our services until it’s too late. They’re already about to age out and then the services are no longer available to them, um, you know, we have some youth that are opting to stay in care with the AB12 but you know, by the time they decide “well hey I want to use After Care” and we’re starting to teach them their skills, they’re turning 21 and the services are no longer there for them” (Participant 6, personal communication, March 2015).
**Utilization: Success is Based on Youth Involvement (Continued)**

“We have the services but, you know, if they’re moving from county to county or if, you know, their home base is here but we found a placement in Bakersfield, you know, so just really being well equipped and educated on other counties as far as what they have to offer for our youth and really, I think the thing is once we can stabilize the placements, we can bolster those resources where, you know, our kids can benefit from it” (Participant 7, personal communication, March 2015).

“So I just really think the belief in that commitment that they can succeed and making sure that they get to these services” (Participant 7, personal communication, March 2015).

“Well it’s easy to manage a budget when you get a fake checkbook you know, and you really don’t have money and you’re just doing it for, um, the life lesson. Totally different when you get a check and this is real money and they say here you go. Um, so they’re not able to really process that difference when they get that money so a lot of the…..will blow through that money” (Participant 8, personal communication, April 2015).

“You know, um, but it doesn’t, you know, from a realistic standpoint it doesn’t prepare them to, to be in college or emancipate or anything like- to go to a class and offer them an incentive of giving them a gift card and stuff like that, that’s great but are they really retaining that information? Um, not a lot of them, you know. And then real life hits and then it’s not like they can go back to the system, you know” (Participant 8, personal communication, April 2015).

“Like simulations are ok, you know, but when you give them the money and then they make a mistake and then that mistake becomes a learning lesson…..like a little mistake can snowball into something very, very big” (Participant 8, personal communication, April 2015).

“You know, the problem is half the kids are there for the gift card, they really don’t care. They’re not paying attention” (Participant 8, personal communication, April 2015).
The fifth factor identified is permanent placement, which is displayed below in Table 5, including quotations from participants.

### Table 5. Permanent Placement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Permanent Placement: Barriers</th>
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<td>“Multiple placement failures, you know, not just being, um, um, matched to the right foster parent……when you’re not matched well then, you know, you kind of set yourself up for a situation where, you know, it’s a placement failure” (Participant 1, personal communication, February 2015).</td>
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<td>“So it does put a stigma on them. It makes it harder to find them people who are willing to work with them” (Participant 2, personal communication, February 2015).</td>
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<td>“Stability, so knowing where they’re going to be every day and night and that that’s the place that they have” (Participant 2, personal communication, February 2015).</td>
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<td>“My kids are going to have attachment issues, they’re going to have some trauma-based responses that interfere, the mental health issues, which you eluded to, are going to be higher, we’re going to have, um, probably a higher rate of organicity, um, as far as organic dysfunction, um, that some of them, possibly the population as a whole, so we have that as a balance. So, that my kids struggle more, um, is also true” (Participant 3, personal communication, February 2015).</td>
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<td>“So developmentally, they are unattaching from parents, quote unquote parents, and moving to social groups….. So that makes it harder” (Participant 3, personal communication, February 2015).</td>
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<td>“So, their behaviors, they’re failures to build relationships….but sometimes it’s poor placements too. Not all of our placements are as good as they should be. Not everybody is committed to these kids the way I’d like to see them committed” (Participant 4, personal communication, March 2015).</td>
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<td>“The very first relationship of trust versus mistrust is violated. So they come through with the potential to pick up relationship issues, depression, anxiety, because you never know what’s going to happen next” (Participant 4, personal communication, March 2015).</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Um, I don’t think that they’re needs are that much different than any person’s needs in terms of reaching adulthood. The difference is what kind of support system does that person have compared to youth who are able to remain with their families. And, um, that’s what we’re trying to recreate on their behalf, is some kind of support system that sustains them beyond the system” (Participant 5, personal communication, March 2015).</td>
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“And there is a huge need for foster care placements who have an understanding and ability to work with this age group” (Participant 5, personal communication, March 2015).

“I would just say that it’s often the mental health needs of the youth. That if we were able to be better responsive to the grief and loss issues, or the mental health issues to stabilize the behavior, we would have a better, um, track record, or better outcomes of youth being in stable placements, which could then be stepped down to a more family-like setting, which gives them a greater opportunity to move towards permanence” (Participant 5, personal communication, March 2015).

“So it’s kids who, who’s behaviors, which I define as acting out whatever those grief and loss things are, whatever those mental health issues are, um, aren’t being adequately addressed” (Participant 5, personal communication, March 2015).

“So the transience or the acting out behaviors limits access. And if a youth moves about for placements about what’s available, then their borders are their borders and that’s it. And so they’re in or outs are much further defined in the mental health systems and I’m not just talking about DBH but in general in the mental health system. Either they are eligible and voluntarily participating or they’re not” (Participant 5, personal communication, March 2015).

