EXITING FOSTER CARE: A CASE STUDY OF FORMER FOSTER CHILDREN
ENROLLED IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN KANSAS

by

JAMIE R. SCHWANDT

B.S., Fort Hays State University, 2006
M.S., Fort Hays State University, 2008

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2013

Abstract

In the United States, foster care is provided to children to avert maltreatment and abuse of children in distressed families by providing a temporary home or a foster home. Courts with jurisdiction over families have been charged by Congress to find appropriate homes when necessary circumstances occur. In fiscal year 2009, there were 423,773 children in foster care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). When the term "foster child or foster care" is used, most individuals view the term as negative. Most statistical data reaffirms this belief and casts a negative light on the foster care system in the United States. Foster children exit the foster care system and face higher rates of substance abuse, unemployment, and incarceration, and lower educational attainment. Though foster children do suffer from uncertainty of shattered relationships, there are success stories that arise from foster care. This study examines the discovery of strengths and emerging possibilities in the State of Kansas foster care system and the conditions that make them possible. This study identifies and examines success stories of 15 former foster children in the State of Kansas and analyzes how to build on those success stories. This case study uses qualitative methods such as audio-taped interviews and an interview protocol with a pre-determined set of open-ended questions. This study identifies stories of effectiveness in the State of Kansas foster care system.

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In the United States, foster care is provided to children to avert maltreatment and abuse of children in distressed families by providing a temporary home or a foster home. Courts with jurisdiction over families have been charged by Congress to find appropriate homes when necessary circumstances occur. In fiscal year 2009, there were 423,773 children in foster care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). When the term "foster child or foster care" is used, most individuals view the term as negative. Most statistical data reaffirms this belief and casts a negative light on the foster care system in the United States. Foster children exit the foster care system and face higher rates of substance abuse, unemployment, and incarceration, and lower educational attainment. Though foster children do suffer from uncertainty of shattered relationships, there are success stories that arise from foster care. This study examines the discovery of strengths and emerging possibilities in the State of Kansas foster care system and the conditions that make them possible. This study identifies and examines success stories of 15 former foster children in the State of Kansas and analyzes how to build on those success stories. This case study uses qualitative methods such as audio-taped interviews and an interview protocol with a pre-determined set of open-ended questions. This study identifies stories of effectiveness in the State of Kansas foster care system.

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Dedication

Jack Richard Schwandt Jr

26 July 1952 – 09 April 2001

Dedicated to my loving father, Jack Richard Schwandt Jr, who passed away in April of 2001. My father was an admirable man and a loving father of three children. He was a Veteran of the United States Navy, and I am extremely proud of my father for his service. My father was an honorable man and will be greatly missed.

Dedication

CW2 Bryan Nichols

16 October 1979 – 06 August 2011

Dedicated to CW2 Bryan Nichols, friend and fellow Soldier of 10 years. CW2 Nichols was killed in action in August of 2011 in Afghanistan when his Chinook went down during a mission. CW2 Nichols was an outstanding Chinook pilot and an exceptional warrant officer in the United States Army. He was an excellent father to his son Braydon and a loving husband to his wife, Mary.

CW2 Bryan Nichols and I worked together during two deployments in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). We both grew up in the same unit as enlisted members. CW2 Nichols was always on the go; he and his wife traveled the world. He was a great person and will be greatly missed. CW2 Bryan Nichols was an inspiration to us all and a friend that I will miss forever.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Chapter One presents the background of the foster care program in the United States and in the State of Kansas. The chapter also presents the problem statement and the statement of purpose; lists the research questions; and discusses the methodology, significance, limitations, and assumptions of the study.

Courts with jurisdiction over families and children have been identified by Congress to ensure that "reasonable efforts" are made to sustain and repair families or to place children in foster care when necessary (Committee on Early Childhood, Adoption and Dependent Care, 2000). The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (2010), maintained by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, lists the number of entries into foster care in the United States in fiscal year 2009 at 255,418 while 276,266 exited foster care during this same time period. As of FY 2009, a total of 423,773 children in the United States are in foster care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010).

The purpose of the foster care program is to prevent maltreatment and abuse of children in distressed families by providing a temporary home and a foster care family until the children can safely return to their homes or a permanent home is found (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). Most individuals view the term "foster child" negatively. Though foster children do suffer from insecurity of broken relationships, there are success stories that arise from foster care. The research for this study focused on a system of change approach similar to Appreciative Inquiry. Appreciative Inquiry starts with the belief that any human system is filled with influential stories of success, strengths and emerging possibilities associated with foster children (Hochman, Hochman, & Miller, 2004).

Background

In fiscal year 2009, an estimated 423,773 children were in foster care; 48 percent of these cases were placed in non-relative foster family homes (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). Children are placed in the foster care program due to experiencing abuse or neglect. Children in foster care encounter placement volatility and insecurity which has a significant impact on their behavioral well-being (Rubin, O'Reilly, Luan, & Localio, 2007). At the age of 18, foster children are no longer part of the system. Essentially they "exit" foster care; this process is also referred to as "aging-out" or "emancipation." Foster children exit foster care with startling negative statistics which raise red flags on the success of the program. This will be discussed further in Chapter Two.

Children enter foster care primarily because of abuse or neglect (Hochman et al., 2004). Sixty-eight percent of children who had been in foster care for one year were there because of abuse or neglect (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003). The foster care program in the United States and in the State of Kansas is largely perceived as a problem, and the success stories associated with the program are fundamentally untold.

Foster Care Demographics

United States

There are over 400,000 children in foster care, 53 percent of which are male and 47 percent are female. The average foster child is slightly over 9.5 years of age (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). Ten percent (26,416 children) exited the foster care system at the age of 18; this is the largest number for all age groups who are removed from foster care. Table 1 identifies the top five age groups with the highest number of children who remain in foster care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010).

Table 1: *Top Age Groups With the Highest Number of Children in Foster Care*

Age	% of Children in Care	No. of Children in Care
17 years	8.51 %	36,079
16 years	8.25 %	34,989
1 year	7.34 %	31,141
15 years	6.73 %	28,549
2 years	6.67 %	28, 304

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2010) identifies that the highest number of children in foster care are at or nearing the age where children prepare to exit the foster care system. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2010), over a quarter of a million children entered foster care in fiscal year 2009. Table 2 identifies the top five age groups of entry into foster care by age.

Table 2: *Children Entering Foster Care by Age*

Age of Entry into Care	% of Children Entering Care	No. of Children Entering Care
Less than 1 year	16.02 %	40,931
1 year	7.52 %	19,230
16 years	7.28 %	18,611
15 years	7.07 %	18,074
2 years	6.53 %	16,701

The primary goal of the foster care system is to prepare children to be self-sufficient once they reach emancipation age. There are other goals in the program including reunification and

adoption. The preferred goal for children in care is stability with compassionate parents and reunification with birth parents (Foster Care Alumni of America, 2009). Table 3 outlines the outcomes for children exiting foster care during fiscal year 2009 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010).

Table 3: *Foster Child Exit Outcomes*

Outcome	% of Children Exiting Care	No. of Children Exiting Care
Reunification with Parent or Primary Caregiver	50.69 %	140,061
Adoption	20.15 %	55, 684
Emancipation/Exiting Care	10.66 %	29,471
Living with Other Relatives	7.75 %	21,424
Guardianship	6.98 %	19,290
Transfer to another Agency	.77 %	2,141
Runaway	.77 %	2,141
Death of Child	.15 %	417

There are certain demographics and factors that limit reunification of children with their natural parents. For example, infants and adolescents are less likely to be reunified with their birth parents than children in other age groups. African-American children are less likely to be reunified with their birth parents than children of other racial backgrounds (Wulczyn, 2010). Additional research has indicated that parents with substance abuse problems, mental illness, and the lack of housing are less likely to reunify with their children (Wulczyn, 2010).

Foster caregivers, both relatives and non-relatives, are substantially older than American parents in general. Most are middle-aged or older; 30 percent are age 50 years or older and 11 percent are 60 years or older (Grimm & Darwall, 2005). There are almost an equal number of foster parents that are single versus foster parents that are married (45 percent single versus 53 percent married). Grimm and Darwall (2005) state that most caregivers have a high school education or less (56 percent), 25 percent have an associate's degree or have completed vocational/technical school, while only 14 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher. Foster households are typically larger than the households in which most American children live, and foster parents have a significantly lower income than most U.S. households (Grimm & Darwall, 2005). Half of the United States earns $50,000 or more per year while only one-third of foster families reach this income level (Grimm & Darwall, 2005).

Kansas

In the State of Kansas, officials believe children are better off if raised by their natural parents. The preference for the role of natural parents is codified in law and provides the justification for retaining reunification as a fundamental outcome for children placed in foster care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). Foster care is a program that is intended to be an interim situation until permanent placement can be made either by reunification, adoption, and/or permanent transfer of guardianship. When a child is placed into foster care, the state agency stands *in loco parentis* to the minor and determines all legal decisions. The foster parent is responsible for the day-to-day care of the minor.

Foster parents must meet specific criteria to become foster parents in Kansas. The Kansas Department of Health and Environment (2008) regulate that individuals interested in

becoming a foster parent shall meet all of the following requirements to obtain and maintain a license:

1. Submit a complete application for a license on forms provided by the department, including request for the background checks specified in K.A.R. 28-4-805;

2. be at least 21 years of age;

3. have sufficient income or resources to provide for the basic needs and financial obligations of the foster family to maintain compliance with all regulations governing family foster homes;

4. participate in an initial family assessment, a family assessment for each renewal, and any additional family assessments conducted by the sponsoring child-placing agency;

5. individuals must meet the training requirements in K.A.R. 28-4-806; and

6. obtain and maintain ongoing sponsorship by a public or private child-placing agency, including a recommendation by the sponsoring child-placing agency that the home be used for placement of children in foster care.

The State of Kansas conducts a thorough background investigation and pre-licensure training process. According to the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (2008), with each initial application or renewal application, the applicant or licensee shall submit a request to conduct a background check by the Kansas Bureau of Investigation (KBI) and a background check by the Kansas Department of Social Rehabilitation Services (SRS). The request shall list the required information for the following:

1. Each individual ten years of age and older who resides, works, or regularly volunteers in the family foster home, excluding children placed in foster care;

2. each caregiver 14 years of age and older; and

3. each resident of a home in which informal visitation occurs who is at least ten years
    of age.

Demographic Comparisons

In fiscal year 2009, there were 5,691 children in the foster care system in Kansas (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). In fiscal year 2009; 3,163 children entered foster care and 3,615 children exited foster care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010).

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2010) shows that the average age in the State of Kansas for foster children was 10.6 years of age, which is slightly higher than the national average of 9.6. The length of stay for children in Kansas was 24 months, which doubles the national average of 12.2 months.

Program Administration

In the State of Kansas, the Social and Rehabilitation Services (SRS) oversees foster care, but the agency does not handle the individual case load. The State of Kansas is privatized, meaning when a child enters into state custody, the SRS will contact a private agency to administer the case. This private agency is also responsible for the placement of the child into a home. Prospective foster parents will contact the specific agency when beginning the stages of licensure. The private agency is responsible for assisting the prospective foster parent in obtaining a license to become a foster parent. The agency is also responsible for providing mandated and voluntary training for prospective and current foster parents. There are currently four privatized agencies in the state:

1. TFI Family Services
2. KVC Behavioral Health Care

3. St. Francis Community Services

4. United Methodist Youthville

Adult Education Considerations

Youth exiting foster care have significant obstacles to overcome when they transition to independent living and self-sufficiency. Young individuals who exit the foster care program are expected to be self-sufficient adults, meaning they are expected to find adequate housing, get a job, enroll in post-secondary or vocational educational opportunities, take care of their basic needs, and assume numerous other adult responsibilities (National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention, 2010).

The State of Kansas, by defining an exit age of 18, identifies that these individuals are ready to be self-sufficient adults. Being a self-sufficient adult would also imply these individuals are adult learners. Adults and children differ in ways they learn, think, process information, and solve problems. Adult education is a process through which learners become aware of a significant experience (Knowles, Holton III, & Swanson, 2005).

For the purpose of this study, the meaning of the term "adult" must be identified. Adulthood is considered to be a sociocultural construction, meaning that the definition of an adult is composed by a specific society and culture at a particular time (Merriam & Brockett, 2007). Furthermore, most adults are legally defined by an individual's age. An individual's age can be defined by the age they can drink an alcoholic beverage or by their voting age of 18. Knowles, Holton III, and Swanson (2005) identify adulthood upon psychological maturity or social roles stating that individuals should be considered as adults educationally if their self-concept is that of an adult.

Adulthood has a direct connection with adult learning and the Transformative Learning Theory. The Transformative Learning Theory identifies that the way in which individuals make meaning of their experience assists growth and learning. Transformative learning is a process where one assumes psychological and behavioral changes. Transformative learning takes place when individuals make knowledgeable decisions on how and when to act upon their new assessments, thus becoming critically insightful (Merriam, 1995).

Additionally, adult learning can be identified by the difference between andragogy and pedagogy. Pedagogy is the style of learning that is closely associated with pre-adult learning and andragogy associated with adult learning. Knowles et al. (2005) define five key assumptions of andragogy that were initially defined by Lindeman (1926). These assumptions establish the foundation of the Adult Learning Theory.

1. Adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs and interests.

2. Adults' orientation to learning is life-centered.

3. Experience is the greatest resource for adult learning.

4. Adults have a desire to be self-directing; therefore, the role of the teacher is to engage in a process of shared inquiry.

5. Individual differences among people increase with age; therefore, adult education must make provision for differences in style, time, place, and place of learning.

The pedagogical model assigns to the teacher authority for determining decisions about what will be learned, how it will be learned, when it will be learned, and if it has been learned (Knowles et al., 2005).

Knowles et al. (2005) discuss the six assumptions of pedagogy:

1. The need to know – learners only need to know that they must learn what the teacher teaches if they want to pass and get promoted.

2. The learner's self-concept – the teacher's concept of the learner is that of a dependent personality. Therefore, the learner's self-concept eventually becomes that of a dependent personality.

3. The role of experience – the learner's experience is of little worth as a resource for learning.

4. Readiness to learn – learners become ready to learn what the teacher tells them they must learn if they want to pass and get promoted.

5. Orientation to learning – learners have a subject-centered orientation to learning; they see learning as acquiring subject-matter content.

6. Motivation – learners are motivated to learn by external motivators (such as grades, the teacher's approval or disapproval, and parental pressures).

Knowles et al. (2005) identify how adult learners learn best when compared to children and teens. Lieb (2011) discusses six key concepts associated with Knowles:

1. Adults are autonomous; they need to be free to direct themselves. Their teachers must actively involve adult participants in the learning process and serve as facilitators for them. Specifically, they must get participants' perspectives about what topics to cover and let them work on projects that reflect their interests. They should allow the participants to assume responsibility for presentations and group leadership. They have to be sure to act as facilitators, guiding participants to their own knowledge rather than supplying them with facts.

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2. Adults have accumulated a foundation of life experiences and knowledge that may include work-related activities, family responsibilities, and previous education. They need to connect learning to this knowledge/experience base. They draw out participants' experience and knowledge which is relevant to the topic. They must relate theories and concepts to the participants and recognize the value of experience in learning.

3. Adults are goal-oriented. Upon enrolling in a course, they usually know what goal they want to attain. They appreciate an educational program that is organized and has clearly defined elements.

4. Adults are relevancy-oriented. They must see a reason for learning something. Learning has to be applicable to their work or other responsibilities to be of value to them. Instructors must identify objectives for adult participants before the course begins. Theories and concepts must be related to a setting familiar to participants.

5. Adults are practical, focusing on the aspects of a lesson most useful to them in their work. Instructors must tell participants explicitly how the lesson will be useful to them on the job.

6. Adult learners need to be shown respect. Instructors must acknowledge the wealth of experiences that adult participants bring to the classroom. These adults should be treated as equals in experience and knowledge and allowed to voice their opinions freely in class.

There are various factors that motivate adult learners, and motivation is a unique aspect of adult learning. There are six factors that serve as sources of motivation for adult learning (Lieb, 2011):

1. Social Relationships – to make new friends, to meet a need for associations and friendships.

2. External Expectations – to comply with instructions from someone else, to fulfill the expectations or recommendations of someone with formal authority.

3. Social Welfare – to improve ability to serve mankind, prepare for service to the community, and improve ability to participate in community work.

4. Personal Advancement – to achieve higher status in a job, secure professional advancement, and stay abreast of competitors.

5. Escape/Stimulation – to relieve boredom, provide a break in the routine of home or work, and provide a contrast to other exacting details of life.

6. Cognitive Interest – to learn for the sake of learning, seek knowledge for its own sake, and to satisfy an inquiring mind.

Adult learners constantly battle barriers to participation. These same barriers can be linked to foster children and their development as adults. There are three major categories of barriers to adult learning participation (Merriam & Brockett, 2007):

1. Situational Barriers – these barriers deal with factors in an individual's life circumstances at a given point in time. The most common of these are lack of time and money, lack of a home, and the lack of job responsibilities.

2. Institutional Barriers – these barriers are those practices, procedures, and policies that place limits on opportunities for potential adult learners to participate.

3. Dispositional Barriers – these barriers relate to attitudes and self-perceptions about oneself.

Identifying an individual as an adult is a difficult task. For the purpose of this study, the State of Kansas has already identified foster children exiting the system at the age of 18 as an adult. This study identifies individual's ages 18 or higher as adults.

Rationale for Study

The goal of this study was to determine the perceptions of the "success stories" in foster care and to determine the conditions that make success possible. The focus of this study was to find the untapped stories of effectiveness, while discerning the problems that are associated with foster care. The foster care system has a number of shortcomings, but the strong aspects receive very little attention. Attempts to improve the foster care system have been devoted almost entirely to fixing the problems (Office of the Family & Children's Ombudsman, 2001).

Today, nearly half a million children in the United States live "somewhere else." They are placed in foster care by public authorities because they could not live safely with their own families (Hochman et al., 2004). Children who are part of the foster care system face many challenges, and studies have shown they are at a disadvantage from those children not in foster care. According to the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services (2010), foster care services are provided to children and families when the court has found the child in need of care and the parents are unable to meet the needs of the child. The types of children who require placement in foster care are children who have been abused or neglected with significant developmental, emotional, or physical needs.

It is important to understand the unique disparity between children in foster care and children in the general population. With a history of abuse and neglect, in addition to experiencing multiple home placements, youth in foster care are more likely to have academic and behavioral problems at school as well as having higher rates of absenteeism and disciplinary referrals (Ramos & Brooks, 2009). Foster children are less likely to obtain a high school degree, less likely to obtain a bachelor's degree, more likely to become incarcerated, more likely to become homeless, more likely to be unemployed, more likely to have no health insurance, and

more likely to receive public assistance than children not placed in foster care (Foster Care Alumni of America, 2009). This study focused on the contemporary "success stories" of children in foster care.

Statement of the Problem

Young adults do not truly feel confident to be on their own at the age of 18. The average non-foster youth does not leave home and become fully self-sufficient until age 26 (Lemon, Hines, & Merdinger, 2005). Shockingly, when foster children reach the age of 18, they will exit the foster care system and are expected to survive on their own. The children who exit the foster care system will face higher rates of substance abuse, unemployment, incarceration, and lower educational attainment.

There is little to no evidence of comprehensive research on the discovery of "success stories" upon exiting foster care and the conditions that make them possible. The sole focus on foster care research has been extracting the negatives or the issues associated with the system.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is the discovery of strengths and emerging possibilities in foster care and the conditions that make them possible.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do foster children describe the benefits of being in foster care?

2. What positive influences did the foster care system have on foster children during their time-in care?

3. How does the foster care system assist foster children in becoming self-sufficient adults upon exiting?

4. Do the educational benefits foster children receive after exiting foster care assist foster children in becoming self-sufficient adults? How do these benefits assist them?

5. What are some ways foster parents use their strengths, skills, and talents in developing foster children?

Significance of the Study

This research characterizes an effort to comprehend the multi-faceted process of documenting and understanding "success stories" in foster care. This study will add to the knowledge base surrounding the positive perceptions of the foster care system. Identifying these positive outcomes creates greater awareness of needs and actions.

Limitations

This study was limited by a number of factors. The major limitation of this study was the small sample size. The views and reactions held by the participants during their time in foster care influenced their perceptions.

The data collected offers a perspective from a researcher with a background in foster care. As a former foster child, I understand that my own experiences and bias could have potentially affected this study. However, I remained unbiased and objective throughout this study.

The participants in this study were former foster children attending a post-secondary academic institution in the State of Kansas. The small sample was intended to narrow the focus of the study.

Assumptions of the Study

For the purpose of this study, the following assumptions were made. The participants would provide truthful responses and provide an accurate representation of the foster care system.

Definitions

The following definitions are used in this study:

1. *Aging out, Exiting, and Emancipation from Foster Care:* Youth being discharged from foster care (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2010).

2. *Appreciative Inquiry:* A narrative-based process of positive change. It is a cycle of activity that starts by engaging all members of an organization or community in a broad set of interviews and deep dialogue about strengths, resources, and capabilities (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

3. *Bounded System:* The "case" selected for study has boundaries, often bounded by time and place (Stake, 1995).

4. *Calendar Year:* Begins January 1 and ends December 31.

5. *Case Study:* In qualitative research, this is the study of "bounded system," with the focus being either the case or an issue that is illustrated by the case or cases (Creswell, 2007).

6. *Educational Attainment:* Highest degree of education an individual has completed.

7. *Entry:* Children who entered the foster care system by fiscal year (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2010).

8. *Fiscal Year:* The federal government's fiscal year begins October 1 and ends September 30. The fiscal year carries the date of the calendar year in which it ends and is referred to as FY.

