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Understanding Campus Support Programs: How Universities Are Assisting Foster Care Alumni in Achieving Success

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Understanding Campus Support Programs: How Universities Are Assisting Foster Care Alumni

in Achieving Success

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Philip and Maryann Wilson. Thank you both for teaching me at a young age how to share my home and my heart with children from foster care. You both are living examples of acceptance and love at its finest. You have made a positive difference in the lives of so many children in need by providing them a loving home. Your roles as foster parents inspired my research and shaped my life for the better.

Love, Bonnie

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Abstract

Young adults with foster care experience encounter a number of challenges related to obtaining a college degree. To assist this population in reaching their academic goals, many colleges and universities have created campus-based support programs with an array of services, ranging from financial aid to mentorship. However, little is known about how these programs are designed or implemented, or how effectively they are meeting the needs of this population. This dissertation sought to build upon previous research that examined the barriers faced by former foster children who are pursuing a college degree. Additionally, it sought to contextualize previous literature on the effectiveness of support programs in promoting academic success. This exploratory study employed a mixed-methods design that primarily focused on qualitative data, gathered through in-depth interviews with both former foster youth pursuing a degree and with administrators of campus-based support programs. In addition to qualitative data, this study elicited quantitative data in the form of survey responses from foster youth. The survey questions focused on the protective and resiliency factors used by this population to succeed, along with data on academic success in the form of grade point averages. The qualitative data in this study found campus-based support was considered accessible and utilized by students, but it was not the only resource that foster care alumni relied on to succeed. The qualitative data also confirmed the importance of having a program specifically designed to meet the needs of former foster youth. Both student participants and program administrators spoke of the effectiveness of engagement in campus-based support however, quantitative data gathered in this study did not show the use of campus-based or community-based support had a significant influence on academic performance.

<div align="center">**Introduction**</div>

Purpose of the Study

The lack of published data surrounding the supports and services offered to foster youth on university campuses has prevented researchers and policymakers from being able to fully address the unmet needs of this population. The goal of this study is to contribute to filling gaps in the literature about on-campus support programs intended to assist foster care alumni and identify the areas of research that call for further examination. This dissertation is guided by three separate research goals. The first goal is to evaluate the array of services offered at different four-year public universities in both Michigan and Florida. To achieve this research goal, in-depth interviews were conducted at eight different universities with administrators of campus-based support programs. The second goal assess the student characteristics that former foster youth relied on to achieve their academic goals, specifically their protective and resilience factors. This portion of the study also assessed academic data to evaluate whether an association exists between fostered youth s utilization of support services and their academic success. The final goal of this study was to examine access to and utilization of support services from the viewpoint of former foster youth themselves. This portion of the study explored the sources of support these youth rely on and allowed foster youth to describe how they overcome barriers and define success in their own words.

Background and Significance

As of 2017, approximately 442,995 children were living in foster care in throughout the United States (Health & Services, 2018). According to federally-gathered data, about 19,954

young adults either aged out or were emancipated from the foster system in 2019 (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2018). After exiting the system, many of these young adults find themselves facing homelessness, incarceration, unemployment, poverty, and other negative life outcomes (Courtney, 2009). The long-term outcomes for many young adults who spent a considerable about of time in foster care are less than desirable, and despite all of the challenges they face, nearly 20 of former foster youth will enroll in postsecondary education (Rios & Rocco, 2014). Although attending higher education is the goal of nearly two-thirds of foster youth, we know that only a small fraction of them will matriculate to a college or university

(Rios & Rocco, 2014). However, only 2 to 10 of former foster youth who enroll will graduate with a degree (Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010). The percentage of former foster youth that earn a degree is far below the 33 of Americans age 25 or older who report having completed a bachelor s degree (Ryan & Bauman, 2016). This large gap between the desire to pursue higher education and enrollment in postsecondary education for foster care youth stems from lack of educational preparedness, insufficient financial aid, and the absence of adult support (Blome, 1997 Dworsky & Perez, 2010 Lovitt & Emerson, 2009 Wolanin, 2005). To help mitigate some of the challenges faced by fostered youth in their pursuit of higher education, and to aid in the disparity between traditional young adults and those with foster care experience the federal government and individual states have enacted several financial programs to help lessen the cost of college. Additionally, schools have created support services and programs to aid students in adjusting to college life, living independently, and becoming academically successful.

Barriers to Higher Education for Alumni of Foster Care

Youth and young adults with a history of foster care have many barriers to overcome when considering higher education. Historically, youth and young adults in foster care have

encountered educational disadvantages at a disproportional rate (Courtney, 2009). Among those barriers is completion of primary and secondary education according to estimates, 30-50   of foster care youth fail to complete high school (Blome, 1997 Courtney et al., 2007). The negative trajectory of educational accomplishment for foster youth can be attributed to several factors, such as frequent changes in school placement, attendance at lower-performing schools, higher enrollment in special education, and lack of family support (Kinarsky, 2017 Yvonne A. Unrau, Font, & Rawls, 2012).

Another reason why former foster youth fail to pursue higher education is the enormous financial obligation that attending college can bring. For most foster youth, the financial responsibilities of college seem unattainable (Davis, 2006). To ease the financial burden of higher education for former foster youth, federal and state policymakers have created several financial programs to assist this population. The Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program was initiated in 2001 as an amendment to the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act of 1999. The ETV Program allows current and former foster youth who are attending higher education to access up to   5,000 in voucher funds per year. In addition to federal funding programs, many states offer state-specific financial programs. While state and federal governments have made financial resources available to help youth in foster care attend higher education, one study found that financial assistance alone did not prove sufficient for supporting these youth in attending college (Day, Dworsky, Fogarty, & Damashek, 2011).

Campus Support for Alumni of Foster Care

Colleges and universities have designed on-campus support programs specifically to assist students with foster care experience, with the overall aim to assist foster care alumni in overcoming obstacles, pursue higher education, and successfully graduate (Kinarsky, 2017).

The services offered by these programs vary by institution, but range from financial support, housing, tutoring, and mental health services. One study (Geiger, Piel, Day, & Schelbe, 2018) provided a descriptive analysis of campus-based support programs for foster care alumni, which included 22 different states and survey data from 81 program directors. The results showed that most campus-based support programs offered assistance in the areas of financial aid, housing, mental health, and social support. An additional study examined the perceived value of campus-based support (Yvonne A Unrau, Dawson, Hamilton, & Bennett, 2017) and found that while campus support is valuable to students, it was not sufficient in closing the graduation gap between fostered youth and non-fostered peers. One of the first programs to support former foster youth was the Seita Scholars Program at Western Michigan University. This program published collected data on retention rates, grade point averages, and graduation rates (Seita, 2001). The study found that youth with foster care experience were graduating at a rate below other high-risk student populations. Several studies have explored the barriers faced by foster care alumni prior to college and during their transition to young adulthood (Rios & Rocco 2014). Other studies have examined the struggles these youth must overcome to succeed in higher education and complete a degree (Day, Dworsky, Fogarty & Damashek 2011). While data exist on the components of various campus-based support programs, there is little data on the impact these programs have on academic success. In addition, many of these programs are created in the absences of user s input.

Justification for the Study

When children enter the foster care system, it means they have been the victims of abuse, trauma, or neglect, leaving them to face a myriad of life challenges. Over the past two decades, a significant amount of research has evaluated the issues encountered by youth living in the foster care system and transitioning out of care (Day, Dworsky, Feng 2013).

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There has been far less data produced on the educational pathways that youth from foster care take after high school, specifically in regard to their experiences in college or the challenges they face as independent young adults. Our federal government and individual states have set up financial aid programs to help these young adults achieve their educational goals. To assist them while enrolled in postsecondary education, institutions of higher learning have developed campus-based support programs. These programs tackle the unique needs of former fostered youth and provide support in areas such as financial aid, housing, tutoring, mental health, and social networking. One drawback of these programs is that they are developed and implemented without the contributions or perspectives of former foster youth themselves. There is a gap in the literature surrounding the voices or lived experiences of fostered youth in college. In addition, there is insufficient research on the strengths and barriers of these campus-based support programs in assisting former foster youth. There is also a lack of research on these programs effectiveness at increasing the academic success of those who are utilizing them. This study attempts to fill these gaps in the literature by exploring the services offered to foster youth on university campuses. This research was conducted through in-depth interviews with administrators of campus-based support programs and former foster youth using the services. This research method allowed program administrators to explain firsthand the strengths and barriers of their programs, while providing a valuable perspective on what they believe to be the core needs of these young people. In addition, this study includes the voices and perspectives of former foster youth to gain an understanding of their experiences and views on support. Lastly, using survey data, this study assessed which services these youth were using and the association between the use of these services and their academic success.

Research Design

To appropriately fill the gaps in the literature surrounding the missing viewpoints and perspectives of program administrators and students, this study employed two different qualitative research methods. To complete the third research goal, which examined students utilization of support services and its association with academic success, this study used survey data to perform descriptive and correlational analysis.

