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EXTENDED FOSTER CARE: THE FOSTER PARENT'S
PERCEPTIONS

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
Tosha Thomas

June 2013


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Approved by:


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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examined the perceptions of foster parents who have accepted young adults receiving extended foster care into their home. The study was administered to address the lack of research regarding extended foster care. Assembly Bill 12 (AB 12) was passed in 2010 and formerly extends the time youth can remain in foster care in California. Foster parents who have intergrated young adults into their home were interviewed regarding the implementation of AB 12 and their understanding of extended foster care. This qualitative study found that there were many similarities in the experiences of foster parents. The study also found that most foster parents were already caring for foster youth who had aged out foster care in their home prior to the passing of AB 12. The study further confirmed that AB 12 is not fully developed and guideline information provided to foster parents is limited.

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To Rachel Strydom, Dr. Ray Liles and Susan Culbertson, three instructors who pushed me to go farther than I ever thought I could go. I thank you for your constant encouragement and knowledge you bequeathed me which is worth more than you can ever know. I will carry this knowledge with me and go on to do the good works that you expect me to do in the name of social work.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my father John Arthur Williams who always taught me told me that I could do anything I put my mind to and to always reach for the top. Even though you are no longer here with me, I know you are shining down on earth from heaven. Thank you daddy for always providing for me and believing in me.

To my mother Betty Williams who has always been my biggest cheerleader and supporter. Your unconditional love and support is immeasurable. I love you mommy.

To my children Jaelen and Chanel, from the day you were born, I have pushed and strived harder to be an example for you. Thank you for always encouraging me, hugging me when I needed it and making me laugh when I felt like giving up.

To all of my friends who knew I could do it even when I did not believe in myself, 'you are my "Bridges" over troubled waters. Thanks for holding me down! Hey Punky!

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The proposed study seeks to collaborate with the County of San Bernardino Children and Family Services to evaluate how foster parents are experiencing the implementation of AB 12; extended foster care.

Problem Statement

In 2008 and 2009, there were approximately 60,000 children in out of care placement in the state of California. Out of those 60,000, approximately 4,500 were turning 18 years old and would no longer be eligible for foster care (School of Social Welfare, University of California, Berkley, 2010). In the State of California, there are 2,248 county welfare supervised youth who aged out of the foster care system in 2011, of those, 161 were from San Bernardino County. In 2011, 26,286 foster youth emancipated from the foster care system nationwide (California Department of Social Services [CDSS], 2012). There is increasing interest and concern over how the youth will fare once they leave foster care. While in foster care placement, foster children experience various placements, frequent changes in schools and psychological

problems as a result of being removed from their family and placed into foster care. After leaving foster care placement, foster youth are faced with transitioning into adulthood and are not adequately prepared. Foster youth are suddenly charged with securing a place to live, employment and an income. Developmentally, most youth between the ages of 18 and 25 are not psychologically mature enough to deal effectively with issues encountered daily by adults. Youth are often distrustful of adults and find it difficult to share information that is vital to assisting them during the different transitional stages. Foster youth suffer from familial separation and consequences of abuse resulting in physical, social, emotional and cognitive development deficiencies (Brice, 2004).

Existing Independent Living Programs have not effectively addressed these problems and as a result, former foster youth encounter homelessness, lack of educational options, and unemployment. The State of California has recognized that there is disconnect between foster family agencies and foster youth at the time of emancipation. The challenges facing children who "age out" of the foster-care system has only been

magnified and intensified as a result of the current economy and recession. The cost of education is soaring and employment is scarce, making it difficult on youth who are trying to make it on their own. Millions of young adults are forced to move back in with their families. For youth in foster care, there are no families to move back in with.

This study proposes to examine AB 12: California's Fostering Connections to Success Act, as it relates to the experiences of foster parents that choose to care for young adults after they turn 18.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to identify the impact of the implementation of California's Fostering Connections to Success Act, AB 12 on foster parents working with young adults in extended foster care.

The population of foster youth in placement is substantial. It is a critical age for most young adults and many foster youth faced with "aging out" of the foster care system. In the state of California, Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 allocated funds to pass AB 12 in September 2010 in

order to address the disparity young adults are faced with after leaving foster care. The passing of AB 12 allows foster youth to voluntarily continue to receive foster care benefits or leave foster care and re-enter services until the age of 20. This will have a significant impact on foster parents as they are charged with caring for foster youth and young adults. The implementation process as it relates to foster parents will be the focus of this study.

Significance of the Project for Social Work

The purpose of the study was to identify the impact of the AB 12 on foster parents working with young adults in extended foster care.

The population of foster youth in placement is substantial. It is a critical age for most young adults and foster youth transitioning out of the foster care system. Unique challenges await the young adults as they are abruptly transitioned out of foster care and into adulthood (Lemon, Hines, & Merdinger, 2005). The passing of AB 12 will have significant impact for child welfare social workers in that it brings awareness to increasing problems that young adults leaving foster care are faced

with. AB 12 also extends the relationship between the social worker and the young adult in hopes of increasing the chances of positive outcomes.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

It is estimated that approximately 20,000 older adolescent foster youth are released from foster care each year and it is expected that they will become independent young adults (USGAO, 1999). Research suggests that foster youth who "age out" of the foster care system are at risk for disruption and negative outcomes. Negative outcomes include lack of education, homelessness, and financial challenges, as well as mental health and physical problems (Barth, 1990).