9. *Foster Parent:* Certified caregiver for a foster child (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2010).

10. *Homeless:* People or social category of people who do not have a regular home because they cannot afford or otherwise maintain safe or adequate housing.

11. *Incarcerated:* Person in jail or prison.

12. *In Loco Parentis:* Latin for "in the place of a parent" which refers to the legal responsibility of a person or organization to take on some of the functions and responsibilities of a parent.

13. *Length of Stay in Foster Care:* Amount of time between entering and exiting foster care (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2010).

14. *Maltreatment:* To treat in a rough or cruel way; abuse (Belsky, 1980).

15. *Private Foster Care:* Includes state or territory child welfare agencies or private agencies contracted by the state or territory that place children into the foster care system. Term used for the system in which a minor has been made a ward and is placed in the private home of a certified caregiver otherwise known as a foster parent (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2010).

16. *Substance Abuse:* Overindulgence in a dependence of a drug or other chemical leading to effects that are detrimental to the individual's physical and mental health, or the welfare of others.

17. *Unemployed:* A person is available and willing to work, but currently without work.

Summary

This chapter provided information on the background for this study to include an introduction to foster care in the United States and foster care in the State of Kansas. The

chapter also provided an overview of the rationale for the study, statement of the problem, statement of purpose, the research questions, the significance of the study, the limitations and assumptions of the study, and the definitions. This chapter is followed by chapters on the review of literature and the methodology used to conduct the research.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

This chapter is separated into six sections. The first section supplies a history of foster care in the United States. The second section identifies the status of foster care in the State of Kansas. The third section discusses past research closely associated with this study. The fourth section identifies theories and approaches related to this study. The fifth section discusses challenges associated with foster care. The final section identifies the definition of success.

History of Foster Care in the United States

Throughout the history of the United States, the child welfare system has evolved according to changing attitudes regarding what role government should play in the security and care of abused and neglected children (O'Neill & Gesiriech, 2011). Goals and ideological thought form all government programs. There are two prominent ideological debates that shape child welfare (O'Neill & Gesiriech, 2011):

1. The first debate is about the rights of state and local government, versus the responsibility of the federal government to ensure adequate protection for all children.

2. The second debate centers on the rights of parents versus the rights and needs of the child.

Church congregations have been instrumental in the development of our current foster care system. Documents regarding foster care can be traced to one of the most popular historical writings ever created, the *Holy Bible*. According to the National Foster Parent Association (2010), some of the earliest documentation of children being cared for in foster homes can be found in the Old Testament. Early Christian church records show children lived with trustworthy widows who were paid by collections from the congregation (National Foster Parent Association, 2010).

The English Poor Laws can be traced as the beginning of policies standardizing foster care. The origin of the English Poor Law began in the fourteenth century instructing each parish to undertake voluntary weekly collections to assist the poor. The parish had been the basic unit of local government since at least the fourteenth century (Slack, 1995). The English Poor Law was created due to the ever increasing number of poor citizens in England. In the eighteenth century, orphans and children whose parents could not care for them were often indentured to work for other families (O'Neill & Gesiriech, 2011).

In 1636, Benjamin Eaton, at seven years of age, became the United States' first foster child (National Foster Parent Association, 2010). During the 1800s, America transferred the physical, educational, vocational, and medical care of impoverished children from children's institutions to private homes (Trattner, 1999). During this timeframe, states also started to finance foster homes. The church congregations would continue to provide foster care assistance. Minister and director of the New York Children's Aid Society, Charles Loring Brace, began the first free foster home movement. He was concerned with the large number of immigrant children sleeping in the streets of New York (National Foster Parent Association, 2010). States then started to become involved in foster home placements following Minister Loring's efforts. By the early twentieth century, agencies started to supervise and keep records of foster parents.

The history of foster care in the United States is centered on the legislative actions taken by Congress. In 1912, the United States Children's Bureau was created and it is still in existence today. The Children's Bureau is one of two bureaus within the Administration for Children and Families of the Department of Health and Human Services with an annual budget of over seven billion dollars. In 1935, the Social Security Act created a framework of child welfare. The

Social Security Act of 1935 authorized the first federal grants for child welfare services; though somewhat small, these first federal grants served as an incentive for states to form child welfare agencies (O'Neill, & Gesiriech, 2011). The earliest Social Security Act produced the Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) in order to provide state's financial assistance to support needy children.

In 1967, Congress amended the Social Security Act and made foster care mandatory for all states. In 1974, the Child Abuse and Treatment Act made child abuse reporting and investigation mandatory. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2010), in the Child Abuse and Treatment Act, Congress named ten key criteria to reporting child abuse and decreasing the number of incidences:

1. Each year, approximately one million American children are victims of abuse and neglect.

2. Many of these children and their families fail to receive adequate protection or treatment.

3. The problem of child abuse and neglect requires a comprehensive approach.

4. The failure to coordinate and comprehensively prevent as well as treat child abuse and neglect threatens the futures of thousands of children. This results in a cost to the nation of billions of dollars in tangible expenditures as well as significant intangible costs.

5. All elements of American society have a shared responsibility in responding to this national child and family emergency.

6. Substantial reductions in the prevalence and incidence of child abuse and neglect and the alleviation of its consequences are matters of the highest national priority.

7. National policy should strengthen families to prevent child abuse and neglect, provide support for intensive services to prevent the unnecessary removal of children from families, and promote the reunification of families if removal has taken place.

8. The child protection system should be comprehensive, child-centered, family-focused, and community-based. It should incorporate all appropriate measures to prevent the occurrence or recurrence of child abuse and neglect, and should promote physical and psychological recovery and social re-integration in an environment that fosters the health, safety, self-respect, and dignity of the child.

9. Because of the limited resources available in low-income communities, federal aid for the child protection system should be distributed with due regard to the relative financial need of the communities.

10. The federal government should assist states and communities with the fiscal, human, and technical resources necessary to develop and implement a successful and comprehensive child and family protection strategy.

During the 1970s, the number of children entering care proliferated, as did their length of stay in care. Lawmakers became increasingly concerned that many children were being removed from their homes unnecessarily. Insufficient efforts were made to either reunify them with their biological families or place them with adoptive families once a foster child entered care (O'Neill & Gesiriech, 2011). In 1976, the number of foster children had increased to 100,000. By the year 1980, the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act allocated money for preventive measures that reunited children with their families. The contemporary child welfare system is founded on this legislation. This was the first time that a major federal role in the administration

and oversight of child welfare services was established. The Act established (O'Neill & Gesiriech, 2011):

1. The first federal procedural rules governing child welfare case management, permanency planning, and foster care placement reviews;

2. required states to develop a state plan detailing how child welfare services will be delivered;

3. required states to make "reasonable efforts" to keep families together by providing both prevention and family reunification services;

4. created an adoption assistance program (Title IV-E Adoption Assistance); and

5. created the first significant role for the court system by requiring courts to review child welfare cases on a regular basis.

Substantial changes were made to the child welfare provisions with the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (Public Law 105-89). This Act was established due to three general perceptions regarding the current child welfare system:

1. Children continued to remain too long in foster care.

2. The child welfare system was biased toward family preservation at the expense of children's safety and well-being.

3. Inadequate attention and resources were devoted to adoption as a permanent placement option for abused and neglected children.

The key provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 were to

1. ensure that child safety, permanency, and well-being are of paramount concern in any child welfare decision;

2. encourage states to expedite permanency decisions for children in foster care;

3. promote and increase the number of adoptions, particularly through a new adoption incentive payment program;

4. establish performance standards and state accountability system, whereby states face financial penalties for failure to demonstrate improvements in child outcomes; and

5. encourage states to test innovative approaches to delivering child welfare services.

In December 1999, the Foster Care Independence Act lengthened foster care services until the age of 21 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families (2010), this legislation helps guarantee that young people involved in the foster care program receive the tools necessary to make the most of their lives while providing opportunities for additional education or training, housing assistance, counseling, and other services. One of the main provisions was that it provides opportunities for states to assist youth who are liable to remain in foster care and those who have exited foster care up to 21 years of age.

Foster Care Program in Kansas

The foster care program in Kansas is directed by the needs of the children and the state budget. Due to usual and consistent budgetary constraints, the State of Kansas required a detailed assessment of programs and services to determine how to reduce expenses. Following a determination of the House Bill-HB 2210, a child who is 18 years old and still in school is to be released the following June 1. This bill terminates jurisdiction when any child in need of care reaches the age of 18 following June 1, 2010.

With a goal to make the foster care program more responsive to the needs of helpless children, the State of Kansas, in 1996-1997 became the first state to privatize foster care. Other states are either researching the privatization process or are in the process of privatizing foster

care in their respective state. When Kansas decided to privatize the foster care system, they included specific criteria for performance regarding outcomes which included children undergoing a minimum number of placements and children maintaining family, community, and cultural ties (Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services, 1996).

The decision to privatize foster care in Kansas was controversial. Many attested the decision was made without involvement from major stakeholders such as judges, child-welfare workers, and families (Kansas Action for Children, 1998). During this time period, Bill Graves (former Governor of Kansas) tried to encourage all state agencies to study privatizing services in an effort to reduce state spending. In response to legal and fiscal challenges, the SRS decided to privatize all child-welfare services except for child protective services (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1997).

When the State of Kansas decided to privatize foster care, they opened competitive contract bidding for each of the state's five regions. The contract bidding was for foster care services, family preservation, and statewide adoption services. The amounts of the contracts allocated were based on the population for each region.

The State of Kansas has separated four contracted foster care agencies into five different geographical regions (APPENDIX A – Kansas Foster Care Region Map outlines each region in the State of Kansas). Regions 1 and 3 are contracted out to TFI Family Services, which is a private non-profit organization. TFI Family Services, otherwise known as The Farm, Inc., began in 1965, originally as a summer camp, and would later specialize in long term residential care and caring for children by attempting to keep brothers and sisters together (TFI Family Services, 2010). In 1996, after becoming a statewide subcontractor for family foster care homes, they ended their residential services to focus solely on foster care programs. TFI Family Services

covers Region 1, consisting of counties in southwest Kansas, and Region 3 which consists of north central/western Kansas counties.

KVC Behavioral HealthCare, Inc. operates Region 2 for the State of Kansas. KVC Behavioral HealthCare began in 1970 as a single group home for boys and has now grown into an organization serving more than 10,000 children a year (KVC Behavioral HealthCare, 2010). This agency is also the state's largest child care provider and is responsible for 40 percent of the children in the State of Kansas foster care system. KVC Behavioral HealthCare includes northwest counties of Leavenworth, Wyandotte, Douglas, Johnson, Franklin, and Miami.

Region 4 is operated by St. Francis Community Services, Inc. St. Francis Community Services began as the vision of a western Kansas Episcopal minister, Father Robert Mize Jr., in 1945. During their early years, the focus of this organization was on troubled juvenile offenders that had become lost in the system of institutions (Saint Francis Community Services, 2010). St. Francis Community Services covers the largest geographical region in the State of Kansas, which includes western Kansas in its entirety.

Region 5 is the last region for the State of Kansas, which is covered by United Methodist Youthville, Inc. This is the smallest geographical region in Kansas, but is one of the largest non-profit child welfare agencies in Kansas, specializing in foster care, adoption, psychiatric residential treatment, and counseling and therapy (United Methodist Youthville, 2010). Youthville began in the early 1920s as the United Methodist Church and recognized the need for a residence for homeless and abandoned children.

The privatization process for foster care in the State of Kansas has not come without its detractors. Republican Mike Kiegerl, R-Olathe stated that "This is a very dysfunctional system" after calling for hearings after receiving dozens of complaints about Kansas foster care (Klepper,

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2010). Officials from the state and the state's foster care contractors defend their system and

argue that privatization has brought more responsibility. Dusty Buell, Director of Public Policy

for Youthville, contends that other states look at Kansas as the paradigm they want to follow

when debating positive factors associated with the privatization of foster care in Kansas

(Klepper, 2010).

Humphrey, Turnbull, and Turnbull III (2006) from the University of Kansas performed a

qualitative study examining the perceptions of foster care providers, service providers, and

juvenile court judges regarding privatized foster care services in Kansas. Several research

questions guided this specific study: (a) In what way(s) do youth and their families, foster care

providers, service providers, and judges think that privatization of foster care services has

affected their child/their access to services? and (b) In what other ways do youth and their

families, foster care providers, service providers, and judges think privatization has affected

children and families?

The investigators used a Participatory Action Research (PAR) Committee qualitative

study. The purpose of the PAR Committee was to increase the possibility that the findings

would help the research project's intended recipients (Humphrey, Turnbull, & Turnbull III,

2006). PAR is a method that brings together researchers and stakeholders as equal partners

throughout the research process (Breda et al., 1997). The committee consisted of the research

stakeholders such as the young individuals who had been in foster care, foster care providers,

adoptive parents, service providers, child welfare workers, child welfare researchers, and judges.

There were 33 participants in the above study, selected by purposive sampling. The

participants selected were comparable to the committee stakeholders. The primary data

collection method for this study was participant interviews. The interviewers used an interview

guide with open-ended descriptive questions using a separate interview guide for the different

participants. The results of this study found a lack of agreement regarding the advantages or

failings of the State of Kansas' privatization of foster care services. Participants views on

privatization fluctuated from the feeling that privatization will continue to improve, to the view

that foster care should no longer be privatized (Breda et al., 1997). One key note to this study is

that no participant expressed strongly in favor of privatization and only one participant

acknowledged strongly that foster care services should not be privatized.

Past Research

While there has been research relating to strength based approaches, there has been little

research relating to the discovery of strengths and emerging possibilities relating to foster care in

the State of Kansas.

In 1999, the Vera Institute of Justice and the Administration for Children's Services

created a demonstration project titled Safe and Smart. The project was in collaboration with the

New York City Board of Education where child welfare workers (known as school specialists)

were placed in five Bronx County middle schools to provide guidance and counseling to foster

children (Vera Institute of Justice, 2003).

The Safe and Smart school specialists concentrated on improving school attendance and

academic accomplishment. The specialists found that there were distinctive obstacles. Some of

these obstacles were changes in placement, directed medical court appointments that kept foster

children out of classes, and the trauma from abuse and emotional concerns regarding their

biological families that distracted concentration from school (Vera Institute of Justice, 2003).

After three years (1999-2002) the program was determined successful on several

measures (Vera Institute of Justice, 2003).

1. Because foster children have poorer attendance records than other students and because attendance is strongly linked to academic achievement, the program set a goal of matching the citywide average attendance for middle school (goal of 91 percent). By the end of the 2001-2002 school year, Safe and Smart participants had achieved an attendance rate of 92 percent.

2. Safe and Smart participants recorded modest academic gains. The specialists put a high priority on tutoring services for the participating children, and more than half were placed in tutoring programs.

3. Safe and Smart increased foster parent participation at parent-teacher conferences by working directly with the foster parents of the children in the program and with foster care contract agencies.

In 2001, the Office of the Family and Children's Ombudsman completed an Appreciative Interview Report to identify what works in foster care. The Ombudsman approach was based on the idea that young people in foster care have the most to teach adults about what in the system is working well and what means the most to them (Office of the Family & Children's Ombudsman, 2001). The Ombudsman project, as well as this study, was greatly influenced by a system change approach, Appreciative Inquiry. Appreciative Inquiry ascertains that by engaging the system in an all-inclusive discovery of "success stories" and the conditions that make them possible, the system is able to create and focus energy on repeating and boosting strengths and successes in exceptional ways (Office of the Family & Children's Ombudsman, 2001).

The Ombudsman project staff interviewed 32 young individuals between the ages of 11-17 who resided with a licensed foster family. All participants had been living in foster care for at

least one year. The Ombudsman project staff used the following seven interview questions

(Office of the Family & Children's Ombudsman, 2001):

1. During your time in foster care, you have probably had some tougher times and some better times. For now, I'd like you to remember one of the really good times you've had. It might be a particularly good day or week, or any time when things were going really well for you.

2. Think about a time while you've been in foster care when you felt really taken care of by an adult. This could have been a time when someone was really kind or caring, or a time when someone listened to you or helped you get what you wanted.

3. Think about a time while you've been in foster care when you felt really taken care of by an adult, who seemed to just understand what you wanted or needed without you even asking.

4. This next question is an important question for most people and you may need a moment to think about it. It can be a great feeling to be accepted and included in things. Think of a time during your foster care experience when you felt a part of things. This could be a person who made you feel accepted or a part of a group where you felt included.

5. Now I'd like you to think for a moment about your own strengths and gifts. Specifically, I'd like you to remember a time that you went after something that you wanted. It might have been something big or something quite small. Anyway, there was something that you realized that was important to you and you said to yourself, "Go for it," and, as a result, you made something good happen for yourself.

6. Imagine that you had a magic wand and could make anything happen. What three wishes would you have that, starting right now, would make the rest of your time in foster care the best experience you can imagine?

7. The last thing we want to ask you is how adults, who would really like to help, could make a difference for kids that are in foster care.

The Ombudsman project staff identified three prominent themes from the interviews. The first theme was feeling normal; success in foster care happens when children feel and are seen by others as not being different (Office of the Family & Children's Ombudsman, 2001). The second theme was feeling cared about; success in foster care appears when the foster child truly feels cared about. The third theme was feeling like their opinions matter; success in foster care happens when young individuals feel that adults listen to them, respect their opinions, and they have influence over what happens to them (Office of the Family & Children's Ombudsman, 2001).

The Ombudsman project staff found that the appreciative interview process was an effective and gratifying experience (Office of the Family & Children's Ombudsman, 2001). The Ombudsman project staff was surprised by the young individual's interview responses. Specifically, the staff was impressed by the straightforwardness of the participant's best experiences and wishes and the unexpected understandings in feeling invigorated and hopeful about the possibility of improving young people's experience in foster care (Office of the Family & Children's Ombudsman, 2001). The Ombudsman project staff concluded that the successes discovered through this process could be repeated and expanded throughout the system if sufficient consideration and energy were devoted to such an effort (Office of the Family & Children's Ombudsman, 2001). The Ombudsman recommended that the Children's

Administration should focus concerted attention, energy and resources on identifying, replicating and enhancing the positive experiences of young people in foster care (Office of the Family & Children's Ombudsman, 2001).

In 2010, Nancy Garrett Howell of the University of Nebraska conducted a study of Appreciative Advising. The intent of her study uses similar approaches to this current study. The purpose of her study was to explore academic advisors' perceptions of Appreciative Advising and to determine how Appreciative Advising had impacted their advising practice (Howell, 2010). This case study measured the understanding of nine academic advisors who utilized the Appreciative Advising approach. The data was collected in one-on-one interviews and the researcher examined the perceptions of these participants to discover the following (Howell, 2010):

1. Ways that Appreciative Advising advisors make use of their personal strengths, skills, and talents.

2. Ways that academic advisors perceive that Appreciative Advising made them more effective advisors.

3. Ways that academic advisors using Appreciative Advising perceive that it improves the advisor/student relationship.

4. Ways that academic advisors using Appreciative Advising believe that Appreciative Advising has influenced their relationships outside the student/advisor relationship.

Howell (2010) utilized the six phases of Appreciative Advising which, are similar to the 4-D cycle model of Appreciative Inquiry. The six phases of Appreciative Advising are the Disarm Phase, the Discover Phase, the Dream Phase, the Design Phase, the Deliver Phase, and the Don't Settle Phase. Howell (2010) concluded that several of the participants felt that

Appreciative Advising influenced relationships beyond the advisor/student relationship, and that every participant felt that it had permitted a more positive work environment.

Students with disabilities are similar to foster children in that they also suffer from the lack of social inclusion. Calabrese et al. (2007) conducted an Appreciative Inquiry study on the benefits of social inclusion of students with disabilities. The purpose of the study was to improve a program that focuses on developing the social inclusion of students with disabilities by increasing the circles of their social relationships; this program is known as the Circle of Friends Program (COFP). The program's intent is to help students with disabilities develop social relationships with general education students (Calabrese, Patterson, Liu, Goodvin, Hummel, & Nance, 2007).

The study used a qualitative case study outlined by an Appreciative Inquiry theoretical research perspective to describe the positive central perceptions of the COFP's sponsors as well as the parents of the children served by the COFP (Calabrese et al., 2007). The study utilized three methods to collect data: focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and an online survey. One focus group was comprised of eight parents of children with disabilities in the COFP; the other focus group was comprised of eight COFP sponsors (Calabrese et al., 2007). The semi-structured interviews included two parents and two sponsors in COFP, and an online survey was sent to eight former COFP participants (Calabrese et al., 2007).

The study was guided by the following research questions (Calabrese et al., 2007)

1. How do school sponsors in the Circle of Friends Program describe the benefits of the COFP?

2. How do parents of children with disabilities in the Circle of Friends Program describe the benefits of the COFP?

3. How do former buddies of students with disabilities in the Circle of Friends Program describe the benefits of the COFP?

Calabrese et al. (2007) concluded the study with four key findings:

1. Participation in the Circle of Friends Program reduced the level of alienation felt by parents of children with disabilities (more powerful, less isolated).

2. Participation in the Circle of Friends Program was transformative.

3. Additional financial, human, and time resources are crucial to sustain the Circle of Friends Program.

4. Ecological conditions are created for inclusion into the school's social experience for students with disabilities.

Theories and Approaches

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry is a narrative-based process of positive change. It is a series of activity that starts by involving all members of an organization or community in a broad set of interviews and deep discourse about strengths, resources, and capabilities (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Appreciative Inquiry is based on the belief that organizations are developed on their strengths.

