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BARRIERS TO HOUSING FACED BY TRANSITIONAL AGE FOSTER YOUTH WHEN TRANSITIONING OUT OF CARE

Taryn Cronkite

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BARRIERS TO HOUSING FACED BY TRANSITIONAL AGE FOSTER YOUTH WHEN TRANSITIONING OUT OF CARE

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

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

by
Taryn Cronkite
May 2021
BARRIERS TO HOUSING FACED BY TRANSITIONAL AGE FOSTER YOUTH
WHEN TRANSITIONING OUT OF CARE

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

by
Taryn Cronkite
May 2021
Approved by:

Dr. James Simon, Faculty Supervisor, Social Work
Dr. Armando Barragan, M.S.W Research Coordinator
ABSTRACT

This study examines current barriers to stable housing, as well as gaps within the social service system, that hinder transitional age foster youth from obtaining stable housing after exiting extended foster care. This study is relevant to the social work profession due to overrepresented number of youth in the foster system and a need for services to reduce their chance of homelessness once aging out. The barriers found in this study were identified by the researcher through the interviews with both professionals working with this population, as well as transitional age foster youth themselves. Maximum variation was achieved with the participants through a non-probability sampling technique commonly referred to as snowball sampling. This technique was used to target the perspectives of professionals working with transitional age foster youth as well as the population itself, in a large county in Southern California. Qualitative data analysis was obtained through guided interviews with four transitional age foster youth living in a transitional housing program and seven professionals who have experience working with this population. Content analysis was used to identify commonalities in the data that the researcher categorized into themes: systemic factors and transitional factors.

The research provided comprehensive information that indicated serious barriers and gaps experience by transitional age foster youth, contributing to the inability for many in this population to obtain safe and stable housing after exiting care. The themes found in this research point to a clear need for improvement.
within the social service system (i.e., more resources, extended age requirements, proper social worker involvement and more collaboration between agencies) and during transition (i.e., education and employment assistance, increased need for motivation among this population, increased self-sufficiency/independence and more permanent connections and supports) in order for them to have a better chance of becoming independent and avoiding homelessness.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge all of the social service agencies, community partners, social workers and support staff for your advocacy and all that you do to ensure your clients have their needs met. I know it can be tough with various policies and limited funding but the work you do does not go unnoticed. I would also like to acknowledge my family for being a source of self-care during this writing process. Finally, I want to give a special thanks to the participants and agencies involved in this study, along with Dr. James Simon for his patience and support, without all of you this study would not have been possible.
DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to all of the transitional age foster youth working toward independence and/stable housing; you are seen. I hope this research will bring awareness to the various gaps in our social service system and provide insight to help spark collaboration and the implementation of much needed services.
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CHAPTER ONE
ASSESSMENT

Introduction

The focal point of this research is to explore and identify barriers to housing that transitional age youth (TAY) face when transitioning out of the foster care system. The current system for this population does not have sufficient housing for these TAY and leaves them unprepared for independent living. Due to the complexity of the barriers the foster TAY face, the constructivist paradigm was chosen to allow for more development within the focus of the study. A hermeneutic circle was formed with key stakeholders and beneficiaries, where they were asked about their assessment on the issue and how they believe it could be improved. The researcher’s notion was that because specific needs of the foster youth are not being met, they are not able to successfully advance in other areas of their lives. The literature indicates that this population faces many more challenges when compared to their counterparts due to the trauma and instability many of them have faced while growing up. In addition to these hardships, there are limited sources readily available for foster TAY that would aid in making this transition less daunting. The hope for this study was that the barriers identified within the research would be used to pinpoint specific challenges these youth face when transitioning out and what support is needed to help them transition more successfully. Organizations could then use these
data as evidence when applying for funding to implement programs that could help foster TAY prepare for adulthood.

Research Focus

According to the 2018 Adoption and Foster Care Analysis Reporting System (AFCARS) released by the Children’s Bureau at HH’s Administration for Children and Families (2019), there are over 447,300 children living in the foster care system at any given time. While in care, these children have access to group homes, foster homes or are able to be placed with a family member; some are even able reunified with their biological families. Yet oftentimes many foster youth emancipate or “age out” of the system at 18 years old without having anyone, or anywhere to go. Within the system, most children who do not reunify have on average 2.4-9.5 different placements (Curry & Abrams, 2015). For these youth, it is harder to maintain any sort of permanency and this only becomes more difficult because this instability follows them throughout adulthood (Curry & Abrams, 2015).

The focus of this research study is transitional age foster youth (18-21 years old) and their housing needs. The purpose of this research is to identify barriers that transitional age foster youth face when transitioning out of care, onto their own with the assistance of the agencies and beneficiaries of the services. The research aims to pinpoint specific challenges TAY face when transitioning out and what support is needed to help them transition successfully. The current research shows many barriers for these foster youth and gaps within our social
service system in terms of providing them with housing after they transition. Some of the issues that are negatively impacting these youth include mental health issues, lack of confidence for work and schooling, too young of a cut off age for the housing programs, and insufficient support services such as mentors.

Many foster TAY have past trauma they are working through which makes it harder for them to focus as well as learn to live independently at such a young age, especially depending on the severity of their trauma. On top of not being able to focus due to mental health issues, the majority of these youth have also moved a variety of times and attended multiple schools (Benbenishty et al., 2017). Many have not graduated, or they were pushed through the system to graduate, and do not feel as if they have the same level of education as non-foster youth. The requirement for most housing programs is that they are able to stay in an apartment that is furnished and paid for, as long as they are working or in school. The problem is that some youth are so far behind in school that three years in a housing program barely gets them out of high school. If they are in community college, sometimes the course load is too difficult for them to begin full time, so it can take them even longer to transfer out. The worst part is, once they turn 21 years old, they lose the support of the housing as well as any support staff that was once provided to make sure they are progressing.

Paradigm and Rationale for Chosen Paradigm

For this particular study, the most effective paradigm would be constructivism. This paradigm was chosen because it is the one where the
researchers understanding gets more sophisticated over the course of the study (Morris, 2014). This approach assumes that “the only way we can understand a human phenomenon is to completely and thoroughly understand the perceptions, or constructions, of those people who are engaged in that human phenomenon” (Morris, p. 1277, 2014). With that being said, it is important to have the perspective of those affected by the issue because they are the ones experiencing the challenges and housing crisis. It is crucial to know what other barriers foster youth face, coming from them; as well as what they, as other key stakeholders think a good solution may be.

The constructivism paradigm typically does not have a research question, but a research focus; one that is broad enough to include central issues but narrow enough to serve as data (Morris, 2014). The constructivist approach leaves room for development and allowed the study to gather perspectives from those who utilize the system and those working within it. This paradigm is the most effective for this study because it understands that the only way to fully comprehend a human circumstance is through a subjective reality (Morris, 2014).

**Literature Review**

Many foster TAY end up without sufficient housing once they transition out of care. Research has shown that this population faces many unique challenges that puts them at a greater risk of homelessness. While new laws have been passed extending the age of care, these TAY are generally not prepared to live independently by age 18, or even 21 (Curry & Abrams, 2015). There are housing
programs that provide these youth a place to live, as well as services to teach independence, but this is still not enough. Even with new laws and programs, there is still a gap between the services provided and the number of youth transitioning out of care every day (Curry & Abrams, 2015). The housing programs are a great short-term resource, but if foster TAY feel insufficiently prepared or supported once their time in the system is up it can lead to problems like homelessness, low graduation rates, and substance abuse (Curry & Abrams, 2015).