“Because that’s where the struggle is, is that permanency so they’re not bouncing from place to place and that their goals can be met” (Participant 7, personal communication, March 2015).

“But I think that is the challenge just finding stability and a stable placement where you have caregivers in place that understand that and will still walk alongside them to give them the tools” (Participant 7, personal communication, March 2015).

“And I really just think that’s what needs to be, um, messaged, you know, to people that come into foster care, to people that this is commitment as parents. I can’t throw my kids away. I can’t well you know you’re at this age now, I don’t want to deal with it” (Participant 7, personal communication, March 2015).

“They don’t educate them well enough to say hey this kid is going to test you when they come, they’re going to do this, they’re going to do that. And then it’s like oh my goodness what do I do with this kid? Um, so it’s just preparing and educating people about not like if it’s going to happen, like it’s going to happen, you know, you just have to have a plan for when it does happen like what are you going to do?” (Participant 8, personal communication, April 2015).
Model of Success

The following model was developed based on the data obtained in this study. The theory of Emerging Adulthood has major implications on the implementation of services. Implementation will require the macro systems that influence this population to reconsider policy and improve the utilization of services based on this theory in order to increase the permanent placement of foster youth.

Figure 1. Model of Success
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

Chapter five will discuss the five factors identified in chapter four in relation to the need for improvement of the macro systems that affect current and former foster youth. The Child Welfare system, specifically, has taken enormous strides in order to identify the issues that negatively influence the outcomes of this population, resulting in the addition, modification and removal of services available. However, services continue to lack the appropriate components to fully prepare youth with the knowledge, skills and support to be successful after they age out of system. This study has identified the lack of permanent placement as a major indicator of negative outcomes after emancipation. Therefore, the following chapter will focus on the model presented in chapter four in order to highlight the need for reformation of Child Welfare system and the services provided to this population, as well as how to accomplish this.

Discussion

Theory: The Need for Support

Emerging Adulthood Theory asserts that the length of time in which individuals between the ages of 18 and 25 meet the milestones of adulthood has increased dramatically when compared to past generations (Arnett, 2004). Jeffrey Arnett, the creator of this theory, discusses the importance of social
support during this stage of development as a protective factor to negative outcomes. Social support allows individuals between these ages to successfully complete the tasks required for this stage of development due to the fact that this support acts as a safety net in the event of failure (Schoeni & Ross, 2005). Applying this theory to former and current foster youth has major implications on the program components and program objectives of the services provided to this population because of the lack of the parental support Arnett identifies as crucial to their transition into adulthood.

**Application of Theory of Emerging Adulthood.** As seen in chapter four, administrators believe that the theory of emerging adulthood does apply to foster youth in the sense that these individuals do not become self-sufficient and independent adults simply because they reach the age of 18 or 21. Therefore, many administrators identified support as one of the key components of success in adulthood for this population. Administrators recognized that support is utilized as a safety net, is a factor that promotes the motivation needed to succeed, and is a provider of the guidance needed in this time of transition into the unknown. Based on this information, the first factor identified was that of theory, which signifies the importance of applying the theory of emerging adulthood to this population.

If the theory of emerging adulthood were applied to foster youth, it would challenge the current system’s view of what it means to be an adult. In the past, services were terminated at the age of 18 because it was believed that an
individual possessed the tools necessary to be successful as an adult at this age. Due to the negative outcomes experienced by this population, termination of services was recently postponed to the age of 21. Despite this extension of services and “support”, negative outcomes continue to be seen at an exceptional rate in this population. In regards to the theory of emerging adulthood, it is crucial that the macro systems involved with this population understand that independence is not contingent on the age of the individual rather on the acquisition of the knowledge, skill set, and support needed to foster such independence.

**Services.** The factor of theory also indicates the need for changes in the services provided to this population. As stated above, the theory of emerging adulthood emphasizes the importance of support on future success. Although some administrators believe that the current services are making the appropriate efforts, many believe that services continue to be incapable of adequately meeting this need and advocate for the need for improvements. Therefore, the services provided to this population will have to evaluate their effectiveness in terms of meeting this need and make appropriate modifications to either provide the support that is lacking in the lives of these individuals or to assist these individuals in building relationships with others that can provide this support.

**Education and Training.** The factor of theory also indicates the need for changes in the education and training of individuals that work with this
population. According to the data collected, many of these individuals are unaware of the theory of emerging adulthood and therefore, unaware of the implications it has on the way in which to interact with this population. One administrator in particular felt very strongly about the need for additional education and training due to the fact that employees fail to treat youth “differently by the virtue of the fact that they’re adults” (Participant 5, personal communication, March 2015). If service providers continue to interact with this population as dependents rather than the adults they are expected to be, independence will never be achieved. This population needs to be given the opportunity to make decisions for themselves and have a voice in the services that are provided to them (Participant 5, personal communication, March 2015). Without this knowledge, employees will never know the importance of these opportunities or the importance of treating this population as the adults they are to become in a limited amount of time.