The term Appreciative Inquiry has been described in many different ways. One way to describe Appreciative Inquiry is to define the approach as a favorable method to change that lets go of problem-based management and alters strategic planning, survey methods, culture change, and measurement systems (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Others define the approach as a model of conscious growth geared for the actualities of the present (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

Appreciative Inquiry identifies four key phases in a 4-D cycle model (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005):

1. Discovery – mobilizing the whole system by engaging all stakeholders in the articulation of strengths and best practices or identifying the best of what has been and what is.

2. Dream – creating a clear results-oriented vision in relation to discovered potential and in relation to questions of higher purpose.

3. Design – creating possibility propositions of the ideal organization, articulating an organization design that people feel is capable of drawing upon, and magnifying the positive core to realize the newly expressed dream.

4. Destiny – strengthening the affirmative capability of the whole system by enabling it to build hope and sustain momentum for ongoing positive change and high performance.

At the center of the 4-D cycle is the affirmative topic choice. The affirmative topic choice can be defined as the beginning point and the most planned characteristic of the Appreciative Inquiry process (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Selecting these subjects is a way for the organization to set a strategic plan for the future.

The process of selecting affirmative topics (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005):

1. Involves a cross section of people from throughout the organization;

2. grows out of preliminary interviews into the organization at its best; and

3. challenges people to reframe deficit issues into affirmative topics for inquiry.

Cooperrider & Whitney (2005) discuss five principles for positive revolution associated with Appreciative Inquiry:

1. The Constructionist Principle – human knowledge and organizational destiny are interwoven. We are constantly involved in understanding and making sense of the people

and the world around us by providing strategic planning analysis, environmental scans, needs analysis, assessments and audits, surveys, focus groups, and performance appraisals.

2. The Simultaneity Principle – inquiry and change are not separate moments, but are simultaneous. The seeds of change, the things people think and talk about, the things people discover and learn, and the things that inform dialogue and inspire images of the future are implicit in the very first questions we ask.

3. The Poetic Principle – human organizations are more like an open book than a machine. An organizations story is constantly being co-authored. Pasts, presents, and futures are endless sources of learning, inspiration, and interpretation.

4. The Anticipatory Principle – our positive images of the future lead our positive actions. This is the energizing basis and presupposition of Appreciative Inquiry. The image of the future guides the current behavior of any organization.

5. The Positive Principle – building and sustaining momentum for change requires large amounts of positive affect and social bonding. Items such as hope, excitement, inspiration, caring, camaraderie, sense of urgent purpose, and sheer joy in creating something meaningful together.

Positive Psychology

Positive Psychology is the scientific study of the strengths and merits that permit individuals and communities to prosper. Positive Psychology encourages research, training, and education (University of Pennsylvania, 2011). Positive Psychology was established on the belief that people want to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives, and to improve their perceptions of love, work, and play (Stickell & Callaway, 2007). The President of the American Psychological

Association, Martin Seligman, founded the scientific study of Positive Psychology (Stickell & Callaway, 2007).

Positive Psychology has three central concerns: positive emotions, positive individual traits, and positive institutions (University of Pennsylvania, 2011). Wallis (2005) discusses that Positive Psychology can be defined into three overlapping areas of research:

1. Pleasant Life – the life of enjoyment examines how people experience, predict, and enjoy the positive feelings and emotions that are part of normal and healthy living.

2. Good Life – life of engagement examines the beneficial effects of involvement, engagement, and flow that individuals feel when occupied with their primary activities.

3. Meaningful Life – the life of affiliation questions how individuals receive a positive sense of well-being, belonging, meaning, and purpose from being part of and contributing back to something larger and more permanent than themselves.

Applications of Positive Psychology include assisting people and organizations in realizing their strengths and utilizing those strengths to promote their levels of well-being. Numerous professions utilize this strategy: therapists, counselors, coaches, and other psychological professionals use this method to increase the strengths of individuals (Wallis, 2005).

Self-Worth Theory

American psychologist, Abraham Maslow, included self-esteem in his hierarchy of needs. He described two different forms of esteem: the need for respect from others and the need for self-respect. Martin Covington's Self-Worth Theory has numerous similarities to this study. Covington (1992) believed that several factors affect an individuals need to protect his/her personal values or sense of importance through academic attainment.

The Self-Worth Theory states that self-worth should not be confused with individuals' perceptions of their own competence or self-efficacy, which are cognitive beliefs about the self (Schunk et al., 2008). Self-worth is a more sentimental or emotional reaction to the self as it can mean taking pride in yourself and your behavior, feeling good about yourself and accomplishments, and having a general positive image of yourself (Schunk et al., 2008).

Constructivist Theory

As discussed in Chapter One, Knowles et al. (2005) defined five key assumptions of andragogy that were initially defined by Lindeman (1926). The Constructivist Theory, otherwise known as the Learning Theory, states that humans generate knowledge and meaning from an interaction between their experiences and their ideas (Dougiamas, 1998).

Jean Piaget suggested that through processes of accommodation and assimilation, individuals develop new knowledge from their experiences. When individuals assimilate, they incorporate the new experience into an already existing structure without changing that structure (Kim, 2001). The Constructivist Theory can be linked to either andragogy (form of adult learning) or pedagogy (form of pre-adult learning). Constructivism is a theory describing how learning happens; this could be achieved through various possibilities of learning. Foster children must develop strong adult learning skills to become successful and self-sufficient. The Constructivist Theory is closely associated with the Adult Learning Theory which was discussed in Chapter One.

Social Bond Theory

A child's ability to bond with his or her society is a key marker for success in life. The Social Bond Theory assumes that the motivation for deviant behavior is present in everyone, and concerns itself with the components that keep an individual from participating in deviance

(Durkin, Wolfe, & Ross, 2007). Hirschi (1969) was the first sociologist to formally introduce the Social Bond Theory and stated that we are moral beings to the extent we are social beings. The Social Bond Theory is the link between society and the individual. When these bonds are weak or deficient, the individual has less at stake and is at higher risk for perpetrating deviant acts (Faupel, Horowitz, & Weaver, 2004).

According to Hirschi (1969), the Social Bond Theory has four functions: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. This theory is frequently connected with criminal activity, but also has a direct connection with foster children. Hirschi's (1969) supporting research found that youth who were strongly attached to their parents were less likely to commit deviant acts, and commitment to established values such as striving to get a good education and refusing to drink alcohol was suggestive of conventional behavior. Youth involved in conventional activity, such as homework, were less likely to engage in deviant behavior. Hirschi (1969) also found that youth involved in unconventional behavior, such as smoking and drinking, were prone to criminal behavior. Youth who maintained fragile and detached relationships with people were more delinquency prone, and those who avoided unconventional acts were attached to their peers.

Challenges Associated with Foster Care

Disadvantages

Children are placed into foster care either by court order or because their parents are incapable or unwilling to care for them. Involuntary placement will occur when a child has been abused or neglected or may be at risk of abuse or neglect by his or her parent's or primary care givers. These children are removed from their homes and placed into a foster care system that can lead to multiple placements. Foster children suffer severely in terms of low educational

attainment, high rates of incarceration, high rates of non-marital childbirth, high rates of unemployment, and are more likely to receive public assistance.

The United States General Accounting Office (1999) performed a study on foster care challenges in helping youth live independently. This study found that many foster youth have a challenging time making the transition from the foster care system to self-sufficiency. Research has shown that former foster children have alarming education deficiencies and rely on public assistance (General Accounting Office, 1999). There is also a disturbing connection between homelessness and prior episodes of foster care. In a 1997 study of 400 homeless individuals, 20 percent had lived in foster care as a child, and 20 percent had one or more child currently in foster care (General Accounting Office, 1999).

Foster children are severely disadvantaged in terms of educational attainment as well as other negative circumstances. Table 4 identifies the disadvantages that foster children endure when they exit the foster care system (Foster Care Alumni of America, 2009).

Table 4: *Disadvantages Foster Children Endure After Exiting Foster Care*

Disadvantage/Circumstance	% of Foster Children who Exited the System
Completed high school (compared to the general population)	56 % of foster children completed high school compared to 82 % of the general population (children not in foster care)
Completed a Bachelor's Degree (compared to the general population)	1.8 % of foster children completed a Bachelor's Degree compared to 24 % of the general population (children not in foster care)
Homelessness	25 % of foster children had been homeless since exiting the foster care system
Public Assistance	30 % were receiving public assistance
Health Insurance	30 % had no health insurance
Unemployed	51 % were unemployed

Drifting

Foster children develop unique challenges in life, and some of these challenges can be associated with drifting. As children are moved from one location to the next, they tend to have placement problems and feel further sequestered from any sort of family structure. Identification with the lifestyle of drifting may be an unintentional outcome of growing up drifting through placements (Penzerro, 2003). Drifting from one foster care home to the next becomes more of a problem if children enter the system at an older age. Stability is often hard to find for these children because they typically enter care late and stay in care longer than others (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010).

Removing a child from his or her home can cause a great amount of emotional trauma and instability. Emotional trauma and instability stem from children being removed from their biological families and the troubling atmosphere they were previously living under. The negative behaviors that children have extend into foster care, as foster care itself can be an unstable experience. This is evident by the multiple homes a child may reside in. Some negative behaviors toward foster care include feelings of uncertainty and overall displeasure with the foster care experience (Ryan & Testa, 2005). Insecurity can create hostility toward others including foster parents and the foster care administrators.

Moving from one home to another forces foster children to change schools regularly. Constant relocation has a negative effect on a child's educational outcomes. The absence of required school records can lead to an interruption in registering at the new school and a gap of days or weeks in learning. Each transfer requires the child to adapt to new instructors and peers and to a curriculum that may fluctuate extensively from the previous school (Vera Institute of Justice, 2003).

Tinto (1994) identified Dimensions of Institutional Action, where he examines three major sources of student departure: academic difficulties, the inability of individuals to resolve their educational and occupational goals, and failure to become or remain incorporated in the intellectual and social life of the institution. Tinto's model of Institutional Departure states that, students need integration into formal and informal academic systems as well as formal and informal social systems (Tinto, 1994). Foster children, just as children in the general population, are in need of these institutional actions to succeed. Foster children whose institutions have these actions in place have a greater chance of success.

Table 5 identifies the length of time 276,266 foster children, who exited foster care during fiscal year 2009, spent in foster care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010).

Table 5: *Timeline – Foster Children Who Exited During Fiscal Year 2009*

% of Children Exiting Care	Timeline in Care
19 %	1 to 5 months
18 %	6 to 11 months
13 %	12 to 17 months
9 %	18 to 23 months
7 %	24 to 29 months
5 %	30 to 35 months
12 %	3 to 4 years
11 %	5 years or more

Stigma

Foster children are no different than children who remain with their biological family their entire lives, and they respond to expectations the same as all children. When adults expect a child to perform poorly, the child will perform poorly. Too often teachers, guidance counselors, and other school staff do not expect foster children to excel in school. Even foster parents (some of whom may have little formal education themselves) and caseworkers may expect nothing more than passing grades from a foster child (Vera Institute of Justice, 2003). Few foster children are encouraged to think about college and few are encouraged to participate

in the extra-curricular activities associated with higher academic achievement (Vera Institute of Justice, 2003).

Most foster children do not reach out for assistance that contributes to continued educational opportunities, possibly because they are ashamed of being a foster child. Vera Institute of Justice (2003) reached out to a middle school boy and asked if any of his fellow students knew he was in foster care, and the boy replied "I hope not!"

Maltreatment

Foster children suffer through an abundance of difficulties, and these difficulties typically begin before they enter foster care. Foster children typically suffer maltreatment and/or neglect before they enter foster care; unfortunately, there are recorded experiences of maltreatment during foster care. Grimm and Darwall (2005) conclude that there are in fact maltreatment experiences while in foster care. Table 6 displays the type of maltreatment and the percent of foster children affected.

Table 6: *Maltreatment Experiences While in Foster Care*

Type of Maltreatment	% of Foster Children Affected
Some Child Maltreatment	32.8 percent
Physical Neglect Only	10.1 percent
Physical Neglect & Physical Abuse	9.4 percent
Physical Abuse Only	5.6 percent
Sexual Abuse & Maltreatment	4.0 percent
Sexual Abuse Only	3.7 percent

Definition of Success

Participants for this study were drawn from individuals who have exited from the foster care system in Kansas and are currently attending a post-secondary academic institution in Kansas. These are the rational choices for participants in this study. These participants have experienced the phenomenon that is exiting the foster care system in the State of Kansas and have found success in life after foster care.

Based on the disadvantages discussed in this study, foster children could be labeled a success just by simply avoiding incarceration, graduating high school, avoiding a life of homelessness, or attaining employment. Educational attainment can be an identifier for success in a foster child, and can affect the quality of life for a foster child. As adults, with less of a safety net than children from intact families, they need a strong educational foundation in order to support themselves (Vera Institute of Justice, 2003). As mentioned before, foster children lag behind their non-foster peers in school. When compared educationally to the general population, foster children have poor attendance rates, are less likely to perform well for their grade level, are more likely to have behavior and discipline problems, are more likely to be assigned to special education classes, and are less likely to attend college (Vera Institute of Justice, 2003).

For the purpose of this study, a foster child was considered a success by meeting all of the following criteria:

1. Successful graduation from high school or attainment of a GED.

2. Enrollment in a post-secondary academic institution in the State of Kansas.

3. Completion of at least one academic semester.

4. Maintaining a 2.0 cumulative Grade-Point-Average (GPA) (freshman – senior).

Summary

The literature examined in this review covered a history of foster care in the United States, the status of foster care in the State of Kansas, past research closely associated with this study, the theories related to this study, challenges associated with foster care, and the definition of success. Chapter Three will discuss the methodology of this study, and will describe items such as the research design and the sampling methodology.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

Chapter Three describes the methodology used to analyze the data in the current research. This chapter discusses the study's research design, the research questions, statement of the problem, purpose statement, and the significance of the study. This chapter will also discuss the population, the sampling methodology, the selection size, the rationale for selection, and data collection procedures.

Research Methodology

Qualitative and quantitative research are two important research traditions. The focus of quantitative research is to classify and count as well as develop statistical methods to explain what was observed. Qualitative research starts with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups assign to a social problem (Creswell, 2007).

Quantitative research sends out testing data for individuals to complete; whereas, qualitative researchers tend to collect data in the field at the site where participants experience the issue or problem under study (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative research is a form of inquiry in which researchers make an interpretation of what they see, hear, and understand (Creswell & Clark, 2007).

This qualitative research study made use of the case study tradition to explore perceptions of foster children by discovering strengths and emerging possibilities in foster care and the conditions that make them possible. Extensive interviewing was used throughout this study. Interviewing is one of the most widely accepted methods for collecting data, as the researcher must conclude what type of interview is practical and will bring about the most useful information to answer research questions (Krueger, 1994). Interviewing also presents different

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challenges to the researcher. Suoninen and Jokinen (2005) discuss whether the diction of the interview questions leads to refined persuasive questions, responses, or explanations.

Research Design

Case Study

At the onset of a qualitative study, researchers have distinctive choices for their approach. Creswell (2007) discusses the five qualitative studies as well as what is traditionally studied and what type of information is typically collected with each.

Table 7: *Five Qualitative Studies*

Qualitative Study	What is traditionally studied	Information collected
Narrative Research	Single individual, accessible and distinctive	Documents and archival material, open-ended interviews, subject journaling, participant observation, casual chatting
Phenomenology	Multiple individuals who have experienced the phenomenon	Interviews with 5 to 25 people
Grounded Theory	Multiple individuals who have responded to an action or participated in a process about a central phenomenon	Primarily interviews with 20 to 30 people to achieve detail in the theory
Ethnography	Members of a culture-sharing group or individuals representative of the group	Participant observations, interviews, artifacts, and documents
Case Study	A bounded system such as a process, an activity, an event, a program, or multiple individuals	Extensive forms such as documents and records, interviews, observations, and physical artifacts

The dilemma is choosing the appropriate study for the research. All five approaches have in common the general process of research that begins with a research problem and proceeds to the questions, the data, the data analysis, and the research report. They also use similar data collection processes including, in varying degrees, interviews, observations, documents, and audiovisual materials (Creswell, 2007).

Foster care or social work research could fit into the five different approaches. The two approaches that fit this study the best are phenomenological research and case study. Phenomenological research has a strict emphasis that is the understanding of the core of the experience, and is designed to illustrate the essence of a lived phenomenon (Giorgi, 1994). Case study research has a long, prominent history across many fields (Creswell, 2007). In qualitative research, a case study is the study of a "bounded system," with the emphasis being either the case or an issue that is defined by the case. A qualitative case study provides an in-depth study of this "system," based on a wide array of data collection materials, and the researcher establishes this system or case within its larger context (Stake, 1995).

Types of qualitative case studies are identified by the size of the bounded case, such as whether the case involves one individual, several individuals, a group, or an entire program (Creswell, 2007). Case studies can also be broken down into terms of the intent of the case analysis such as:

1. Single Instrument Case Study

2. Collective or Multiple Case Study

3. Intrinsic Case Study

Qualitative research is often conducted by case studies. Case study analysis is suitable for rigorous, in-depth examination of one or a few instances of some phenomena (Goetz &

LeCompte, 1984). In most studies, certain boundaries are necessary and case studies can be bounded by different sets of conditions. This is important if the intent of the researcher is not to study everything going on for a particular situation, but to focus solely on a specific issue or problem.

Research Questions

The research questions are addressed to the researcher only. They bind the study and serve as a control for developing questions to be posed to the participants in the interview protocol. Marshall and Rossman (2006) state that qualitative research questions are:

1. Open-ended, evolving, and non-directional.

2. Restate the purpose of the study in more specific terms.

3. Start with a word such as "what" or "how" rather than "why."

4. Are few in number.

The following research questions guided this study.

1. How do foster children describe the benefits of being in foster care?

2. What positive influences did the foster care system have on foster children during their time in care?

3. How does the foster care system assist foster children in becoming self-sufficient adults upon exiting?

4. Do the educational benefits foster children receive after exiting foster care assist foster children in becoming self-sufficient adults? How do these benefits assist them?

5. What are some ways foster parents use their strength, skills, and talents in developing foster children?

Statement of the Problem

Young adults do not truly feel confident to be on their own at the age of 18. The average non-foster youth does not leave home and become fully self-sufficient until age 26 (Lemon et al., 2005). Shockingly, when foster children reach the age of 18, they will exit the foster care system and are expected to survive on their own. The children who exit the foster care system will face higher rates of substance abuse, unemployment, incarceration, and lower educational attainment.

There is little to no evidence of comprehensive research on the discovery of "success stories" upon exiting foster care and the conditions that make them possible. The sole focus on foster care research has been extracting the negatives or the issues associated with the system.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is the discovery of strengths and emerging possibilities in foster care and the conditions that make them possible.

Significance of the Study

This research characterizes an effort to comprehend the multi-faceted process of documenting and understanding "success stories" in foster care. This study will add to the knowledge base surrounding the positive perceptions of the foster care system. Identifying these positive outcomes creates greater awareness of needs and actions.

Population

The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System estimates the number of entries into foster care in the United States for fiscal year 2009 was 255,418, while 276,266 emancipated foster care. A total of 423,773 children were in foster care in fiscal year 2009 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). The State of Kansas in fiscal year 2009 had 5,691 children in the foster care system. Participants of this study were drawn from children that

exited foster care from the State of Kansas and currently attend a post-secondary academic institution in Kansas.

Multiple participants were interviewed one-on-one in their natural setting to attain their perspectives on strengths and emerging possibilities in foster care and the conditions that make them possible. Data analysis was accomplished by utilizing a standard format for coding.

Sampling Methodology

Qualitative research most often uses purposive sampling rather than random sampling, where a good understanding of these sampling tactics and why they are used is essential to creating a sound qualitative study (Devers & Frankel, 2000). With the goals of qualitative research, purposive sampling is often utilized where purposive sampling strategies are designed to improve the comprehension of selected individuals or groups (Devers & Frankel, 2000). Miles & Huberman (1994) note that three types of cases have the greatest payoff in purposive samples:

1. Typical Cases – those who are "normal" or "average" for those being studied.

2. Deviant or Extreme Cases – those who represent unusual manifestations of the phenomenon of interest.

3. Negative or Disconforming Cases – those who are exceptions to the rule.

Two sampling techniques that could have been utilized for this study are theoretical and criterion. Theoretical sampling is identifying groups or categories to study based on their relevance to a specific set of research questions (Mason, 1996). In a grounded theory study, the researcher chooses individuals who can add to the development of the theory, whereas, criterion sampling works well when all individuals studied represent the phenomenon being studied

(Creswell, 2007). Theoretical sampling is a method of sampling individuals that can promote to building the opening and axial coding for the theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Participants for this study are individuals who have emancipated from the foster care system in Kansas and are currently attending a post-secondary academic institution in Kansas. These are the rational choices for participants in this study. These participants have experienced the phenomenon that is exiting the foster care program in the State of Kansas and have found success in life after foster care. Determining success with a foster child can be a difficult task. With the low levels of education attainment achieved by foster children, it could be argued that by simply graduating high school, a foster child could be labeled a success.

As determined in Chapter Two and for the purpose of this study, a foster child must be in his or her second semester at a post-secondary academic institution in Kansas and maintaining a minimum 2.0 cumulative GPA. This study utilized a criterion-based selection process to choose participants. There were four key criteria that each participant was required to meet to be eligible to participate in this study. Each participant must:

1. Have been a child in the foster care system in the State of Kansas within fiscal years 2001-2011. The participant can be from another state (or have been in foster care outside of Kansas), but must have exited from the State of Kansas foster care system.

2. Be currently enrolled (freshman – senior) at a post-secondary academic institution in the State of Kansas and not currently serving on academic suspension or probation. The student must have completed at least one academic semester.