**Homelessness and Housing Instability**

It is estimated that each year, 23,000 foster youth age out of the system; 11-37% experience at least one or more nights of homelessness, while 25-50% have to deal with housing instability in the years following them leaving care (Shah et al., 2017). Homelessness is characterized as “experiencing an undesirable living situation, even for one night, as a result of the inability to afford to live elsewhere” (Shah et al., 2017, p. 34). Housing instability is when youth report that they either spend more than 50% of their income on housing, they have trouble paying rent, live with multiple people in cramped places, or move around often (Yen et al., 2009). One study even found that over 600 emancipated youth had stayed in five or more places since aging out (Curry & Abrams, 2015). Overall, the opportunities for young adults in general are limited. Not only has rent increased nationwide, but young adults are now relying more on their parents for financial and other support, more than any other time in
history (Shah et al., 2017). Thus, these TAY are at increased risk for homelessness due to their foster care history, and they face a unique set of challenges that their counterparts do not, not to mention all without familial support or assistance (Yen et al, 2009).

**Challenges**

Foster youth who are or have aged out of care have many barriers to overcome in order to achieve any sort of independence and stability. For instance, when compared to the average young adult, former foster youth have lower rates of both high school graduation and college enrollment (Curry & Abrams, 2015). In terms of post-secondary education, foster youth are six times less likely to hold a college degree and nine times less likely for it to be from a four-year college by age 26 (Curry & Abrams, 2015). The low rates of education and graduation cause this population to experience higher rates of joblessness and lower earnings (Curry & Abrams, 2015). In addition to the educational challenges they face, it is not unusual for foster youth to suffer from a mental illness, substance abuse, be pregnant and/or parenting, and have a learning or physical disability (Curry & Abrams, 2015). Former foster youth are also more likely to have experience with the criminal justice system, utilize public assistance, and have little to no familial support (Shah et al., 2017). Considering all of these challenges, the foster care system still considers these youth adults once they turn 18. One study found that over 60% of aged out youth between 18-25 years old did not feel that they had fully reached adulthood (Yen et al., 2009).
The problem here is that this population does not have enough resources and assistance to transition them successfully out of care. There are a few programs that provide services up until age 21, but the research still show they experience homelessness and housing instability even after leaving those programs (Curry & Abrams, 2015).

Assistance

In 1999 the Foster Care Independence Act (FICA) allowed foster care services to be continued to age 21, instead of 18 (Yen et al, 2009). Although this change recognized that foster youth need access to more support, beyond the legal age of 18, the act did not provide funding for these services, so the amount of assistance varied by state (Yen et al, 2009). One study reported that in 2009, there were 44 states that provided some type of transitional housing assistance but there was, and still is discrepancy between availability and need (Curry & Abrams, 2015). The Department of Housing offers vouchers through the Urban Development and Family Reunification Program (FUP), and Section 8 housing offer vouchers as well but even with resources such as these, not all apartment complexes accept the vouchers they provide (Curry & Abrams, 2015). There are also Transitional Housing Programs (THP) that allow foster youth to live independently at no cost to them until they are 21 years old. These are all great housing options for foster TAY but one problem with THPs can be that because they pride themselves on encouraging independence, the constant reinforcement of this ideal can become damaging if it leads the youth to become hesitant to
seeking and receiving emotional support, consequently leaving them feeling disconnected from others for various kinds of resources because they feel the need to be independent (Curry & Abrams, 2015). Many of these youth have a strong yearning for self-sufficiency, and pride themselves on self-reliance (Curry & Abrams, 2015). Thus, these programs should be teaching interdependence, meaning learning how to live on their own, while teaching them it is okay to ask for help when needed (Curry & Abrams, 2015). Not enough information is known about how we can assist foster TAY in overcoming the unique set of barriers they face. Thus, this research aims to achieve this goal by creating constructs gathered from the information in the interviews, that will represent the various barriers faced by foster TAY.

Limitations in the Research

One of the main issues when looking to research this population is that there is no national database for youth exiting foster care, so it is difficult to track them after they age out (Yen et al., 2009). This makes it difficult for research to be done after they leave care to see what their outcomes were and what their struggles were. Another issue with the research is that “they tend to be dated and have non-representative samples” (Yen et al., 2009, p. 80). This research study is current, relevant and based on data gathered from a diverse group of participants who have experience either in working or living within the foster care system. Yet this is just one study, more research needs to be done in order to
find ways to assist these youth in overcoming barriers as well as to propose new solutions for housing.

Theoretical Orientation

The theory that best describes the framework for this study is Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. This is a motivational theory that provides an explanation for the barriers these youth face when transitioning out of care. At the bottom of Maslow’s pyramid are physiological needs; food shelter water. The theory states that lower needs must be met before the person can move up higher on the pyramid (McLeod, 2018). Some of the barriers that these youth face when transitioning out have to do with employment, feeling disconnected and low self-esteem, all components that are higher on the pyramid. When discussing how to make these transitions to adulthood successful, one must feel their physiological needs are met before they can focus on employment and education. This research could help propose solutions to housing extending past age 21, in order to help the TAY continue to move up on the pyramid.

Potential Contribution of the Study to Micro and/or Macro Social Work Practice

Not only would having this research and the perspectives of the foster youth start a conversation about an overlooked population, but it could also create potential solutions and development of more support services. This research serves to bridge barriers in order for transitional age foster youth to
obtain stable housing but throughout the interviews there will be more constructs that arise that could be looked into further.

If the research were to give insight on how educational and employment barriers could be overcome, TAY could utilize the services and become productive members of society. Finding a resolution to the housing issue could also keep hundreds of youth off the street and thus potentially reduce the homeless population in the county the study was conducted in. The data that were gathered in this study could also be included in grant applications for non-profit organizations. Having this data to explain where the gaps are and why more funding is needed could show the funder how the money could be used to create a better success rate in the organization.

Summary

Foster youth transitioning out of care to adulthood face many unique challenges when compared to their counterparts. More research needs to be done in order to understand the barriers they face and how our system contributes to them. The purpose of this constructivist research study was to identify those barriers and come up with constructs that could give insight on how to assist foster TAY in being more prepared for independent living once they age out of care. It is the hope of the researcher that this study will spark conversations that will jumpstart initiatives that bridge gaps within the system so these foster TAY have more hope for their future.
CHAPTER TWO

ENGAGEMENT

Introduction

During the engagement stage of the study, the researcher established rapport with various social service and community organizations to gain permission by their gatekeepers to conduct the study. The researcher prepared themselves by acknowledging different ethical, diversity, and political issues that arose and how they were resolved. The role that technology played within the study is also discussed.

Research Site and Study Participants

The research was conducted via Zoom with various social service organizations and community college employees that service transitional age foster youth, throughout a county in Southern California. Key stakeholders in the study were organizations that provide housing, case management, educational support and other services to help these foster TAY gain independence and self-sufficiency. Directors, social workers, and youth from a non-profit transitional housing program were engaged by rapport established by the researcher from working with these members. This transitional housing program (THP) offers foster TAY independent living in apartments free of cost, as long as they are working or in school. The program also provides them with social workers who meet with them weekly, an education/employment specialist, bi-monthly life skills
training, parenting classes, and a stipend. Members from foster care support programs at local community colleges were engaged by networking done previously by the researcher at her position in the transitional housing program. These programs provide college counseling, educational workshops, a lounge area specifically for foster youth, as well as various types of monetary assistance. Additionally, the researcher was able to speak with a director of an emergency shelter in this county whom she was connected with from her position at the transitional housing program. At this emergency shelter, services are provided to TAY who were living on the streets. This is a short-term shelter where they receive crisis intervention and can later be connected with more permanent housing. Lastly, the researcher was able to contact an employee from the county’s housing department by emailing gatekeepers and being connected to this person. The housing department serves many diverse populations, including foster TAY, provides various housing options throughout the county.