**Implementation: Beginning Independent Living Programs at a Younger Age**

The second factor, implementation, might be interpreted in this study as indicating the need for Independent Living Programs to begin at a younger age due to the importance of these skills at an earlier developmental stage, the importance of lengthening the time in which these skills can be applied, and the importance of both of these aspects as a protective factor from future dependence and negative outcomes.
Developmental Importance. Foster youth are currently referred to Independent Living Programs at the age of 16; however, some administrators expressed the need to educate these individuals of independent living skills well before this age and developmental period. This belief comes from their understanding of adolescence as well as the tasks necessary for the successful completion of this stage.

Independent Living Programs provide services that attempt to instill certain values such as education, career, success, financial stability, etc. However, according to Erikson’s psychosocial theory, adolescence is a time in which an individual struggles with solidifying his/her identity. In order to achieve a sense of identity, the individual must integrate “earlier identifications, present values, and future goals into a consistent self-concept” (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013, p. 317). Independent Living Programs attempt to imbed values that should already be present within the individual youth well before this developmental stage. Therefore, Independent Living Programs are not only responsible for preparing these youth with the skills needed for success, they are also tasked with targeting any delay an individual may have in terms of development, while being cognizant of the time limit in which this must be accomplished. This expectation is currently not being met, leading to further delay in development and increasing the susceptibility of an individual for negative outcomes. Many administrators felt that the solution is beginning these services at a younger age.
Beginning services at a younger age would benefit this population by preventing the delay in development that is currently seen in this population. Educating foster children on the importance of these services and imbedding certain values in them will have long-lasting effects on their success. If we can target this issue at an earlier age, the services provided at the age of 16 would only be responsible for preparing these youth for emancipation, a task that can be easily achieved when it is the only priority.

**Application.** Beginning these services at an earlier age would also provide these individuals with the skills needed at a more appropriate time. Independent Living Programs are known to provide education on how to perform “household tasks such as cleaning, nutrition and grocery shopping” and attempt to educate youth on “personal development, including effective communication, decision-making, managing anger, and managing interpersonal relationships” (Howard & Berzin, 2011, p. 59). Many administrators felt that the skills provided by these services are skills that individuals of any population should have mastered by the age of 16, as seen by the following quotation: “Independent Living isn’t about what you do at 16. Independent living is about what you teach at 8, 9, 10” (Participant 3, personal communication, February 2015).

Once again, a delay in development is highlighted and foster youth, as well as the services provided to them, are forced to exert an enormous amount of resources to compensate for this delay. Foster youth are not only expected to learn these skills, but also expected to find opportunities to apply these skills in
order to master them in a matter of two years (if they choose to end services at the age of 18) or five years (if they choose to end services at the age of 21) when it is known that it requires a much larger amount of time.

Beginning services at a younger age would allow these individuals to learn the skills necessary and it would increase the time in which these skills can be applied to various situations. These individuals would be given the opportunity to practice the utilization of these skills with the support of the system behind them if they were to fail or need additional support. Their ability to perfect these skills will then positively affect their ability to utilize these skills in the future, decreasing their vulnerability to negative outcomes.

**Protective Factor.** The second factor, implementation, also might also signify the importance of beginning services at an earlier age as a protective factor from future dependence and negative outcomes. Future dependence and negative outcomes are a persistent issue when discussing this population and much of that is due to the fact that they are not fully prepared to be successful after emancipation. Values that are essential for success are introduced too late, causing a domino effect that may lead to negative outcomes. Valuing education, a career, and financial stability increases the motivation an individual has to succeed in obtaining and integrating these aspects into their lives. The ability to provide for oneself decreases the need for assistance from federal programs. Therefore, if services were to start at the appropriate developmental stage, the
occurrence of developmental delay will decrease and appropriate values can be
instilled, increasing an individual's ability to succeed after emancipation.

Providing services at a younger age may also protect individuals from future dependence and negative outcomes because they will have become proficient in the use of the skills needed to be successful. Given the appropriate amount of time, individuals can learn how to care for themselves in terms of maintaining a clean environment and being able to feed themselves appropriately. Individuals will also be able to learn appropriate impulse control and decision-making skills which can have drastic effects on the situations in which they place themselves, decreasing the chances of substance abuse, teenage pregnancies, incarceration, etc. Learning interpersonal skills such as effective communication and relationship building may allow these individuals to build the support network needed to be successful during transition.

Beginning services at a younger age would also serve as a protective factor in terms of reducing the number of individuals who fail to be linked to the appropriate services. It is known that there is a high rate of individuals who continue to be failed by the current system due to sheer lack of social workers. Some individuals pass through the system without knowing about Independent Living Programs, preventing them from obtaining the knowledge and skills that is provided. If services were to be offered at a younger age, this would allow more time for these individuals to be linked to the services needed to foster independence.
Policy: The Need for a Balance Between Dependency and Independence

Limitations of Current Services. The third factor, policy, is interpreted in this study as indicating that there is a need to place limitations on the services provided to this population. The studies involving this population, as well as the current one, advocate for the improvement of services in regards to the how, when, and where. However, many studies fail to answer the question to what extent. Administrators identified that there is a need to balance between providing the necessary services to foster independence and providing too many services, creating a sense of dependency.