3. Currently maintain a 2.0 cumulative (GPA) or higher.

4. Be a volunteer who willingly signed the informed consent statement to participate in the study.

These participants were selected on a rational basis. The researcher consulted employees at various universities in Kansas, employees with the Kansas SRS, and the privatized foster care agencies for participants in this study. The researcher reached out to the Kansas SRS to find participants for this study. The researcher sent a document highlighting the research project to the SRS and the privatized foster care agencies within the State of Kansas. The SRS and privatized foster care agencies then sent the document to potential participants. Those participants then reached out to the interviewer to participate in the study. The researcher also used contacts that were attained during speaking engagements that the researcher conducted with the privatized foster care agencies. The researcher also utilized another sampling technique called snowball or chain sampling. Snowball or chain sampling is utilized as each participant will be asked to identify a potential next participant in a snowball manner (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher was able to identify additional participants with this method. Participants chosen were willing to donate an hour to an hour and a half of their time to be interviewed for this study. They were encouraged to be truthful and candid in answering interview questions.

Sample Size

The concept of purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research; this means that the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can decisively inform an understanding of the research problem in the study (Creswell, 2007). Selecting a sample size that meets the needs of the researcher is extremely important.

A sample size of 15 participants was used for this study. Sample size is often justified by interviewing participants until reaching data saturation. Saturation or the "point of redundancy" can be reached at 15 participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Role and Background as Researcher

As the researcher, I have a unique interest in the foster care program. As a child, I was in the foster care system in the State of Kansas. As the interviewer and, therefore, an instrument of the research, I am aware of my bias. I understand that there is a stigma related to being a "foster child" and this is a negative stigma. I maintained an analytical distance throughout the study, but I believe that my own experiences as a foster child in Kansas and a student at Kansas State University contributed to my ability to identify with and explain the perceptions of the participants in this study. My skills, experience, and knowledge enabled me to interpret and analyze the data that was gathered.

Data Collection Procedures

Data was collected through interviews with participants who met the selection criteria and through observations during the interview process. The interviews were conducted in person and each interview lasted approximately one hour to one-half hour in length. The researcher conducted the interviews throughout the State of Kansas at local academic institutions. Each interview was audio taped and transcribed verbatim and used open-ended questions as outlined on the Interview Protocol in APPENDIX E. Appropriate probing questions were asked to acquire additional and new information from the participant. The researcher made observations during the interviews.

The interview protocol was a method of insuring consistency during the interview process. The interviewer utilized a pre-determined set of questions for each interview, and the questions remained the same for each participant. The interviewer introduced each participant to the interview protocol to assist the participant in attaining a degree of comfort. The interviewer familiarized himself with the questions so he was not dependent on reading the questions word

for word from the interview worksheet and was able to maintain eye-to-eye contact. The interview protocol ended with a reminder to thank the interviewee when the interview was completed.

The interview protocol was reviewed by the researcher's committee members. The committee members were asked to make suggestions for changes to obtain the required results. The committee member suggestions were incorporated into the final interview protocol. Each participant interviewed completed the following additional documents along with the Interview Protocol:

1. APPENDIX C – Informed Consent
2. APPENDIX D – Interview Worksheet

Data Analysis Strategies

The strength of qualitative research is extensive collection of data, typically from multiple sources of information. After organizing and storing data, researchers analyze them by carefully concealing the names of respondents, and engage in the confounding practice of trying to make meaning of the data (Creswell, 2007). The narrative form was an in-depth study of each interview. This was accomplished by utilizing a case study coding template. This template includes the development of a theoretical lens, analyzing themes, and interpreting the themes. The researcher identified themes for this study based on the responses received during one-on-one interviews. The researcher identified key words and phrases to develop themes for this study. The researcher identified key phrases that were repeated by the majority of the participants to develop the themes. These key words and phrases were identified during the transcription process. Transcriptions were carefully analyzed to ensure themes were interpreted accurately. After reoccurring phrases were identified, the researcher carefully developed a

coding template to accurately develop themes based on the comments provided by the participants. The researcher developed ten themes based on reoccurring phrases that answered the research questions

Verification Strategy

Verification procedures were used for this study. Without thoroughness, research is insignificant, becomes false, and loses its value (Morse et al., 2002). Participants were asked to verify that the themes identified by the researcher are accurate. After the interviews were transcribed, each participant was sent a summary of the interview and asked to verify that the information is accurate. Any additional comments provided by the participant were incorporated into the final analysis.

Guba and Lincoln (1981) define member checking as a process where participants validate that the themes identified are accurate. Member checks are a continuous process during data analysis (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Member checks are critical for the verification process. Verification is the process of checking, confirming, making sure, and being certain. In qualitative research, verification refers to the devices used during the process of research to incrementally contribute to ensuring reliability and validity and the accuracy of a study (Morse et al., 2002). Verification tactics that ensure both reliability and validity of data, ensure procedural coherence, sampling adequacy, developing active relationships between sampling, data collection and analysis, theoretical thinking, and theory development (Morse et al., 2002).

Ethical Considerations

An Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained prior to the beginning of this study. Each individual participant in this study was informed of the purpose of this study. Each individual participant signed an Informed Consent form (APPENDIX C). The identity of each

individual participant was kept confidential. The interview recordings were stored with the researcher at all times.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview on the methodology that was used to analyze the data for this research. This chapter discussed the study's research design, the research questions, statement of the problem, purpose statement, and the significance of the study. This chapter also discussed the population, the sampling methodology, the selection size, the rationale for selection, and data collection procedure. Chapter Four will discuss the results of the study. The results of the study include the themes as well as the participants' perceptions relating to those themes.

Chapter 4 - Results

The results of this research are discussed in this chapter. The themes as well as the participants' perceptions relating to those themes are identified. The data collection in case study research is typically broad, drawing on several sources of information such as observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials (Creswell, 2007). Through this data collection, a detailed description of the case appears (Creswell, 2007). The results of this were based upon one-on-one interviews.

For one-on-one interviewing, the researcher needs individuals who are not cautious to speak and share ideas, and needs to determine a setting in which this is possible (Creswell, 2007). Creswell and Clark (2007) hold that qualitative interviews are a great way to obtain an understanding through comprehensive examples and rich narratives. In addition, qualitative interviews allow researchers to ascertain the meanings of actions and experiences and the underlying opinions (Creswell & Clark, 2007).

The Research Questions and Resulting Themes

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do foster children describe the benefits of being in foster care?

2. What positive influences did the foster care system have on foster children during their time in care?

3. How does the foster care system assist foster children in becoming self-sufficient adults upon exiting?

4. Do the educational benefits foster children receive after exiting foster care assist foster children in becoming self-sufficient adults? How do these benefits assist them?

5. What are some ways foster parents use their strength, skills, and talents in developing

    foster children?

    The Interview Protocol was created and provided to the participants to examine the

framework for the data collection, and the interview questions were built to obtain the

participants' responses based on the research questions.

Themes as Perceived by the Participants

    This study revealed ten themes perceived by the participants examined. Theme

identification is one of the most important tasks in qualitative research (Bernard & Ryan, 2003).

Themes link different expressions and can be broad or focused. Bernard and Ryan (2003) state

that you know you have found a theme when the theme answers a research question. Bernard

and Ryan (2003) identify that analyzing text involves several tasks:

1. Discovering themes and subthemes.

2. Deciding which themes are important in a project.

3. Building hierarchies of themes or code books.

4. Linking themes into theoretical models.

The Ten Themes

1. Participants were adamantly against re-integrating with their biological families.

2. School was an escape for foster children before they entered foster care.

3. Foster parents served as an important positive mentor in the young individual's life.

4. Foster children were confused and were not provided clear guidance when they were

    removed from their biological family.

5. The participants would not be where they are today if they would not have been placed in

    foster care.

6. The Kansas tuition waiver was instrumental to the participants' success.

7. Participants felt that they were not notified of the education benefits until it was nearly too late.

8. Participants were perceived to have a "chip on their shoulder" due to the negative stigma of being a foster child and used the "chip" as motivation.

9. Participants felt that being socially active was instrumental to their success.

10. Participants perceived that education was a key to attaining success in life.

The results of the research indicated that participants perceived the foster care system in the State of Kansas as an effective program that enabled them to be successful. They felt that being removed from their biological families was instrumental in becoming a success story. The participants were against reunification with their biological families. Some of the participants were not against reunification in the beginning, but as time went by, the participants realized there was a reason they were taken from their biological families in the first place.

Most participants felt that, before they were placed in foster care, school was an escape from life. These participants were living in homes that were unstable and some participants were severely neglected as children. One participant identified that before she was placed in foster care, school was the best place to receive a meal and a shower.

Foster parents are instrumental to the success of these young individuals. The participants now understand the importance of a positive mentor in their lives. Most of the participants felt that their foster parents served as the positive mentor that they needed. The majority of the participants still stay in contact with their foster parents.

In an interesting revelation, the majority of participants identified that when removed from their biological families, they felt as if they had no idea what was taking place and felt they

lacked solace. The participants identified that they felt uncomfortable when they were removed from their biological families. They also identified that they were not informed as to the cause of their removals from their biological families.

The participants interviewed perceived that the foster care program saved their lives. The benefits of being in the system and being removed from their biological families enabled the participants to have a better chance of success in life. The tuition waiver was perceived as an important key to their success. The waiver allowed the participants to focus on school and not on how to pay for school. Some of the participants stated that they would not have gone to college without the tuition waiver. The education benefits were perceived to be a key to success, but the participants identified that they were informed of the benefits late in the exiting process. The participants stated that some of their peers did not attend college due to being informed too late. These young individuals could still use their educational benefits for a set period of time, but the perception is that they do not clearly understand their benefits and will most likely not use them.

The participants felt that being a foster child carries a negative stigma. That stigma, at least for these children, provided them with extra motivation to want to prove people wrong. They felt as if they had a "chip on their shoulder." This "chip" seemed to provide a little extra motivation and pushed them to want to succeed. Another source of motivation was being socially active. The participants perceived that being part of a group, any group, was instrumental to their success. They may not have realized it at the time, but being socially active saved a couple participants in this study.

Table 8 identifies the individuals who participated in the study. The participants are identified by their pseudonyms, age, gender, ethnicity, academic year in school, and number of

foster homes or group homes they have resided in. The participants were identified by the

following demographics: there are12 female participants compared to 3 male participants; the

average age of the participants was 20.06 years of age; there were 9 Caucasian participants, 5

African American participants, and 1 Latino participant; academically there were 5 freshmen

participants, 4 sophomore participants, 4 junior participants, and 2 senior participants; and the

average number of foster/group homes the participants resided in was 5.8.

Table 8: *Participant Information*

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Year in School	Number of Foster Homes/Group Homes
Casey	21	Female	Caucasian	Junior	20
Ash	20	Female	African American	Junior	2
Taylor	19	Female	Caucasian	Freshmen	2
Katy	21	Female	Caucasian	Junior	1
Josh	20	Male	Latino	Sophomore	1
Kelly	21	Female	Caucasian	Junior	1
Vany	21	Female	African American	Sophomore	2
Lynn	19	Female	Caucasian	Freshmen	1
Alex	19	Female	African American	Freshmen	32
Phil	22	Male	Caucasian	Senior	3
Brit	19	Female	Caucasian	Sophomore	2
Billy	18	Female	Caucasian	Freshmen	12
Stef	22	Female	African American	Senior	6
Jon	20	Male	African American	Sophomore	1
Sam	19	Female	Caucasian	Freshmen	1

Theme 1: Participants were adamantly against re-integrating with their biological families.

The results of this study revealed that participants were against re-integrating with their biological families. This is particularly interesting as the preferred goal of the Kansas foster care program is reunification with biological families. The preferred goal for children in foster care is permanency with caring parents and reunification with birth parents (Foster Care Alumni of America, 2009).

During the interview, the researcher commented to Kelly, "If you could change three things about your foster care experience, what would those three things be?" Kelly, who regularly conducts interviews detailing her situation, commented:

> One of the things I said before you started the recording, and the thing I say in a lot of my speeches, a recommendation for something that needs to be changed in a lot of these states and agencies is their mission for kids put into foster care is reintegration *[sic]*. I feel like that is not necessarily the case for a lot of people, like my older brother. Because they obviously were taken away from that home for a reason. And sometimes second chances are good, but with what happened to us, like with my brother's alcohol and drug problem, or whatever, I just feel like in our situation it wasn't a good thing *[sic]*. It shouldn't be reintegration; it should be the best interest of the child. Because like I said, reintegration is not the best thing for a lot of people.

Some of the participant's biological families were not suitable to keep their children. One of the participants, Katy, was expected to take care of her younger siblings as her biological family was unable to care for them. Katy commented, "I was the parent of the family; I was taking care of the younger ones. They'd go out at night and not come home. I'd have to be the one up in the morning, getting people ready for daycare, getting people ready for school." Katy

informed the researcher that she was ten years old at the time. The researcher commented "And you were ten?" Katy stated:

Ten. Made supper, did dishes, did everything pretty much. And I also had my first job at ten. I had a paper route. We moved around a lot. I would go to the paper route office, fold all these papers and I'd ride my bike around downtown delivering papers for about two hours. I'd come home and my parents may be home or the other kids would be there by themselves. So I'd take care of them, put them to bed, pretty much do everything by myself.

The researcher inquired, "Were they out drinking?" Katy replied:

Drinking, partying, sometimes they were just working and just left us at home. Didn't feel like paying a babysitter when they had one at home. We always got spanked when we were little, then it turned to verbal abuse, and then physical abuse. When I was little, I was molested by my stepdad's friends. So just a little bit of everything, abuse and neglect.

Katy was adamant about not being re-integrated with her biological family. She stated:

The courts were going to send my brother and me back to our biological mom. I didn't want to go back; I knew I was going to be better off where I was at. So, my mom [foster mother] helped me write a letter, because I told her I wanted to talk to the judge. I didn't want to go back. So, she helped me write a letter, and basically taught me formatting because I was in fifth grade and didn't really know how to write a letter. And she told me to write what I wanted to. She said I had to write what I wanted. We sent that letter to the judge and I got a letter back in the mail. She said she wanted to meet with me before the court hearing. So, she took me down to the soda shop and we talked, and I basically

told her that I was going to have a better life if I stayed where I was at. I wasn't going to

get the same opportunities and I was happy where I was at. So [the judge] gave my foster

parents legal guardianship over me, and my brother went back to his mom.

The researcher asked Katy about her siblings, "Are they all still in foster care?" Katy replied:

No, all of them went back to my biological mom. They got taken away from their dad

and got sent back to my biological mom. My little brother has actually taken the most

trauma out of all of it. He's very ADHD. He and my younger brother, they both have

ADHD very, very bad. And he has a hard time behaving; he's always beating kids up at

school. They actually were going to commit him to a mental institution because my little

sister walked in on him with a trash bag over his head. He was trying to kill himself.

Some of the experiences were worse than others. The type of abuse these children

endured was severe. The abuse ranged from sexual molestation, physical abuse, verbal abuse,

emotional abuse, and some situations could have been fatal. While interviewing Ash, the

researcher posed the question "Alright, let's get to the questions. Question number one: please

tell me about yourself and why you were placed in foster care. Please also discuss if you lived in

multiple foster homes. Ash commented:

Ok, well, I am currently a junior in a university in the city. I first started with my parents

obviously. I have six brothers and sisters. To start off, we all began living with our

biological parents and we were all separated. Each of us individually had different foster

homes. I was put into foster care because my parents were drug abusers; they were very

abusive. And at one point, my father tried to kill one of my sisters. He was very

physically aggressive and abusive towards us.

Kelly's family situation was horrifying all around. She did not have anyone else to turn to except for her sister, who was abused as well. Kelly commented about being placed into foster care:

I was thirteen when I was placed in foster care. It was two weeks after my thirteenth birthday. It was after spring break. We were placed into foster care because my sisters and I were physically and sexually abused by our two older brothers and my father. Our brother was an alcoholic and did drugs. My other older brother, he was into gangs. It was a very dysfunctional family. That's why we were placed into foster care.

During the interview with Casey, the researcher posed a short question, "Why were you initially placed in foster care?" Casey replied, "Abuse, physically, sexually, and emotionally by both parents." The researcher responded, "And you discussed earlier that you were placed in foster care at a young age and you were brought back." Casey replied, "Oh, I've been in and out five times." The researcher commented, "Can you discuss that? Were you in and out with your natural birth parents? Or foster parents?" Casey commented:

Natural birth. First time, I was six months. From what I heard from my aunt, was the reason me and my sister got taken away was because my mom didn't know how to take care of two kids at the time *[sic]*. I was only six months at the time, and my sister is only about two years older than me.

Casey stated later in the interview that she was sexually molested:

It's not the easiest thing to do, being taken from your parents, especially at such a young age. And you know after being taken out five times from my mom, I didn't really have a relationship because all I knew in the home was abuse. And you know being sexually abused and other stuff in my past that I remember clearly. And you know something

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that's going to be stuck with me the rest of my life. It's kind of personal here, like this

one time my dad was raping me and my mom was just sitting there watching him, doing

nothing.

Casey continued on discussing how her mother stabbed her father:

My dad loved baseball, so we had like these boxes of baseball cards, and my mom got

mad at him one day for something. I don't remember what it was, and then she threw the

baseball cards at him and he pushed her. She went and grabbed a chef's knife and

stabbed him in the stomach, and he knocked her in the face and broke her nose. I was

three at the time.

A review of the interviews revealed that all of the participants agreed that reunification

with their biological parents would have been a terrible decision. One of the participants, Lynn,

has a good relationship with her father. Lynn commented, "Yeah, me and my dad get along

great. He's always in the background of everything, kind of." Lynn was put into foster care in

the custody of her grandparents as her step-father killed her biological mother. She was unable

to get along with her step-mother and ran away, so living with her biological father was not an

option.

Theme 2: School was an escape for foster children before they entered foster care.

The participants in the study revealed that school was an escape from reality before they

entered into foster care. Lynn commented, "It was a getaway." Some of the participants were so

severely abused that school was a way to show them that what was happening was not normal.

Kelly commented, "School was my way of getting out of what was going on in the family." The

researcher replied, "So, it was your escape?" Kelly responded, "Yeah, it was my escape. Like, I

didn't necessarily concentrate on my education. Like, I didn't care, because I was just happy I was out of the situation."

Kelly's comment about going to school, not necessarily for her education, was interesting. Kelly attended school, as did the other participants, as an escape from reality. Kelly commented that this affected her education and still does today:

I know I'm struggling today because I didn't have the parents that set me down to do my homework and spell. When you were little, you have those spelling tests. I didn't have my parents to set me down and say, "How do you spell this? How do you pronounce this?" and have that structure. So right now I'm paying for it because I have to work double and study harder. And today, I have test anxiety.

Some of the participants even used school as a way to stay physically clean. Brit commented:

Well, right before foster care, I was distracted. So, I actually had bad grades in school, which was a first for me because I usually get good grades. And that was an indicator that something wasn't going good at home, because my grades were bad. They would actually let me take showers at school in the locker rooms and stuff, because I couldn't do it at home because there was no hot water.

When asked about school before she entered into foster care, Billy commented, "I found it actually fun, and wanting to go." When asked if school was an escape, Billy replied, "Escaping and getting to socialize with the other kids and trying to be normal." The participants used school not just as an escape, but as a way to feel normal. Sam commented, "My escape was school. I went to school not intending necessarily to do my class work, but to be out of the house."

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Theme 3: Foster parents served as an important positive mentor in the young individual's life.

In foster care, success can be closely associated with a positive foster parent. Good foster parents are instrumental to the success of a child. One participant encouraged her foster mother to become a foster parent. Casey commented regarding her foster mother:

But I've known her before she actually became my foster mom. She was actually my mentor in one of the group homes I was in. And I was the one that encouraged her to become a foster parent. So, that's kind of good. And Christmas, my senior year of high school, my foster parents took me to San Antonio, Texas, which was the coolest thing ever. We stayed at a hotel on the River walk. It was awesome. We went to the Alamo, and we went to the River walk. They took me to the Tower of the Americas.

Casey continued about her foster parents, "They're actually the ones that encouraged me to go to college." Casey even went so far as to request a mentor while in a group home. The researcher commented, "Did you know at the time what a mentor was?" Casey commented:

No. I had no clue. And then I went to go talk to my case worker that I had. And I was like, "How do I get a mentor? I want a mentor because it's not fair that I'm stuck here. I've been here since after my birthday and I see all these girls going out on these outings." And she goes, "Well, we'll see what we can do." She knows this lady that wanted to become a mentor and help out, and she ended up being my mentor and knowing me at the age of 13. I was excited. And then this was like after Christmas when I first met her. She took me out for ice cream at McDonald's. I was like, I hope this lady talks to me so I can get the hell out of here, but it was fun and she explained to me what a mentor was.

The participants that had a positive experience with their foster parents identified that they still have a relationship with them today. During the interview with Casey, the researcher clarified, "So, you didn't have a mentor at the time, so you found her? And she's still your mentor today?" Casey commented, "Yes. Even though I'm like 21 and in college, she actually came down when I first moved to college. She came down and helped me move into my dorm room. She took me to Wal-Mart and bought me things I needed to move into my dorm." The researcher replied, "If you did go home for Thanksgiving and Christmas, that's where you would go [referring to her foster family]?" Casey replied, "Yes, that's where I would go. They say I'm welcome back anytime."

The foster parents that treated the participants as their own received the greatest feedback. The researcher asked Josh, "Now, your foster parents, do you look at your foster mother or father as your mentors? Do you look at them as someone you would look to for guidance and still look for guidance?" Josh commented:

Yeah, I do. They were such a big part of my life for five, six years. Actually, this weekend I was going back to their place. Once again, I'm happy that they treated me as one of their own. Their support, and it not only came from them, but their biological children and their children. They treated me like a brother; they called me "brother."