Research Aims

Aim 1. Contribute to gaps in the literature about on-campus support programs intended to assist foster care alumni. More specifically, to evaluate the array of services offered at different four-year public universities in both Michigan and Florida.

Research Questions.

1. What are the specific support services offered to foster care alumni at various four-year universities

2. How are these support programs created, implemented, and delivered to students

3. What are the perceived impacts of engagement in support programs for former foster care alumni

Aim 2. Add to the literature through survey data collected from youth who were participating in campus support programs at four-year universities in two states, and to assess the utilization rate of support services and their association with academic success.

Research Questions.

1. What individual student characteristics and protective factors aid former foster youth in their pursuit of a college degree

2. What are the associations between the utilization of support services and the academic success of former foster youth

Aim 3. Describe and evaluate the access and utilization of on-campus support programs for former foster youth from the viewpoint of the youth themselves.

Research Questions

1. How do former foster youth learn of support on campus

2. What are former foster youth s perceptions of on-campus support, and what other forms of support do they rely on

3. How do former foster youth define academic success, and to what do they attribute their success

Overview of Methods

This dissertation employed a mixed-methods design. Addressing the first research aim entailed conducting telephone interviews with program administrators from the eight campus support programs in Michigan and Florida that participated in the study. The interview questions spanned several domains, including personnel characteristics and responsibilities, administrators qualifications, specific support services offered, the referral and recruitment process, barriers to services and support, effects of the services, and the data collection process. (Emerson & Bassett, 2010) At the start of this study, all university campuses had recently closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Knowing that this would impact the services being delivered to students, several interview questions were added to address the shift to distance learning and remote/virtual services. Program and administrative characteristics were collected from each participant at the start of the interview, and the results were reported in table format. The interviews with program administrators were analyzed using the general data analysis strategies outlined by (Creswell &

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Poth, 2016). Spiral analysis was employed as a guiding framework for this study. The analysis process began with transcribing each interview verbatim and then uploading the interview into ATLAS.ti in Cloud. An initial set of codes was created using open coding. After establishment of codes, the remainder of the interviews were coded. Following completion of the coding, the frequency of each code was counted, and the codes were ranked by importance. The codes were reduced to salient themes by examining them for interconnectedness. Each of the main axial themes is reported in detail in the results section, with supporting quotes from program administrators.

The address the research questions in the third aim, this study used descriptive and correlational analysis with survey data collected from student participants at eight different universities in Florida and Michigan. The survey was designed to collect descriptive data, including former foster youth s demographics and academic standing. The survey also measured students usage of campus-based and off-campus support services. To achieve a more holistic view of their experiences in foster care and the factors that influenced and supported their pursuit of a degree college, the survey included questions about their experience in foster care, employment status, pre-college education, and financial aid. To assess the presence of an association between engagement in support services and academic standing, the survey asked questions on both topics. To analyze the data collected in this study, a descriptive analysis was first used. Next, a correlational analysis was used to examine whether the possible association between the utilization of support services and academic success was statistically significant. All data were collected in Qualtrics and exported to SPSS, a statistical software used for analysis.

To accomplish the last research aim, a phenomenological research study design was chosen as the most fitting method to accurately answer the research questions.

The phenomenological approach to qualitative research allows the researcher to focus on the lived experiences of the participants, specifically on the participants perceptions of what influences their individual behaviors and attitudes. The data gathered in a phenomenological study are used to describe the essence of a phenomenon through the perceptions of the participants in terms of both *what* was experienced and *how* it was experienced (Moustakas, 1994 Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019) . The phenomenological design of this study allowed it to move beyond previously learned background data on the participants and make room for the current views and voices of the participants to guide the results (Creswell & Poth, 2016) .

The interview protocol consisted of 17 open-ended questions, with follow-up questions employed when necessary. The interview questions were divided into two main sections: access to support services and utilization of support services. Once all the data were collected, a three-pronged approach was used to fully evaluate the research questions. To complete this step, each transcript was reviewed for specific experiences and perceptions as well as significant phrases related to the research aim. Transcripts were then coded using a pattern coding method (Miles & Huberman, 1994) , which allowed for the grouping or summarizing of a larger set of codes into a smaller number of set codes that fit into themes. To account for trustworthiness, the data were reviewed twice, first by the researcher and then by a secondary coder, with the intent to control for bias and include analysis to create a narrative depiction of the participants attitudes and perceptions. After completion of the initial coding in ATLAS.ti Cloud, the next phase of the coding was completed as a two-person team. This phase involved examining the data across the established set of codes and their definitions. The data were searched for patterns and divided between salient themes.

Definition of Terms

Former Foster Youth. In this study, the term "former foster youth" refers to individuals who have spent time in foster care or as a ward of the state. This term is used to collectively describe youth with experience in foster care regardless of the amount of time spent there or their method of exit from state care. The terms foster alumni and fostered youth are also used as synonyms for former foster youth and their means are synonymous.

Campus-Based Support. These support programs are created at the institutional level and are not always specifically designed for foster youth. For example, some of the programs mentioned in this study cater to first-generation college students, low-income students, or students with disabilities. In addition, some of the services mentioned in this study are accessible by the general student body, such as mental health counseling and health or wellness services. In this study, the term "campus-based support" refers to supports or services offered to students on their college campus while attending college. Program services vary considerably and can include personal and academic counseling, financial assistance, housing, mentoring, transportation, social events, and other services provided by individual institutions.

Program Administrators. This term refers to individuals working at four-year public universities in both Florida and Michigan, at a campus-based support program, in an administrative role. While not all programs exclusively serve former foster youth, these administrators are responsible for providing support, overseeing the implementation of services, and acting as an administrative representative of their program or department.

Extended Foster Care. Extended foster care is one tool that individual states can choose to employ to lessen negative life outcomes for older foster youth. This is accomplished by providing older youth with the opportunity to receive services and establish permanent connections with supportive adults prior to leaving the foster care system.

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While most states offer some version of extended foster care, the services and eligibility requirements differ depending on the state. Extended foster care allows older youth to stay in care past age 18 and receive needed services and supports to aid in the transition to adulthood. Support services can include financial aid for postsecondary education, stipends for living expenses, continued supervision through case management, and Medicaid.

The Seven Life Domains. The Seven Life Domains framework (Emerson & Bassett, 2010) offers professionals, supportive adults, and students a concrete way to organize, understand, and develop a response to the complexity of the lives of students with experience in foster care who are transitioning into young adulthood through the college experience. This framework is the cornerstone of the campus-based support programs that are members of the Fostering Future Success consortium in Michigan.

The Department of Child and Families Tuition Waiver. Florida provides tuition and fee exemptions to eligible young adults. The waiver is authorized at state (public) universities, colleges (public) in the Florida College System, and school district workforce education programs. The tuition waiver is available to youth who are considered wards of the state at the age of 18 years, or who were adopted from state care after 1997, or who were at any time a ward of the state living in either relative or non-relative placement in the state of Florida.

Manuscripts

This dissertation was designed to aid in better understanding three separate questions. The first is, what are the specific support services offered to foster care alumni at various four-year universities The second is, how widely utilized are the support services designed to assist them in reaching their academic goals Lastly, what are former foster youth s perceptions of on-campus support, and what other forms of support do they rely on

The results of this dissertation are presented in the following three manuscripts.

1. *"Campus Services for Former Foster Youth: Viewpoints of Program Administrators."* This manuscript contributes to gaps in the literature about on-campus support programs intended to assist foster care alumni, with a specific aim of evaluating the array of services offered at different public universities.

2. *"Student Characteristics, Service Utilization, and Academic Success of Former Foster Care Youth."* This manuscript uses survey data collected from youth who were participating in campus support programs at four-year universities in two states and assesses the utilization rate of support services and their association with academic success.

3. *"Perspectives of Former Foster Youth on How to Succeed in Postsecondary Education."* This manuscript describes and evaluates access to and utilization of on-campus support programs for former foster youth from the viewpoint of the youth themselves.

Conclusions

The benefits of a college degree are well-documented (Wolanin, 2005). Researchers have demonstrated that young adults who complete at least a bachelor s degree have improved life outcomes beyond just financial ones (Courtney, 2009). They report an improved quality of life, fewer mental health concerns, less criminal involvement, less likelihood of substance use, and improved physical health. Thus, it is critical to make support and services available to assist former foster youth in obtaining higher education.

The results of this study describe some of the formal and informal supports and services that are offered to fostered youth and some of the challenges encountered in delivering them.

Additionally, this study examines the rate at which former foster youth are utilizing these services and their association with the youth s academic success. This study concludes that specific supports provided by campus-based programs, such as financial aid, housing, and mentorship, are viewed by former foster youth as vital and are relied upon frequently. This study also finds that additional research is needed to fully understand the effects these services are having on the youth and to what degree. Recommendations of the study include centering and incorporating the voices and concerns of fostered youth in the development and implementation of support services.