Engagement Strategies for Gatekeepers at Research Site

The participant selection was conducted similar to that on the Brown (2011) study of Spirituality (Morris, 2014). It was especially important for the researcher to form relationships with key members of those in the hermeneutic circle. The researcher did have working relationships with employees and youth at a transitional age housing program, as well as employees in local community colleges and the housing department. In order to get permission to conduct the study, the researcher explained how the study could potentially give their
organization new insight into what support could make the youth more successful in the housing programs and colleges. The researcher also suggested the data collected be used in grant proposals to provide funders with a better idea of why their donation is needed and how it could be utilized to better the program. Once given permission to interview, the researcher asked the gatekeepers to nominate someone from their agency to participate in the first interview.

Self-Preparation

Unlike the other research paradigms, this type of study required the researcher to be more involved with the participants considering that virtual face-to-face interviews were conducted in order to gather the data. This meant that the researcher had to be more aware of their demeanor, the way they are dressed, and the tone of the interview. For instance, when interviewing professionals in the field the researcher dressed in business attire, but when interviewing the youth in the program, it felt more beneficial for the researcher to dress more casual in an attempt to make them feel more comfortable and build rapport. Another thing the researcher had to prepare for was conducting the interviews while following the stay at home and social distancing orders due to COVID-19. For this study, the researcher adhered to the protocol outlined on the Institutional Review Board announcements section of the California State University of San Bernardino website (https://www.csusb.edu/institutional-review-board/announcements).
An informed consent form was created to lay out the potential risk factors, and participants were informed that all participation would be kept anonymous and confidential (see Appendix A). The document was sent via email and was signed either verbally or electronically before participants were interviewed.

Diversity Issues

In regard to the participants in the study, age, gender, culture and background were all considered during the interviews. Not only are TAY very diverse but the workers are as well. It was important for the researcher to remain sensitive and aware of gender pronouns when conducting the interviews, as well as potential language barriers.

Ethical Issues

As a social worker, the Code of Ethics was at the forefront of this research project. The confidentiality and best interest of the participants were kept in mind. For this study, the researcher informed the participants that their confidentiality would be of the highest priority. The researcher took extra precautions to ensure confidentiality by keeping all participants and organizations anonymous within the findings, as well as not including any identifying information in the transcripts.

It was also important that the researcher had mental health resources such as the Crisis Text Line which provides free 24/7 Crisis Counselor Support as well as the county’s Community Access, Referral, Evaluation and Support line
(CARES) on hand to provide additional support to participants, if needed. A copy of these resources can be found in Appendix D.

Considering the constant evolution of the study, the researcher was monitoring for any ethical issues because the intention was to make sure all of the participants in the study felt comfortable and heard. Although no unexpected issues arose, the researcher reminded participants that they could refuse to participate in the study or discontinue at any time without any repercussions. The terms and agreements given at the beginning of the study and made any necessary changes or accommodations.

Political Issues

Ideally in constructivist research all negotiations are made with the gatekeepers prior to beginning the research, making it rare to run into political issues (Morris, 2014). The participants are essentially agreeing to commit their honesty and time in order to come up with the creation of a joint construct (Morris, 2014). In a worst-case scenario, if members were not able to come to an agreement this would typically be noted in the findings and limitations (Morris, 2014). Due to COVID-19 restrictions, there was no member check-in meeting in order to follow the stay-at-home order.

The Role of Technology

In this study, technology played a large role, specifically when analyzing data and writing on the findings. The development of computer programs have
been extremely useful when inputting and coding the data, especially for qualitative research. For many years, statistical data has been calculated by computer software but it has not been until recently that the software has given researchers the ability to manage and code data for qualitative studies, just like the one presented above (Morris, 2014). The researcher used an audio recorder that was not connected to the internet to record the interviews so that there are no discrepancies in recollection. Lastly, the researcher used Zoom to interview members of the study to follow social distancing guidelines. These calls were conducted in a closed room, with no one else around, in order to protect confidentiality.

Summary

After the researcher engaged and obtained permission from the gatekeepers, they were able begin preparing for the interviews. During their preparation, the researcher considered any ethical or diversity issues that arose. They also ensured they had a plan and possible solution for any issues that did arise and always kept the Code of Ethics in mind. For the constructivist approach, there should be little issue with politics considering consent was given by gatekeepers before interviewing any participants and all names and organizations were kept anonymous. Technology played a large role in the production of this study in order to gather data as well as analyze it.
CHAPTER THREE
IMPLEMENTATION

Introduction
This chapter covers who was a member of the hermeneutic dialectic circle, how the participants were selected and categorized, as well as how the data were gathered. A discussion of the different phases of data collection will also be gone over, along with how the data were analyzed and used to form various constructions.

Study Participants
The purpose of this study was to bring extended foster care service providers together with other key members of the community to get a better understanding of how community organizations and service providers could assist this population to be successful, for a better chance of obtaining long-term housing once they age out. The interviewees included in the study were foster TAY ages 18-21 who were in a transitional housing program and social workers employed within that organization. Other important stakeholders include the county housing department, emergency shelter for TAY, foster care liaisons, as well as counselors within the community college system in that county.
Selection of Participants

The researcher divided the stakeholders into categories; agents and beneficiaries of any transitional housing for foster youth. The agents were the social service workers; i.e. employees of the housing programs, and any other employees from government agencies or non-profits. The beneficiaries were the foster youth receiving services from the housing programs or social service agencies. In order to create a maximum variation sample selection, the researcher interviewed those initial participants and then asked that they refer someone else within their agency or any other individuals they felt could provide a different perspective on the issue; commonly known as a snowball sample.

Demographics

The participants consisted of a diverse group of seven professionals and four foster TAY. In Table 1 below, the demographic information is presented for the professionals. 57% of the professionals identified as female, while 43% identified as males. Within this group, 57% were between 31-40 years old, with 43% being between ages 41-50. 14% identified as Latino American, with 43% identifying as White American and African American. In regard to the agency they work at, 43% are employees at the transitional housing program, 14% work for the county housing department, 29% work for the community college district and 14% work at an emergency housing shelter in the county. 86% of these participants had worked at their agency for 0-5 years, while the other 14% worked for the agency between 11-15 years.
In Table 1.2 below, data on demographics is provided for the foster TAY who participated in this study. Of the four TAY, 50% identified as male, with 50% identifying as female. 75% identified themselves as African American, with 25% identifying themselves as Latino American. Because 100% of them were living in a THP, 100% of them were between the ages of 18-21. 25% had been there a year or less, with the remaining 75% having lived there between 2-3 years.

Table 1. Sample Demographics for Professionals Working with Foster Transitional Age Youth (N=7)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency (n)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White American</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino American</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency/Organization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THP</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Department</td>
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<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency Shelter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years at Agency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
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<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Sample Demographics for Foster Transitional Age Youth (N=4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency (n)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Gender</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<tr>
<td>18-21</td>
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<tr>
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Data Gathering

Throughout the interviews, different questions were asked in order to build rapport, gather the appropriate data, and check for consistency. In the beginning of the interviews, the researcher asked questions that would put the participant at ease and establish trust. Due to the fact that the researcher interviewed both the agents and the beneficiaries, there were two questionnaires created. The data
gathering questions were focused to where the researcher could get a better understanding of the topic and constructs. The researcher asked descriptive questions about a day-to-day experience at the agency and/or housing program, what they liked most about the organization, and were also asked clarifying questions to better understand a particular topic. For beneficiaries, the researcher asked them questions about how they felt the program had helped them overcome barriers and if they felt prepared for their transition out of the program. For a complete list of questions, please refer to the interview guide in Appendix C.