In comparison to young adults raised at home with their families, foster youth are more likely to be homeless, unemployed and dependent on transitional assistance funds. Foster youth are also at risk for risky health behaviors, mental health issues and possible criminal involvement resulting in incarceration (Courtney, 2005). These damaging outcomes are compounded by the fact that foster youth are more than likely to transition into adulthood faster than youth in the general population and have no financial or emotional

support from their families (Cashmore, 2007).

Policymakers and legislatures have taken notice and are taking action to help foster youth prepare for transition into adulthood.

Challenges for Foster Youth

A small number of studies exist that have investigated the factors associated with foster youth preparedness for life after foster care (Iglehart, 1994). The study by Iglehart found that fewer out-of-home placements, quality education, lack of mental health problems and contact with family were indicators for positive future outcomes for foster care youth (Iglehart, 1994). Concerns about foster youth were increased during the 1980s, as there were large numbers of youth aging out of placement (Lammert, 1986). In a study conducted by Mech, Ludy-Dobson, and Hulseman in 1994, an examination of life skills knowledge among 534 older adolescent foster youth indicated that youth in apartment placements and youth, in group home or institutional placements scored low on independent living skills knowledge (Mech, 1994).

Independent Living Skills (ILPs) are increasing external factors that contribute directly to the success of transitions for foster youth who age out of foster care. In 1999, ILP coordinators were surveyed in all 50 states and the District of Columbia and it was concluded that ILP services differ greatly (USGAO, 1999). The USGAO report indicated that the most frequent services offered by ILP included using an instructional model that taught adolescent foster youth skills needed to be self-sufficient including money management skills, job preparedness, housekeeping and nutrition. Securing housing and education were also addressed by ILP services (USGAO, 1999).

The number of children in foster care is substantial. Foster care placement accounted for 408,000 American children in 2010. That is a slight decline from 2003 when 523,000 American children were placed in foster care (Child Trends Databank, Foster Care, 2012). Most of these young adults who are "aged out" of foster care are disadvantaged and lack the resources to live independently (Cheung, 1994). Currently, child welfare workers are unclear on how to prepare foster youth for transition into adulthood and encourage appropriate

behavior that is often associated with positive outcomes. This is difficult for child welfare workers given that the personal history of many foster youth included problems with the placement system, movement from placement to placement, and frequent school changes, all contributing towards the loss of continuity between childhood and young adulthood (Timberlake, 1987).

In 1987, Kaleidoscope, a private child welfare facility in Illinois, noted that foster youth are expected to overcome social, behavioral and educational deficits. The children were observed to be behind in school, in some cases illiterate and experiencing behavioral problems (Stehno, 1987).

Existing Models of Extended Foster Care

Assisting foster youth in making the transition into early adulthood involves encouraging behavior associated with self-direction, self-expression, personality and taking accountability and responsibility for one's decisions. Other states have addressed extending foster care in recent years.

In 2006, the state of Washington passed House Bill 2002 (HB 2002) and extended foster care support services

for foster youth until the age of 21. HB 2002 or Washington's Foster Care to 21 programs was aimed at 150 youth who had completed a post high school academic or vocational program. Results from HB 2002 showed early positive outcomes. Between the months of July 2006 and September 2008, research showed that participants had higher educational attainment, a decrease in arrest rates, and lower rates of public assistance in comparison with youth not participating in the program. In comparison to California's AB 12, with an expected cost of 735 million over an eight-year period (Schutte, 2010), HB 2002 was expected to cost \$1.35 million annually. Taxpayers also benefited from the program as it provides a financial benefit to the state and taxpayers (Schutte, 2010).

In the state of Illinois, foster youth have the option to petition the court to remain wards of the court until the age of 21. If jurisdiction by the court is maintained, foster youth will continue to have an assigned social worker and involvement by the social worker will depend on the needs of the youth. The program is funded by federal Chafee funds and supplemented by Illinois' General Revenue Fund. Financial support is

ongoing until the age of 21 pending that the foster youth is enrolled in an educational or vocational program (Cashmore & Paxman, 2007).

The outcomes for Illinois have been positive overall. In Chapin Hall's Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 19, 736 foster youth ages 17 and 18, were interviewed and it was determined that one year later, 72.5% of the respondents still remained under court jurisdiction. It was also determined that foster youth remaining in care received independent living services were twice as likely to have positive relationships between foster care and educational enrollments. Foster youth lacking a high school diploma or GED were enrolled at a higher rate than their released counterparts (Cashmore & Paxman, 2007).