While interviewing Josh, the researcher inquired, "What particular strengths, skills, and/or talents did your foster parents bring to your life?" Josh commented:

I always felt that they were very hard-working people. I bonded very well with them because they also told me their life stories. We bonded well. They were always in the same boat as I was. I felt as if they were pioneers, very hard working, but they keep their heads up and they keep going. Their work ethic, their sense of focus, and also their

ability to reason through things to help me out and assessing my options, so I can see where I'm going.

The researcher replied, "And this stuff rubbed off on you I'm sure?" Josh commented, "Yeah. They were also mature. I mean, they were already mature for their age, and where they were at with other people. So I also felt that was a big thing, too. I could have gone to a foster home where they're in their mid-age and stuff like that." Josh also stated that his foster parents were instrumental in getting him to college. The researcher asked, "Did they help you get to college?" Josh replied, "Yeah they did. They didn't just tell me to go here, like they supported me. If I gave them an idea of what I wanted to do, they supported it." The researcher commented, "Did they tell you what kind of research you needed to do?" Josh replied, "Yeah, they helped me look at tuition, and what criteria I needed to keep up. They helped me out with the letters of recommendation that I needed. They just supported me."

Some of the participants stated that their foster parents guided them to attend college. The researcher commented to Katy, "How were your foster parents able to assist you in becoming a self-sufficient adult, and how were they able to successfully develop and prepare you for life after foster care? And by self-sufficient, I mean life building skills, finding a job, preparing for college, stuff like that?" Katy commented:

> Basically it's just they wanted to help. That was, there's a lot of foster families that do the job just because of the money they will get. They were a family that wanted to better you. They pushed me to go out for sports, try out for cheer.

The researcher commented to Katy regarding college, "How did you get to the university?" Katy commented:

Basically, they had told me that I needed to start thinking about colleges my junior year. And so I'd started looking; I didn't want to go somewhere very far. I wanted to go somewhere cheaper.

Kelly commented that her foster parents taught her the necessary life building skills that she needed to succeed. Kelly commented regarding her foster parents, "They helped me make that connection, and they also started up a bank account for us. We started making money with working and stuff. We were required to pay for our own insurance on our car, and we were required to pay our own bills. So they kind of taught us how to be independent and budget our money of course."

Theme 4: Foster children were confused and were not provided clear guidance when they were removed from their biological family.

Foster children suffer through extremely rough experiences. Through some of the interviews, the participants commented on their experiences of being removed from their biological families. The researcher asked Katy, "If you could change three things with your foster care experience, what would those three things be? And please explain them. This could be anything you now see that the system should change, or anything you wished would have changed when you were in foster care." Katy commented:

I know the first thing I remember when we got taken away, we were just like, taken away. They didn't really say, "Well, this is where you're going or this is what we're doing." They didn't really do anything, and I was so young. I was ten, but there was no explanation on this is what we're doing, or this is where you're going, or this is how it's going to work. I know I'm ten, and they don't want to talk to someone like that. But at ten, you're scared. You're scared that your family is being torn apart. You don't know

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where you're going. You're just sitting in a room at the SRS office. They just put us in a

room, and we're just like, "What's happening?" We didn't actually know we were being

taken away yet. We just were picked up by an officer, taken to SRS, and then put in a

room for about two hours. Then, they picked them up and that's when they took us to our

house and told us we needed to pack a bag. They didn't tell us where we were going.

They were just like, "Well, just pack your bags, we'll tell you later," and we went in the

house and even my stepdad didn't know what was happening. All he had were the

younger kids in the house; he had picked them up from daycare and all I see is cop cars.

Katy continued:

We didn't know what was going on. And, then the younger kids knew that we were

upset, the three year old and the one year old, so they're screaming, they're crying. I'm

trying to pack my bags. I don't know what's going on, and they take us back down to the

SRS office. And, then whenever they said, "Ok, you two are coming with us; you two

are going with them." We didn't get to say good-bye to each other. I didn't get to say,

"It's ok. I'll come see you later." Nothing. I was considered the mom of the family and

that was hard for me because I didn't know what was going on. I can't reassure them of

anything because I didn't know what was going on. They just picked us up from there,

and I think that's the main thing just not letting us know. And the second part was when

they took us to the foster home, they just dropped us off. They just dropped us off and

we were like, "You're going to be staying here for a while." And then they left and that's

all they ever said. And because of that, my foster mom didn't really know what to tell us.

And I'm like, "What's going on? Why are we here? When are we going home?" And

she's like, "You're just going to stay here for a while." So I mean, she didn't know what

to tell us either. We were there for about two days before they explained what was going

on.

The other participants had similar situations. The researcher commented to Brit, "Now

when you were taken out of your home, were you explained why you were taken out of your

home?" Brit commented, "No, not really. I just knew I wasn't going to be living at home

anymore. I didn't really know how it was going to affect me or anything." The researcher asked

Jon the same question and Jon commented:

> I'm not sure. I'm not sure exactly how they worked, but it was a temporary thing. You
>
> had a worker that took you to school and where you need to go. So, they never really
>
> explained. We just all got together one day and our older brother was not coming with
>
> us. So that was weird, because it was always us five.

The researcher commented, "So they didn't even tell you that your brother was not coming with

you?" Jon commented:

> No, I never knew what happened to him. That was weird because a week before my
>
> sisters had been staying at my stepmom's house and they hadn't come back during that
>
> week. I don't know, it just would have been really weird if they hadn't come back and
>
> we were taken and they weren't. And so it was kind of like, no one really explained what
>
> was going on; no one tried.

The researcher commented, "They didn't even try to comfort you?" Jon commented,

"No, and they just got a driver and went. Had no idea where we were going. I think our driver

told us where we were going once we got in the car." The researcher replied, "And this isn't a

social worker or anything, just a driver?" Jon commented:

Just a driver. He told us we were going to a farm. He just drove us. We went to the first

town for the first few days and then, so yeah, it was really hard just not knowing. It's

really weird that no one, at least to the best of my memory, no one explained.

Theme 5: The participants would not be where they are today if they would not have been

placed in foster care.

The foster care program in Kansas was perceived by the participants as saving their lives.

The participants felt as if they had more opportunities staying in foster care than if they were re-

integrated with their biological families. The researcher commented to Kelly, "If it wasn't for

being put into foster care, do you think you'd be in college right now?" Kelly replied, "No. And

I've thought about this a lot." The researcher replied, "Where do you think you'd be at?" Kelly

commented:

Dead or in the same situation. Or, you know, drugged up on the streets. Honestly, that's

the way I feel. Because I kind of want to say God has a plan for everybody. And maybe

this is the way for him, for me to succeed and go to school. Because I honestly don't

think I would have gotten this far if that didn't happen. And I know that's kind of hard to

say, because you didn't want to go through what you had to go through to get there.

During the interview with Ash, the researcher asked the same question and Ash

commented, "I would probably be dead. That's sad to say." The researcher received similar

responses to the exact same question with all the participants. Jon commented, "Honestly I see

myself in the same situation as my older brothers, in legal problems and really just let life get the

best of them. They don't really try because they feel like there's nothing better out there." The

researcher commented, "So you wouldn't be here at all?" Jon commented, "I do not think we

probably would have gone down the same path. I do feel that being in foster care did shape me,

not always in a bad way either. I think it did change how the situation probably would have ended. I think it helped with school and having that parent figure there."

During the interview with Sam, she commented that her grades improved after entering foster care. The researcher asked the same question as before, "If it wasn't for being put in foster care, where would you be right now?" Sam commented, "I don't know." The researcher replied, "Would you be in college?" Sam commented, "I don't know if I really would have gone to college or just kind of disappeared. I don't know if I would have stayed around here." The researcher replied, "You said your grades got immediately better." Sam commented:

Yeah, my grades were not college material. I don't even think I would have graduated if I hadn't gone into foster care. I can honestly say I don't see myself graduating high school if that had not happened, because I didn't have the opportunity. I wasn't focused enough. I probably would have been OK with quitting my high school career and working at a small town restaurant for the rest of my life.

Theme 6: The Kansas tuition waiver was instrumental to the participant's success.

Children that exit the foster care program in Kansas are eligible for the Kansas tuition waiver. According to the Kansas Deparment of Social Rehabilitation Services (2009), Statute 74-32,161:

1. Every Kansas educational institution shall be required to provide for the enrollment without charge of tuition, undergraduate fees, including registration, matriculation and laboratory fees for any eligible applicant.

2. No Kansas educational institution shall be required to provide for the enrollment of more than five new applicants in any academic year.

3. An applicant who was in custody of social and rehabilitation services on the date such applicant reached 18 years of age, who has graduated from a high school or fulfilled the requirements for a general educational development (GED) certificate while in foster care;

4. was released from the custody of Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services prior to age 18 after having graduated from a high school or fulfilled the requirements for a GED certificate while in foster care placement and in the custody of the Kansas department of social and rehabilitation services; or

5. an applicant who was adopted from a foster care placement on or after such applicants' 16th birthday, and who is accepted to a Kansas educational institution within two years following the date such applicant graduated from a high school or fulfilled the requirements of a GED certificate shall be eligible for enrollment at a Kansas educational institution without charge of such fees through the semester the eligible applicant reaches 21 years of age, not to exceed eight semesters of undergraduate instruction, or the equivalent thereof, at all such institutions (Kansas Deparment of Social Rehabilitation Services , 2009).

The waiver was a perceived strength, as this provided the children an avenue to pay for their schooling. The researcher posed the question to Kelly, "Do the educational benefits you receive after exiting foster care assist you in becoming a self-sufficient adult? If so, how do these benefits assist you right now and do you link these benefits as a tool to help you succeed?" Kelly commented, "Definitely a tool to succeed. Because without it, I probably wouldn't be in school." Kelly commented regarding the tuition waiver:

I definitely think the benefits that I'm receiving are definitely making me successful and

helping me accomplish what I want to get done. Without it, I wouldn't be able to go to

school. I could apply for scholarships, and I could probably make money, get money off

of those, but it definitely wouldn't help me as much as the tuition waiver.

Kelly stated that the tuition waiver helps her focus on school and not on how to pay for school.

Kelly commented:

Because right now I'm getting subsidy to help me pay for my bills, and I have to tell

them how much my bills are or whatever, I have to balance it out with all the funds I

receive from financial aid. The gist of it is, if I didn't receive those benefits, I wouldn't

be able to, plain and simple as it's harder financially.

All participants unanimously stated that the tuition waiver was a relief. The researcher

commented to Brit, "So if it wasn't for those educational benefits from being in foster care,

would you be here right now?" Brit commented, "I don't think I would be coming to college

without the benefits of being in foster care." The researcher replied, "Where do you think you

would be right now?" Brit commented, "I think I would be working at a minimum wage job,

trying to make it through the month." Brit also commented regarding the tuition waiver, "I think

it's a relief, because I don't have to worry about a financial burden. I think I can finish college

debt free, without having to take out loans. It's a way for me to succeed in college, because I

don't have to worry about money as an educational aspect."

Josh commented regarding the tuition waiver, "I guess the tuition waiver helped me out.

I worked very little in high school. My biological mom couldn't provide enough for me and my

foster parents didn't make much. They couldn't provide for me, so the tuition waiver helped me

out a lot." The researcher asked, "Would you be here at college without the tuition waiver?"

Josh commented:

> I don't think so. The housing and stuff, it's just big housing and it's hard to cover. And
> the tuition, the classes, just stuff to get started, it's hard. You couldn't come in. The
> finances are very nerve-racking. If you worry about finances, you have to worry about a
> job and stuff like that. A job would take you away from school and stuff. I feel very
> lucky I was able to get the tuition waiver.

Casey expressed a similar viewpoint during the interview. Casey commented, "I mean
with the Kansas tuition waiver, and the school paying for everything, it has been a great help.
Coming out of the system, being independent, and having my school paid for takes a big weight
off." Casey also commented:

> Knowing that I'll be graduating after four years in college with no debt, unlike some kids
> who are twenty or thirty thousand dollars in debt. They ask me how I pay for my degree,
> and I say the State of Kansas pays for me. What is that? I try to explain to my friends
> like what I went through growing up. I'm like, "If you were moved out of your parents'
> house at a young age and you had no one to go to and then you've been offered by the
> state to go to college and you go to college for free, like who wouldn't take that?" Like if
> you're a foster kid and the state is paying for you to go to college and you don't take it
> up, then you're stupid.

The tuition waiver was a huge strength for all the participants in this study. The waiver
provided an avenue for these participants to attend college and graduate with little or no debt.
Affording these participants the opportunity to attend college was instrumental to these

participants becoming successful. The tuition waiver is an extremely powerful tool for the Kansas foster care program.

Theme 7: Participants felt that they were not notified of the educational benefits until it was nearly too late.

As noted before, the tuition waiver and the educational benefits these participants receive are an extremely powerful tool for the Kansas foster care program. However, some participants informed the researcher that they, and other foster children, were notified too late in the exiting process. The participants informed the researcher that some foster children did not use their benefits as they were informed about the benefits late in the exiting process. They also felt as though their benefits were not adequately explained to them and that they had no idea how to use their benefits. The participants perceived that their peers did not attend college for this reason.

The researcher commented to Sam, "Do the education benefits you received after exiting foster care assist you in becoming a self-sufficient adult? If so, how do these benefits assist you right now? And do you link these benefits as a tool to help you succeed?" Sam replied:

> Yes, I think it's really beneficial. But I'm still trying to figure it out. I'm not sure how it works. I get FAFSA. I get government grants and everything, but I'm trying to figure out why they still take my tuition out of it before they give it to me.

Sam is 19 years of age and has already exited the program and still has questions about her benefits. The researcher asked Sam why more foster children do not take advantage of their educational benefits and commented, "Do they know that they have college paid for?" Sam replied, "I don't think so." The researcher commented, "If they did know, what do you think?" Sam commented:

I think they would work a lot harder. First of all, they don't understand that they get the FAFSA; they can get Pell grants. I didn't know about that stuff until my senior year of high school, and I really think that if kids knew that, they would be like "wow." Rather *[sic]* they have the tuition waiver or not, they can go to college. At least go to get their bachelor's or something. To get the associate's degree, they can do that.

Kelly commented, "I feel like I was just thrown into college, and I had to start fending for myself. I had to apply for a job, I had to apply for FAFSA, and I had to do scholarships to get the tuition waiver. I feel like I was just thrown into it." The researcher received different responses when he questioned the participants about their exiting process. The researcher commented to Billy, "When you were preparing to exit the foster care system, did your workers or the agency workers, did they meet with you consistently to discuss with you a phase plan. For example, did they discuss that you need to start looking at college? Did they meet with you again to see if you looked at colleges? Did you start completing stuff? Did they meet with you regularly to make sure you got the guidance you needed to get into college?" Billy replied, "No." The researcher commented, "Did they meet with you at all?" Billy replied, "Not my whole senior year. If they did, only once or twice."

During the interview with Brit, the researcher commented with the same questions that he asked Billy. Brit replied:

I don't remember when I first met with my independent living coordinator with SRS. I think it was at the end of my last semester, I had already been accepted into college and we just talked about what we needed to do; like I had to fill out a W-9 form to get the ETV funds and I had to fill out a tuition form.

The researcher commented to Stef, "When you were exiting foster care, did they have an exit plan for you? Stef replied, "Sort of. They have an independent living coordinator, where they have the independent living coordinator and the case managers come and talk to you about the different things." The researcher commented, "Is that after you exit foster care or before?" Stef replied, "That was when I turned eighteen. They talk to you about what happens if you want to go to college and tuition waivers and all that. They still do it now. I've been to a couple of them to talk to kids about college." The researcher asked, "How early do they start?" Stef replied, "They talk to you your senior year of high school. You have to be at least a senior before they talk to you about it." The researcher commented, "Do you think the foster care agencies and the social workers communicate with you enough?" Stef replied, "No."

The researcher received a similar response from Jon. During the interview, the researcher commented, "When you were exiting, did the foster care agencies sit down with you and discuss your benefits and your plan?" Jon replied:

Not really, actually that was one thing I was almost going crazy about. I was like, "I can't go to college now. I don't know what I'm supposed to do or how any of this is supposed to happen." When I did come for my visit, two of my workers were here, and then they left because they had other kids to take care of. A lot of it was going into it and hoping for the best, and they explain it kind of on my visit.

The researcher asked Jon, "And that was out of high school or almost out? Jon replied, "That was when I was almost out." The researcher asked Jon, "Maybe if you could have learned that a year or two ago and started preparing for it mentally." Jon replied, "It would have helped a lot to know." The researcher commented, "So do you think kids that want to go to college in foster care, if they would tell them earlier, would have gone?" Jon replied:

I think so, definitely if they had more of a plan. Because I feel like a lot of foster kids are

figuring out what to do next and what's next. And when you're kind of going into that

blindly, when we're taken out of the home, that's going into it blindly *[sic]*. I feel like if

you had the opportunity to prepare and know what's coming next, it would change the

way you saw things."

The majority of the participants felt as if they were not ready and did not understand the

process to obtain their educational benefits. Phil, on the other hand, had no issues with the

process. The researcher commented to Phil, "So the tuition waiver was a tool that was very

useful, correct?" Phil replied, "Yeah." The researcher commented, "So they explained how to

get that?" Phil replied, "Yeah, all I had to do was fill out the paper once, sign, and send it to this

lady at college."

Theme 8: Participants were perceived to have a "chip on their shoulder" due to the

negative stigma of being a foster child and used the "chip" as motivation.

The participants felt as though being a foster child carries with it a negative stigma.

Foster children feel as though others perceive that they are and will become a failure. The

negative statistics that were discussed in earlier chapters identify that most foster children do

become failures. Jon commented:

I don't strive for the center of attention. I strive to prove people wrong. It's kind of like

they don't get interested in your life until you do something good. Even with some of my

biological family, when I try to figure out who I'm related to . . . one lady said she didn't

know my mom had four kids. So part of it is, like I want them to know that this didn't

break me, and I'm stronger than what a lot of what my relatives were and what they are

in life. I think it's kind of like a chip on my shoulder. I do want to show people this isn't

something that's going to break me.

Billy informed the researcher that she has heard negative comments throughout her life.

Billy stated, "I used a lot of them as motivation to prove people wrong." Kelly commented, "I

want it for myself. You want to prove to people that you're doing well." Ash commented during

the interview:

I refuse to be a delinquent. I don't want to be a statistic. I don't want to be a delinquent.

I don't want to live and survive off other people. And that's what I think a lot of people,

women particularly, are doing. Living off the government, having so many kids, not

being able to afford to take care of their kids, it just really kills me. And that's another

reason why I wanted to graduate. I have a couple friends in high school, one good friend,

dropped out and had three kids. I said, "Oh God, no, I can't be like that. No, I got to do

something with my life." "I said, I'm about to be like this and live." I like to travel, but

you have to have money to travel. So I would definitely say I'm an eager person. I'm

eager to graduate; I'm eager to educate myself. Education is the most important thing to

me. Being the fact that I was deprived of it as a child, it's more important to me now.

And just graduating from college, it's so important to me. It's just like laughing in my

parents' faces.

Brit felt as though she worked harder when someone was proud of her accomplishments.

Brit commented, "If somebody's not proud of me, I just get, I think my achievements are more

of an achievement if I know somebody is proud of me." She also commented, "It'll make me

want to do more, because I like the feeling of having people be proud of me, so it makes me want

to do more to make them be proud of me." Brit stated that:

I think that's one of the main reasons that motivate me to finish college. I just know that most of my family either didn't finish high school, they just got their GEDs, and a couple of them tried going to college, but they didn't finish college. I want to be more successful. I see the way they're living. I mean most of them are doing good; they're stable. They're not doing drugs or anything, but they're struggling because they have jobs that don't pay much and stuff. So, I just want to be more successful.

Sam informed the researcher that she uses her past negative experiences as a way to channel her emotions to become better. Sam commented:

I try not to remember everything word-by-word, just because naturally I have a feisty personality. I have anger built up from everything that's happened, and I don't want to use that as anger. I want to channel it into something better. So I stop focusing on necessarily what was said. I try to focus on what I need to change that.

The researcher commented, "Do you feel like foster children go the wrong route? Do you say that you channel it and use it for your benefit? Do you think other children use it as a crutch or as an excuse to fail?" Sam replied:

Absolutely. Yes, actually, I've had instances after high school, when I would tutor kids and they would say, "Well, all my mom does is do drugs" and I say, "Well, do you want to be the same way?"

The researcher inquired, "What makes us use that? And what makes foster children use it as a crutch and an excuse to fail?" Sam replied:

I think that everyone works in a different form, but I think that children in foster care just want to hear that they're doing good because you don't hear it. I think we all have our own determination, and it just depends on if someone else tells you that determination is

good and that you are doing good. And if someone doesn't hear that enough or from someone they truly value, then I believe that effects how they are going to turn out because they don't have that support. They don't hear that they're doing good. They've thrown in the towel; they're done.

All the participants felt that they needed to prove people wrong. They felt the negative stigma of being a foster child, and they each had their own personal way of proving people wrong. Some of the participants used their anger to fuel their fire, and some channeled their emotions and used their past experiences as a tool to assist them to succeed.

Theme 9: Participants felt that being socially active was instrumental to their success.

Most of the participants in this study reflected that being socially active was instrumental with their success. The participants discussed different organizations that were key to their success, as well as being active in high school sports, academic organizations, and church organizations. They also discussed the importance of being involved in organizations with other individuals who were going through similar life situations.

Brit was placed in foster care due to severe neglect. Brit stated, "Well, my mom did drugs and the house was really dirty, and there was no electricity so we weren't able to take very many baths, and we had lice, so I think it was mainly neglect."