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Campus Services for Former Foster Youth: Viewpoints of Program Administrators

Target journal: *Children and Youth Services Review*

Secondary journal choice: *Research in Higher Education*

Abstract

Foster care alumni attend college at a much lower rate than their non-fostered peers. The youth that do overcome challenges and enroll in college often arrive with little to no support and face new barriers once they are students. Colleges and universities across the United States are responding to this concern with the development of campus-based support programs to assist this vulnerable population. This study sought to build on previous research which called for more comprehensive understanding of the barriers and strengths of current programs providing support to former foster youth on college campuses. This study relied in-depth interviews with program administrators at eight different universities in Florida and Michigan. The interviews provided the administrators perception of the strengths and barriers to their programs. They also provided descriptive information on program characteristics and the methods used for delivering services. Results emphasized the importance of having a program specifically designed to meet the needs of former foster youth. The results also create a foundation for a discussion about future research and program development that most effectively meet the need of former foster youth in college.

Introduction

The economic benefits of a college education are well documented (Wolanin 2005). In contrast, studies that have examined life outcomes for former foster youth have found an association between lacking a college degree and negative life outcomes (Courtney, 2009). Young adults who graduate with at least a bachelor's degree earn significantly more than those with less education. Moreover, graduating from college has been shown to produce more benefits than monetary gains (Courtney 2009). Therefore, postsecondary education should be the goal for most, if not all youth, and those with experience in the foster care system are no exception. However, data show that youth who have spent time as wards of the state are far less likely to graduate from college (Courtney & Hook, 2017 Dworsky & P rez, 2010 Kirk & Day, 2011). In fact, foster youth who have spent at least one year as a ward of the court after age 13 are among America s most disadvantaged in terms of attending and completing higher education (Wolanin, 2005).

In a midwestern study of foster care alumni, 70   reported a desire to attend college, yet only 2   had earned a bachelor s degree (Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010 Wolanin, 2005). In contrast, a recent report released by the U.S. Census Bureau stated 33   of Americans overall who are 25 years or older reported having completed a bachelor s degree or higher (Ryan & Bauman, 2016). For foster youth who beat those odds and enroll in college, less than 10   persist and graduate with a degree (Rios & Rocco, 2014). Disruptions to persistence and barriers to graduation can be attributed to the myriad challenges former foster youth encounter. Studies show foster care alumni enrolled in higher education experience challenges related to academic performance, housing, food insecurities, concerns with self-identity and social interactions, financial aid, mental health, and transportation (Kinarsky, 2017 Tobolowsky et al., 2019 Unrau et al., 2012).

While several studies have shed light on the financial benefits of a college degree and the obstacles that foster care alumni encounter when enrolling in higher education (Davis, 2006), very few have examined the supports available to young adults who do enroll in college and the effectiveness of these supports. This research gap in the research creates a problem for institutions of higher education, especially those that are attempting to create programs to assist former foster youth in being academically successful in college. Given all the benefits of a college degree, specifically for this vulnerable population, there is a need for greater information about program and intervention development. The purpose of this study is to examine the supports currently available to former foster youth and the method of delivery of those services from the viewpoint of program administrators.

Literature Review

Every year, there are nearly 800,000 children and adolescents who receive services through the foster care system in the United States (Health & Services, 2018), and 23,000 of those children will age out of that system. Many of the youth who age out or complete a transitional, independent living program have the desire to attend higher education (Children s Bureau, 2014). While attending higher education is the goal for nearly two-thirds of foster youth, only a small fraction of those will matriculate to a college or university (Rios & Rocco, 2014). Researchers have examined the reasons why there is such a large gap between the desire to attend higher education and enrollment in postsecondary education for foster care youth, and lack of educational preparedness is a primary reason (Blome, 1997 Wolanin, 2005).

Early Educational Barriers

According to the Pathways to College research study, conducted in 2005 and aimed at examining educational success factors for former foster care youth, 63.8 of the participants reported they felt unprepared by the foster care system to enter higher education (Merdinger et al., 2005). This feeling of being unprepared or performing "below level" can stem back to secondary and even primary school. Studies show youth in foster care experience lower scores on state standardized exams, are retained more often, and are placed in special education for academic or behavioral needs at a much higher rate (Courtney et al., 2001 Shin, 2003). These educational hurdles, coupled with the adverse childhood experiences these youth have faced, place them at risk of dropping out of high school at an alarming rate. Estimates vary depending on the study, but between 37 and 50 of foster care youth fail to complete high school (Blome, 1997 Courtney, 2009). This is due in part to the overwhelming number of school placements children in foster care encounter. For example, over one-third of 17- and 18-year-olds in the "Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth," a longitudinal study of foster youth in Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin, had changed schools five or more times due to changes in their foster care placement (Courtney, 2009). These school changes can have a negative effect on academic progress and may be one reason why graduation rates are lower and ultimately, why so few foster youth enroll in higher education.

Access to College

The child welfare system has traditionally focused on the areas of child safety and permanence. Since it has promoted these area as their main goal, education has become an afterthought rather than a focus for children and youth (Wolanin, 2005). This leaves many foster youth without a support network or mentor to encourage them to seek higher education or to

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pursue career goals. A consistent finding in the literature is many resilient students who enroll in postsecondary education credit the involvement of some type of supportive parental figure, or positive adult guidance in their lives (Kirk et al., 2013). Foster youth without the benefit of mentorship are left to navigate the complex process of college selection, financial aid, completing applications, and enrollment on their own. This process can be daunting and anxiety-provoking for any young adult, but for those with no support system, it can prove too overwhelming, leaving many foster youth to abandon the idea of higher education all together (Unrau et al., 2012).

Another reason for the low enrollment in postsecondary education is many foster youth who are aging out of care feel the pressure of providing for their own basic living necessities such as food, money, health, and shelter these realities limit their ability to pursue higher education (Blome, 1997 Shin, 2003 Wolanin, 2005). For many foster youth who desire to attend higher education, the financial responsibilities of college seem unattainable (Davis, 2006). Even though under federal law, all youth who are considered wards or dependents of the state are entitled to "financial independence." These entitlements mean income from their parents or legal guardians will not affect their eligibility for aid under the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). However, most foster youth are unaware of the financial assistance available (Dworsky & Perez, 2009).

In response to the negative life outcomes for former foster youth and to assist with the barriers to post-secondary education, federal and state policymakers have created several financial programs to assist this population. The Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program was started in 2001 as an amendment to the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act of 1999. The ETV Program allows current and former foster youth who are attending higher education to access up to 5,000 in voucher funds per year.

In addition to federal funding programs, many states offer state-specific financial programs. These programs can be used in conjunction with an ETV and can be extended to cover costs not met by the federal program. Some of the costs not covered by tuition waivers include housing fees, medical expenses, books, transportation, and supplies (Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010 Unrau et al., 2012 Wolanin, 2005). State-specific funding varies greatly by state, and little is known about the impact of either state-specific funding or federal funding on enrollment or graduation rates (Dworsky & Perez, 2010). While state and federal governments have made financial resources available for youth in foster care to attend higher education, one study found that financial assistance alone was not sufficient in supporting these youth in attending college (Day et al., 2011).

For the nearly 20   of foster care alumni who overcome the challenges of navigating the system and enroll in higher education (Wolanin, 2005), many of them arrive with unique needs that student service personnel at most colleges and universities are not familiar with or prepared to address (Dworsky & P rez, 2010). Several studies have demonstrated the importance and benefits of on-campus support programs for this population (Dworsky & Perez, 2009 Kirk & Day, 2011 Unrau et al., 2012). Many foster youth enrolled in higher education are eligible to receive support services either for low-income students or students from first generation-in-college programs. While these students may fall into these categories, their additional needs as foster care alumni often go unmet. Previous literature has examined the barriers former foster youth encounter while earning a college degree (Rios & Rocco, 2014), the retention and graduation rates of this population (Day, 2011) and the successful components of a campus-based support program (Geiger et al., 2016). However, previous literature is missing the critical voice of the administrators who are charged with meeting the needs of this population and hearing firsthand what they believe to be most valuable to their students.

Purpose of the Present Study

There is a lack of published research surrounding the various forms support and the means of delivering services to foster youth on university campuses. Additionally, there is a lack of research surrounding the effective implementation of support programs and the academic impact these programs have. This research gap has prevented universities and policymakers from being able to fully address the needs of this population and prevented the design and implementation of effective programs on campuses. The goal for this study is to contribute to gaps in literature related to on-campus support programs aimed at assisting foster care alumni. Specifically, the aim is to evaluate the array of services offered at various four-year public universities in both Michigan and Florida, using three succinct research questions as a guide. The first questions was, what are the specific support services offered to foster care alumni at various four-year universities Next, how are these support programs created, implemented, and delivered to students Lastly, what are the perceived impacts of engagement in support programs for former foster care alumni from the viewpoint of support program administrators

Methods

Sample

The target population for this study is academic directors of programs for foster youth. To reach this population, information regarding the study was sent to all four-year, public universities in both Michigan and Florida. The points of contact for universities in Michigan were listed on the state of Michigan s student aid website. The contact persons at universities within Florida were found on the Florida Department of Education website. Of the 15 schools in the Michigan Association of State Universities (MASU), five agreed to participate in this study. Of the 12 schools in the State University System of Florida, three agreed to participate.