In the state of Arizona, foster youth are terminated from court jurisdiction and can remain in foster care on a voluntary, contractual basis. Foster youth receive a stipend of \$585 per month from social services. The contract stipulates that youth must be enrolled in an educational or vocational training program. Federal Chafee funds and Children's Services matches 20% of the funding fund this program. There are no reported outcomes

for Arizona's transitional living program for foster youth but reports indicate that foster youth do access the program (Cashmore & Paxman, 2007).

Role of the Foster Parent

There has been substantial research on the complicated aspect of foster youth living placed in foster care (Oke, Rostill-Brookes, & Larkin, 2013). There is less research regarding the perception or experiences of foster parents. Results of this study showed that foster parents would have cared for adult youth in their home without the implementation of extended foster care. Foster parents are motivated incessant needs and the motivation of wanting to make an impact in a child's life (MacGregor, Rodger, Cummings, & Leschied, 2006).

The foster parents role is defined as one who cares for another parents child and is key to assisting the child in care to becoming emotionally and psychologically adjusted in life. This role is seen as empowering and vital to the child (Broady et al., 2010).

The study revealed a need for collaborative effort between the social worker and the foster parent in understanding the implementation of extended foster care.

According to Dr. Nadia Farmakopoulou (2002), in order for an effective collaboration to exist between the professional agency and the foster agency, a routine review and assessment of local partnerships need to be reviewed together and independently of each other (Farmakopoulou, 2002).

This qualitative study developed out of the lack of research regarding foster parents views on caring for young adults. According to Glaser (1965), the constant comparative method is imperative to generating theory that is rooted in the data and using the constant comparative method of analysis will expand and introduce other options that will be beneficial for future research.

By using the comparative method, the research looks to develop a theory by doing what is necessary through categorizing, coding, delineating the categories and joining them together. The data collected is compared with every other piece of related data (Boeije, 2002).

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

The Developmental Theory is combination of theories that looks at how a desired change in society is best

achieved. Lesser and Pope (2007) assert that a person's self-perception will result in expected behavior. The proposed research looks to link or make a connection between the foster parents perception of extended foster care and the actual implementation of extended foster care in hopes of improving the foster parents experience for future implementation. The ultimate goal is that the research will lead to successful outcomes for young adults in extended foster care.

Summary

A comprehensive review of literature regarding foster parent experience was completed and determined that there is a lack of information regarding extended foster care and insufficient information regarding the experiences of foster parents.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This chapter contains the methodology and procedures of this research project. The study design and sampling procedures which include the interview questions are discussed. In addition, the data collection and instruments are discussed. Finally, the protection of human subjects and data analysis are also discussed in this section.

Study Design

The study design of this research project explored how foster care parents in San Bernardino County are understanding and experiencing the implementation of AB 12. There is a significant lack of research in this area so this project provides an essential understanding of foster parents experiences and perceptions of extended foster care. The goals of this study include identifying gaps in and lack of knowledge or skills needed to successfully implement AB 12 in San Bernardino County.

Although there has been some success in existing independent living programs nationwide, foster youth

turning 18, often lack the resources and life skills necessary to successfully live independently. There is little evidence that currently exists to measure the effectiveness and the impact that independent living programs have on foster care social workers (Montgomery, Charles, & Underhill, 2006). The foster parents experiences including both positive and negative were examined and their recommendations for social workers were gathered and presented.

Qualitative research proved to be the most appropriate research method as the implementation of Extended Foster Care is new and it allows foster parents to openly share the their experiences rather than limit their answers to what is predefined.

Qualitative studies present a pattern of trust and provide and understanding of emerging theories as they pertain to the participants. These studies also provide open and indepth interviews that acknowledge the perception of the foster parents.

Sampling

The researcher interviewed foster parents who have been identified to have extended foster care youth from

San Bernardino County in their home. The researcher interviewed ten foster parents working in San Bernardino County. The focus of the interviews provided information on how implementation and impact of AB 12 is going from a foster parent perspective, and determined what additional information and training is needed to provide full implementation of AB 12.

Data Collection and Instruments

The analysis of interviews were completed using the qualitative method. The researcher used data transcription, analysis, and report writing to collect data. The interviews were completed and transcribed verbatim. The interview guide asked questions regarding the implementation of AB 12 from the beginning to end and the experience of the foster parents during the the beginning phase of the implementation. As part of qualitative data analysis, coding was used to distinguish categories and assign codes to the categories. Coding information was kept in a notebook used to transcribe and guide the definition of categories and to guarantee the consistency of coding. The second level of coding was used to manage and identify similarities and differences

between the categories. Second level coding observed any relationships between major themes or patterns that are revealed from the data collected. Three reviewers completed the coding independently to ensure no personal bias and to add to the reliability of the data.

Procedures

Participation was solicited verbally by requesting interviews at the foster parents home. The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews, with ten foster care foster parents. The researcher informed the voluntary participants of informed consent and their right to terminate the interview at anytime during the interview process. The researcher asked questions and transcribed the questions verbatim as answered by the foster parents. The timetable of interviews took place during the month of March 2013 and used qualitative questions regarding the implementation of AB 12.