Speaking with Brit, it was easy to see that there were social issues in her life. The researcher asked Brit, "So what are your keys to success? Is it being socially involved in groups, constant communication with your mentors?" Brit stated, "Yeah, I think it is communication with mentors and also KYAC. I can interact with kids that are in my situation and members of KYAC are like all successful, doing good in school. We can just talk."

There was definitely a sense that being socially active was a key to Brit's success. Brit mentioned participating in a specific group, the Kansas Youth Advisory Council (KYAC). KYAC is a program which empowers youth to provide advice and recommendations regarding child welfare in Kansas. She stated that she recently became Vice President of KYAC, and she felt that was a big achievement. The researcher asked Brit, "How did that make you feel to be the Vice President there?" Brit replied:

> Well, it just made me feel important, like more important. I wasn't even planning on running for Vice-President. I was going to go for Treasurer and then someone just asked me if I was going to go for Vice-President, and I was like, I'll just wing it.

The researcher responded, "Do you think that will help you continue to be more socially involved and seek positions of greater responsibility?" Brit replied,

I think so, although, just being on KYAC without a position has just, like I've been on panels where I've spoken and I'm just very shy, so I never even knew I'd be speaking on panels or making speeches in front of rooms of people.

Social inclusion was brought up by nearly all the participants as an important factor in their success. KYAC was also brought up by quite a few participants as a key to success. During the interview with Ash, the researcher asked, "Social inclusion is very important. Think of a time in foster care that you felt part of a group and felt accepted. Think of a time you felt you had control over something that positively assisted you. Please explain." Ash replied:

Oh yeah, well, I would say this was during my sophomore year of high school when my case manager brought me to KYAC. When she brought me there, I was able to relate to other kids in similar circumstances. And with that, that helped me to feel more accepted,

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because I was not only talking to other people who had experienced what I had experienced, but as a whole we were more glued together. So that really helped me out, that association I got involved in.

Ash commented regarding KYAC, "It is excellent, especially for children involved in the foster care system. That just gives them someplace to go and associate with people that are just like them and understand where they are coming from." The researcher commented to Ash, "Developing your own strengths and skill sets are important. Remember a time during foster care when you went out and achieved something. This can be something big or small, like a grade you received, an award, or getting into college. Please explain." Ash replied:

Well, there are a lot of events like this. I'll give you the recent event. I have been recently nominated by the leaders of KYAC to represent the State of Kansas at Washington D.C., at a youth convention center for the national youth database transition. For me, that was definitely an honor because I never thought they would pick me for something like that. To me, that is very high, being the only representative from Kansas to go to Washington D.C. To represent them is just amazing to me, and being able to give my opinion over things is just amazing . . . I like to talk, and I definitely like to talk on foster care kids, like that's important to me.

Jon also discussed the positive benefits of social inclusion during his interview. The researcher asked Jon, "Social inclusion is extremely important. Think of a time during foster care that you felt you were part of a group and you felt accepted. Think of a time when you felt like you had control over something that positively assisted you." Jon replied:

The youth group in the church was kind of a big thing, especially in summer. We would go on this trip, and it's just a short-term like trip around the U.S. and Canada. We did it

for four years in a row. It was really cool because we did get connected with the people

there because we would have to do fundraising and go door to door and stuff like that.

And was kind of that group felt like you were included in something. Some friends from

high school went to it and we kind of grew up, and the people in the church kind of got to

see us grow up through that. It was really cool too.   I felt like that was inclusion because

it was like it was more than just a youth group. We had friends outside of it in different

churches and different people in town, and it was just really cool to really feel like that

group was really something I could take ownership.

Josh also discussed the importance of social inclusion during his interview. The

researcher commented to Josh, "Developing your own strengths and skill sets are important.

Remember a time while in foster care you went out and achieved something. This can be

something big or small, i.e. attaining a good grade, an award you received, or getting accepted to

college. Please explain." Josh commented:

Throughout high school, I knew I was doing very good in sports and stuff. I knew that I

could compete. But, then I felt somewhat curious about how I was intellectually in my

school, and I guess this time came where I got elected to compete in Academic Olympics.

From then on, I thought, "Wow, I'm actually doing pretty good to compete in stuff like

this." So I felt very happy and becoming part of the Academic Olympics team was a big

milestone because I felt I was pretty stable in school. The last time we had Academic

Olympics was in 2010. I was able to rack up enough merits to take the championship, so

I felt pretty happy.

During interviews with the participants, they regularly mentioned that they were actively

engaged in sports, and sports assisted them with social inclusion. Other participants were

socially involved in church organizations, KYAC, and different academic organizations. Social inclusion was extremely important to these participants, especially coming from a life where there was little social inclusion.

Theme 10: Participants perceived that education was a key to attaining success in life.

Education can be linked to success in just about everything, but in foster care, it might just be 'the' key to success. One positive factor that the Kansas foster care system has provided to the foster care children is funding for education. All of the participants in this study used this funding to assist them in receiving an education. These participants overwhelmingly stated that their education benefits were a key to their success. The majority of them stated that they would not be where they are without these benefits. Most of the participants in this study grew up in a life where their parents or caregivers were not well-educated and did not understand the process in obtaining financial assistance. They did not understand how to successfully work through the process of applying for financial assistance or how to enroll in school. Finding assistance with education would have been nearly impossible without the benefits of being in foster care.

Ash stated, "My father and mother, they didn't have a proper education. My mother dropped out of school when she was sixteen." Ash also commented about education, "I'm eager to graduate; I'm eager to educate myself. Education is the most important thing to me. Being the fact that I was deprived of it as a child, it's more important to me now and just graduating from college, it's so important to me."

The researcher asked all participants if they link higher education with success and do they link graduating college with success. Brit replied, "Yes, this is my way of being successful." The researcher received other similar replies. During her interview, Kelly was asked how she was doing. Kelly replied:

I just keep telling myself that I want to be able to provide for my kids. I want to be

successful. That's what's kept moving me forward, is that I don't want to be like my

mother, and father, and my older brothers of course. I mean, I don't want to be this

person that has to live paycheck to paycheck. I don't want to be this person that has to

work three jobs just to pay for my kids to do sports. I want them to do this and that. I

want my kids to do sports and not have to work while they're in high school. I know in

order for that, you have to have money, and in order to have money you have to have an

education.

The researcher replied, "So, you tie success to education?" Kelly responded, "Yeah,

definitely." Kelly also commented about education:

Personally, I think education is success. I honestly think education is key to a better

future. Because what else are you going to do? Work out of McDonald's for the rest of

your life because you don't have a degree? You can't make ends meet with that.

Kelly also linked education with self-esteem. The researcher commented to Kelly, "How

did the foster care experience help you build your self-esteem and your self-confidence?

Because you are a very confident woman." Kelly responded, "Yeah, just the fact that I got out of

that situation, and like I've said before, education." The researcher replied, "So more and more

education, more and more confidence?" Kelly responded, "I think so, honestly."

The researcher posed the same question to all participants, "Do you link education to

success?" Sam commented, "Absolutely." Lynn commented, "Yes. It helped because one of my

best friends, her mom was a teacher. She was a great teacher, and I just looked up to her. I want

to be like that." All participants commented that education was either 'a' key or 'the' key to

success.

Summary

The results of this research were discussed in this chapter. Ten themes were identified, and the participant's perceptions pertaining to the themes were discussed. Chapter Five will discuss the findings of this study concerning the original research questions as perceived by the participants, as well as the link to adult education. This study's implications, recommendations, and conclusion will also be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 5 - Analysis & Discussion

Chapter Five discusses the findings of this study regarding the original research questions and further examines how the State of Kansas foster care system was perceived by the participants. These findings are then linked to the field of adult education. The strengths and weaknesses of the foster care system, from the participants' viewpoints, are discussed in congruence with implications for future research. This chapter closes with recommendations on how to improve the foster care system in the State of Kansas and a conclusion to this study.

Discussion of the Research Findings

Chapter Two identifies the literature review, while Chapter Three identifies the methodology for the research. Chapter Four provides the research a voice by discussing the participant's responses to the interview questions. Chapter Five focuses on the findings of the research by using thick and rich verbatim descriptions of the participants regarding their perceptions by discussing the following research questions.

Research Question 1.

How do foster children describe the benefits of being in foster care?

The preferred goal for children in care is permanency with caring parents and reunification with birth parents (Foster Care Alumni of America, 2009). Children are placed into foster care due to abuse or neglect. Themes 1, 5, 9, and 10 of the research reveal the participants' perceptions on how they describe the benefits of being in foster care.

Theme 1 identified that participants were adamantly against re-integrating with their biological families. The participants realized the importance of being in foster care and challenged the idea of reunification with their biological families. Kelly articulated that:

One of the things I said before you started the recording, and the thing I say in a lot of my speeches, a recommendation for something that needs to be changed in a lot of these states and agencies is their mission for kids put into foster care is reintegration *[sic]*. I feel like that is not necessarily the case for a lot of people, like my older brother. Because they obviously were taken away from that home for a reason. And sometimes second chances are good, but with what happened to us, like with my brother's alcohol and drug problem, or whatever, I just feel like in our situation it wasn't a good thing. It shouldn't be reintegration; it should be the best interest of the child. Because like I said, reintegration is not the best thing for a lot of people.

Kelly identified that there was a reason she and her siblings were taken from their biological families, and she strongly believed reunification would not have been a smart decision. Katy understood the importance of staying in her foster family and disagreed with reunification with her biological family. She drafted a letter to her local judge advocating that she be placed permanently with her foster family. Katy commented:

The courts were going to send my brother and I back to our biological mom. I didn't want to go back, I knew I was going to be better off where I was at. So, my mom [foster mother] helped me write a letter, because I told her I wanted to talk to the judge. I didn't want to go back. So, she helped me write a letter, and basically taught me formatting because I was in fifth grade and didn't really know how to write a letter. And she told me to write what I wanted to. She said I had to write what I wanted. We sent that letter to the judge and I got a letter back in the mail. She said she wanted to meet with me before the court hearing. So, [the judge] took me down to the soda shop and we talked, and I basically told her that I was going to have a better life if I stayed where I was at. I wasn't

going to get the same opportunities and I was happy where I was at. So she gave my foster parents legal guardianship over me, and my brother went back to his mom.

Theme 5 described that the participants would not be where they are today if they would not have been placed in foster care. These young individuals recognized the benefits of being in foster care compared to what could have been if they were still residing with their biological families. Kelly commented when asked where she would be right now if she was not placed in foster care:

Dead or in the same situation. Or, you know, drugged up on the streets. Honestly, that's the way I feel. Because I kind of want to say God has a plan for everybody. And maybe this is the way for him, for me to succeed and go to school. Because I honestly don't think I would have gotten this far if that didn't happen. And I know that's kind of hard to say, because you didn't want to go through what you had to go through to get there.

Some of the participants' experiences were more severe than others, but they all recognized the benefits of being in foster care. Sam was asked where she would be in life if she had not been placed in foster care. Sam commented:

Yeah, my grades were not college material. I don't even think I would have graduated if I hadn't gone into foster care. I can honestly say I don't see myself graduating high school if that had not happened, because I didn't have the opportunity. I wasn't focused enough. I probably would have been ok with quitting my high school career and working at a small town restaurant for the rest of my life.

The participants also felt that Theme 9 was a positive factor with the foster care system.

The participants felt that being socially active was instrumental to their success. They also felt that being in foster care assisted them in being socially active. The Kansas Youth

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Advisory Council (KYAC) is an organization the participants discussed as being a positive factor that assisted with social inclusion. This organization allowed the participants to participate and serve in positions of responsibility with other young individuals that were going through similar situations. Brit discussed how her involvement with KYAC assisted her in being more socially active and encouraged her to seek positions of greater responsibility. In reference to her recent election to the role of Vice President of KYAC, Brit commented, ". . . I've been on panels where I've spoken and I'm just very shy. So I never knew I'd be speaking on panels or making speeches in front of rooms of people."

Theme 10 was an important theme, one that can be used to answer most of the research questions in this study. The participants perceived that education was a key to attaining success in life. Just by simply being in foster care, these young individuals now have the unique opportunity to attend college. They may not have had the means or the access had they not been placed in foster care. As stated in Chapter Four, one positive factor that the Kansas foster care system provides to foster children is funding for education.

Ash stated, "My father and mother, they didn't have a proper education. My mother dropped out of school when she was sixteen." Ash also commented about education, "I'm eager to graduate; I'm eager to educate myself. Education is the most important thing to me. Being the fact that I was deprived of it as a child, it's more important to me now and just graduating from college, it's so important to me."

The answer to Research Question 1 is that foster children describe the benefits of being in foster care as positive and essential to their success in life. Educational benefits, social inclusion, and being removed from dangerous situations significantly assisted the participants in this study.

Research Question 2.

What positive influences did the foster care system have on foster children during their time-in

care?

Theme 2 identified that school was an escape for foster children before they entered

foster care. Some of the participants stated that before being placed into foster care, they used

school as an escape from their personal situations. The participants did not necessarily attend

school to learn but rather to escape their dysfunctional living arrangement. By entering foster

care, the participants were able to focus on school without the negative concerns of their living

arrangements. Kelly identified that, "School was my way of getting out of what was going on in

the family." She continued with, "[School] was my escape. Like, I didn't necessarily

concentrate on my education. Like, I didn't care, because I was just happy I was out of the

situation."

The participants in this study all felt as though they had something to prove. They all had

a "chip on their shoulder" and wanted to prove that they could succeed in a life doomed for

failure. Theme 8 identified that the participants were perceived to have a "chip on their

shoulder" due to the negative stigma of being a foster child. The participants used the "chip on

their shoulder" as motivation. The foster care program gave these participants an avenue to use

this motivation and prove people wrong. Jon commented:

> I don't strive for the center of attention. I strive to prove people wrong. It's kind of like
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> they don't get interested in your life until you do something good. Even with some of my
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> biological family, when I try to figure out who I'm related to . . . one lady said she didn't
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> know my mom had four kids. So part of it is, like I want them to know that this didn't
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> break me, and I'm stronger than what a lot of what my relatives were and what they are

in life. I think it's kind of like a chip on my shoulder. I do want to show people this isn't something that's going to break me.

The participants recognized those that have been in foster care and have failed. They also noticed family members that went down the wrong path and recognized the importance of using their motivation in attaining an education. Ash commented during the interview:

I refuse to be a delinquent. I don't want to be a statistic. I don't want to be a delinquent. I don't want to live and survive off other people. And that's what I think a lot of people, women particularly, are doing. Living off the government, having so many kids, not being able to afford to take care of their kids, it just really kills me. And that's another reason why I wanted to graduate. I have a couple friends in high school, one good friend, dropped out and had three kids. I said, "Oh God, no, I can't be like that. No, I got to do something with my life." I said, "I'm about to be like this and live." I like to travel, but you have to have money to travel. So, I would definitely say I'm an eager person. I'm eager to graduate; I'm eager to educate myself. Education is the most important thing to me. Being the fact that I was deprived of it as a child, it's more important to me now. And just graduating from college, it's so important to me. It's just like laughing in my parents' faces.

The participants perceived that being socially active was instrumental to their success. They were able to link being involved in organizations as a key to their success. Theme 9 identified that the participants felt that being socially active was instrumental to their success. The participants identified that they were not socially active before they entered foster care, and they explained that the system provided avenues to become socially active. They also identified the importance of being socially active with other individuals that were in similar circumstances.

In the interview with Brit, she identified her unfortunate reality before she entered foster care. Brit stated, "Well, my mom did drugs and the house was really dirty and there was no electricity so we weren't able to take very many baths, and we had lice, so I think it was mainly neglect."

Brit had significant social issues in her life. She identified that being socially active was instrumental to her success in life. Brit stated, "Yeah, I think it is communication with mentors and also KYAC. I can interact with kids that are in my situation and members of KYAC are like all successful, doing good in school. We can just talk."

The participants mentioned the importance of being socially active in different organizations such as sports, church, academic teams, and foster care organizations. KYAC was again mentioned as a helpful organization. Brit stated that she recently became Vice-President of the organization and identified how the organization assisted her.

Given the responses identified by the participants and the themes that emerge from the research, the answer to Research Question 2 was that the participants identified specific positive influences that the foster care system had on foster children during their time-in care. These influences were identified by Themes 2, 8, and 9.

Research Question 3.

How does the foster care system assist foster children in becoming self-sufficient adults upon exiting?

This study was intended to focus on the positives associated with foster care; however, there were a couple re-occurring themes that identified some weaknesses that must be identified in this chapter. Theme 4 revealed that foster children were confused and were not provided clear guidance when they were removed from their biological families. The participants identified

specific factors that the foster care system assisted them in becoming self-sufficient adults upon exiting; however, this was a simple step that seemed to be missed by the system.

The researcher asked Katy to identify three things she would change with her foster care experience during their interview. Katy commented:

I know the first thing I remember when we got taken away, we were just like, taken away. They didn't really say, "Well, this is where you're going. This is what we're doing." They didn't really do anything, and I was so young. I was ten, but there was no explanation on this is what we're doing, or this is where you're going, or this is how it's going to work. I know I'm ten, and they don't want to talk to someone like that. But at ten, you're scared. You're scared that your family is being torn apart. You don't know where you're going. You're just sitting in a room at the SRS office. They just put us in a room, and we're just like, "What's happening?" We didn't actually know we were being taken away yet; we just were picked up by an officer, taken to SRS, and then put in a room for about two hours. Then, they picked them up and that's when they took us to our house and told us we needed to pack a bag. They didn't tell us where we were going. They were just like, "Well, just pack your bags, we'll tell you later," and we went in the house and even my stepdad didn't know what was happening. All he had were the younger kids in the house; he had picked them up from daycare and all I see is cop cars.

Katy continued:

We didn't know what was going on. And, then the younger kids knew that we were upset, the three year old and the one year old, so they're screaming, they're crying. I'm trying to pack my bags. I don't know what's going on, and they take us back down to the SRS office. And, then whenever they said, "Ok, you two are coming with us; you two

are going with them." We didn't get to say good-bye to each other. I didn't get to say, "It's ok. I'll come see you later." Nothing. I was considered the mom of the family and that was hard for me because I didn't know what was going on. I can't reassure them of anything because I didn't know what was going on. They just picked us up from there, and I think that's the main thing just not letting us know. And the second part was when they took us to the foster home, they just dropped us off. They just dropped us off and we were like, "You're going to be staying here for a while." And then they left and that's all they ever said. And because of that, my foster mom didn't really know what to tell us. And I'm like, "What's going on? Why are we here? When are we going home?" And she's like, "You're just going to stay here for a while." So I mean, she didn't know what to tell us either. We were there for about two days before they explained what was going on.

Other participants had similar situations when they were removed from their biological families. In Katy's situation above, her foster family had no idea what to tell her as they were not provided proper guidance. In this circumstance, the foster family and the foster child were placed in an unnecessary state of confusion for several days. The situation is already unnerving and uncertain as it is.

Theme 6 revealed that the Kansas tuition waiver was instrumental to the participants' success. The Kansas tuition waiver is identified, in detail, in Chapter Four. This waiver provides foster children an avenue and resource to attend college after they are emancipated from foster care. Kelly commented that she would probably not be in school right now without the tuition waiver. When asked if the tuition waiver was linked to her success, Kelly Commented:

I definitely think the benefits that I'm receiving are definitely making me successful and

helping me accomplish what I want to get done. Without it, I wouldn't be able to go to

school. I could apply for scholarships, and I could probably make money, get money off

of those, but it definitely wouldn't help me as much as the tuition waiver.

Kelly revealed that the tuition waiver helps her focus on school and not on how to pay for

school. Kelly commented, ". . . the gist of it is, if I didn't receive those benefits, I wouldn't be

able to [go to school], plain and simple as it's harder financially."

Given the response of the participants and the themes that emerge from the research, the

answer to Research Question 3 revealed that the Kansas foster care system does assist foster

children in becoming self-sufficient adults, but there are issues within the system. These issues

require simple fixes that must be resolved as identified in Theme 4. Theme 6 reveals the success

the system has had with assisting individuals in becoming self-sufficient adults.

Research Question 4.

Do the educational benefits foster children receive after exiting foster care assist foster children

in becoming self-sufficient adults? How do these benefits assist them?

Theme 6 reveals that the participants identified the Kansas tuition waiver as instrumental

to their success. This was also identified extensively in the last research question. During the

interview with Brit, the researcher asked where she would be right now if she had not received

the education benefits from being in foster care. Brit replied, "I don't think I would be coming to

college without the benefits of being in foster care." When asked where she would be right now,

Brit replied, "I think I would be working at a minimum wage job, trying to make it through the

month." Brit also commented that, "I think it's a relief, because I don't have to worry about a

financial burden. I think I can finish college debt free, without having to take out loans. It's a

way for me to succeed in college, because I don't have to worry about money as an educational

aspect."

Theme 7 revealed a second weakness within the Kansas foster care system. Theme 7

identified that the participants felt that they were not notified of the educational benefits until it

was nearly too late. The participants noted that they knew of other former foster children who

did not attend college, and that they might have if they had known about their benefits earlier in

the exiting process. They also identified that they were still confused on the process in obtaining

these benefits. Sam commented:

> Yes, I think it's really beneficial. But I'm still trying to figure it out. I'm not sure how it
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> works. I get FAFSA. I get government grants and everything, but I'm trying to figure
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> out why they still take my tuition out of it before they give it to me.

During the interview with Sam, the researcher asked if other foster children knew that

they had their college paid for. Sam replied, "I don't think so." The researcher asked if they did

know, what do you think? Sam commented:

> I think they would work a lot harder. First of all, they don't understand that they get the
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> FAFSA. They can get Pell Grants. I didn't know about that stuff until my senior year of
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> high school, and I really think that if kids knew that, they would be like "wow." Rather
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> *[sic]*, they have the tuition waiver or not, they can go to college. At least go to get their
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> bachelor's or something. To get the associate's degree, they can do that.