Phases of Data Collection

Once the researcher felt prepared, interviewees were contacted via email to tell them more about the study as well as what to expect during the interview. The informed consent document was also included in this email. Once the interview began, the researcher started with some introductory questions to build rapport and relax the participant. Then when ready, the researcher moved on to data-gathering questions. At the conclusion of the interview, the researcher summarized what the participant said to clarify and give an opportunity for further discussion. Finally, the researcher asked if the participant had anyone they wanted to nominate to provide another perspective on the topic. After the interview, the researcher transcribed and summarized their notes and themes from the interview were developed into constructions.
Once all interviews were completed, the researcher had planned on gathering all of the constructs to create a joint construction that was to be shared with the hermeneutic circle at the member check-in meeting. This step was removed due to the stay-at-home order. The purpose of this meeting would have been to identify areas of agreement, disagreement, and potential suggestions for solutions. Although this step was removed, the constructs formed were reviewed and double-checked by the research supervisor.

Data Recording

First, the researcher began the data recording by purchasing a journal to take notes over the course of the study. Before collecting the data in the interviews, the researcher asked for consent to audio record on a device not connected to the internet, because it is not as invasive as video recording but still a reliable way to capture the parts they may have missed while taking notes. If the participants did not consent to audio record, the researcher would then have to rely solely on notes and utilize critical incident reporting. Once the researcher had the audio recording, it was translated to transcripts for data analysis.

Data Analysis

This study was a qualitative analysis that analyzed the data using content analysis to identify themes and subthemes. In the data collecting stage the researcher kept a journal to document any notes or themes that had come up
during an interview. After the interviews were transcribed the researcher began to identify common themes within the data and organized them into constructs; this was done for each interview. Although there was an overlap in constructs, the objective was to see if the next interviewee had any other insights or a different perspective on the topic. Data was either organized under a previous category or a new one was created. Once the themes were identified the researcher looked for links between them, this information helped the researcher focus the data to begin developing the constructions. Once the researcher built the units, they were then categorized.

It was important to limit the units, so each category had units that provided useful information that validated the research focus. Microsoft Word was used to group the categories and assign numbers so the categories were clear and organized.

Once the categories were created the researcher looked for relationships between them. The categories were not meant to be completely separate because they are constructs stemming from one focus, in this case, Housing for Transitional Age Foster Youth, the categories should really be thought of as bridges between each other. Linking the categories helped to provide a clearer picture as to what factors need to be considered when studying this topic.

The purpose of constructivist research was to create a joint construct that summarized the key constructions provided by the data in hopes to spark initiative and collaboration between various organizations that work with this
population. As previously stated, a join construct was unable to be produced due to the COVID-19 stay at home orders, so the hope is that this research can be used to inform agencies that work with this population on efforts that can be made to help them transition more successfully to independence.

Lastly, some cross-cutting issues to consider were that of diversity and technology. Due to the qualitative nature of the constructivist approach, the data, because they were an analysis of words, are meant to tell a story. There has been some debate on what the best way to present data and some radical thinkers have proposed turning these data into art such as poetry or a script, in order to better express the diversity of perspectives.

Summary

Once the members of the hermeneutic dialectic circle were chosen, the researcher divided them into categories of agents and beneficiaries. The researcher prepared for the interviews by coming up with a set of questions for each category. After the first interview was conducted, the researcher asked the participant to nominate another member who they felt could add a different perspective to the study. When this was complete, the data were transcribed and. After the data were analyzed and the constructs were identified, the researcher came up with a joint construct that captured all of the findings.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

In this chapter the outcomes of the study will be discussed, along with the themes and subthemes that were constructed by the researcher. Quotes from the participants will be used throughout this chapter to provide supplemental perspectives to support the findings.

Outcomes

Data from this study was collected from 11 interviews from current employees of a transitional housing program, the county housing department, a local community college, as well as current foster TAY living in the transitional housing program. Once the researcher transcribed the interviews, the data was analyzed and coded into themes and subthemes related to the barriers to housing that TAY face when transitioning out of care. Direct quotes from the interviews are included to provide additional context. Participants’ names are not included, and participants will be identified by a numerical ID. Table 2 below provides a visual and short summary of the themes and subthemes; the evidence of these themes directly follows with participant quotes.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes and Subthemes</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Systemic Factors</td>
<td>This theme involves factors within the social service system that contribute to barriers foster TAY face when exiting care.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Lack of resources</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Age requirements</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Social worker involvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Collaboration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional Factors</td>
<td>This theme is supported by subthemes that can play a role in either the successful or unsuccessful transition to permanent housing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Education and Employment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Lack of motivation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Self-Sufficiency</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Permanent Connections and Supports</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3. Themes in Connection to Barriers to Housing*

**Themes and Subthemes**

**Theme One: Systemic Factors**

When analyzing the data, the researcher found that all participants faced at least one systemic factor. This included issues within the social service system with some participants expressing more than one barrier due to this system. This theme is evidenced by subthemes of lack of resources, age requirements, social work involvement, and collaboration.

**Lack of Resources**

Lack of resources was found to be a barrier in regard to counties not having enough housing options for foster TAY who are aging out of extended care. It was specifically asked in the interviews if the participants felt there were adequate housing resources for this population once they aged out, and all 11
participants described, in one way or another, the scarcity of housing resources for foster TAY after age 21.

Participant 1 described not being familiar with additional housing resources even as a social worker for this housing program:

There aren’t a lot of housing programs like ours that extend past the age of 21. There’s literally two that our agency has a relationship with and once those agencies are at capacity our youth are still back to square one, where they have to be on the waiting list but in the meantime they have to find somewhere that is secure housing while they are in waiting! So it’s a struggle because some of the youth end up couch surfing again so then they’re back in homelessness and that’s, that’s not what our aim.

As a TAY in care, Participant 6 recalls having more housing options under the age of 21, “Oh when you are 21? Um not as much as if I were under 21 but yeah there are a couple options.” Participant 7 touched on how lack of resources is a barrier in itself, “The availability of housing is a limiting factor kind of right off the bat. There are certain programs that there is only so much capacity; like the THP+ program is very limited in our county.” Participant 10 gave some explanation as to why there are a lack of housing resources for TAY aging out of care:

No, I think nowadays a lot of landlords or management companies shy away from having rental assistance, vouchers or dealing with Section 8 because I am just going to be honest- some clients destroy the homes…so therefore
the market has been reduced to having potential slumlords who have a little
bedroom or even studio for $900 in rough areas.

Age Requirements

Another hinderance when it comes to foster TAY housing is the age limit it
is suspended at. Not only is it an issue because of the lack transitional housing
programs (THP) after age 21, but also because some TAY may not be ready to
successfully transition at that age. Six of the participants felt that the age
requirements are barriers for TAY both when exiting care, or when trying to find
other housing resources for this population. Participant 4 described the foreboding
they notice when a TAY talks about their time being up in the program:

I feel like a lot of them talk about that age like 'oh 21,' like it’s like a death
sentence. They’re always bringing that up like ‘I have until 21.’ So if it was
longer maybe it wouldn’t be like this ceiling like they’re always looking at it,
kind of like your gas gauge when you’re driving through the desert and its
getting low and you keep staring at it and oh my god its getting lower and
you can’t focus on anything else but that gas gauge. Maybe they would
not focus on that if they had more time.

Participant 7 discussed how although former foster TAY are able to receive
services from the school up to age 26, those same TAY would not qualify for
foster TAY housing services:

We work with sort of a broad range of foster youth and ages that they
were in care so not all foster youth qualify for all programs and so a lot of
the students that would be participating in our college programs may not qualify for some of the transitional housing programs that are out there just based on the age they left the system or whatnot.

Participant 8 discussed the struggle of having to leave right at age 21, even if you do not have a plan for housing:

…with the extended foster care, you have to move out first and then get on the list, technically. Like they let you apply 30 days before you turn 21 but I don’t know how long the list is, so you still have to move out and find somewhere else to stay before you get approved.