Data Collection

First an interview guide was developed which included three areas of questions: administrator/program background, types of supports offered, and data collection. Then pilot test of the initial draft of the interview guide was administered to two individuals who have experience working for campus support programs in administrative roles. The pilot participants were each asked to read through the interview questions and then provide verbal feedback on what they believed the questions to be asking. After the pilot test, several interview questions were altered to elicit responses that more aligned with the research questions. Additionally, questions were added to the interview guide to include responses from program administrators whose programs were not exclusively for former foster youth.

The researcher conducted telephone interviews with program administrators from the eight campus support programs in Michigan and Florida who participated in the study. Each interview took approximately 45-60 minutes to complete and used a semi-structured, open interviewing framework. The interview questions spanned several domain areas, including personnel characteristics and responsibilities, administrator s qualifications, specific support services offered, referral and recruitment process, barriers to service and support, impact of the services, and data collection process. At the start of this study, all university campuses had recently closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Knowing that this would impact the services being delivered to students, several interview questions were added to address the shift to distance learning and remote/virtual services. With the interviewer s consent, each interview was audio recorded.

Analysis

Program and administrative characteristics were collected from each participant at the start of the interview these results are reported in Table 1.

If responses during the interview pertained to program or administrator characteristics they were extracted and inputted into Microsoft Excel for totaling. Qualitative data collected through interviews with program administrators were analyzed using the general data analysis strategies recommended by Creswell and Poth (2016). Thematic analysis was employed as a guiding framework for this study. This method was chosen because of its ability to describe patterns across the data. Thematic analysis, "reports the experiences, meanings and the reality of the participants and organizes them into patterns" (Braum and Clarke, 2006, p.81). The analysis process began with transcribing each interview verbatim and then uploading the interview into ATLAS.ti in Cloud. Field notes that were taken during the interviews were also included in the coding. An initial set of codes was created using open coding, and codes were created under three categories: (a) role of administrator and programmatic components, (b) needs, services, and method of delivery, and (c) impacts and data. With the assistance of another researcher, each code was defined, and four of the interviews were co-coded to achieve an acceptable level of inter-rater reliability. Once a set of codes was agreed upon, the remainder of the interviews were coded. After the coding was complete, the frequency of each code was counted. The importance of each code was ranked by their frequency. After examining the relationships between the different codes and looking for interconnectedness, the most salient themes emerged. Each of the main, axial themes is reported in detail with supporting quotes from program administrators.

Results

Program Characteristics

The first aim of this study was descriptive in nature and sought to explain the array of services offered through campus-support programs and the means of delivering them.

Eight universities were included in this study. All were four year-public universities in Michigan (5) or Florida (3). Of the participating universities, half had programs exclusively for former foster youth. The remaining half included universities with support programs that serviced former foster youth along with other student populations (low-income, first-generation, or students with disabilities). Five of the program administrators recruited students prior to admissions. Program administrators reported that they were informed by various sources within their universities or local communities about applicants with foster care experience. Administrators reached out to potential students prior to enrollment informing them of their program and helping with financial aid, housing, and enrollment paperwork. Seven of the program administrators reported that they recruited either only after enrollment or both prior to and after enrollment. Only one participant reported that no time did their university recruit students for support, on the bases of their previous foster care experience status.

More than two-thirds of the participating universities were considered large institutions with a student population over 25,000. Two of the universities had a student population between 10,000-25,000, and only one university had less than 10,000 students. All participating universities had funding in place to cover the cost of tuition and fees for former foster youth. This funding came from a mix of state tuition waivers, federally provided Educational Training Vouchers (ETV), private scholarships and institutional funding. The funding for support programs included a mix of funding, two of the universities received state funding, seven universities reported receiving grant funding and private donations but all the universities received institutional support. Most schools utilized support from a combination of funding sources. Much of the cost to cover the physical space of programs came from in-kind contributions from the universities.

Another contribution from institutions was the partnership of additional services offered by university-funded departments or programs, such as The Office of Student Support. All the participating programs reported that they collaborated with other programs on-campus to assist in meeting the needs of their participants.

The services offered to students varied depending on the university. Respondents with support programs exclusively for former foster youth offered a more holistic approach to services and support. Program administrators with programs that included multiple student populations tended to be academically driven and referred students out for services   than offering them within the program. All the programs included in the study offered resource referral, and seven offered financial assistance (outside of tuition and fees) and career counseling. Seventy-five percent of programs reported hosting social events, and 62   reported offering emotional support and assistance with year-round housing. Half of the participating programs helped with personal care and food using food pantries and personal care supply closets. Two of the programs included in the study helped with transportation in the form of bus or metro passes. While many of the participating universities have on-campus transportation available to students, these programs helped with transportation off-campus as well. In the wake of COVID-19, all the participating universities had to close their physical program locations however, at the time of the interviews, seven had begun offering services through remote or virtual capabilities. The program characteristics are shown in Table 1.

The responsibilities of the program administrators interviewed for this study varied. Two of the program administrators held professor/teaching positions within the university, in addition to assisting fostered youth. In contrast, six of the participants held an administrative staff position within their universities without faculty responsibilities.

Four of the program directors reported having direct interactions or involvement with former foster youth, the other half reported that their responsibilities and interactions with former foster youth were limited to an administrative role.

Seventy-five percent of those interviewed held a master s degree, and 25 held a doctorate degree. The participants fields of study varied, with four having a degree in Social Sciences, mostly Social Work or Clinical Mental Health Therapy, three had a degree in the field of Education, either Educational Administration or Higher Education. One participant had a degree in Business Administration and had focused on not-for-profit businesses. Half of the participants reported having previous experience prior to this position working with foster care youth, either as social workers or in a public child welfare setting. Eighty-seven percent of those interviewed were women, and only one male program administrator was interviewed. Lastly, 75 of the program administrators interviewed responded that they felt that the needs of foster care youth on their campuses were being met. The characteristics of program administrators is shown in Table 2.

Perceptions of Campus Support Programs

Through a structured qualitative analysis of the responses given by program administrators, several salient themes emerged as overarching components to program importance and effectively meeting the needs of foster care alumni on-campus. The main themes and sub-themes are shown in Table 3.

Types of Services and Method of Delivery

Seven Life Domains. Half of the participating program administrators explained that their programs were based on the Seven Life Domains framework (Casey Family Program, 2001). These programs rely on a specific framework to guide the services offered.

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The seven domains are centered around education as the focus and are key for organizing the services these programs view as essential in preparing young adults with foster care experience for adulthood. The seven domains include: education, life skills, housing, physical and mental health, relationships and personal identity (Day, Schmidt, Unrau 2017). In practice, the Seven Life Domains framework is explained in an implementation manual to be used by program directors, supportive staff, and students (Emerson & Bassett, 2010). The framework serves as a concrete way to organize, understand, and develop services to respond to the unique needs of undergraduates with experience in foster care. The goal is to assist these students in the process of transitioning into young adulthood through a supportive college experience. For the programs that utilized the Seven Life Domains Framework, their services appeared noticeably similar. For example, all the prescribing programs offered similar coaching methods for the instruction of the domains to students. All the programs that ascribed to this framework mentioned it as the backbone of their program and appeared well-versed in the different domains. One administrator said, "We use the seven life domains, and well, all of our coaching is done around it."

Academic Services. Program administrators were each asked about the specific services their programs offered and the methods through which those services were delivered. While the amount of services varied greatly from program to program, services offered by all were academic support and academic advising. With regard to academic advising, all of the participating administrators said that their programs collaborated with academic advisors on-campus, but over half of the programs partnered with faculty mentors that volunteered their services and assisted fostered youth in choosing courses, monitoring progress, and setting career and academic goals. Academic assistance or tutoring was delivered to students by several means.

Some programs collaborated with academic services on campus and utilized learning labs at the on-campus library or student service center. Other programs used peer-to-peer tutoring or faculty members. One program even covered the cost of outside tutoring. Several of the administrators commented on the importance of keeping the students within their program "on-track" academically. Over half of administrators mentioned that students were reluctant to ask for academic assistance until, in many cases, it was "too late", and the students were struggling to complete their coursework. This prompted administrators to begin checking in with students, and one of the criteria on program check-in lists was academic standing. This requires students to engage with professors and self-monitor their class performance. Many respondents mentioned that this requirement on the check-in list, is what led to the creation of academic advising partnerships. One participant said, "Well, we offer, first, academic support, which includes tutoring, helping them to have conversation with the faculty member that is going to assist them. It has to be a good fit to be helpful."

    Financial Assistance. Another common support offered was financial assistance to students, which differed across institutions. Five of the eight program administrators stated that their programs offered financial assistance specifically for former foster youth in the form of yearly scholarships. These scholarships could be used to cover costs outside of tuition and school fees, such as housing, books, or meal plans. Florida is a tuition-waiver state. This means that a waiver issued by the state of Florida can be used to cover the cost of in-state tuition and fees at any state college or university. Eligibility for the waiver is not based on years spent in foster care or the age of exit from state care. One of the program administrators in Florida said their school did not have a scholarship program to cover expenses outside of tuition specifically for former foster youth. However, when she knew one of the applicants was an alumna of the system, she always made sure to make a note of the student's involvement in foster care on their application.