In her interview, Stef revealed that foster children have to be seniors in high school

before they are approached about college and their benefits. Stef commented, "They talk to you

your senior year of high school. You have to be at least a senior before they talk to you about

it." The researcher commented, "Do you think the foster care agencies and the social workers communicate with you enough?" Stef replied, "No."

Jon identified in his interview that he was confused about the process. Jon revealed that he was nearly out of high school when he was approached about his benefits and college. When questioned about his awareness of his benefits, Jon commented:

. . . that was one thing I was almost going crazy about. I was like, "I can't go to college now. I don't know what I'm supposed to do or how any of this is supposed to happen." When I did come for my visit, two of my workers were here, and then they left because they had other kids to take care of. A lot of it was going into it and hoping for the best, and they explain it kind of on my visit.

The researcher asked Jon if he thought foster children that did not attend college would have had they been notified of their benefits earlier. Jon replied:

I think so, definitely if they had more of a plan. Because I feel like a lot of foster kids are figuring out what to do next and what's next. And when you're kind of going into that blindly, when we're taken out of the home, that's going into it blindly. I feel like if you had the opportunity to prepare and know what's coming next, it would change the way you saw things.

Theme 10 identified that the participants perceived that education was key to their success. Josh commented:

The tuition waiver helped me out. I worked very little in high school. My biological mom couldn't provide enough for me, and my foster parents' didn't make much, so they couldn't provide for me. So the tuition waiver helped me out a lot.

Stef identified that the educational benefits that she received greatly assisted her. The researcher asked if she would still be in school without those benefits and she responded, "No definitely not." The researcher asked, "Where would you be?" Stef replied:

I'd be working a minimum wage job at McDonald's, or Wal-Mart, or wherever they hire people with high school diplomas. Because you have to have a bachelor's degree for pretty much anything. I firmly believe one day you'll need a bachelor's degree to work at McDonald's.

Casey identified that, "The Kansas tuition waiver, and the school paying for everything has been a great help, because coming out of the system, being independent, and having my school paid for takes a big weight off." The researcher commented, "So, could you have gone to college without the help?" Casey replied, "I wouldn't have known how to get the money."

Theme 6 revealed that the Kansas tuition waiver was a perceived strength in the Kansas foster care system. The participants revealed that education was a key to their success and that the tuition waiver significantly assisted them in attaining their education. However, theme 7 identified a weakness in the system; the participants felt as though they were notified of their benefits too late in the exiting process. Theme 10, as with theme 6, identified that the participants perceived that education was a key to their success.

Research Question 5.

What are some ways foster parents use their strengths, skills, and talents in developing foster children?

Theme 3 revealed that the participants perceived foster parents as positive mentors in their life. The participants in this study felt as though their foster parents assisted them with their

development as a self-sufficient adult. The study also revealed that the majority of the participants still stay in contact with their foster parents. Casey commented:

> I've kept my relationship with my mentor since eighth grade. And my foster family, I have on Facebook, and stay in contact with them. What's more funny is that I stay in contact with them more than I do my biological family.

> Kelly identified that her foster family assisted her with the skills necessary in developing as an adult. Kelly informed the researcher that her foster father was a resource for her in attaining employment. She commented:

> He helped me make the connection, and they also started up a bank account for us. We started making money with working and stuff, and we were required to pay for our own insurance on our car. We were required to pay our own bills, so they kind of taught us how to be independent and budget our money of course.

Sam informed the researcher that her foster parents welcomed her with open arms. Sam stated:

> I actually worked at a small town family restaurant before I got into foster care. My foster parents actually owned the restaurant. I wasn't aware, but of course people I worked with knew what was going on, because it was visible on me. I wasn't aware that they [my foster parents] were keeping up on me.

Sam stated that her foster parents maintained contact with her high school counselor. She continued:

> I knew if something was going to happen, the more people noticing I was missing, the better. So, they actually contacted my counselor one day when I didn't show up for work, and they found out I was incarcerated. At that time, they actually worked to get me out. I was out just within a day. I was in a juvenile home, and when I was released, I

was really shocked that I was going to go to their house, but they welcomed me with

open arms.

As with Research Question 1, Theme 9 identified that the participants felt that being

socially active was instrumental to their success. Vany discussed the importance of social

inclusion and acceptance. She commented:

I didn't want to be treated differently. I want people to see me as Vany, not the foster girl

who got taken out of home because her mom couldn't take care of her. I think in school,

my friends were very important to me. I made some really good friends and also joining

the church group and that was a really good way to be social with people around. And

that was really nice, because in church you were accepted no matter what. I think that

was really nice.

The two most reoccurring locations for social inclusion that the participants identified

were KYAC and church organizations. Lynn commented:

Church camp. I like going home because my church is kind of my second family. I have

a bunch of friends that are my age, and we always sit together at church. Just going to

church camp, I miss it, because I can't go anymore. I felt wanted there.

Given the responses of the participants and the themes that emerged from the research,

the answer to Research Question 5 is that foster parents successfully use their skills and talents in

developing foster youth. As with education, foster parents serve as a key to the foster child's

success. Theme 3 identifies how foster parents serve as a positive mentor to their foster children.

Theme 9 identifies the participants' perceptions on the importance of social inclusion. Foster

parents are instrumental in assisting foster children in becoming socially active. Based on the

perceptions of the participants, just by simply including the foster child in attending church can lead to successfully assisting the youth in being socially active.

Adult Education Link

What an individual wants to learn, what is offered to learn, and the ways in which an individual learns are determined by the disposition of society at any particular time (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). This section discusses the skills that foster children learn throughout their stay in foster care and how it is linked to adult education.

It can be argued that foster children are in a different demographic than children in the general population. In today's contemporary society, the urgency of dealing with social realities is felt by adults, and society no longer waits for its youth to catch up (Merriam et al., 2007). Foster children must establish adult learning techniques in order to succeed in life. As discussed in previous chapters, foster children face low high school graduation rates and high drop-out rates. High school education has become the minimum educational standard, and those who drop out are at a severe disadvantage. Adult education opportunities may become the only hope for this population; however, adults with less than a high school diploma are less likely to participate in adult education activities (Merriam et al., 2007).

Foster children possess hidden traits that they do not realize they have attained. Without knowing it, they have participated in adult education activities just by going through the foster care process. Merriam et al. (2007) state that appreciating and taking into consideration the prior knowledge and experience of learners has become a basic assumption of adult education practice. Foster children had to learn how to take care of their basic needs even before they entered foster care. For example, a child that was neglected by his or her parents at a young age

may have been responsible for taking care of his or her younger siblings. That child had to learn and understand how to take care of the basic needs of others under adverse living conditions.

People in all walks of life are adult learners, whether they know it or not. Merriam et al. (2007) identify that if educators helped learners recognize the many places and ways they have gone about learning in adulthood, more adults might see themselves as active learners, and as a result, they may be less cautious about learning new things. This, in turn, would allow the individual, in this case the foster child, to be more willing to enter formal education.

How Learning Occurs

In adult education, learning occurs in three types of settings (Merriam et al., 2007). These settings are 1) formal institutional settings, 2) non-formal settings, and 3) informal contexts. According to Merriam and Brockett (2007), formal education is highly institutionalized, bureaucratic, curriculum driven, and formally recognized with grades, diplomas, or certificates. Based on the low educational attainment rates of foster children, formal education is a weakness for this population. As discussed in previous chapters, 56 percent of foster children completed high school compared to 82 percent of the general population, and 1.8 percent of foster children completed a bachelor's degree compared to 24 percent of the general population.

Informal education has been used most often to describe learning opportunities outside the formal educational system (Merriam & Brockett, 2007). Informal educational opportunities are usually local and community-based, such as those programs offered by museums, libraries, and religious organizations (Merriam et al., 2007). This type of education targets those who have dropped-out of the formal education system.

A sub-type of non-formal education that is typically used by foster families and communities who raise foster children is community-based learning. This type of learning normally identifies gathering in churches, libraries, and community centers, organizing to overcome a specific problem they feel to be important in enhancing their quality of life (Merriam et al., 2007). Merriam and Brockett (2007) state that educators who work in these programs feel that education and training can be a useful asset in assisting learners to take control over their own lives.

The last method in which adult learning occurs is informal learning. This type of learning is the impulsive, unprompted learning that goes on daily in the home and neighborhood (Coombs, 1985). Informal learning is often christened as everyday learning as it takes place in everyday life. Merriam and Brockett (2007) point out that this form of learning takes place without the externally forced curriculum of either formal or informal educative programs. The participants in this study identified that their communities, their local churches, participation in athletic organizations, and participation in social organizations were key to their success. Without knowing it, these participants participated in informal learning.

Merriam et al. (2007) identify that there are three forms of informal learning. Those forms are 1) self-directed learning, 2) incidental learning, and 3) socialization. Although self-directed learning is a method of informal learning, many public schools, colleges, and universities have used this notion to describe one of the primary goals of their institutions: to empower their students to be lifelong, self-directed learners (Merriam et al., 2007).

Self-Directed Learning

Merriam et al. (2007) identify three main goals of self-directed learning:

1. To enhance the ability of adult learners to be self-directed in their learning. This goal identifies that human nature is basically good, and that individuals possess virtually unlimited potential for growth.

2. To foster transformational learning as central to self-directed learning. This goal identifies that there is probably no such thing as a self-directed learner, except in the sense that there is a learner who can participate fully and freely in the dialogue through which we test our interests and perspectives against those of others and accordingly modify them and our learning goals. Adults need to reflect critically and have an understanding of the historical, cultural, and biographical reasons for their needs, wants, and interests.

3. To promote emancipatory learning and social action as an integral part of self-directed learning. The authors promote that goal three enhances the ability of individual learners to be more self-directed learners.

To be more active in self-directed learning, foster children must develop control over education decisions. Brookfield (1993) argued that having learners exercise control over all educational decisions needs to be a constant component of self-directed learning. Foster children who identify that they need to learn and that they must control what they learn will be at an advantage over their peers.

With the low educational attainment levels of foster children, they seem to be at a disadvantage in terms of access to education or resources for education. However, this is not the case. Foster children who can successfully maneuver through high school will receive benefits

after graduating from high school and exiting the Kansas foster care system, as discussed in previous chapters. The participants in this study were able to successfully maneuver through high school and the exiting process. They were able to effectively utilize their benefits and attend college. One of the main issues identified in this study was that the participants felt as though they did not understand their benefits and were informed too late in the exiting process. Some participants even highlighted that they felt this inhibited other foster children from attending college. Brookfield (1993) proposed that we need more easily accessible and adequate resources so that learners can more quickly exercise control over their learning, especially learners who have been deprived access to resources because of cost or preferential treatment for privileged groups.

Although foster children are entitled to receive benefits, there are still significant barriers that this population must overcome. Having access to education benefits does not necessarily mean foster children will use them. Research has demonstrated that removing apparent barriers to participation in adult education, such as producing a program cost-free, has overall little effect on increasing participation (Merriam & Brockett, 2007). Specific factors such as an individual's color, gender, location, and ethnicity all contribute to barriers.

Merriam and Brockett (2007) identify the following barriers to adult education:

1. Geographic conditions – access to learning opportunities is partially determined by where people live.

2. Demographic factors as well as age and sex – studies have identified that age-related concerns limit access to education. Some of these concerns are health, fear, lack of transportation, and burn-out from school.

3. Socioeconomic conditions and education – the widening gap between rich and poor is identified in studies of participation in adult education that consistently link participation with socioeconomic status and previous levels of education. The authors also identify that the pattern is difficult to break as it is affected by families through the generations, as well as by the institution of society itself. Children in the foster care program, their foster families, and their biological families do not reach high educational attainment levels, as discussed in previous chapters. Higher education can be difficult for them to understand, where as those born and socialized into the dominant society have the advantage of the educational system (Jarvis, 1985).

4. Cultural determinants – societies are made up of subcultures such as race, religion, language, or ethnicity as well as shared values, beliefs, and practices. The authors identify that in every society, certain groups enjoy a higher status, have more power, and command more control over educational opportunities than other groups.

Although foster children are provided benefits that they attain by successfully maneuvering through the foster care process and high school, there are significant barriers that keep them from attending college or post-secondary education. The participants identified that they felt that foster children lack the knowledge of the system and their benefits. They also identified that they were informed of their benefits too late in the exiting process. This has created unintended barriers for foster children.

Garrison (1997) proposed a multidimensional model of self-directed learning. This model discusses the following three dimensions:

1. Self-management – learners are interacting in formal or informal settings. This dimension involves learners taking control of and shaping contextual conditions so that they can reach their stated goals.

2. Self-monitoring – this dimension describes the ability of learners to be able to monitor both their cognitive and metacognitive processes, which includes their being able to use a repertoire of learning strategies and the ability to think about their thinking.

3. Motivation – this dimension involves what influences people to participate or enter into a self-directed learning activity and what keeps them participating in the activity or task.

The participants in this study were able to identify with Garrison's model. They were able to learn self-management by maneuvering through formal and informal educational systems by taking control over their situations. The participants in this study were able to identify and learn their strategies to assist them in obtaining their goals. All participants in this study revealed that education was a key to their success. They were able to identify the importance of education. The participants learned what steps they needed to take in order to reach their goal of getting to college. They were able to find the necessary motivation to keep moving throughout this process.

Experience & Learning/Experiential Learning

People learn from experience in a vast amount of ways. Lindeman (1961) stated that the resource of largest value in adult education is the learners experience; experience then becomes the adult learners living textbook. As adults live longer, they accrue both a greater capacity and range of experiences, and they tend to delineate themselves by their experiences (Knowles,

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1989). Foster children will forever be linked to their time in foster care, both the positive and negative experiences. They will also learn from these experiences.

Although adult educators have accepted the correlation between experience and learning, the practice is still discovering this correlation and how to use it most effectively in both formal and informal learning situations (Merriam et al., 2007). The outcome of experiential learning as participation is that society enhances its practice. Fenwick (2003) identifies that there are different theoretical conceptualizations of experiential learning:

1. Reflecting on concrete experience.

2. Participating in a community of practice.

3. Getting in touch with unconscious desires and fears.

4. Resisting dominant social norms of experience.

5. Exploring ecological relationships between cognition and environment.

    Kolb (1984) identified a model for experiential learning presented as a four-stage cycle:

1. Gaining new kinds of concrete experience.

2. Engaging in reflective observation that allows one to interpret experiences from different viewpoints.

3. Forming an abstract conceptualization that leads to the development of theories about the experience and reflection.

4. Active experimentation with these theories in order to solve practical problems.

    Fenwick (2003) identified a community of practice through which groups learn from experience. In the research, the participants identified that through social inclusion, they connected with and learned from other foster children in similar situations. The participants mentioned one group specifically, KYAC. They were able to communicate with other children

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going through situations that they could relate with and learn from. Experiential learning is not merely that the growth of experiences makes a difference; it is how learners identify meaning to their experience that matters (Merriam & Brockett, 2007).

<div align="center">**Strengths and Weaknesses of the Kansas Foster Care System**</div>

The ten themes identified the strengths and weaknesses of the Kansas foster care system. They revealed that the participants perceived the foster care system as effective, and in some cases, lifesaving. This study revealed the success stories identified by the participants; however, weaknesses were also identified during this study.

Strengths

The participants expressed the following perceptions concerning the strengths of the Kansas foster care system. The educational benefits that the participants received were instrumental to their success. Receiving the Kansas tuition waiver allowed the participants to focus on getting through college without having to worry about paying for it.

The following are participant comments regarding the Kansas tuition waiver and the educational benefits:

1. Kelly: "Definitely a tool to succeed, because without it, I probably wouldn't be in school."

2. Vany: "Oh yeah, it feels nice to not have to worry about that [tuition]. I think the education that I'm getting now, it's going to be helpful for me in the future."

3. Ash: "I would definitely say that the resources have helped me greatly simply because I am not in debt as of now. It has helped me maintain a budget plan, to see how much I can afford, and what I cannot pay."

The participants identified that foster parents served as positive mentors in their lives. The foster parent's in this study were able to use their strengths and skills to successfully develop their foster children. Foster parents must function as a positive mentor in their foster child's life. They are with the foster child every day and are exceptionally influential in their life. The following are comments from Jon on how his foster family helped shape him into the person he is today:

1. Jon: "Everything they did, they just kind of shape us into people. They did have very strict rules, very strict about how we did things. They did talk about how to become independent. I think they're really good at showing instead of just telling.

The participants were against reunification with their biological families. They would not have felt this way if they would not have had loving and caring foster parents. This is a strength for foster parents but a weakness for the foster care system as reunification is one of the main goals of the Kansas foster care system. Katy was adamant about not re-integrating with her biological family. She even went as far as to draft a letter to her local judge to prevent re-integration. At a young age, she realized that her foster family offered a better life. The following comments from Katy reflect this attitude:

1. Katy: "I didn't want to go back. I knew I was going to be better off where I was at, so my foster mom helped me write a letter, because I told her I wanted to talk to the judge."

The participants revealed that social inclusion was particularly important to their success. They revealed that participating in different school organizations, different athletic events, community functions, church organizations, and foster care organizations were important to them. Participating in these different activities allowed the participants to feel normal. This also

offered them a way to communicate with peers that are going through similar situations. Brit discussed how she was severely neglected as a child and displayed noticeable anxiety and social issues. She was recently picked to become Vice President of KYAC, discussed in previous chapters. Her following comments identified how this made her feel:

1. Brit: "Well, it just made me feel important, like more important. I wasn't even planning on running for Vice President."

Weaknesses

The participants expressed the following perceptions concerning the weaknesses of the Kansas foster care system. The participants identified that they were not notified of their educational benefits until late in the exiting process. Some participants discussed how this affected other foster youth who did not attend college due to being notified late. The participants could still use their benefits for a set period of time, but the perception was that they did not adequately understand their benefits. If they would have been notified of their benefits earlier in the exiting process, this may have generated an interest to learn more about their benefits and attend college. The following are comments from the participants regarding being notified of their benefits late in the exiting process:

1. Ash: Some do [some foster youth are notified too late]. They should, but some of them are not aware, and in that case they age out of the system and don't know that they have those benefits."

2. During the interview with Sam, the researcher posed the question, "Do they know that they have college paid for?" Sam replied, "I don't think so."

3. Jon discussed similar opinions of other foster youth who were notified too late. The researcher discussed with Jon, "If they were informed earlier that their college is paid

for, would they have gone to college?" Jon commented, "I think so, definitely if they had more of a plan. Because, I feel like a lot of foster kids are figuring out what to do next. You are kind of going into that blindly. I feel like if you had the opportunity to prepare and know what's coming next, it would change the way you saw things."

4. Billy acknowledged that she did not understand the benefits until her senior year in high school. The researcher posed the question, "Did they [the foster care agency] meet with you at all?" Billy replied, "Not my whole senior year. If they did, only once or twice."

5. Kelly discussed the exit plan that was provided to her, "No, we never even talked about anything like that, it was just sign the papers and you're out of foster care. That was it."

Another glaring weakness of the Kansas foster care system took place when children were removed from their biological families. Being removed from your family is a traumatic experience, and this should not be taken lightly. Children should be comforted and supported during this time. They should also have an understanding of what is taking place. Katy discussed that she had no idea what was happening when she was removed from her biological family. She identified that neither she nor her foster family knew what was happening. Katy made the following comments:

1. Katy commented, "I know the first thing I remember when we got taken away, we were just like taken away. They didn't really say, 'Well, this is where you're going. This is what we're doing.' They didn't really do anything. I was so young, I was ten, but there was no explanation."

2. Katy continued regarding her foster mother, "My foster mom didn't really know what to tell us. I mean, we were there for about two days before we were actually explained to what was going to happen. I think that was like the hardest part because they didn't really explain anything to us and then they just take you somewhere. Here you go. Have fun."

The participants perceived that the Kansas foster care system had weaknesses; however, the participants felt as though the program was also a lifesaver as the benefits of the program far exceeded the weaknesses. The perceived weaknesses of the program need to be improved. Foster children must be informed of the exiting process and the benefits that they are eligible to receive before they enter their senior year of high school. The participants perceived that they were informed too late in the exiting process and this actually inhibited some foster children from entering college and using their education benefits. Foster children must be informed of what is taking place when they are removed from their biological families. The foster parents taking in the children must also be informed of what is taking place so they can properly console the child. Finally, the participants were against reunification with their biological families. As this is the number one goal of the Kansas foster care system, the State of Kansas needs to take a deeper look at this philosophy and identify if this is in the best interest of the child.

Implications for Practice and Research

Implications for Practice

This research studied the success stories of former foster children who exited the Kansas foster care system. Overall, the perceptions of the participants was that the Kansas foster care system assisted them in achieving their goals and provided them avenues of success they otherwise would not have received. A review of Chapter Four and Chapter Five revealed

problems that need to be addressed. These issues have implications for practice and future research.

The number one goal in the Kansas foster care system is reunification with a child's biological family. This study provided evidence that this may not be in the best interest of the child. The participants were against reunification with their biological families. One participant went as far as to write a letter to her local judge to inform her that she wanted to stay with her foster care family.

The participants in this research are all successfully attending a post-secondary academic institution in the State of Kansas. They revealed that the educational benefits they received after exiting care was significant to their success in life. The participants revealed that more foster children may have entered college after foster care had they known about and understood the benefits they were eligible for. For an increase enrollment of foster children in post-secondary schooling, foster care agencies must provide more detailed exit plans. They must also begin planning prior to the child's senior year of high school.