Protection of Human Subjects

The protection of the rights and welfare of all voluntary participants were protected by the research design and procedures rooted within the study. As this study used data collected using interviews voluntarily

with San Bernardino County foster parents and the risk to human subjects was minimal. The data extraction tool used for this study, used coding and had no attached identifiers and the data was kept in a locked office in the Social and Behavioral Sciences Building at California State University at San Bernardino.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis was used to collect data and identify relationships between the variables. Coding of the data was used to process and refine the data. The theoretical construct that emerged is that the implementation of AB 12 is necessary but not fully developed.

Summary

A qualitative method of research was used to conduct the current study. The study was conducted by interviewing voluntary participants employed as foster parents within San Bernardino County. The study looked at the impact of the implementation of AB 12 on foster parents.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

Included is a presentation of the data information collected from foster parents who were interviewed in this study. This chapter will also include the major themes that arose from the foster parents' responses to the interview questions. Quotes from the participants are furnished as supporting examples for each main theme

Presentation of the Findings

Family Demographics

The sample for this study was comprised of ten foster parents. In each interview, the foster mother completed the interview and provided insight on her experience with extended foster care. The experiences that were shared involved the foster mother's experience with the implementation of extended foster care. Since extended foster care is fairly new, the participants were asked to provide demographic information based on the time when they first learned about extended foster care. Please see Table 1 for the demographic characteristics of

this sample. In the table that follow, "foster parent" refers to the foster mothers.

The participants ages ranged from 31-60, all women. The race or ethnicity reported was majority Caucasian (5), Latino (3), and African American (2). The mean number of years for the average length of being a foster parent was 14 years and nine of the foster parents currently have extended foster care youth in their home. Of the nine foster parents who have extended foster care youth in their home, two were not foster parents to youth prior to them turning 18 years of age. The remaining seven foster parents were already parenting the youth prior to them turning 18 years of age.

Table 1. Demographics

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Length of being a foster Parent/guardian		
Less than one year	1	10
1-5 years	4	40
6-10 years	2	20
10-15 years	1	10
15-30 years	1	10
More than 30 years	1	10

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Highest Level of Education		
Less than a High School Education	1	10
Some High School	1	10
High School Graduate	2	20
Some College	2	20
AA/AS Degree	3	30
Graduate Degree	1	10
Are you currently a foster parent/guardian for EFC		
Yes	9	90
No	1	10
Were you a foster parent/guardian for this young adult before he/she turned 18		
Yes	8	80
No	2	20
Gender		
Male	0	0
Female	10	100
Age		
31-35	1	10
41-45	1	10
46-50	4	40
56-60	3	30
61-65	1	10
Race/Ethnicity		
African American	2	20
Caucasian	5	50
Hispanic/Latino	3	30

Developed by Carolyn McAllister, Tosha Thomas, Heidie Morris and Sandy Melancon

Foster parents were asked about their perspective on extended foster care. Foster parents were asked what their thoughts were about extended foster care when they learned about it. Four of the ten parents interviewed thought it was a great idea. Four of the parents did not know anything about it, one of the parents said that she had previous experience caring for young adults in Los Angeles County and one parent said that she did not think she would do it. Of the 10 participating foster parents, nine responded that they felt comfortable with working with young adult over the age of 18. Of those nine, five were already caring for young adults in their home prior to the implementation of extended foster care. Three of the foster parents said they were comfortable with having young adults in their home and began doing so after the implementation of extended foster care. One parent indicated that she was not interested in having a young adult in her home unless they were a an individual that had already been living in their home.

Awareness of Needs

The majority of foster parents interviewed were aware that there is a need for extended foster care as many young adults are not adequately prepared to

transition into adulthood. "Um my thoughts about it are I think it's (extended foster care) absolutely necessary but not fully developed to make those kids self-sufficient" (010, personal interview, March 2013)

I was thinking it was a great idea because I do know that there is a lot of students or well I say students or people or young people who need more time in a foster home to prepare themselves for the outside world. (001, personal interview, March 2013)

Another equally common theme among foster parents interviewed was the educational component indicating young adults are not adequately prepared for a secondary college education and the expenses associated with that. Three of the 10 parents interviewed expressed concern about the young adults furthering their education.

"Another program called a SILP. Once they choose to leave there are rules they have to be independent or students, students in dorms but they have to prove to be very responsible" (003, personal interview, March 2013).

It doesn't seem like there's, there's no housing for him. There's no and part of that is you know when we got him he didn't even have the grades to get into a four year university. Where a kid who could get into

a four university could move into the dorms and come and stay with us during the summer. What's happening now is he told us I'm going to get an apartment it's going to be great. (010, personal interview, March 2013)

I just think school is so important right now especially the day that we live in when everybody is looking for degrees, degrees, degrees when you've got people with degrees flipping burgers and like you know what I mean it's just so hard out there and I don't think you know with continued education...I just don't know how these kids are going to make it.

(005, personal interview, March 2013)

Transportation was also documented as a concern for one foster parent.