Support. As seen in the first factor, theory, a major component of success was the presence of support before, during, and after the transition out of the foster care system and into adulthood, implying the need for current services to focus their efforts on either becoming that support or linking youth with individuals who can offer that support. AB 12, also known as Extended Foster Care, was implemented with the intention of offering systemic support to foster youth until the age of 21 rather than terminating the provision of services at the age of 18. However, administrators believe that the implementation of this piece of legislation extended dependence rather than providing the additional time necessary to become independent.

The factor of policy indicates that the type of services provided continues to promote dependence rather than independence. The extension of services may have been an appropriate modification but if the same services that were
failing to prepare these individuals at the age of 18 are continuing to be utilized, how could they possibly prepare individuals for emancipation at the age of 21 simply because the individuals were given more time? Legislation failed to modify the type of services provided, which is a major component needed in the reformation of this system.

Therefore, this factor may indicate that the provision of systemic support promotes dependence and may emphasize the importance of investigating whether linking these individuals to other support systems will support this population in making the transition to adulthood successfully.

**Social Worker/Foster Youth Relationship.** The third factor, policy, may also be interpreted in this study as indicating the need for the relationship between foster children and his/her social worker to evolve as this individual approaches adolescence and adulthood. Many administrators emphasized the importance of the relationship transitioning from one of dependence to one of independence, which could be done by effectively creating an environment in which individuals feel empowered to make decisions for themselves, rather than remaining stagnant while others proceed to make the decisions.

**Need for Improvement/Addition of Services.** The third factor, policy, indicates that, despite the recent modifications of the Child Welfare system, services continue to be ineffective in the prevention of negative outcomes experienced by this population. The extension of systemic support is believed to be inadequate in assisting this population in making the transition from
dependence to independence which implies that the current services continue to lack the component necessary to assist this population in achieving independence. This belief suggests that the addition of services is not sufficient in preparing this population for transition. This belief is also indicative of the fact that macro systems need to focus on the type of services offered rather than the number of services offered. Administrators have identified the need for support as a key component for success, which signifies the importance of researching other avenues of support, such as linking these individuals to more informal supports that will continue to be present after aging out of the system.

As previously stated, the results of this study also reveal that the relationship between foster children and social workers must parallel the developmental transition from child to adolescent and then adolescent to adult. According to administrators, the treatment of foster youth as dependents will always present as a barrier to independence and self-sufficiency. One administrator reinforced this belief by stating that the system has found that “the youth [that] remain with their originally assigned social worker…. are continued to be treated as a dependent child just like the other dependent children” and that social workers within the Extended Foster Care Unit are better equipped to form a relationship that supports “the youth having a voice and decision [making rights] instead of…..the social workers making choices for them” (Participant 5, personal communication, March 2015).
This perception signifies the importance of exploring the benefits of transitioning adolescents to a social worker who not only has a better understanding of the theory of emerging adulthood but is also able to apply it when working with these individuals and comparing these benefits to those attained by remaining with the same social worker throughout these developmental stages. Services should then be modified accordingly.

Utilization: Success is Based on Youth Involvement

Service Utilization. The fourth factor, utilization, is interpreted in this study as indicating that future success is based on the youth's involvement in the services provided by Independent Living Programs. Some administrators believed that individuals in this population are provided with the appropriate services and identified the discrepancy between the availability of services and the utilization of services as the element that leads to future negative outcomes. The data collected identified the following factors as barriers to the utilization of these services: presentation of services, timing of services, lack of foster parent involvement, and mental health issues.

Presentation. The fourth factor, utilization, signifies the importance of improving the way in which the services provided by Independent Living Programs are presented to foster youth. The administrators interviewed in this study perceive services as “structured”, “boring”, and “not fluid enough for kids” (Participant 3, personal communication, February 2015). This information may signify the importance of modifying services to regard youth as active participants
in their own learning, incorporating opportunities for application rather than presenting the skills in a lecture-like manner.

If youth view independent living classes as boring, this perception may also have detrimental effects on their ability to realize the importance of mastering the skills presented. This factor poses an obstacle that is not easily overcome due to the fact an individual cannot be forced to find the importance in something they do not value. This information may indicate the need for services to involve youth in the evaluation process to not only identify ways in which services can be improved but also identify the components that reinforce this negative perception of services. If these components were identified, services can be customized to fit the needs of the target population, thus increasing the utilization of services.

The factor of utilization is also indicative of the need for multiple improvements to the Child Welfare system in order to prevent the failure of social workers to notify youth of the services available to them. According to administrators, high caseloads and high rates of placement disruptions result in the failure to notify youth of these services, hindering their ability to utilize most, if not all, of these services. This data signifies the importance of obtaining the funding needed to employ more social workers, which will result in the reduction of caseloads and the increase in time social workers can devote to each youth. This data also indicates a need to improve communication between social workers of different counties in order to prevent youth from falling through the
cracks when there is a change in placement. The overall indication is the need to reduce the amount of placement disruptions each youth experiences, which will be discussed in factor five, permanent placement.