The field of adult education is directly linked to the participants in this study. As the participants exit the foster care system, they make the step into adulthood. As identified in previous chapters, they have already participated in different forms of adult learning. After exiting foster care and making the leap into adulthood, they are now participating in age-appropriate tasks. Levinson and Levinson (1996) proposed an age-graded model of adult education. The structure of relating development to specific age periods has led a number of educators to propose a connection between age-appropriate tasks and behavior (Merriam et al., 2007).

Implications for Research

A review of the study reveals implications for research. Learning in adulthood means that we must become more self-directed and self-governing (Merriam et al., 2007). Self-directed learning is one of the most important aspects of adult education. Self-directed learning is a procedure in which people take initiative for planning, and evaluating their own learning experiences (Merriam et al., 2007).

The participants were pleased and eager to participate in the research. They perceived that the Kansas foster care system and the benefits they received after exiting foster care was significant in their development as self-sufficient adults. They were eager and willing to provide their feedback on their experience in foster care. The majority of the participants did not want to use pseudonyms and wanted to use their real name; however, for the purpose of this study pseudonyms were still used. All participants were volunteers who candidly provided their perceptions.

This qualitative study was difficult to conduct and time intensive. Conducting the research, transcribing the interviews, and analyzing the research generated a vast amount of data. Correspondence with the SRS, the local foster care agencies, and the post-secondary educational institutions were instrumental in the success of this research.

<p style="text-align:center">Recommendations</p>

The State of Kansas foster care system provides outstanding educational benefits. The foster parents that mentored the participants in this study provided instruction and guidance on how to become self-sufficient adults. Overall, for these participants, the Kansas foster care system accomplished what it set out to do: Prepare these participants for life after foster care and provide them an opportunity for success in adulthood. The recommendation is that the State of

Kansas continues to fund the tuition waiver, continue to encourage foster parents to provide mentoring to foster children, and to improve on the weaknesses identified in this study.

Foster parents and the educational benefits that foster children receive after exiting foster care are the keys to success. The researcher's perception during this study was that foster parents, without realizing it, are the primary key for a child's success. They are with the child at all times and can be a direct influence on these children. Foster parents, without realizing it, are the child's mentor, and these children need structured guidance. Foster care agencies and the SRS must ensure that foster parents receive the training needed to properly mentor Kansas foster children. They should also ensure that the foster children understand what their benefits are before they exit the system. They need to contact the children before their senior year of high school and provide a structured exit plan.

Results of this study identified that foster children are directly linked to the field of adult education. Foster children have already participated in adult learning. These participants, without even knowing it, have learned from their past experiences during their time in foster care and before foster care. The foster children in this study have developed as self-directed learners. They are learning how to formulate learning goals and are implementing their learning strategies to succeed in life.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research provided former foster children in the State of Kansas an opportunity to provide their perceptions on how well the foster care system prepared them to develop as self-sufficient adults. Future research should consider conducting a similar study and dive deeper into the strengths and weaknesses provided in this study. Future research should consider performing examinations of the exit plans that are provided to foster children, should consider

the process of how children are removed from their biological families, should consider the training that is provided for foster parents and the motivation on why foster parents volunteer for this duty, and should consider research on why the State of Kansas prefers reunification with biological families.

Training foster parents to properly mentor their foster children is a vitally important task. Foster parents should be trained on the importance of mentoring and providing life lessons to their foster children. They should ensure that they are volunteering for their role with a full understanding of what goals need to be accomplished. The State of Kansas and the privatized foster care agencies must have mechanisms in place to ensure these goals are met. Further research must be completed on the process of foster parent training in Kansas. The training for foster parents must be flexible, and the training must be responsive to the needs of the foster parent and foster child. Lessons learned from former foster children and former foster parents must be researched as well. Further research with current and former foster parents would complement this study.

This study identified two glaring weaknesses perceived by the participants: 1) lack of clear guidance once removed from their biological parents, and 2) participants perceived that they were informed too late regarding their benefits after exiting foster care. Future research should consider conducting a similar study with the SRS and the privatized foster care agencies in the State of Kansas. During interviews with these stakeholders, specific items must be researched. Future research should consider looking into the current exit plans prepared by the SRS and the privatized foster care agencies, as well as the process of entry into foster care. Doing so would add to the relevance of this study.

The State of Kansas is one of the few states that have privatized foster care. Future research should consider conducting a similar type of study in a state that has not privatized foster care and identify the success stories in that area. Doing so would complement the research of this study and examine the differences of two different programs.

Additionally, future research should examine the State of Kansas' primary goal of reunification with a child's biological family. Future research should consider conducting a study on different stakeholders' perceptions of reunification. Stakeholders should include the following: 1) past and current foster children, 2) SRS and the privatized foster care agencies, 3) past and current foster parents, 4) past and current families who have had a child placed in foster care, and 5) court-appointed officials and education professionals who regularly work with foster children.

Based on the limitations of this study, a small sample size was used. However, this sample size was efficient and effective for this specific study. It would be interesting to interview samples from the five different areas in Kansas and identify the differences between the four foster care agencies in the state. It would also be interesting to interview former foster children who did not attend college after they exited the system and examine their current situation.

Conclusion

The goal of the foster care system is to create a self-sufficient adult when the child exits the program. The preferred goal for children in care is permanency with caring parents and reunification with birth parents (Foster Care Alumni of America, 2009). The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of the 15 former foster children interviewed and the

discovery of strengths and emerging possibilities during their time in care, as well as the conditions that made them possible.

The conclusion of this study is that the Kansas foster care system, in regard to the participants that were interviewed, accomplished what it set out to do. Foster children suffer through abuse and neglect before they enter foster care. After entry into foster care, they face a tough challenge to succeed when statistics show that most will fail. The intent of this study was to identify those who have succeeded after foster care and identify those who are currently and successfully completing college. This study identified 15 success stories and the conditions that made them possible. However, these 15 participants are not the norm and the majority of foster children do not complete college. As discussed in earlier chapters, only 1.8 percent of foster children will complete a bachelor's degree and only 56 percent will attain a high school diploma. As discussed in earlier chapters, 25 percent of foster children in the United States had been homeless since exiting foster care, 30 percent were receiving public assistance, 30 percent had no health insurance, and 51 percent were unemployed. The State of Kansas, as well as the United States, benefits when a foster child succeeds.

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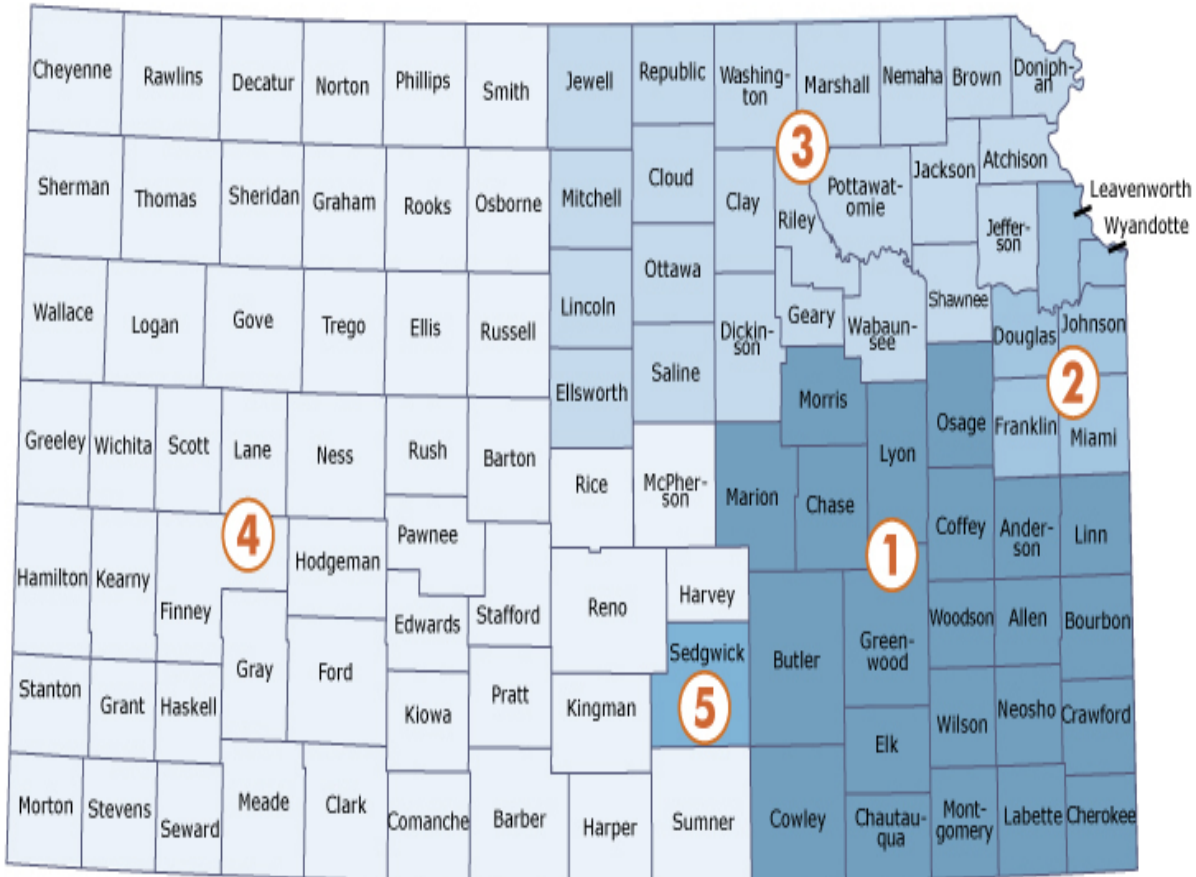
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Appendix A - Kansas Foster Care Region Map

Foster Care Provider Regions

1. TFI Family Services
2. KVC Behavioral Health Care
3. TFI Family Services
4. St Francis Community Services
5. United Methodist Youthville

Appendix B - Introductory Note to Participants

I want to thank you for agreeing to participate in this research and allowing me to interview you. With your permission, our conversation will be recorded and notes will be taken. Even though you have agreed to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time.

Enclosed are several documents for you to review and complete prior to the interview. The first is an interview worksheet. This will provide basic information and allow me to report on the demographic characteristics of the participants. If you do not feel comfortable providing any information please leave it blank. I am asking that you read all documents prior to the interview. We will review this information at the start of the interview and answer any questions that you may have.

The second form is the Informed Consent Form. This is a requirement to ensure that you completely understand your rights regarding participation in this study. This includes:

1. The purpose of this study.
2. The motives of the researcher.
3. The protection of your privacy.
4. The confidentiality of your interview recordings, notes, and transcripts; and
5. You have the right to choose not to participate in this study at any point prior to the defense of the study.

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this study.

Jamie R. Schwandt

Appendix C - Informed Consent

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

INFORMED CONSENT

(If you are performing research involving human subjects, it is your responsibility to address the issue of informed consent. This template is intended to provide guidance for crafting an informed consent document. The Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB*) strongly* recommends that you model your consent form on this template. However, if you choose a different approach, it must contain at a minimum the same elements as this standard version. Language and terminology used in the consent form must be written at no more than the 8th grade level, so that the potential participant can clearly understand the project, how it is going to be conducted, and all issues that may affect his or her participation*. In addition, please write the consent form in a manner that addresses your subjects directly instead of writing it in a manner that addresses the University Research Compliance Office directly. *Information on the important issue of informed consent can be found in 45 CRF 46 at* http://ohrp.osophs.dhhs.gov/humansubjects/guidance/45cfr46.htm#46.116. **Federal law mandates that all signed and dated informed consent forms be retained by the P.I. for at least three years following completion of the study.**)

WAIVER OF INFORMED CONSENT: *There are limited instances where the requirement for a formal informed consent document may be waived or altered by the IRB.*
45 CFR 46 states that " An IRB may waive the requirement for the investigator to obtain a signed consent form for some or all subjects if it finds either:
1) *That the only record linking the subject and the research would be the consent document and the principal risk would be potential harm resulting from a breach of confidentiality. Each subject will be asked whether the subject wants documentation linking the subject with the research, and the subject's wishes will govern; or*
2) *That the research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required outside of the research context."*

(If a study employs only questionnaires and surveys as the source of their data, it may generally be assumed that to answer and return the questionnaire is an appropriate and sufficient expression of free consent.   However, there are circumstances that might call this assumption into question – e.g., teacher-student relationship between the investigator and the subject, etc. However, a statement should be included on the questionnaire or survey form indicating that participation of the subject is strictly voluntary, the length of time reasonably expected to complete the questionnaire or survey form, and that questions that make the participant uncomfortable may be skipped.)

This form is designed to word process in the spaces provided – Microsoft Word. If you use this form, please delete all explanatory or administrative text in brackets. If you have questions, please call the University Research Compliance Office (URCO) at 532-3224, or the Chair of the Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects.)

PROJECT TITLE: EXITING FOSTER CARE: A CASE STUDY OF FORMER FOSTER CHILDREN ENROLLED IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN KANSAS

APPROVAL DATE OF PROJECT: 2012/02/09   EXPIRATION DATE OF PROJECT: 2019/02/08
(both dates will be provided in the approval letter, dates must be in place before distributing to subjects)

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr. W Frank Spikes

CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Dr. David Griffin, Dr. Jeffrey Zacharakis, Dr. Doris Wright Carroll

CONTACT NAME AND PHONE FOR ANY PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS: Dr. W Frank Spikes   wfs3@ksu.edu
785-532-5873
IRB CHAIR CONTACT/PHONE INFORMATION*: (This information is for the subject in case he/she has questions, or needs or wants to discuss any aspect of the research with an official of the university or the IRB)*

- Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

- Jerry Jaax, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance and University Veterinarian, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

SPONSOR OF PROJECT: NA

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH: The purpose of this study is the discovery of strengths and emerging possibilities in foster care and the conditions that make them possible.

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED: The target of this study includes former foster children who have exited from the foster care system in the State of Kansas and are currently enrolled at a four-year university in Kansas. A sample of approximately 15 participants will be selected and interviewed. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Each participant will be asked to review the transcript of their interview to ensure that the transcription is accurate and that the intended perception of the participant was interpreted sufficiently by the researcher.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES OR TREATMENTS, IF ANY, THAT MIGHT BE ADVANTAGEOUS TO SUBJECT: NA

LENGTH OF STUDY: The interviews will last approximately one and one-half hours with possible follow-up questions via telephone or e-mail during the final data analysis stage.

RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS ANTICIPATED: None

BENEFITS ANTICIPATED: This study will provide the participants a sense of accomplishment. Foster children that succeed seem to be rare, and these students in this study will be identified as a success story.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY: Confidentiality related to all aspects of the data collected from each participant will be strictly maintained. The researcher will conduct the interview in a private location.

The respondent will be asked to select a pseudonym to be used in labeling the data collection materials as well as in the transcript and final version of the research. The recording of the interview will be heard by only the transcriptionist, the third party reviewer, and the researcher. The transcripts of the interview will be seen by only the transcriptionist, the researcher, and the third party reviewer. All data collection materials will be stored in a secure location. There is the potential that this research will be submitted for publication following the successful defense of the dissertation. In this case, the identity of the participants will continue to remain confidential.

IS COMPENSATION OR MEDICAL TREATMENT AVAILABLE IF INJURY OCCURS: This study has zero risk involved.

PARENTAL APPROVAL FOR MINORS: All participants will be over the age of 18.

TERMS OF PARTICIPATION: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is completely voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

(Remember that it is a requirement for the P.I. to maintain a signed and dated copy of the same consent form signed and kept by the participant).

Participant Name: _____

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

Witness to Signature: (project staff) _____ Date: _____

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

INFORMED CONSENT

PROJECT TITLE: EXITING FOSTER CARE: A CASE STUDY OF FORMER FOSTER CHILDREN ENROLLED IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN KANSAS

APPROVAL DATE OF PROJECT: 2012/02/09   **EXPIRATION DATE OF PROJECT**: 2019/02/08

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):
Dr. W Frank Spikes
Dr. David Griffin
Dr. Jeffrey Zacharakis
Dr. Doris Wright Carroll

CONTACT AND PHONE FOR ANY PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS: **Dr. W Frank Spikes wfs3@ksu.edu 785-532-5873**

IRB CHAIR CONTACT/PHONE INFORMATION: Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

Jerry Jaax, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance and University Veterinarian, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

SPONSOR OF PROJECT: NA

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH: The purpose of this study is the discovery of strengths and emerging possibilities in foster care and the conditions that make them possible.

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED: The target of this study includes former foster children who have exited from the foster care system in the State of Kansas and are currently enrolled at a four-year university in Kansas. A sample of approximately 15 participants will be selected and interviewed. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Each participant will be asked to review the transcript of their interview to ensure that the transcription is accurate, and that the intended perception of the participant was interpreted sufficiently by the researcher.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES OR TREATMENTS, IF ANY, THAT MIGHT BE ADVANTAGEOUS TO SUBJECT:

NA

LENGTH OF STUDY: The interviews will last approximately one and one-half hours with possible follow-up questions via telephone or e-mail during the final data analysis stage.

RISKS ANTICIPATED: None

BENEFITS ANTICIPATED: This study will provide the participants a sense of accomplishment. Foster children that succeed seem to be rare, and these students in this study will be identified as a success story.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY: Confidentiality related to all aspects of the data collected from each participant will be strictly maintained. The researcher will conduct the interview in a private location. The respondent will be asked to select a pseudonym to be used in labeling the data collection materials as well as in the transcript and final version of the research. The recording of the interview will be heard by only the transcriptionist, the third party reviewer, and the researcher. The transcripts of the interview will be seen by only the transcriptionist, the researcher, and the third party reviewer. All data collection materials will be stored in a secure location. There is the potential that this research will be submitted for publication following the successful defense of the dissertation. In this case, the identity of the participants will continue to remain confidential.

IS COMPENSATION OR MEDICAL TREATMENT AVAILABLE IF INJURY OCCURS: This study has zero risk involved.

PARENTAL APPROVAL FOR MINORS: All participants will be over the age of 18.

TERMS OF PARTICIPATION: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is completely voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

(Remember that it is a requirement for the P.I. to maintain a signed and dated copy of the same consent form signed and kept by the participant

Participant Name: _____

Participant Signature: _____   Date: _____

Witness to Signature: (project staff) _____   Date: _____

Appendix D - Interview Worksheet

Name:_____
              First Name   Middle Name   Last Name

Pseudonym:_____
              A fictitious name you select in order to retain confidentiality

Date of Birth:_____   **Age**:_____
              YYYYMMDD

Date of Entry into Foster Care: _____
                                    YYYYMM
Date of Exit from Foster Care: _____
                                    YYYYMM
Address:_____

_____

Telephone Number:_____
                     (xxx) xxx-xxxx
E-mail Address:_____

Highest Level of Education:_____

Did you reside in a foster home or a group home or both? (circle one or more)

Foster Home   Group Home   Both

Home many foster homes/group homes did you reside in? _____

List your foster homes/group homes and dates of residence (beginning with most recent)

1) _____
              City & State of Residence   From: YYYYMM   To: YYYYMM
2) _____
              City & State of Residence   From: YYYYMM   To: YYYYMM
3) _____
              City & State of Residence   From: YYYYMM   To: YYYYMM

Did you read and understand the Informed Consent Form? (circle one & initial) YES NO

_____
Initials

Appendix E - Interview Protocol

The interview protocol is a guide used to assist the researcher in conducting the interviews. Conducting interviews is taxing, especially for inexperienced researchers engaged in studies that require extensive interviewing (Creswell, 2007).

Statement of Purpose

> The purpose of this study is the discovery of strengths and emerging possibilities in foster care and the conditions that make them possible.

Research Questions

> The following research questions guided this study:

1) How do foster children describe the benefits of being in foster care?

2) What positive influences did the foster care system have on foster children during their time-in care?

3) How does the foster care system assist foster children in becoming self-sufficient adults upon exiting?

4) Do the educational benefits foster children receive after exiting foster care assist foster children in becoming self-sufficient adults? How do these benefits assist them?

5) What are some ways foster parents use their strength, skills, and talents in developing foster children?

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. I will be recording and transcribing what we discuss today. Once our conversation has been transcribed, I will have you review the transcription to ensure that it is accurate. It is extremely important that the transcription be verbatim, so I do not unintentionally paraphrase our dialogue. **Please remember, you do not have to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable.**

Interview Questions

    The following interview questions will be asked to each participant:

1) Please tell me about yourself and why you were placed into foster care. Please also discuss if you have lived in multiple foster homes.

2) I want you to remember a time while in foster care that you felt good. This may have been a good day, week, or month. This may have been something a foster parent or adult did for you or something you spoke about with another person. Please explain this time.

3) How were your foster parents able to assist you in becoming a self-sufficient adult, and how were they able to successfully develop you and prepare you for life after foster care?

4) What particular strengths, skills, and/or talents did your foster parents bring into your life?

5) Social inclusion is extremely important. Think of a time during foster care where you felt like you were a part of a group and you felt accepted. Think of a time when you felt you had control over something that positively assisted you. Please explain this time.

6) Developing your own strength and skill sets are important. Remember a time, while in foster care, that you went out and achieved something. This can be something big or small (i.e. attaining a good grade, an award you received, getting accepted into college). Please explain this.

7) Do the educational benefits that you received after exiting foster care assist you in becoming a self-sufficient adult? If so, how do these benefits assist you right now? Do you link these benefits as a tool to help you succeed?

8) If you could change three things with your foster care experience, what would those three things be, and please explain them?

9) How has your foster care experience enabled you to better utilize your strengths, skills, and talents?

10) What did you enjoy most about being in foster care?

11) Is there anything else you would like to share?

Conclusion

Thank you for your time.