He's way more expensive than that though. Especially since it's his senior year. So we've got senior pictures, we've got prom, we've got homecoming. I mean you know it's investing in his life so to us it doesn't really make a difference. But, um as far as help for him I feel like he's in a place where my husband and I are wondering, what's he going to do? I mean ultimately the way we are looking at is, you

know he, as far as getting a car, getting back and forth to college. You know, all those things. (010, personal interview, March 2013)

Why We Do This

Although not every foster parent had an interest in caring for young adults over the age of 18, seven of the 10 foster parents interviewed were already caring for young adults in their home because they felt like they were a member of their family and had compassion and concern.

One foster parent commented

I enjoy working with ages 16 to 18 and since at the age of 18 when my girls were about to go, I would be concerned about them not having places to go so I always wanted to extend that here. (002, personal interview, March 2013)

Another foster parent shared how because of her bond with her foster daughter she could not see not letting her remain in the home.

I think because they, I don't know, you kind of have a connection with them, a bond with them and you kind of give them an option you know you can go out there and be on your own but for some reason my foster daughter she um she wanted to stay here. You

know you can't say no. I'm like it's hard to say no to me to somebody that you bonded with and kind of helped and they show appreciation you know so it didn't bother me at all. (006, personal interview, March 2013)

One indepth interview with a foster mother revealed the love and compassion that she has for her foster daughters.

Um I think when you take care of a kid and it's not yours and the come into you house, you have to become a mother to them. So you have to be a mother to those kids like your own kids and you have to treat them like your kids. You have to do everything like you do with you own kids. Because if they are in need of a parent.... (009, personal interview, March 2013)

Support Received

Of the foster parents who were interviewed, five indicated that they have received great support from the Children and Family Services case managing social worker. "Yes the social workers are very helpful. They give a lot of information and resources for schooling, education and housing" (003, personal interview, March 2013). Another

parent indicated that even though she is new to being a foster parent, her social worker is very supportive in keeping her informed.

Like I said I am kind of new in it so I only know the support I get from my social worker. She's the one that I tip my hat off to her because she has been so supportive. I call, she gets right back with me. She really has a heart for it and when I see that it makes me go okay, what else can I do to help make your job easier. You know the social worker has a big part. (006, personal interview, March 2013)

Another parent stated, "The social worker has been excellent" (008, personal interview, March 2013).

One foster parent gave a touching and lovely story of her first encounter with the social worker.

You know what I loved about her? She walked in and looked at him and said, "I know you" and she had had him when he was younger but she remembered him and she was I mean, it took her a few minutes but was like your mom's name is this, your aunt's name is this, your sister's name. I mean I was like ok and for him that was just like. Well and we asked her to find his sisters because he couldn't find his

sisters you know. Boy she had somebody out there the next day they put together a family tree for him. I was like this is cool, this is good. (010, personal interview, March 2013)

Suggestions for Improving Foster Care

While majority of the foster parents indicated that they had limited knowledge regarding the implementation of extended foster care as it is fairly new, they were quick to suggest improvements and what they thought would be beneficial as extended foster care is implemented. Two of the most common suggestions were that there be clearer guidelines regarding what extended foster care is and for foster parents to open up their homes to young adults because they care and not for financial gain. One foster parent was a needed follow up.

I thing the biggest thing that you guys following up and doing this survey interview was great because you're really hearing the truth about what goes on in the home and stuff so I think that's wonderful. Anyways, show affection show them (foster youth) that they did a good job. Explain to them why we do what we do. (001, personal interview, March 2013)

Another foster parent who was very compassionate about caring for extended foster youth stated, "No I mean the only thing I ask as a foster parent when you go and do this please do it for love and don't do it for money" (009, personal interview, March 2013).

The most universal request asked of foster parents was an explanation or interpretation of the rules for youth in extended foster care and training for foster parents.

I like being able to extend care and the daughter I have is such a wonderful child but in case I run into future problems with a child that's difficult I'd really need to know those rules and boundaries and things. (002, personal interview, March 2013)

Educating foster parents along with the people in the community was also seen as an important factor to implementing extended foster care.

I would like teachers in school to know more about this program as well. Not all of the responsibility should be on the social workers, because these young adults spend most of their days in school. There are bulletins in universities and colleges, and there should be information for those kids in the systems,

that there should be information about the services that can be offered for those young adults. (007, personal interview, March 2013)

Another foster parent felt that training and education for foster parents are also what is needed for successful implementation. "I just think that well now if we could get more classes as a foster parent" (003, personal interview, March 2013). One foster parent mentioned that in addition to rules needed, she has developed her own questionnaire to ask the social worker prior to a young adult being placed in her home. "That the county have rules before placing a child, for EFC in general. I have a questionnaire that I use with youth coming into my home-21 questions to ask before a placement" (008, personal interview, March 2013).

Summary

Chapter Four examined the results of this qualitative study. The results revealed that the participating foster parents expressed anxiety and discourse regarding the lack of information being disseminated regarding the rules and guidelines of extended foster care. The foster parents felt that the

social workers were doing an exceptional job in answering general questions but lacked imperative information regarding the guidelines of extended foster care.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

Chapter five discusses the conclusion from the research findings. Also discussed in this chapter are the limitations of the study, as well as the recommendations for social worker practices, policy, and research.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of extended foster care as it relates to the experiences of foster parents. Future implications for the data analysis collected indicate a strategic planning process is an important component missing from the implementation of extended foster care. The qualitative data collected also gives credence to the rationale for establishing guidelines for extended foster care.