**Timing.** The factor of utilization indicates that there is room for improvement in terms of the time at which these services are provided. As previously stated, independent living services are offered during the adolescent stage of development. Developmentally, adolescence is a time in which individuals are preoccupied with obtaining independence, resulting in the exhibition of certain behaviors. It is known that “adolescents often rebel against their parents' attempts to guide them and reject their views as being out-of-date” (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013, p. 355). Despite past attempts of Independent Living Programs to demonstrate the importance of the services they provide to this population, individuals continue to underutilize them due to this developmentally appropriate mindset.

When discussing foster youth, the identifiable “parent” is the Child Welfare system and social workers and foster caregivers as an extension of this system. This data signifies the fact that the modification of services may not be sufficient in increasing the utilization of these services, especially if these services are provided by the very “parent” the youth are attempting to “rebel against” and “reject”. This truth may indicate the importance of providing these services at an earlier age, one in which individuals will be more receptive to the information
presented, which can possible increase the utilization of such services (this also reinforces the factor of implementation previously discussed).

**Foster Parent Involvement.** The factor of utilization also signifies the importance of involving foster parents in the process of preparing foster youth with the skills necessary to become independent and self-sufficient. Administrators identified two reasons as to why involving foster parents is vital for the future success of foster youth. First, some administrators identified the perceptions of foster parents and their lack of education on the importance of youth participation in these services as factors that lead to the underutilization of services by foster youth. It is difficult to motivate an individual to utilize services if their caregiver does not believe or understand the importance of them, and in some cases, prevents them from attending.

Therefore, the perceptions of foster parents on the importance of these services has the potential to deny youth the opportunity to learn the skills needed to decrease their vulnerability to negative outcomes after emancipation. This information indicates the importance of providing classes and/or services to foster parents in order to educate them on the importance of independent living services.

Secondly, administrators emphasized the importance of foster parents creating an environment that is conducive to the application of the skills learned from these services in a variety of contexts. It is known that learning begins with the exposure to information and is solidified by the application of that information.
Administrators identified the application component of learning as lacking in current independent living services. However, it is important to understand the impracticality of expecting a single group of services to be responsible for the provision of all of the components identified to assist this population in achieving success.

This information indicates the importance of providing classes and/or services to foster parents in order to educate them on the importance of creating opportunities for the application of skills learned in independent living services. The provision of these services may meet the youths’ need for opportunities to apply knowledge as well as relieve some of the responsibilities of Independent Living Programs, allowing these services to focus on the many other components necessary to prepare this population for transition.

**Mental Health.** Administrators identified the presence of a mental health issue as another component that leads to the underutilization of services by this population. The experiences that prompted intervention by the Child Welfare system continue to affect these individuals throughout their lifetime, which was highlighted in this study. One identified theme was the fact that foster youth are unable to trust others. Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development identifies trust versus mistrust as the crisis at the developmental stage of infancy and emphasizes the importance of acquiring the ability to trust others, especially when discussing the successful development of healthy relationships in the future (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013). According to one administrator, many of
foster youths’ trust was “violated” early on in life by their caregiver, the one “person who was supposed to be here for” them and “failed” which affects their ability to “go forward trusting other people” (Participant 4, personal communication, March 2015).

This information may indicate that mistrust causes a barrier in terms of accessibility to this population due to the fact that this mistrust is usually manifested as rejection. Rejection of social workers and the services they provide may eliminate any possibility of utilization. This may signify the importance of challenging the negative perceptions youth have about relationships by “rebuilding those relationships and allowing them to understand that people can be trustworthy and they can be dependable” (Participant 4, personal communication, March 2015).

However, this is made difficult due to the nature of the field and unrealistically high caseloads. It is difficult to build connections and prove an individual is trustworthy and dependable when they do not have the time needed to do so. This information once again signifies the importance of obtaining the appropriate funding needed to increase the number of social workers employed by the Child Welfare system.

The underutilization of services can also be understood when viewed from the perspective of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. This concept identifies “a hierarchy of needs that motivates behavior” and asserts that an individual cannot progress to the subsequent level until the needs of the previous level are met;
these levels include the need for “physiological” elements, “safety”, “belongingness and love”, “self-esteem” and “self-actualization” (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013, p. 473). More often than not, the experiences of foster youth do not provide the components necessary to meet the needs of safety and belongingness and love, which prevent them from progressing in this hierarchy.

One administrator stated that “obviously, on the hierarchy of needs, if you’re just emotionally exhausted it’s hard to learn all of that stuff and…..be where you kind of should be” (Participant 2, personal communication, February 2015). The youths’ inability to focus on independent living services due to their preoccupation with the emotional effects of their experiences may indicate the need to improve the identification of those in need of mental health services and linking them with the appropriate providers in order to prevent these issues from further affecting these individuals.