Participant 11 spoke of their own experience aging out of foster care with the age requirements:

So when I was in foster care the age was 18, so I was kicked out and was homeless on the street. Then it went to 21, which was better but my thing is, is that the county prides themselves on having a “TAY Aged” program. Transitional age youth is up to 24, 25 or 26 depending on the organization or what have you, but I feel like if we can sit and say that your brain finishes developing at that time then that should be the time that these kids still have to grow and kind of beat the system in that way because it is tough, even for a 24 year old. I think it should be extended to 24-25 or 26 like I said it depends on the agency. If we are comfortable giving those kids resources to that age then why not extend [housing] services to that age.
Social Worker Involvement

Seven participants also felt that the amount of involvement by either a county or housing social worker played a role in how successful the TAY would be in obtaining stable housing. For example, Participant 2 describes how they feel the social service system assists this population:

… mainly of course we know it falls on the county social worker or their housing social worker. So I have seen some county workers engage with their youth who has been terminated or their youth who has successfully graduated, in preparing them; I have seen it on both sides. I have seen some say well ‘they’re aging out of EFC, their case is about to be closed they knew this time was coming they should have been preparing its not my responsibility.’ See I have always been told that even if they terminate or if they successfully graduate, of course if they successfully graduate some will have a plan but it’s still the responsibility of the county social worker to provide resources ‘cause you never know where they are going to go, they may not find that apartment.

Participant 4 illustrated the conversations TAY have regarding their social workers:

I think social workers and the social service system gets a bad rap. You know I know a lot of our students I speak to and I work with they often have bad things to say about their social worker and the system and there are. Just like there are cops who are racists, there are social workers that
don’t always do the right thing for their youth; but I feel like it is easy to blame them; it’s also like when kids are growing up sometimes when they get to be older they blame their parents for things that when wrong in their life.

Participant 11 scrutinized the involvement of social workers by stating:

There is just an abundance of cases and social workers for whatever reason are so bombarded with cases that they can’t focus on one kid… It kind of just puts a wrench in things and it kind of makes it difficult for a kid to get those services and feel cared for so it puts a wrench in care for sure…with the social workers I have dealt with and going back to my own story it’s just, it would be nice to say that they do [prepare clients for independent living] and I am sure they do in some cases but most of the time they don’t. If that were the case then I wouldn’t have this job right now."

Collaboration

The need for more collaboration between service providers is something that came up in seven of the interviews, mostly touched on by service providers who see the gap first-hand. For example, Participant 1 talked about the need to bring back transitional conferences:

I think the counties have stopped doing what was called…transitional conferences so there used to be transitional conferences where all of the client’s team would meet together 30, 60 and 90 days prior to the
transition into THP and so that all the treatment team members could be on board in supporting this client with you know, learning their new program… the transition conferences really speak to and provide youth with all of their you know, resources that they can make like a wise educated decision that they feel is best for themselves…But those have stopped so I think that is a huge, huge opportunity that we should really consider bringing back.

Participant 2 shared about the disconnect between the county and the various agencies involved:

Yes, if agencies tended to work more together, because to me it seems that all the agencies are doing their own thing and there is like a gap between agencies; even just with the county it’s just a lack of information because the county is so overwhelmed its kind of like you don’t hear from the county social worker for months sometimes, you know, so it’s even just sharing basic information. Most of the time when you are talking to a county social worker for the most part it is when something goes awry… They go from therapist to therapist; they move around a lot with different resources they have started to work with so they may work with one agency for resources then work with another one. They may have seen four or five therapists since they have been in the system, so the information gets lost.
Participant 4 discussed how collaboration between the social workers and the community college can help the student be more successful:

…the social workers that I have worked with where it has been a real big success have been the ones that say ‘hey, I have a student that is graduating high school and I would like to introduce them to you and I would like to get them started’ and then we work together. Then the three of us sit, somebody that they trust, somebody that they know is sitting there with them meeting somebody that they don’t know and that warm hand off of like ‘hey here is [redacted], I have been working with them and they are going to help you with this next part’ and it is a team effort and so that has been always successful… I can tell there is a difference with students with when they have other people involved.

Participant 10 also shared how collaboration can help successfully link the client with services:

I think that [collaboration] definitely would be helpful. Let’s say with your organization the youth had already identified goals, can we transition that set of goals into this environment where they can continue working on the goals instead of saying ugh now we’re going to go through this process again, maybe if there was a way information could be more integrated so we are aware of where they are at so we can just ask them some follow up questions so it doesn’t seem like they have to go through the same process.
**Theme Two: Transitional Factors**

The second theme that came up in the findings is transitional factors. These are factors that have proved to be either barriers or supports to a successful transition to independent living. The subthemes within transitional factors are education and employment, lack of motivation, self-sufficiency and independence and lastly, permanent connections and support.

**Education and Employment**

While obtaining education or employment is part of being compliant in a transitional housing program, not all clients are able to both, successfully for a number of reasons. Eight participants commented on the need for education and employment as well as how many TAY drop out of school in order to work to save up for their transition out of care. Participant 3 addressed how to their clients, making money is their primary concern:

I have one right now who is new on my caseload; has the desire to go to school, wants to go to school but she has realized like ‘I’m only going to be in this program a year now and I got to save up my money so I can have an apartment on my own.’ So right now, school is not in the forefront, it’s stacking money. Not even just with housing I have heard them say ‘look this stipend check I am getting is just not cutting it, I need to get a job, full time.’ I try to work with them to balance it out, you know do work part time, do school part time but sometimes that can be too much for them and still be like ‘these part-time checks still aren’t cutting it so let me
just quit school part time and go to work full time so I can see a larger check.’ I have seen that very often.

Participant 9 touches on the pros and cons of staying in school and how it will not help them now, to prepare to live on their own:

I was say staying in school is kind of tough because you aren’t really helping yourself… It is just because I am going to be in school, it is not like I am helping myself financially or like um just for job opportunities like you need experience, so it is not like I have that… you’re at school, you are working obviously toward a goal and a degree but at the same time you are not really putting yourself into the work experience that you are going to need eventually.

Participant 11 describes how many TAY prioritize working over getting their education:

I would say maybe 70% of our kids that come in drop out. It is pretty sad because their main focus is getting a job rather than getting housing. So they would rather get a job and have that income than have a safe place to sleep at night, it’s a lot because that is what they have been told to do their whole lives. If you get a job you’ll have a place to stay and all that stuff and then education is always put last. That is what we are seeing right now on the streets, education is last, job is first and housing falls somewhere so yeah it gets confusing for them to place which one they should do in order.
Lack of Motivation

While only four participants commented on their observations they see with lack of motivation within the TAY, it is a notable subtheme. Not having the motivation to work, go to school, plan for aging out, etc., can leave the client with very little housing options at 21 years old, creating a barrier to obtaining stable housing. Participant 3 shows evidence of this by the following:

Even after you have provided them all of the resources, all of the housing resources from section 8 on down, even other THP+ programs, their lack to fill out applications or if they do fill out their application, the lack of follow through in getting the supporting documents that will help their application, the lack of following up with the individual who calls and leaves a message, the lack of going to the interview or the failure to go to the interview I feel those are a lot of challenges that I’ve noticed… when you continue to give handouts, when you continue to enable them you don’t allow them the opportunity to show accountability and to be responsible. You are not teaching them to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps and get out there and get it. I do understand different exposures and different rearing’s but at some point you have to teach them how to dig deep within and just find that motivation to want to do better.

Participant 9 explained how being successful in the housing program is do-able, but only if you work for it, “Um I think for anybody yes. I think anybody could do
either of them, but you have to want too. If you aren’t going to do work or go to school then it’s not really worth it.”