The analysis also facilitates the lack of an implementation process to extended foster care. Foster parents resoundingly stated that guidelines and rules needed to be in place for young adults to smoothly transition into extended foster care. Secondly, foster parents felt that there needs to be a consensus and

collaboration in the decision making process involving the foster parents, the young adult and the social worker. Refocusing and making sure decision making process is inclusive benefits all parties involved and expands the scope extended foster care.

The study also revealed that foster parents would like more training regarding extended foster care. They felt that a specific skill set is needed to take on the role of teaching youth. This indicates that foster parents would like to place an emphasis on increasing positive outcomes for young adults.

Although foster parents are aware of resources made available to them through County of San Bernardino through Children and Family Services and programs like the Independent Living Program, there are specific resources missing that would assist in successful transitioning. Foster parents indicated in the study that help with obtaining a driver's license and a car is an necessary missing component that would aid young adults in successful transitioning to adulthood. The resources made available to foster parents help assist in caring for the young adults. Foster parents use different

service providers in order to meet the needs of young adults such as the Independent Living Program.

The demographic data on the foster parents provided specific insight as to the compassion that needs to be in place when choosing to provide extended foster care to young adults. The demographics indicated that all of the participants interviewed were women and had biological children of their own. The particular experience corresponded to the process as nine of the ten foster parents interviewed already had young adults in the home they were parenting prior to the implementation of extended foster care. Despite some diversity in the perception of extended foster care, the overall experience of each foster parent's choosing to have young adults in the home was unanimously positive. The amount of experience ranged from one and half year to thirty-three years. However, 60% of those interviewed had been foster parents for more than four years.

Finally, as a social worker, I found it inspirational and was appreciative that five of the foster parents interviewed indicated that they were happy with the work their social worker provided.

Limitations

The limitations of this qualitative study were revealed during the interview process. One of the limitations of this study was the formatting of the questions. The questions were open-ended questions that called for some verbal prompting and probing in order to extract a clear answer from foster parents.

In addition to formatting concerns, all of the foster parents interviewed were women. The impact that the male foster parent experience may have had on their perspective of extended foster care may have provided education as to what is currently working regarding the implementation of extended foster care and what is not fully developed. Although it was not intentional to disclude male foster parents, the omission of their input may be significant for extended foster care outcomes.

Finally, the implementation of extended foster care is new and there is no existing data to compare it to. The foster parents interviewed only had current experience to base their perceptions on. Many foster parents also indicated that they had already been caring for young adults in their home and did not fully comprehend what would be different regarding extended

foster care. This was attributed to the lack of information provided to them regarding guidelines and rules for extended foster care.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

Attention must be given to the suggestions made by the foster parents and is imperative for successful implementation of extended foster care. Given that there is no previous research regarding extended foster care from the perspective of the foster parent, the foster parents were united in their belief that this research will decrease the challenges they have experienced during the implementation process. It is conceivable to think that the planners or implementers of extended foster care will not take into consideration the suggestions by the people who work closely on a daily basis with young adults; i.e. the foster parents. In order to keep a trusting relationship between the foster parents and the agency, it is imperative that their suggestions are taken into consideration and ongoing communication is established between not only the agency and the foster parent, but the young adults as well.

Providing Generalist Practice social worker practice is at the core of what we do as social workers. In order to provide best practice to out foster parents, the agency must continue to assess the needs of the foster parent and engage them into providing services for the young adults. The results of this study identified that foster parents who have accepted young adults in their home are not agency driven but rather young adult driven by choosing to provide services. Although none of the foster parents interviewed indicated any negative experiences with the agency, it is essential that the data collected is used to provide information regarding the implementation of extended foster care and the experiences foster parents endure as it is implemented.

Mech (1994) asserts that transitional periods are characterized by unpredictability that individuals face when learning to respond to new and unfamiliar challenges. Past research has shown that the transitioning into adulthood for foster youth is difficult, the qualitative data here also strongly suggests that it is a difficult transition for foster parents who have young adults in their home as well.

This research is important to the field of social work in that it speaks to many values within the Social Work Code of Ethics. Social workers primary goal is to help the disenfranchised and to address social problems (National Association of Socical Workers [NASW], 2008). Advocacy on behalf of another is necessary to ensure that foster parents receive services they are entitled to. As this research presented, foster parents discussed that they did not have enough resources to feel confident in what services they are required to provide young adults. It is imperative that social workers are available not only during the implementation process and but provide ongoing services as well.

"Social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person" (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2008, para. 18). Althought the needs of the young adults are at the forefront of extended foster care, foster parents have value as well, and their input regarding extended foster care is invaluable tojuxatapose of the relationship between the social worker and the young adult.