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The administrator then recommended the student be highly considered for financial assistance by the scholarship board. Michigan is not a tuition-waiver state for fostered youth, but it does offer scholarships and financial aid packages set up to specifically to assist students who have spent time in foster care. A Michigan administrator stated that money to cover tuition is not usually a concern for students in her program. She went on to clarify that paying for "all the extra costs, like rent, utilities, etc.." was what her students worried about.

All participants reported having some form of emergency funds for former foster youth. These emergency funds were provided mostly by alumni or private donations and sometimes institutional contributions. These funds cover unexpected costs that youth without assistance from family might otherwise be unable to pay, such as cell phone bills, food, or toiletries. In the wake of COVID-19, program emergency funds were reported as being critical for students who were forced to leave campus housing or who s on-campus jobs have temporarily ended. One participant stated that each of her students was receiving a prepaid gift card to cover extra expenses incurred by the pandemic and that those cards were being provided by an emergency relief fund. Another respondent in Florida said the following:

> "When students come to me and ask me to cover something that the traditional student would ask their parents for, like gas money or money to fix their laptop, that is what I use emergency funds for. I have a certain amount I can use at my discretion each semester, and I kind of know which students really need it."

Essential Needs. All the program administrators who were interviewed reported that their university offers some form of year-round housing for undergraduates who require it. Three of the programs offer stipends to cover rent over the summer months for students that live off campus, because their housing aid only covers the academic year.

Other programs had specific dormitories for undergraduates that remained open year-round with access to campus food options. Seven of the eight program administrators said that students could choose if they wanted to live on or off campus, and there was assistance for either option. Only one program required students to reside on campus. To meet the need of food insecurities among student participants, programs offered discounted or no-cost on-campus meal plans. This was discussed in the interviews by two administrators, in similar ways. They spoke of an agreement that had been arranged between the program and the campus housing office. Administrators also mentioned that scholarship funds provided by the support programs could be used to purchase meal plans. For students living off-campus, some programs offered gift cards to local grocery stores. In fact, when one of the administrators was interviewed, she was at a local grocery store buying prepaid cards to distribute to program participants who were unable to access the cafeteria because of COVID-19 closures.

Half of the administrators also mentioned that their schools or programs operated a food pantry on campus. Some of the respondents talked at length about their schools food pantries, which were also called supply or needs closets. One respondent in Michigan said, "We have a supply closet within our office that has food and personal care items. Students can come whenever they want and take what they need, no questions asked." Two of the administrators that mentioned they offered a food pantry on campus stated that it was intended for all students with need, not only foster alumni. The other two administrators said that their food closets were located in their program offices and were only for program participants. All the respondents who mentioned the food or supply pantries said that they were proud of the support they received from local agencies and donations to keep them stocked.

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Mental and Physical Health. All respondents reported that mental health services and physical wellness services were handled through referrals to either on-campus or off-campus providers. They also recognized the need for high-quality, effective mental health services for their students. Four of the respondents specifically acknowledged that former foster youth have been the victim of some form of abuse or neglect at some point in their lives, and many have lived trauma-laced lives. The administrators spoke about the understanding that childhood trauma does not disappear when students enroll in college if anything, it can be exacerbated by the stress and pressures of collegiate life. One administrator from Michigan said, "We know that they come to us with baggage and unresolved issues. How can they not " Several administrators expressed frustration about the long waits that students were given to see a counselor on-campus. Others complained about arranging for students to see mental health providers and the students not following through with these services. Overall, many of the administrators said that they felt their students viewed them as their unofficial counselor and often came to them with their personal issues or concerns. One respondent stated, "I am a licensed mental health counselor, and I know I am not my students therapist, but sometimes I need to be because I am someone they trust, and that is a big thing for these kids."

Program Development

Core Population. The programs represented in this study varied with regard to their core populations. While five of the programs were created to exclusively serve those with foster care experience, others focused on low-income students, first-generation students, or students with disabilities, with the occasional undergraduate with foster care experience folded in. It is correct to assume that fostered youth might fall into one of these categories as well, but this leaves a myriad of unique needs that may go unattended. The understanding or knowledge of these

unique needs is what led most of the administrators or university departments to create a program exclusively for this population. Four of the administrators who participated had a background working with the foster care system and either sought out or created a program at the university that would continue to service fostered youth. One administrator who also serves as a social work professor wrote a state-funded grant for a proposed pilot program that would service high-risk student populations. This program administrator was from Michigan and had previously worked in a public child welfare agency. She was aware of the vulnerability of foster care youth on college campuses. "I was shocked to learn that we did not have a program here to support them, and I knew I needed to start something." The intrinsic need to assist this population of students is what led to the creation many of these administrators programs. While only one of the participants from this study was responsible for starting their program, three respondents whose universities did not have programs exclusively for former fostered youth recognized the need and stated that they had the desire to start programs at their schools. Two of those study participants were in the process of forming a committee to begin a program at the time of the interviews. One administrator explained that her program began as a scholarship program supported by a private philanthropist who was particularly moved by the needs of foster care youth and felt motivated to assist them. That school s program was created out of the collective desires of several individuals at the university to have financial assistance for fostered youth. The private funding was coupled with the interventions laid out in the Seven Life Domains framework to create the program that is operating today. The overall takeaway from respondents to this area of questioning was, while not all schools have a program specifically for former foster youth, all respondents recognized the benefits one would offer and acknowledged this population has unique needs that may not be fully met by other support services on-campus.

Program Barriers

Unfamiliar to Faculty. The program administrators were asked in the interview what they perceive to be their program s largest barrier. While two of the administrators reported that they felt their programs were well-known on campus, the other six reported that their unfamiliarity amongst faculty and staff was one of their largest barriers. One respondent in Michigan stated that, even though her program has existed for several years, she is still surprised by how often staff will tell her that they had no idea the school offered this type of assistance. Administrators also stated that the lack of awareness of on-campus support was a barrier to recruiting students. One administrator in Florida said, "I can t help humans I don t even know exist on my campus. Unless I am made aware that they are students, I can t reach out and offer assistance." Another participant from a school in Michigan without a program exclusively for former foster youth stated, "Often, a student will come to me for assistance with tutoring or another need, and I will find out later they are also in extended foster care."

Administrators were not definite on where the breakdown in referral or familiarity with support services stemmed from. A few mentioned the need for more collaboration between specific university offices such as Admissions and Financial Aid. Beyond that, most felt it was their responsibility to do more to get the word out about the services offered. Three participants acknowledged a need for a contact person in some university departments, such as housing, financial aid, and the counseling center. They felt a point of contact with someone who was familiar with the services offered and needs of this population would aid this dilemma greatly.

Student Engagement. Another common program barrier was maintaining student engagement. Several administrators reported students were not responsive or interested in engaging in services beyond financial aid.

Each participant was asked why they felt that students who were contacted about services declined to use them. Four stated that the stigma of being a foster youth kept them from engaging. The others mentioned that the students felt that they did not need assistance or did not want the intrusiveness of what felt like another case manager. Some of the administrators said that students would reappear after a year or so and ask if it was still possible to engage in services. One respondent said, "Sometimes they come back when they realize they can t do everything on their own."

Eligibility Requirements. A few administrators mentioned that they felt their programs rigid eligibility requirements were a barrier to offering services to students. These administrators had encountered students who had experience with foster care but had found permanent placements or guardianships after age 13, regardless of the quality of those placements. Those administrators felt that the services would have benefited those students but due to the eligibility requirements of their program, they were unable to include them in their programs. Another example given by a different respondent was that she had encountered several youth who were in and out of foster care during their childhoods but were ultimately adopted by a relative. That adoption in Michigan made them ineligible to receive financial assistance from the state, but they still very much needed support to succeed in college. These administrators felt program benefits should be extended to any youth who had spent time in foster care and did not have family support for college, regardless of how long they had been in care or at what age they entered or exited. For this reason, a few of the respondents stated that they informally assisted certain students and included them in their programs. One respondent from Florida said, "If a student comes to me for help and I think they need it, I am not going to turn them away."

Lack of Funding. Six of the eight administrators reported that funding was one of the main barriers for their programs. Several participants admitted feeling burdened by the idea that they could not offer more financial support to their students, especially when they knew some of their students had unmet needs. Administrators in both Florida and Michigan expressed additional concerns about some of the unmet financial needs that students have recently encountered with their campuses closing for COVID-19. For example, students who had on-campus jobs no longer have that source of income, and students who were reliant on school cafeterias are forced to make alternative arrangements for meals.

Some administrators mentioned feeling as if their programs were underfunded because they were not viewed as a priority by their institutions. Others stated that they could not effectively carry out the responsibilities of their programs without the necessary staff to do so. One participant stated, "I would like to have a program that was able to offer more individualized services, but I am just one person," and another administrator for a program that serves fostered youth exclusively said:

> I used to be able to do more and help more students because I had another person that I worked with, but she moved to Arizona a few weeks ago and I have no idea when she will be replaced.