**Self-Sufficiency and Independence**

This subtheme is based on how prepared the TAY are for transitioning out of care to independent living. Do they have life skills and tools to help them navigate the world on their own after having had support for so many years while in the system? Nine participants felt that the ability for TAY to be independent was a barrier to housing in itself, for example, Participant 1 stated:

Here are the youth that are aging out of foster care and they have very very limited skills in comparison to youth in their cohort who haven’t been through the system and they are expected to be able to pay the same rent as someone who works a full time job, someone who has graduated college. They are expected to be able to afford their own apartment and how?

Participant 8 described not feeling ready for independent living even with less than a year left in the housing program:

I am not even financially ready to be own my own on my own which is why I am going to do the extended one after this one, um mainly because the ages of 18-21 living in this program by myself it’s like I was still learning. Like you know when you first move in and it’s like oh like a honeymoon almost, and I was still learning how to be financially responsible and stuff
like that it was just like a whole other growing phase for me. I feel like now that I have caught on, I still need a little bit more help.

Participant 11 illustrated how not all TAY have the mindset of an independent adult:

A lot of the times in our youth we see that they are a lot younger than what they actually are you know they have a mindset of a 16 year old ,when they are 20 or 19 so it’s like you’re giving them resources but you are also still helping them apply for those resources.

Permanent Connections and Supports

The last theme describes the need for healthy adult connections for TAY and continued supports even after transitioning out, in order to help them stay successful. Seven participants mentioned permanent connections and supports in their interviews, Participant 1 outlined the negative relationships TAY have and the need for mentors:

You know, they haven’t a lot of times haven’t really had success in maintaining strong connections with positive adults. They have a lot connections with a lot of adults who take them through the ringer. They have a lot of connections with adults who don’t necessarily have their best interest at heart. Some of these adults might be their biological family, which it’s hard to break that tie and some of the adults are just people that see the vulnerabilities and weaknesses and you know kind of like the see the foster youth as prey and so there is a predatory relationship that
happens there so I think of one the barriers that I’ve seen is just helping youth to maintain healthy relationships and have healthy boundaries in place if the relationships are toxic… there is so much research that says if youth who have tumultuous pasts or trauma in their past, foster youth specifically; if they have at least one positive adult connection uh and know that they can lean on this one person for guidance, for emotional support for mentoring or whatever the case may be, I think that, that would be such a huge huge huge deal breaker with how they succeed after the program.

Participant 4 spoke about fostering connections and using those people as supports:

Transitioning and building a foundation you know as they move forward, building a network of people that are around them. College for example, they get to know counselors, and faculty and they join clubs and they get to make friends and I feel like it’s building their network of people that are around them. So I think that is a big part of it, not feeling like they belong, feeling alone, like they are the only ones going through this um I think human connection is one of the biggest things. Often times we forget about all these connections we make and how we rely on them.

Participant 10 added to the idea of forming connections with people to create supports by saying:
…[they need] a social support network. That is really difficult I think because it my personal perspective having that social support or support from friends- I mean a lot of them don't really have family or someone that allows them to be empowered that they can do it.

Summary

This chapter included the two main themes found in the study, along with brief summaries of their subthemes with supporting quotes from the transcribed interviews. The findings identified the ensuing themes and subthemes in connection with barriers to housing that TAY face when aging out of care by the participants in the study. The first theme included systemic factors with subthemes describing the lack of resources, age requirements, social worker involvement and collaboration. The second theme included transitional factors with subthemes describing factors related to education and employment, lack of motivation, self-sufficiency and independence, and permanent connections and support. These themes developed from the analyzing and coding done by the researcher once the interviews were transcribed. These themes are representative of first-hand accounts and personal experiences from social service providers, community college employees, and TAY currently in a transitional housing program.
CHAPTER FIVE
TERMINATION AND FOLLOW UP

Introduction
In this chapter the researcher will go over a discussion of the findings and how they compare to current and past literature. Implications for policy, practice and research will also be covered along with the limitations and strengths of the study. Lastly communication of findings and dissemination plan will be discussed.

Discussion
The data collected in this study sheds light on the various challenges that transitional age foster youth face when preparing to transition out of the foster care system to independence. The findings revealed two major themes that contribute to barriers foster TAY face when exiting care as well as factors that play a role in a successful or unsuccessful transition: systemic factors and transitional factors.

In alignment with research from the literature review, the data support that foster TAY are faced with numerous challenges when it comes to preparing to age out of the system. In terms of systemic factors, the data in this study indicated disparity due to lack of resources; a factor that Curry and Abrams (2015) attributed to homelessness and housing instability. Housing, which provides basic needs like shelter, and stability is one of the scarcest resources for this population. Only 28 states have been federally approved for Title IV-E,
extended foster care; allowing TAY to remain in care until age 21 (Finally Family Homes, 2020). 22 states have still not been approved for federal funding, which means they offer their own programs for extended support, but it is very minimal (Finally Family Homes, 2020). Often times youth living in these areas are advised to move to a state that does have federal funding for extended care, making the availability for housing even more scarce (Finally Family Homes, 2020). All seven participants working with foster youth commented on the need for more housing services beyond age 21.

Another factor found in these data was the age requirement for services. Assistance from the foster care system, which provides these youth with housing, financial support, education, health and other necessary services typically ends when these TAY are developmentally not prepared to take on adult roles and responsibilities (Avery & Freundlich, 2009). Moreover, evidence suggests if a TAY has experienced child abuse or trauma, the neurological affects can cause delays or shortfalls in the child's ability to reach age-appropriate behaviors/responses (Avery & Freundlich, 2009). While the four foster TAY who participated generally stated they felt prepared to live independently, those seven participants working with the population felt otherwise. The researcher wondered if this could be due to the TAY not knowing what is expected once they transition out, and unrealistic expectations of living independently because research derived from the literature review also noted that most foster TAY are not prepared to live independently at age 21 (Curry & Abrams, 2015). This period is
a crucial crossroads of simultaneously transitioning out of care and into adulthood (Lee et al., 2015). The current expectations of TAY living independently are not consistent with reality of the life of a young person in the 21st century (Avery & Freundlich, 2009). Data on the living arrangements, workforce entry and education patterns of young people signify that many of them are not ready to take on adulthood before their mid-20’s (Avery & Freundlich, 2009).

Some additional themes the researcher found, that were also noted in other findings were that of social worker involvement and collaboration between agencies. A study done in Sweden found that the relationship between youth and social worker are affected by increasing caseloads; leading to little effort and time spent with a youth (Lindhal & Brun, 2018). This can make it difficult for social workers to build rapport and trusting relationships with their clients, leaving the client feeling unsupported in their transition (Lindhal & Brun, 2018). Participants in one study suggested that adults involved in the social service system provide more “unconditional care and support,” with more understanding of their client’s individual emotions, thoughts and needs (Graham et al., 2015, p. 75). In addition to this, participants felt the communication between members working with foster youth needed to be improved.

One TAY can have between 6-8 youth working with them, which can make transferring of information complicated. Thus, better collaboration is needed so information is transferred correctly and consistently (Graham et al., 2015). In a
letter written by Kamala Harris, Tom Torlarkson and Will Lightbourne (2014), in partnership with the California Department of Education, California Department of Social Services and the Bureau of Children’s Justice, they urged their colleagues to develop comprehensive protocols that would allow information-sharing and collaboration between agencies in order to expedite the exchanging of education records, for the benefit of the foster youth. They go on to reiterate the importance of collaboration between local agencies working with these youth and how it plays a critical role in improving educational outcomes for children in the foster care system (Harris et al., 2014). To the same extent, participants in this study felt if executed correctly, higher levels of social worker involvement and collaboration could benefit TAY in the process of transitioning out of care.