"Social workers recognize the central importance of human relationships" (NASW, 2008, para. 19). Human

relationships are key for everyone. They are imperative in the area of foster parenting and a major guiding principle in dictating how to support foster parents who have opened their home to young adults.

"Social workers practice within their areas of competence and develop and enhance their professional expertise" (NASW, 2008, para. 20). The social worker needs to be able to provide information to foster parents that is consistent with the implementation of extended foster care. Social workers should also display skills that include admitting when they are unsure and offer to research the information in order to disseminate the information to foster parents. This provides empowerment to foster parents. The data collected strongly touches on the fact that extended foster care is new and not fully developed.

Areas of policy that are key to this research is that policy is developed as extended foster care is implemented. The current policy that exists was developed to address the needs of foster youth transitioning out of foster care. The statistics indicated that many foster youth were not adequately prepared for the transition into adulthood and were ending up homeless and jobless.

Youth raised in a family environment often have the support of family members while the foster child does not. The policy sought to address these needs by extending foster care through the passing of AB 12. The goal of the policy was to effectively meet the needs of foster youth by extending their time in foster care on a volunteer basis in order to decrease at risk young adults from becoming homeless. Where the current policy has failed is that the rules and guidelines are unclear to the social worker, the foster parent and most importantly the young adults. The social worker is limited in their knowledge of what services to provide and the foster parent has not been provided with with education and training regarding extended foster care. There is no current training in place and the policy as it pertains to this are of research should include trainings for social worker, foster parents and extended foster care young adults. Foster parents expressed this area concern as indicated in the data collected.

Foster parents also expressed concerned regarding who should eligible for extended foster care. They felt that it should be stipulated in the current policy that young adults should be enrolled in a secondary education

as a determinant for eligibility for extended foster care.

Conclusions

Ambiguity is not a major factor related to foster parents understanding of the role they play in a young adults life. The foster parents understand their roles as foster parents and have formed bonds with youth that have transitioned into their young adulthood. The foster parents have been playing the role of surrogate parents long before the implementation of extended foster care.

The results of this study indicate that foster parents would like to continue to provide the quality of care to young adults that they have been providing. This has become challenging because existing policy regarding extended foster care is unclear as to what has changed other than young adults can remain in foster care until the age of 21. The nature of this qualitative study was done to gain a better understanding of foster parents perception of extended foster care. The data collected is needed to provide information to policy makers as well as social workers to meet the needs of foster parents and most importantly young adults. More research is necessary

and should accompany this research to provide successful future implementation of extended foster care.

Empowerment of foster parents is also imperative in the implementation of extended foster care. Empowerment to foster parents provides reassurance and support. The agency is only as good as the services it provides. Failure to provide the services and trainings to foster parents will have a snowball effect on the quality provided to young adults in extended foster care.

APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What were your thoughts about extended foster care when you learned about it? How did you learn about it?
2. What were your thoughts about working with a young adult population (18+ year old) before extended foster care began implementation (before January, 2012)? Did you feel comfortable working with this population? Did you have any particular concerns about working with this population? Were you looking forward to working with this population?
3. What kinds of support have you received from San Bernardino County CFS as you started working with young adults? From your supervisor? From higher administration? From your colleagues? What has been the most helpful? What additional supports would be useful to you?
4. Are there any trainings or workshops for working with young adult/ NMD clients or on the implementation of extended foster care that you feel would help you or your colleagues?
5. Have there been any challenges or times you were uncertain of what to do in regards to implementing the extended foster care regulations? How did you resolve those instances?
6. What do you think about the processes of extending current living arrangements or establishing new living agreements such as a SILP? Do you feel such arrangements are reasonable for young adults/ NMDs as well as for caregivers? If they are not reasonable, what changes might you suggest?
7. What (additional) services/support/programs do you think young adults/ NMDs currently need most?
8. What (additional) services/support/programs do you think caregivers/placement managers currently need most?
9. What are, in your view, major benefits (strengths) of extended foster care? What benefits do you feel young adults/ NMDs are receiving from extended foster care?
10. What are, in your view, major challenges of extended foster care?
11. What have been the reactions of young adults/ NMDs you have worked with/ are working with about extended foster care?
12. If you are working with transition age youth (16-17 years old), have any of them talked with you about extended foster care? What do they appear to know about it?
13. Do you have any suggestions for improving extended foster care?
14. Are there any other topics/ issues that I did not ask about that you feel are important?

Developed by Carolyn McAllister, Tosha Thomas, Heidie Morris and Sandy Melancon

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

A Process Evaluation of Extended Foster Care Implementation INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to investigate the implementation process of Extended Foster Care in San Bernardino County. This study is being conducted by Dr. Carolyn McAllister, Assistant Professor of Social Work, California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB), Amanda Garcia, MSW Student, CSUSB, Brandi Guzman, MSW Student, CSUSB, Sandy Melancon, MSW Student, CSUSB, Mina Moghaddam, MSW Student, CSUSB, Heidis Morris, MSW Student, CSUSB, and Tosha Thomas, MSW Student, CSUSB. This study has been approved by the School of Social Work Sub-Committee of the Institutional Review Board, California State University, San Bernardino.