Permanent Placement: Barriers

The data gathered for the purpose of this study implies that the services provided by Independent Living Programs are insufficient in meeting the needs of foster youth and indicate many ways in which to improve these services. However, despite the implementation of improvements in the past, foster youth continue to be plagued by negative outcomes, indicating that there continues to be a component that is lacking. Based on the factors previously discussed, the permanent placement of youth has been identified as that component. Although identification of this component moves us closer to the solution of the problem, it
is insufficient in eliminating the barriers that prevent the permanent placement of foster youth.

**Behavior of Foster Youth.** Administrators identified issues related to mental health as one component that prevents the permanent placement of foster youth. Administrators discussed the fact that these individuals are going to have a higher rate of “attachment issues” and “trauma-based responses” (Participant 3, personal communication, February 2015) that cause the individual to exhibit certain problematic behaviors that many in the general public are not prepared to manage. This lack of skill causes foster parents to prematurely terminate the foster relationship, resulting in a disruption in placement in which the youth is removed and placed at another location.

This information signifies the importance of providing psychoeducation to foster parents before their home is considered a viable placement. Psychoeducation must include information about the youths’ mental health disorder, symptoms of the disorder, and how to appropriately handle the behaviors exhibited due to the disorder. This information also indicates that mental health services need to be improved in order to assist these individuals in the process of recovery by teaching the skills necessary to reach their full potential.

Administrators also identified behaviors related to the developmental stage of adolescence as a component that prevents the permanent placement of foster youth. Administrators discussed the fact that adolescence is a time in
which individuals are “unattaching from parents…. and moving to social groups” (Participant 3, personal communication, February 2015). This causes individuals in this stage of development to exhibit acting out behaviors that test the limits of parents which, as previously stated, may involve “rebell[ing] against their parents’ attempts to guide them and reject[ing] their views as being out-of-date” (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013, p. 355). This behavior is also noted as increasing the likelihood that foster parents terminate the foster relationship. This information indicates the importance of providing foster parents with the education to fully comprehend the necessity of these behaviors and the resources necessary to better handle this stage.

Limitations

One major limitation of this study is the reliability and validity of the instrument utilized to collect data. Due to the newly developed theory of emerging adulthood, there has been an insufficient amount of research conducted, resulting in the lack of an instrument that would elicit the information desired in the current study. Therefore, the instrument was comprised of a combination of questions, some of which were taken from past studies and some of which were developed by the conductor of this study based on a detailed review of the literature on this subject matter.

The reliability of the information gathered was further limited by the way in which it was collected by the conductor of this study. Some of the participant's answers to the pre-constructed question were followed up by questions for
further elaboration. This may or may not have influenced the answers given by
the participants at any given time throughout the study, ultimately skewing the
data collected.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy, and Research

Due to the complexity of the issue, the data collected was interpreted as
yielding a model which can be applied to Social Work practice and policy. The
first four factors (theory, implementation, policy, and utilization) signify the
importance of the addition and modification of services provided by the Child
Welfare system in order to adequately meet the many needs of this population.
Although the implications discussed are supported by the data obtained by this
study, it is impractical and ineffective to task a single group of services with the
responsibility of meeting the ever expanding needs of these individuals.
Therefore, the implications presented by the four factors are interpreted in this
study as indicating the importance of identifying the permanent placement of
youth as a priority within the Child Welfare system.

The factor of theory discussed the importance of support before, during,
and after the transition out of foster care as a protective factor against the
negative outcomes that are prevalent in this population. This implicated that
current services need to be increased and/or a modified to provide this support or
current services need to make the necessary improvements to link this
population with individuals who have the ability to provide this support.
However, the factor of policy indicated the ineffectiveness of providing systemic support by highlighting the fact that in doing so, the system fostered continual dependence rather than independence, regardless of the number of services provided. This information may indicate the importance of providing authentic support rather than support that is systematically built. Foster placements attempt to simulate the natural support provided to similar-aged individuals in the general population by creating a family-like unit, which may indicate their effectiveness in promoting independence versus dependence. This information may indicate that permanent placement is the component needed to assist these individuals in making the transition from independence to dependence.

The factor of implementation discussed the importance of beginning independent living services at a younger age in order to prevent the developmental delay that is currently seen in this population. The permanent placement of these individuals has the potential to yield similar results. Permanent placement could naturally expose these individuals to the skills explained in these services, preventing the delay in development from ever occurring.

The factor of implementation also discussed the importance of beginning independent living services at a younger age in order to increase the time in which the skills learned could be applied. The factor of utilization further emphasized the importance of creating an environment that fostered the
application and mastering of these skills in terms of future success. Placement disruptions and a lack of permanent placement prevent youth from engaging in services, obtaining the skills needed, and applying such skills, increasing the ways in which youth are unprepared for the transition into adulthood.