Program Strengths

Collaboration. While participants were clear about what they perceived to be the challenges to their programs, they were even more confident about their programs strengths and benefits. All program administrators discussed the importance of collaboration and were proud of the connections that either their institution or their specific program had made with local support agencies within the community and other university departments. They viewed these partnerships to be the cornerstones of their own programs.

All the respondents recognized that they could not meet every need of their participants without the partnership of other programs on campus.

Five administrators said their universities have either campus mentors or campus coaches to assist students. These are staff positions within the foster youth program or offered through Student Affairs or the Student Wellness center. One school in Michigan recruits volunteers to fulfill what they refer to as "mentor" and "liaison" positions. The mentors are university faculty members who are willing to serve as one-on-one mentors to participants in the program and students choose from available mentors. All of the other universities assign program participants a mentor. The program liaisons are staff members within different departments and offices on campus who are given training on the specific needs of former foster youth. These positions were a large point of pride for this administrator, and she was happy to report that, on average, she had twice as many faculty volunteers as were needed each year, showing her school s willingness to assist.

Academic Impacts. All respondents with a program specifically for former foster youth felt their program positively impacted the academic success of their students. Administrators from schools without exclusive support programs, felt their school did offer assistance that would make an academic impact. Administrators felt students who advocated for their needs and sought out assistance by actively engaging in services fared better academically. Fifty percent (*n* 4) of respondents stated they collect academic data specifically on former foster youth, and all respondents stated their programs or universities collected academic data on low-income students, first-generation students, or students using tuition waivers. When respondents were asked if they felt moving entirely to distance learning due to campus closures from COVID-19 would negatively affect student performance, all said they felt it would negatively impact them.

One respondent stated that several of her students were really struggle academically since the move to distance learning, and several administrators knew of students who had dropped courses because of the switch.

Level of Engagement with Students. Each program administrator was asked several questions about their individual level of direct engagement with students. The administrator s responses were categorized by the researchers into two different categories of engagement, one being considered a personal, supportive relationship, which involved direct, personal interactions and offered adult guidance, and informal emotional support to the fostered youth. The other form of engagement was administrative, which lacked the personal interaction and dealt mainly with the administrative responsibilities of offering support. The participants responses were coded as either being personal or administrative in nature. Two administrators have a strictly administrative role with little interaction with students themselves, the other six administrators discussed an abundance of ways that they personally interacted and supported their students. For example, administrators mentioned attending events or appointments with them, helping them prepare for interviews or important meetings. Some administrators mentioned helping students shop for supplies for their dorm room or set-up when they first moved to campus. This level of engagement or supportive relationship started for many before the students even enrolled in the university. This was because potential students met the program administrators on a campus tour, or the administrator reached out to them personally during admissions to explain the school s services and offer to assist with the complexities of enrollment. These six administrators discussed the importance of building up trust with the students. They also discussed setting boundaries and the importance of helping their students become self-sufficient. They understood and hoped students would become less reliant on them as they progressed through college.

One administrator in Michigan said, "I want students to think of me as one of the first people they can call for help, but hopefully they come to learn I am not their only call." Another quote capturing the type of relationship these administrators have with students came from a respondent in Michigan who said, "There shouldn t be a problem that we get and that we just say, Oh, we can't do anything about this. I might not necessarily have the resources in-house, but I can find them. That s my job." It became clear administrators were passionate about the work they were doing and felt personally connected to these students. It was also clear administrators realized their interactions went far beyond their required duties, and they spoke about this aspect of their position in the highest regard.

Discussion

This exploratory study provides an overview of the on-campus services and supports that are offered to undergraduates with foster care experience. Most of these programs were created with the single mission of meeting the unique needs of former foster youth and helping them transition to adulthood while meeting their academic goals. Previously published research has identified the successful components of a foster youth support program (Dworsky & Perez, 2009 Emerson & Bassett, 2010 Geiger et al., 2016), and additional research has examined the academic impact that these support programs make (Day et al., 2011). Yet, more research is needed on the perceived needs of foster care alumni and the challenges to meeting those needs for the individuals responsible for assisting them. This study contributes to those gaps in the literature by providing a description of the services available to fostered youth along with the facilitators and barriers to delivering supportive services from the vantage point of those who oversee and implement these programs.

Researchers have explored the needs of former foster youth in terms of barriers to admission and enrollment in postsecondary education (Hines et al., 2005 Rios & Rocco, 2014). This research corroborates the findings of this study in terms of the importance of having a program specifically designed to meet the needs of former foster youth. With more understanding and data on the necessary components to effectively meet the needs of foster care alumni, universities might be able to better serve this vulnerable population.

Identifying Students

The specific support services that most programs offered addressed four main areas of need: academic support, financial support, assistance with essential needs, and referrals. The services being offered at many of the universities in this study are similar because they are built on an existing Seven Life Domains framework, with existing research attesting to its effectiveness. Previously published research has already laid out the successful components to developing an on-campus support system to assist foster youth (Emerson & Bassett, 2010 Geiger et al., 2016). While all but two of the administrators who participated in this study said that they were meeting the needs of foster care alumni on their campuses, one of the largest barriers reported was that their program was unknown to students and faculty on-campus. It is not uncommon for students or faculty at large universities to be unaware of all the available services or programs. Five of the universities in this study had a student enrollment of over 25,000, and three had an enrollment of over 45,000. This raises the question of how one program administrator can spread information among a student population of such great size about their services without having students fall through the cracks.

Several respondents in this study mentioned the use of collaboration with other offices or departments on campus and within the community. The program administrators in this study mentioned that specific offices on campus, such as Admissions and Financial Aid, were their pipeline for identifying potential participants. The literature refers to this process as cross-collaboration, and several researchers have suggested that a breakdown in cross-collaboration is how students are overlooked and therefore, remain unfamiliar about what services exist (Day et al., 2013 McMillen et al., 2003 Rassen et al., 2010). This study found that administrators who reported strong cross-collaboration on campus with the use of program liaisons and ongoing informative workshops with other university offices did not report an issue with recruitment or lack of program familiarity on-campus.

Mental Health

One finding that all program administrators in this study mentioned and that was consistent with the literature is the need for appropriate mental health services for students with foster care experience (Harris et al., 2009 Salazar, 2013 White et al., 2015). The existence of past, unresolved trauma exacerbated by the stress and pressures of college was a common occurrence noticed by participating administrators. While the findings in this study and the literature both state that alumni of the foster care system would benefit from mental health services, one study (McMillen & Raghavan, 2009) found that less than half of fostered youth in college utilize mental health services. This study suggests that one reason for this is the barrier that administrators described in terms of accessing mental health providers. Several administrators mentioned that on-campus providers had lengthy waiting lists and that students encountered issues such as not being able to book more than one appointment at a time, meaning that their scheduled appointment times are not consistent and at times not convenient. Therefore, students stop attending.

Possibly, foster care support programs could employ the same method of cross-collaboration used in recruitment to find mental health providers either on-campus or within the community that are familiar with the unique needs of fostered youth. While the resilience and self-determination of former foster youth should not be overlooked, their common factor of a turbulent upbringing places this vulnerable population at a high risk of not meeting their academic goals. To build and continue to enhance programs on a framework with academics as their center will require programs to explore more possibilities for meeting the mental health needs of those they serve. This study supports the finding that the use of cross-collaboration between foster care support programs and on-campus and community-based mental health services would benefit program participants and possibly alleviate some of the reported barriers of access to mental health services.

Provision of Emotional and Direct Support to Students

One study found that the greatest challenge that former foster youth reported in postsecondary education was related to issues with family and personal relationships (Geiger et al., 2018). Additional literature also found that navigating interpersonal relationships was an area of difficulty for former foster youth (Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010). Over 60 of the program administrators in this study said they offered emotional support to students. Several mentioned being available to their students by phone, text, in-person, and e-mail. These supportive relationships on the part of the administrators suggests being personally available and connected to their students was their way of helping students navigate personal relationships and enhanced the student s commitment to graduating. This study found administrators personally attended appointments with students, helped them practice speaking with professors, assisted them with family interactions, and coached them through self-advocating in relationships.

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The findings in this study suggest that having direct engagement and a supportive relationship with students on the part of administrators in both a formal and informal manner might replicate the missing personal support that some former foster youth need in order to be successful in higher education.

Limitations

This study included participants from universities without programs exclusively for former foster youth therefore, some of the challenges and barriers they reported may not be representative of other foster youth support programs. These administrators were included to help demonstrate the variety of support services available to former foster students on campuses, but this study recognizes this as a limitation for a comparison of programmatic challenges. Additionally, this study interviewed and included data from only program administrators. It is recognized that some program administrators may rely on campus coaches or program coordinators to provide direct service. Those staff members often carry out daily interactions with student participants, so the administrators may not be as familiar with personal challenges related to interacting with students. In addition, this study focused on students attending four-year universities. While it did include the responses of students who initially began their higher education at community colleges and were currently enrolled at four-year universities, this study did not include any community college program administrator in the data collection. Lastly, this study included participants in the states of Florida and Michigan. These states have two different eligibility requirements for financial assistance. Florida, unlike Michigan, utilizes a tuition-waiver system. It is not understood if this difference has an impact on students eligibility for campus support services. Further research is needed to understand the impact different tuition assistance programs have on students eligibility for services and academic performance.