Moreover, another main theme discovered within the research were transitional factors. Curry and Abrams (2015) reported low rates of high school and college graduation among foster TAY; similarly, the participants in this research found that employment seemed to be the priority among the TAY they worked with and noted the majority of their clients end up dropping out of school in order to get a job. Even some of the TAY who participated expressed the difficulty of attending school full-time when they know they need a job to save for their transition out. One subtheme of this factor was the lack of motivation by THP participants; this was something discussed by both TAY and workers in the study as a reason youth are sometimes not successful in transitioning out. Prior studies among this population have found that engaging and motivating TAY is
an important component to their success. More research is being focused on the role of self-determination as a way of positive development in youth (Powers et al., 2018). Self-determination emphasizes on intrinsic motivation and self-directed action; research conducted on foster youth receiving special education services show a consistent correlation between growth in self-determination and improvements in workforce, educational and independent transition outcomes (Powers et al., 2018). Youth want to have more control over the decision-making process of their own lives and the needs they feel still need to be met when preparing to exit care (Powers et al., 2018). Youth in this study stated that the support for their transition to independence needs to be based on goals they have for themselves and their future (Powers et al., 2018). The lack of motivation may be due to youth not feeling excited about their plan or their future, therefore, although these TAY must follow rules to be complaint in the THP, their plan for doing so must be tailored to fit their unique situation, and vision they see for themselves.

Self-sufficiency and independence was another subtheme found in the data as some youth reported struggling with basic life skills such as: the freedom of the THP, time management, finding a job, transportation and having to prepare for life without the bi-monthly stipend to fall back on. Furthermore, one study found that while participants reported feeling generally prepared for basic survival, they were not prepared for maintaining a household, independently navigating school/work, healthy meal planning, managing finances, etc. (Graham
et al., 2015). Curry and Abrams (2015) found that most THP’s over encourage independence causing the youth to feel like they should not ask for help once aging out. However, the researcher found that the TAY in this study actually felt that the THP they were living in encouraged interdependence and felt they were knowledgeable of resources that can help them even after they transition. Lastly, the data showed these youth have very little support or healthy permanent connections. This matches the literature that states foster TAY have little to no familiar support or assistance (Yen et al., 2009).

Despite the fact that mental illness, substance abuse and/or parenting were not major themes found in this study, it should be noted they were touched on by some participants as well as allocated by Curry and Abrams (2015) as other reasons for instability and homelessness. Some of the participants reported those characteristics being additional hinderances toward independence and stable housing. It is possible that these components did not emerge as major themes because while many TAY do struggle with these issues, there are many resources and services available to assist them in coping and recovery. Therefore mental health, substance abuse and parenting are additional components that can play a role in the TAYs ability to stay compliant in the housing program and successfully transition, but more services are available to help them overcome those specific barriers.
Policy, Practice and Research Implications

Policy Implications

The findings in this research brings awareness to the need for the extension of age limitation in extended foster care. During their interviews the researcher found that the majority of participants felt that foster care services needed to be extended past age 21. This extension would allow youth more time to not only to prepare for independent living, but to mature mentally as well. Unfortunately, most foster TAY are not fully prepared at age 21 and the three years currently allowed in extended care is not enough time to get them fully educated or on a career path that will sustain independent living. One study that interviewed former foster youth found that one quarter of their participants had experienced homelessness and nearly half reported facing economic hardship within the two years after their abrupt discharge from services at age 21 (Courtney et al., 2020). In 2020 amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Governor Newsom signed the Budget Act of 2020 which allowed foster youth to remain in care until June 30, 2021 regardless if they turned 21 during that time (Youth Law Center, 2020). This was a huge victory and relief for youth in care. When asked if this extension was relieving one THP participant said this:

Yes very, very. So, I just got back on my feet. I have already done pretty good in the program, but I was having some mental health issues, so I wasn’t working, and I wasn’t going to school but I finally got in the mind track of going back to school full time and working
and just taking care of me and being here are the house. So the extension, that really relieved me.

The findings in this study, along with the research done by Courtney et al., (2020), suggest that even after the pandemic is gone, these TAY could still benefit from housing and support past age 21. Fortunately, there are a few Transitional Housing Placement + (THP+) like Aspiranet and Kamali’i, that allow foster youth to stay up until age 24. Similar to THP, THP+ assists foster youth by supporting their transition into adulthood by providing them with a safe living environment while concurrently helping them achieve self-sufficiency (Aspiranet.org, 2021). Sadly, Kamali’i is only available in one county in California (Kamalii.org, 2021) Whereas Aspiranet’s THP+ program is in 14 counties within California; but despite their agency serving over 1,900 TAY annually, there is still a gap in service between those served and the 5,000 TAY aging out of California each year (Aspiranet.org, 2021).

**Practice Implications**

In addition to extended age limitations, this research also acknowledges the role social worker involvement can play in the successful or unsuccessful transition of a foster TAY (Avery & Freundlich, 2009). Although the TAY typically have a team of people working with them, their social worker should be the one preparing them for their transition out. Social workers can work with the TAY to create a transition plan, starting a year before their discharge. This plan should align with the TAY’s needs, goals and circumstances; while addressing housing,
education/employment and support networks (Torrico, 2010). Furthermore, they should be preparing the TAY by making sure they have housing, mental health and food resources readily available for them to contact if needed, as well as assisting them in obtaining and organizing important documents like birth certificate, social security, etc. (Torrico, 2010). During this process the social worker should also empower and encourage the youth to ask for help when needed and teach them to advocate for themselves when they do not feel they are receiving proper services. Working with them while they are in the program to seek out needed services can help normalize this behavior so they will carry it on when they transition out.

In conjunction with their involvement with the TAY, social workers should also be networking and collaborating with other agencies in order to provide the highest quality of care. The need for collaboration was a factor all seven of the professional participants in this study thought to be essential. Coordination of planning among agencies is crucial because not one agency can provide the TAY with all of the services they need (Torrico, 2010). Working across systems not only allows you to have various contacts to easily connect clients too but helps to bridge gaps where there is lack of communication between providers. Therefore, having multiple agencies working together with the TAY can be helpful in planning their transition. Participant 1 suggested reinstating transitional conferences, where everyone on the client’s team would meet at 90, 60 and 30 days prior to the youth’s transition into the THP as well as 90, 60 and 30 days
prior to the youth’s transition out of care. The purpose of these meetings were so that the treatment team members were all on board, supporting their client in educating them with options, providing resources, suggestions and ultimately helping the client make a decision that is the best for them. This way the youth are knowledgably of their plan and prepared for their future.

Research Implications

Future researchers who conduct a similar study can build off of this research by interviewing a wider range of social service providers, along with involving more counties. This would give a more diverse sample and potentially give insight to differences between services within various counties. Additionally, more research should be done following foster TAY past their time of discharge; this way researchers could compare the services given and utilized when in care, with their housing outcomes a few years after their transition. This would give additional insight to what services are really working for this population, what can be improved, and whether the same types of barriers found in this and other studies continue to present themselves once they leave foster care.

Limitations and Strengths

As with many studies, the design of the current study is subject to limitations. To begin, the sample size of the participants was small, and all participants and agencies were within one county in Southern California; therefore, any generalizing of these findings should be made with caution.
Secondly, some of the participants involved with the THP could have been influenced by bias from personally knowing the researcher through her position at the agency. This could mean those participants were not completely truthful in their responses or talked the agency up due to the researcher’s affiliation. Lastly, the constructivist approach is unique in that it offers participants to continue to take action via the member check-in meeting even after the researcher withdraws themselves from the study. Another limitation was that the researcher removed this final meeting due to stay-at-home orders therefore no joint construction or action plan was created.