The factor of utilization also indicated the importance of challenging youths’ negative perceptions about relationships by proving that others can be trustworthy and dependable through their interactions with them, something that is difficult for social workers to accomplish due to lack of time and high caseloads. It also indicated the importance of feelings of safety and belonging and love on the path to self-actualization. Permanent placements have the ability to create an environment that is conducive to the fostering of these feelings and the natural progression of relationship building, which has the potential to heal the psychological wounds many of these individuals possess.

Although permanent placement was identified as one of the major components of success for this population, barriers to achieving this component continue to exist. Issues related to mental health and the developmental stage of adolescents were found to increase the likelihood of a disruption in placement due to the lack of education, skill, and resources available to foster parents. This information signifies the importance of providing psychoeducation to foster parents before their home is considered a viable placement. Psychoeducation must include information about the youths’ mental health disorder, symptoms of the disorder, and how to appropriately handle the behaviors exhibited due to the
disorder, as well as the education needed to fully comprehend the necessity of these behaviors and the resources necessary to better handle this stage. This information also indicates that mental health services need to be improved in order to assist these individuals in the process of recovery by teaching the skills necessary to reach their full potential.

The data in this study provided an immeasurable amount of information that will, hopefully, positively impact the services that are provided by the Child Welfare system. However, there are many other avenues that are in need of exploring in order to provide the best services possible to this population.

Although the permanent placement of these individuals was identified as being of priority, there continues to be barriers that we, as a system, may or may not be able to control. Therefore, some of the implications of this study should be explored in future research. For example, this study indicated that beginning independent living services at a younger age would increase the reception of skills and decrease the developmental delay prevalent in this population, which would serve as a protective factor for future dependence and negative outcomes. Future research should focus on determining whether beginning independent living services at an earlier age has any benefits in regards to this population.

This study also indicated that systemic support promoted dependence rather than independence, highlighting the importance of identifying different avenues of support. Future research should focus on identifying the benefit of
linking the individuals of this population with an informal support system that will continue to be available after the transition out of the foster care system.

This study obtained information from a single administrator that indicated the transition of adolescents to a social worker who not only has a better understanding of the theory of emerging adulthood but is also able to apply it when working with these individuals may benefit this population. Future research should explore this indication and compare these benefits to those attained by remaining with the same social worker throughout these developmental stages, as well as identify the implications for services.

This study indicated that service underutilization was due to lack of foster youth involvement and identified ways in which to improve this. Future studies should focus on the benefits of regarding youth as active participants in their own learning by incorporating opportunities for application rather than presenting the skills in a lecture-like manner, as well as involving youth in the evaluation process to not only identify ways in which services can be improved but also identify the components that reinforce this negative perception of services.

This study also identified barrier to permanent placement and ways in which to eliminate those barriers. Future studies should explore the benefits of providing psychoeducation to future foster parents in order to determine whether it has a positive effect on permanent placement.
Conclusions

The Child Welfare system is widely known as the macro system responsible for ensuring the safety of children within particular parameters, which, in some cases, results in the removal of these individuals from their family of origin. Research has explored the short- and long-term effects of this disruption on cognitive/personal development, future social interactions, and mental/emotional health in hopes of improving the ability of services to effectively prevent negative effects. Despite improvements on a macro and micro level, foster youth continue to be unprepared for the transition out of the foster care system, resulting in negative outcomes such as high rates of pregnancy, incarceration, substance abuse, etc. According to research, the newly developed theory of emerging adulthood may have implications in terms of the component that is key to the success of this population in the future.

The purpose of the current study was to explore the importance of social support for newly emancipated foster youth. The data collected was conceptualized as the following model: the application of the theory of emerging adulthood has major implications on the implementation of services; however, implementation would require the macro systems that influence this population to reconsider policy and improve the utilization of services by foster youth in order to increase the permanent placement of foster youth.

The results of this study implies that future research should determine the benefits of beginning independent living services at a younger age, linking these
individuals with informal support systems, transitioning these individuals to a social worker with the knowledge and ability to apply the theory of emerging adulthood, regarding these individuals as active participants in the services provided, and providing foster parents with psychoeducation.
APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT
INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to explore the importance of support for newly emancipated foster youth. This study is being conducted by Valentina Vela, a MSW student at California State University, San Bernardino, under the supervision of Dr. Thomas Davis, Ph.D., California State University, San Bernardino. This study has been approved by the School of Social Work Sub-Committee of the Institutional Review Board at California State University, San Bernardino.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is to explore the importance of support for newly emancipated foster youth. The following concepts will be addressed in order to better explore the different aspects that affect the success or failure of newly emancipated youth: the developmental stage known as emerging adulthood and its implications on the policy and procedures of the Social Welfare system, particularly the age of emancipation; the effectiveness of support provided by current Independent Living Programs and its implications on the policy and procedures of such programs; the need for additional support for emancipated youth diagnosed with or at risk of developing a mental health disorder and its call for the improvement of current services.