To fully explore this topic, a comprehensive evaluation would need to include multiple states with varying forms of financial aid and eligibility requirements.

Conclusion

The benefits of a college degree are well-documented. Researchers have demonstrated that young adults who complete at least a bachelor s degree have improved life outcomes beyond just financial ones. They report an improved quality of life, fewer mental health concerns, less criminal involvement, less likelihood of substance use, and improved physical health. Therefore, it is critical that support and services be available to assist former foster youth in obtaining higher education. The results of this study describe some of the formal and informal supports that are offered to fostered youth and some of the challenges encountered in delivering these supports. This study concludes that it is imperative for program administrators to have a keen understanding of the unique needs of students with foster care experience. Furthermore, it is necessary for the effectiveness of these support programs that they exclusively serve this population and not expect the services offered by other programs to mitigate the challenges that these students face. In addition, to achieve this goal more long-term longitudinal research is needed on the long-range impacts of these services on life outcomes. Additionally, more in-depth qualitative research is needed with youth with foster care experience so that programs can be uniquely tailored to meet the individual needs of this population. Lastly, there is a need for more research on the supports available to former foster youth who choose to attend community colleges, vocational trainings, and other forms of postsecondary education. Currently, the available research focuses solely on youth who attend four-year colleges and universities. With such a small percentage of fostered youth attending four-year universities, it would be beneficial to explore the other education routes these students are taking following high school graduation.

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Table 1

Program Characteristics (n = 8)

	n	
Student Eligibility and Recruitment		
Program exclusively for foster care alumni	4	50.0
Program includes low-income and first-generation students	4	50.0
Program recruits prior to admission	5	62.5
Program recruits after admission	7	87.5
Institutional Size		
Small (10,000 or less)	1	12.5
Medium (10,001- 25,000)	2	25.0
Large (25,001)	5	62.5
In-State Tuition and Fees Covered		
Yes	8	100.0
Types of Program Funding		
State	2	25.0
Grant	7	87.5
Institutional	8	100.0
Private Donations	7	87.5
Collaboration with Other Programs		
Yes	8	100.0
Support and Services Offered		
Resource Referral	8	100.0
Financial Assistance	7	87.5
Educational/Course Assistance	8	100.0
Emotional Support	5	62.5
Food	4	50.0
Housing	5	62.5
Personal Care	4	50.0
Social Events	6	75.0
Career Counseling	7	87.5
Transportation	2	25.0
Offering Remote/Virtual Services	7	87.5

Table 2

Program Administrator Characteristics (n = 8)

	n	
Gender		
Male	1	12.5
Female	7	87.5
Education/Experience		
Highest degree held: Master s level	5	75.0
Highest degree held: Doctoral level	2	25.0
Field of degree: Education	3	37.5
Filed of degree: Social Science	4	50.0
Type of degree: Administration	1	12.5
Has previous experience with foster care youth	4	50.0
Responsibilities		
Holds an academic appointment	2	25.0
Administrative position only	6	75.0
Has other university appointments	2	25.0
Has direct involvement with former foster youth	4	50.0

Table 3

Themes and Subthemes

Subthemes
Types of Services Offered
Seven Life Domains
Academic Services
Financial Services
Essential Needs (Food & Housing)
Mental and Physical Health
Program Development
Core Population
Program Barriers
Unfamiliar to Students and Faculty
Student Engagement
Eligibility Requirements
Resources
Program Strengths
Academic Impacts
Collaboration
Provision on Emotion and Direct Support for Students

Manuscript 2

Associations Between Student Characteristics and Academic Success

of Former Foster Care Youth

Target journal: *Journal of College Student Development*

Secondary journal choice: *Research in Higher Education*

Abstract

The purpose of this exploratory study is to examine which campus-based and off-campus services are utilized by youth with foster care experience who are college students and to assess if service use is associated with their academic success. Academic success was measured through the participants self-reported, cumulative grade point averages. Additionally, this study provides a descriptive view of which student characteristics and resilience factors influence former foster youth in their pursuit of higher education. In this study, 42 foster youth enrolled at eight different universities in Florida and in Michigan participated in a 63-question survey to evaluate which services they were utilizing and to examine their academic standings. The results indicate that the participants possessed certain protective factors at a high rate and considered themselves to be good students and goal oriented. The students accessed support services on campus at an average of three services per student and accessed off-campus services at an average of one service per student. However, this study did not find sufficient evidence to conclude that utilizing either campus-based or off-campus support services positively impacted the participants grade point averages.

Introduction

The number of children and adolescents in foster care grew by just over 10   between 2013 and 2017, with approximately 442,995 children living in foster care placements (Health & Services, 2018). In most states, foster care placement ends at age 18, and youth either age out or are emancipated from the system, unless youth opt into extended foster care. Most states offer varying forms of extended foster care that provide funding and allow youth to remain under supervision until they are 21-years-old (Gateway, 2017). This alternative to aging out was created in 2008 when the federal government passed the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoption Act (Children s Bureau 2009).

Previous research has shown that youth who age out of foster care are typically unprepared for adulthood and are likely to experience negative outcomes across several life domains (Courtney 2009). Negative outcomes include education, physical and mental health, substance use, criminal justice system involvement, employment and economic self-sufficiency, housing and family formation (Courtney, 2009 Pecora et al., 2006). Several large-scale studies have examined the life outcomes of young adults who have lived in foster care (Courtney et al., 2007 Courtney, Piliavin, Grogan-Kaylor, & Nesmith, 2001 Pecora et al., 2006). Such studies have reported that educational achievement, particularly in higher education, is an area in which foster care alumni fall behind their peers. There is also a growing body of literature on the issues that former foster youth encounter in their pursuit of a college degree (Day, Dworsky, Fogarty, & Damashek, 2011 Hines, Merdinger, & Wyatt, 2005 Kirk & Day, 2011 Merdinger, Hines, Osterling, & Wyatt, 2005 Wolanin, 2005). The barriers faced by former foster youth in relation to admission to college and during their time as students are well documented (Rios & Rocco, 2014).

However, the existing research has not identified student characteristics or resilience factors that influence former foster youth s decision to pursue higher education or the support services that aid them in completing their degrees. This dichotomy leads to the question of why some former foster youth are failing to enroll in postsecondary education (Kirk & Day, 2011) when others are graduating (Day et al., 2011).

Literature Review

Barriers to Enrollment in Postsecondary Education

One area that has historically been an issue for youth in foster care is the educational disadvantages, such as low high school graduation rates, that they encounter at a disproportional rate (Courtney, 2009). There are many barriers for youth and young adults living in foster care to overcome when considering higher education. The first of those barriers is completion of primary and secondary education according to estimates, 30-50 of foster care youth fail to complete high school (Blome, 1997 Courtney et al., 2007). A study estimated that 60 of youth in the United States will attend higher education after high school graduation that percentage drops to 20 for former foster youth (Wolanin, 2005). Furthermore, it is estimated that between 1 to 10 of former foster youth will earn a college degree (Pecora et al., 2006 Wolanin, 2005), compared to 33 of American s over the age of 25 years old (Ryan & Bauman, 2016). The negative trajectory of educational accomplishment for foster youth can be attributed to several factors, such as frequent changes in school placement, attendance at lower-performing schools, higher enrollment in special education, and a lack of family support (Kinarsky, 2017 Unrau, Font, Rawls, 2012 .

A barrier that is unique to foster youth is the frequent disruptions of their primary and secondary education by shifts in school placements due to changes in living situations. On average, youth in foster care change schools about once every six months (Wolanin, 2005). These frequent disruptions impose an additional educational barrier for foster youth. They also reinforce a cycle of emotional trauma involving repeated abandonments and separations from adults and friends. An additional barrier to higher education for foster care youth is their lack of preparedness for independent living. Many youth who age out of foster care are unprepared to make financial decisions and lack the physical resources and emotional and social support needed to live independently. Without family support, these students are left alone on breaks and holidays. Further exacerbating this challenging situation are the responsibilities and pressures of being a full-time student, and many foster care youth who are eligible for college feel it is not feasible for them (Day et al., 2011 Kirk, Lewis, Nilsen, & Colvin, 2013 Pecora et al., 2006).

Barriers to Success in Higher Education

There is a small body of research that examines the barriers and challenges that former foster youth encounter once they have begun their collegiate careers. One study looked at the beginning of the college experience to examine the readiness for engagement and preparedness of 81 former foster care university freshmen (Unrau et al., 2012). Compared to their non-fostered peers, participants were less academically prepared for the rigor of coursework. However, the study also presented findings to support the notion that the former foster population was more academically and socially motivated than their non-fostered peers. The stud reported the participants ere more recepti e to academic and personal support than the

 eneral freshman population   nrau et al. 2012 . This demonstrated   hile the foster outh ma

not ha e een as prepared for colle e life as peers the   ere illin to utili e supports offered.