One strength was that participants were able to expand upon their responses and share the experiences without limitation due to the qualitative nature of the study. The design of the survey was structured so that most questions were open-ended, leaving more room for telling data. Additionally, some of the participants were current or former foster youth either living in the THP or working for one of the agencies discussed in the study. This provided the findings with first-hand account experiencing transitioning out of care and a perspective that could only be given with lived experience. Lastly, while the connections the researcher had due to their role at the THP could be a limitation, it was also a strength in that they had built rapport with the gatekeepers at these agencies and were able to recruit an array of participants that may have otherwise not responded.
Communication of Findings and Dissemination Plan

These findings helped the researcher better understand how community organizations and service providers could assist this population in being successful and independent, in order to have a better chance of obtaining long-term housing once they age out. It also gives service providers more insight on how we can help those youth struggling to keep a job or face challenges in school eventually obtain some type of housing, so they do not become homeless. Due to the fact that the researcher was an employee of a transitional age housing program, she will meet with the Director and COO of the housing program to discuss the research findings and see where changes could be made. The researcher also shared the findings with members of the hermeneutic circle and encouraged them to discuss findings with their superiors to brainstorm how change can be implemented within their organizations to better serve this population. Finally, this study will be published on the California State University San Bernardino ScholarWorks website, where it will be available to other students and will bring attention to the importance of bridging these gaps.

Summary

Most of the data found this study aligns with the research found in the literature review in that most TAY are not prepared to live on their own by age 21 and an age extension for services would be very beneficial to reduce the chances of homelessness after exiting care. In addition to an age extension, the
research acknowledges the need for more support and collaboration between social service agencies, so the TAY have a smooth, planned transition. Future researchers interested in this topic should aim to gather a wider variety of participants, in various counties; some limitations of this study was that the sample size was small and it only looked at one county in California. Although the sample was small, the participants were diverse and came with plenty of experience and unique perspectives. The findings in this study will be published on the California State San Bernardino ScholarWorks website, and the researcher will share the findings with the THP they are employed at to discuss with the COO where changes could be made. Finally, the findings will be shared with the professional participants so they can bring it to their agency, in hopes that they advocate for change and collaboration.
APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT
Informed Consent

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to examine barriers to housing that transitional age foster youth encounter when transitioning out of care. The study is being conducted by Taryn Cronkite, a graduate student, under the supervision of Dr. James Simon, Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). This study has been approved by the Cal State University, San Bernardino Institutional Review Board.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is to examine barriers Transitional Age (18-21 year old) Foster Youth face that hinder them from safe, stable housing after aging out of care.

DESCRIPTION: You will be asked a few questions on barriers that they see TAY foster youth facing when transitioning out, what gaps they see in the social service system, and what solutions they feel could be implemented.

PARTICIPATION: Any participation in this study is purely voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the study or discontinue at any time without any repercussions.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Confidentiality is of the utmost priority, you will not be asked any identifiable information and the data from your interview will be stored in a digital file, not connected to the internet.

DURATION: It will take 15-20 minutes to complete the interview.

RISKS: Although not anticipated, there may be some discomfort in answering some of the questions. You are not required to answer and can skip the question or end your participation.

BENEFITS: There will not be any direct benefits to you.

CONTACT: If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. James Simon at (909) 537-7224.

RESULTS: Results of the study can be obtained from the Pfau Library ScholarWorks database (http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/) at California State University, San Bernardino after July 2020.

I agree to have this interview be audio recorded ___ Yes ___ No

I understand that I must be over 18 years of age or older to participate in your study, have read and understand the consent document and agree to participate in your study.

Place an X mark here _______________________________ Date _______________________________
APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL EMAIL
May 18, 2020

CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Administrative/Exempt Review Determination
Status: Determined Exempt
IRB-FY2020-288

Taryn Cronkite James Simon
CSBS - Social Work
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Taryn Cronkite James Simon

Your application to use human subjects, titled “Barriers to Housing Transitional Age Foster Youth Face When Transitioning Out of Care” has been reviewed and approved by the Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of CSU. San Bernardino has determined your application meets the federal requirements for exempt status under 45 CFR 46.104. The CSUSB IRB has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk and benefits of the study to ensure the protection of human participants. The exempt determination does not replace any departmental or additional approvals which may be required.

You are required to notify the IRB of the following as mandated by the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) federal regulations 45 CFR 46 and CSUSB IRB policy. The forms (modification, renewal, unanticipated/adverse event, study closure) are located in the Cayuse IRB System with instructions provided on the IRB Applications, Forms, and Submission webpage. Failure to notify the IRB of the following requirements may result in disciplinary action.

- Ensure your CITI Human Subjects Training is kept up-to-date and current throughout the study
- Submit a protocol modification (change) if any changes (no matter how minor) are proposed in your study for review and approval by the IRB before being implemented in your study.
- Notify the IRB within 5 days of any unanticipated or adverse events are experienced by subjects during your research.
- Submit a study closure through the Cayuse IRB submission system once your study has ended.

If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Michael Gillespie, the Research Compliance Officer. Mr. Michael Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-7588, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at mgillesp@csusb.edu. Please include your application approval number IRB-FY2020-288 in all correspondence. Any complaints you receive from participants and/or others related to your research may be directed to Mr. Gillespie.

Best of luck with your research.

https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0?ik=95c4f47db&pli=1&view=pt&search=all&permthid=thread-id:%3A1667072547923187343&simpliedmsg=1%3A1667072547923187343

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APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDES
Interview Questions- Professionals
Created by Taryn Cronkite

What is your role at your organization/agency?

How long have you been with this agency?

What is your favorite thing about your agency?

What issues do you see within your agency in regards to preparing foster TAY for independent living?

What challenges do you see these youth facing that hinder them from successfully obtaining stable, sufficient housing?

How do you feel the social service systems assist this population in preparing for independent living?

What could be improved?

What kind of support do you feel is needed to better help them prepare for independent living?

Do you feel there are adequate housing resources for these youth once they transition out?

What age do you feel is appropriate for extended care to be terminated?

How does the current age limitation (21 years) affect the barriers the youth face to independent living?

How does the current system contribute to the barriers and challenges these youth face?

From your experience, have you witnessed any youth quit school to get a job before aging out, in order to have an income to live independently?

Besides homelessness, what do you feel are negative impacts that could come from unsuccessful transitioning for these youth?

What gaps do you see in the social service system in regards to this population?

Do you feel that more collaboration is needed between agencies to improve the situation for these youth?
Interview Questions - TAY
Created by Taryn Cronkite

How long have you been in this transitional housing program?
How much longer do you have until graduating from this program?
Where were you living before getting into this program?
Do you have plans for where you will live once you age out of this program?
What are the requirements for staying in the program?
Do you feel these requirements are realistic for you to meet?
What barriers do you face when trying to meet these requirements?
In what ways does this program help you meet these requirements?
What support or programs do you think should be implemented in this housing program to help you succeed?
Do you have support outside of this program?
Do you participate in any classes or groups that help you gain independence?
How has this program prepared you for independent living?
Do you feel prepared to live independently at age 21?
Do you feel you have adequate housing resources for when you age out?
Do you save your money? If yes, how (checking, savings, etc.)
Does anything worry you about living independently?
Are you aware of resources that can assist you once you age out?
APPENDIX D

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES
Mental Health Resources

Please use either the text line or call line to speak with a crisis counselor if you are in distress.

Crisis Text Line- text CONNECT to 741741

Community Access, Referral, Evaluation, and Support (CARES) Line Call- (800) 706-7500
REFERENCES

http://asp.wordjuice.net/programs/transitional-aged-youth/


Victory! ca governor signs budget to extend foster care. (2020, June 29).

https://doi.org/10.1080/01460860902740982