DESCRIPTION: Individuals will be asked 15 open-ended questions in an interview-like manner by the Master of Social Work student conducting the study. Interviews will be conducted at the time and location convenient for each individual.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation is completely voluntary and you do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. You may skip or not answer any questions and can freely withdraw from participation at any time.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured through a multitude of different ways. The instrument itself will not ask for any identifying information other than the position in which each individual currently holds (excluding the agency in which this position is held). After the collection of information, the auditory records containing data will be secured in a lock-box. Although all answers will require transcription, each will be stored on and protected by a personal password protected computer. At the end of the four month period previously mentioned, all information will be discarded.

DURATION: Interviews will last no longer than 30 minutes.

RISKS: There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study.

BENEFITS: Each participant will be rewarded a $5 Starbucks gift card for their participation.

VIDEO/AUDIO/E PHOTOGRAPH: I give permission to this student (Valentina Vela) to audio record my answers for the purposes of this study

Yes  No

909.537.5501
5500 UNIVERSITY PARKWAY, SAN BERNARDINO, CA 92407-2393

The California State University - Bakersfield - Channel Islands - Chico - Dominguez Hills - East Bay - Fresno - Fullerton - Humboldt - Long Beach - Los Angeles Maritime Academy - Monterey Bay - Northridge - Pomona - Sacramento - San Bernardino - San Diego - San Francisco - San Jose - San Luis Obispo - San Marcos - Sonoma - Stanislaus
CONTACT: If the participant has any questions regarding the research or research subjects' rights, please contact the following individual:

Name: Thomas Davis  
Title: Associate Professor  
Phone: 909-537-3839  
Email: tomdavis@csusb.edu

RESULTS: Results can be obtained from the CSUSB Library after the summer of 2015.

CONFIRMATION STATEMENT:

I have read the information above and agree to participate in your study.

Place a check mark here: [ ] Date: [ ]

909.537.5501  
5500 UNIVERSITY PARKWAY, SAN BERNARDINO, CA 92407-2393
APPENDIX B

AUDIO INFORMED CONSENT
AUDIO
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

As part of this research project, the investigator will be making an audiotape recording of your interview. Please indicate what uses of this audiotape you are willing to consent to by making a check on each point below. You are free to check any number of spaces from zero to all of the spaces, and your response will in no way affect your participation. The investigator will only use the audiotape in ways that you agree to. In any use of this audiotape, your name would not be identified. If you do not check any of the spaces below, the audiotape will be destroyed.

Please indicate the type of informed consent

☐ Audiotape

- The audiotape can be studied by the research team for use in the research project.

  Please make a check: _____

- The audiotape can be played to subjects in other experiments.

  Please make a check: _____

- The audiotape can be played at meetings of social workers.

  Please make a check: _____

- The audiotape can be played in classrooms to students.

  Please make a check: _____

- The audiotape can be played in public presentations to nonsocial work groups.

  Please make a check: _____

I have read the above description and give my consent for the use of the audiotape as indicated above.

The extra copy of this consent form is for your records.

Please make a check as signature  __________  DATE ____________________
APPENDIX C

INSTRUMENT
Instrument

1) Please describe your experience with emancipated foster youth and the services provided to them, including the length of time.

2) Have you heard about Jeffrey Arnett’s theory of Emerging Adulthood.
   a) How do you believe it applies to current emancipated foster youth?
   b) What implications do you believe it has on the services provided to emancipated foster youth?
   c) What implications do you believe it has on legislation concerning emancipated foster youth?

3) What do you perceive as the most important issues/tasks/needs in emancipated foster youth’s transition to adulthood? What are they keys to their success?
   a) What independent living services have been provided relative to those issues/tasks/needs identified?
   b) Based on your experience, how well do you believe these services have prepared emancipated foster youth for adulthood?
   c) Based on the above, what do you believe are the implications for changes in program components and services that may be needed to assist foster care youth in becoming successful adults?

4) Many children enter the system and stay there for a very long time. What do you think gets in the way of placing them in a permanent home?

5) What do you believe are the differences between past and current population of foster care?

6) How do you believe those with a mental health diagnosis or at risk of a mental health diagnosis are affected by this transition?
   a) Do you believe that current services are meeting the needs of this sub-group? Why or why not?
   b) What types of support do you believe these services are lacking?
APPENDIX D

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT
Study of support for newly emancipated foster youth

Debriefing Statement

The study you have just completed was designed to explore the importance of support for newly emancipated foster youth. Your beliefs about the needs of individuals at different developmental stages, the effectiveness of Independent Living Programs and the needs of current and former foster youth with or at risk of a mental health diagnosis were addressed in order to better explore the different aspects that affect the success or failure of newly emancipated youth. This study aspires to provide a comprehensive understanding of your beliefs and the implications of those beliefs on the reformation of relevant macro systems.

Thank you for your participation and for not discussing the contents of the questions with other administrators. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact Valentina Vela or Doctor Thomas Davis at 909-537-3839. If you would like to obtain a copy of the group results of this study, please contact Doctor Thomas Davis at room SB-212 at the end of Spring Quarter of 2015.
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