PURPOSE: This study is seeking to learn more about your experiences in implementing Extended Foster Care (AB 12) with young adults, and to gain your perspective on what is working, what could be changed, and how you believe it is impacting young adults.

DESCRIPTION: Your participation would consist of completing an interview with members of the research team. This interview would be audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed to see the ways your responses are similar to and different from other participants. You have been identified to participate in this study because you are currently working with, or are a foster parent to, at least one young adult (age 18 or 19) in Extended Foster Care (AB 12).

PARTICIPATION: Your participation in this study is voluntary. A refusal to participate will involve no penalty of loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue or withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

CONFIDENTIALITY: This is a confidential study, and all researchers will diligently work to ensure that any identifying information provided be kept confidential. The informed consent form and any other identifying information about you will be kept in a locked office. The digital audio files, transcribed interviews, and analysis will be kept on password protected memory drives, and will not contain any identifying information about you. Findings will be presented in aggregate (group) form. Any quotations used from interviews will not contain any identifying information about you or anyone else. Upon completion of this study, all audio files and identifying information will be destroyed.

DURATION: The interviews are expected to take 30-45 minutes. We may contact you for clarification as needed, however this is not expected.

RISKS: There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you in participation in this research. However, some questions may be of a sensitive nature, and may elicit an emotional response to you.

BENEFITS: The findings of the research may assist San Bernardino and other counties to identify area for future training and support, as well as what is going well during the ongoing implementation of Extended Foster Care.

AUDIO: The interviews will be audio recorded for clarity and to ensure accurate data collection. These will be studied by the research team for use in the research project only. Please initial the following statements: ☐ I understand that this research will be audio recorded, and agree to be recorded for use by the research team only. Initials/ Mark ____.

CONTACT: If you have questions about the research or your rights as a research participant, please contact Dr. Carolyn McAllister, Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work, at (909) 537-5559 or cmcallis@csusb.edu.

RESULTS: Results of this study can be located in the CSUSB Library after September, 2013. **SIGN:** Please place a mark below if you agree to the conditions of this study and volunteer to participate. ☐

Mark: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C
DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographics

Demographics (will be given to participant first to complete)

1. What is your gender?
2. How old were you on your last birthday?
3. What is your ethnicity?
4. How long have you been a foster parent?
5. What is your highest level of education completed?
6. Are you currently a foster parent with a young adult or young adults in extended foster care?
7. Were you a foster parent to this young adult before he or she turned 18? For how long?

Developed by Carolyn McAllister, Tosha Thomas, Heidie Morris and Sandy Melancon

APPENDIX D
RECRUITMENT MAILING

Dear Foster Parent,

We are writing to request your participation in a study focusing on the experiences of foster parents caring for young adults in Extended Foster Care. We received your contact information from San Bernardino County Children and Family Services (CFS) because, based on their records, you were or are caring for at least one person participating in Extended Foster Care.

We are hoping to set up a time to meet with you to conduct an interview focusing on your experiences with Extended Foster Care so far. We want to learn more from you about what you know about Extended Foster Care, how you perceive it to work or not work to the benefit of the person(s) in your care, and what information or support you might need as a foster parent. The information we gather from these interviews will be combined together and presented to San Bernardino County CFS to give them feedback and suggestions for potential changes.

We expect this interview would take between one-half hour and forty-five minutes. Any information you provide in this interview would be confidential, so your name, the identities of the person(s) in your care, and any other information that might make your identity known will be carefully protected.

We are including the Informed Consent form so you can more closely review the process of the study and the ways we will protect your confidentiality should you chose to participate. As a token of our appreciation, we will provide you with a \$10.00 gift card to Walmart after completion of the interview.

If you would be willing to participate in this study, please contact Dr. Carolyn McAllister at cmcallis@csusb.edu or (909) 537-5559 to set up a time to schedule the interview. We will work with you to come up with a time and place that is most convenient to you. If you would prefer, we can also complete the interview by phone.

Thank you very much for your time, and considering participating in this study.

Sincerely,

Carolyn McAllister, MSW, PhD, Principal Investigator and Assistant Professor
Tosha Thomas, MSW Intern at San Bernardino County CFS
Heidi Morris, MSW Intern at San Bernardino County CFS
Sandy Melancon, MSW Intern at San Bernardino County CFS

California State University, San Bernardino
School of Social Work

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ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE

This was a project where this author used a data set collected and transcribed by a group of researchers. However, this research project was written by this researcher alone.

1. Data Collection:

Team Effort: Tosha Thomas, Heidie Morris, Sandy
Melancon

2. Data Entry and Analysis:

- a. Data Entry

Team Effort: Tosha Thomas, Heidie Morris,
Sandy Melancon

- b. Data Analysis

Researcher Alone: Tosha Thomas

3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:

- a. Introduction and Literature:

Researcher Alone: Tosha Thomas

- b. Methods:

Researcher Alone: Tosha Thomas

- c. Results:

Researcher Alone: Tosha Thomas

- d. Discussion:

Researcher Alone: Tosha Thomas