Success in higher education has long been measured by persistence and graduation rates, both of which have proven to be areas of weakness and inconsistency for former foster youth. A study by Merdinger et al. (2005) addressed the issue of persistence and reported that half of the students with foster care experience who attended a 4-year university in California were transfer students, many of whom had transferred from community colleges. Merdinger et al. (2005) found that 20 of the foster youth had previously withdrawn from college at least once and that another 16 were considering withdrawing. Other studies that examined preparedness (e.g., Merdinger et al.,2005 Unrau et al., 2012) found that the child welfare system left students feeling unprepared for academic rigor and campus life. A study by Day et al. (2011) determined that the college retention rate for foster youth was significantly below the same rate for their non-fostered peers. They determined that 21 of former foster youth and 13 of low-income and first-generation students dropped out by the end of their freshman year. Additionally, foster youth were found to be more likely to drop out prior to degree completion (34 vs 18) than students from low-income or first-generation backgrounds.

Another area that greatly affects persistence and graduation is the financial struggles that foster youth encounter. Despite their eligibility for tuition waivers, scholarships, grants, and student employment, foster alumni have reported financial insufficiencies as one of the leading causes of educational abandonment or disruption (Day et al., 2011 Salazar, 2013 Wolanin, 2005). Additional reasons for not completing education include lack of safe and affordable housin and transportation ors re 2010 social-adaption and relationship stru les ernande accarato 2010 and issues ith mental health and ell- ein such as dealin ith unresol ed past traumas ines et al. 2005 .

Resilience Factors and Student Characteristics

All individuals who grew up in foster care or were at one time in the foster care system have experienced some level of trauma in their lives (Day, Dworsky, Feng 2013). These life-altering conditions undoubtedly have adverse effects on each individual s development, but the experiences can also promote strengths, which can lead to characteristics and resilience factors that may aid in academic success (Batsche et al., 2014 Hines et al., 2005 Rios & Rocco, 2014 Unrau et al., 2012). Compared to their non-fostered peers, former foster care youth were found to be more academically motivated and to possess more positive attitudes toward their educators (Unrau et al., 2012). Unrau et al. (2012) also found foster youth to have a favorable perception of the college experience overall and to display a strong desire toward degree completion. A study by Rios & Rocco (2014) examinin supports and barriers to postsecondary completion found students resilience to be a key contributor to their academic success. Furthermore, the study identified seven internal resiliency traits that promoted academic success: perseverance, responsibility, resourcefulness, intelligence, motivation, goal orientation, and self-efficacy.

A foundational study in the area of resilience and foster youth conducted by Hines et al. (2005) gave numerous examples of resilience s impact on academic success for foster youth. indings indicated the internal protective factor of resiliency is a moderating factor to adverse life experiences among this population. Some characteristics or protective factors that emerged as critical to academic success were high intelligence levels patience, optimistic and resourceful personalities, steady dispositions, and self-sufficiency. A stud supportin   ines and collea ue s 2005 findin s on the resilience process claimed participants ere persistent oal-oriented and determined to create a etter famil life than the had e perienced. The had a stron   elief in their o n a ilities and ere a le to see out and accept help   atsche et al. 2014 p.178 .

Campus-Based Support and Help-Seeking Behaviors

One form of resilience that former foster youth display is their persistence in seeking assistance both on and off their college campuses (Samuels & Pryce 2008). Off-campus support would include the supports or services offered by community agencies such a health department, mental health services or food banks. There is currently a lack of literature examining the use of such services by former foster youth enrolled in college. However, several studies have looked at fostered youth s use of services provided on campus (Merdinger et al., 2005, Unrau et al., 2012).

Campus-based support programs are designed to provide fostered youth with the assistance needed to meet their academic goals. Campus-based support programs vary greatly in their offerings, depending on the institution. Most programs offer some form of case management, financial support, peer mentoring, and academic assistance (Geiger, Hanrahan, Cheung, & Lietz, 2016). One study found that many fostered youth utilized the support services offered to them on campus, but most of them (93.2) saw these programs as a resource referral sources and used their campus programs for more informal support (Kinarsky, 2017).

Kinarsky (2017) also found that, in addition to displaying resilience through help-seeking behaviors, former foster youth also sought to offset their financial struggles through employment. dditionall the found that 72.9 of the fostered youth who participated in the stud were employed. outh also sought peer support and social interaction by engaging in campus-based organizations, with 88 of those surveyed engaging in at least one on-campus organization (Kinarsky, 2017).

Purpose of the Present Study

Previous research has addressed the obstacles that former foster youth face after foster care and the challenges they encounter when enrolling in higher education. However, few studies have focused on the resilience characteristics and support services that aided in the participants pursuit of a degree and their success as college students. The goal of this study is to add to the literature through data collected from youth participating in campus support programs at four-year universities in two states. This study is guided by the following research questions: What internal protective factors and external factors do former foster youth use in their pursuit of a college degree and What is the association between the utilization of support services and academic success for former foster youth

Methods

Sample

The participants for this study included undergraduate students (n 42) from eight public universities. All subjects were enrolled in a form of on-campus support aimed at foster care alumni. The study s inclusion criteria included, enrollment in a four-year public university, 18 years of age, receive financial aid based on foster care status, and attend school in Florida or Michigan. To reach this target population, the author utilized the assistance of campus support program administrators. The administrators were each emailed a recruitment flyer to distribute electronically to their program participants. All participants who completed the survey in its entirety were included in the analysis. In the sample, the participants were nearly equally represented between Florida (n 22, 52.4) and Michigan (n 20, 47.6). However, there was a higher percentage of females (n 35, 83.3) compared to males (n 7, 16.7) in the sample. The respondents ranged in age from 18 to 28 years, with a mean age of 21 (SD 2.2) years.

African American/Black was the highest race represented (47.6), followed by Caucasian/White (42.9), then Hispanic/Latino (16.6). Half of all respondents reported a family income of less than 20,000, with 35.7 of the respondents reporting a family income of between 20,000 and 50,000. Table 4 displays the breakdown of relevant background characteristics.

Study Design, Procedure, and Survey Instrument

The participants all consented online to complete a web-based survey (see Appendix A). The survey was designed to collect descriptive data, including data on demographics and academic standings. The survey also measured the students use of campus-based and off-campus support services. The survey questions were influenced by existing literature on risk factors and resilience as well as previously defined components of academic success, such as GPA, persistence, and graduation rate (Day, Dworsky, Fogarty, & Damashek 2011). The survey consisted of 63 questions in total. Of these questions, 33 allowed open-ended responses and 30 relied on yes/no responses (see Appendix B).

A sample version of the survey was created and tested among six doctoral students. Minor adjustments were made before the web-based survey was launched. The survey was available on Qualtrics for 30 days, and six universities posted reminder emails. The incentive of a 20 Amazon gift card was paid electronically to participants at the conclusion of the survey. The compensation was delivered to the university-issued email address of each participant. The university-issued email addresses were used as authenticators and ensured that each student completed the survey only once. The survey took an average of 14 minutes to complete. The study and all survey questions were submitted for Internal Review Board approval and the study was granted an exempt status.

Survey Constructs. The survey was divided into three sections: student demographic data, risk and protective factors, and academic success indicators. To gain a more in-depth understanding of the participants, the survey asked for demographic information. To achieve a more holistic view of their experiences in foster care and the factors that influenced and supported their pursuit of a college degree, the survey included questions about their experiences in foster care, employment status, pre-college education, and financial aid. To examine the association between engagement in support services and academic standing, the survey asked questions on both of these topics. The participants in this study were asked a series of questions about their experiences with the foster care system. This section of the survey was not focused on the youth s experiences during their time in care, but rather on the facts about their time in foster care system.

The survey questions that focused on risk and protective factors aimed to explore whether there were attributes and behaviors that foster youth perceive as aiding them during their educational journey to a college degree. For example, one questions asked if the students perceived themselves to be goal oriented. The survey questions surrounding campus-based and off-campus support as well as participation in on- and off-campus organizations measured the student s utilization of services (e.g., Check all the campus-based services you have utilized). Lastly, the questions on academic standing aimed to assess if there was a correlation between the use of support services and academic success (e.g., What is your cumulative grade point average).

Data Analysis

To address the research questions in this study, a descriptive analysis was conducted. Next, a correlational analysis examined to which there was a statistically significant association

between the utilization of on campus and off campus support services and academic success. The results section of this study reports the frequency of demographic characteristics and foster care experiences, along with the percentage of students in each separate survey construct. The correlations between the use of campus-based support and academic success and between the use of off-campus (or community-based support) and academic success are also reported. All data were exported from Qualtrics SPSS for analysis.

Results

Experiences in Foster Care

Participants were asked about the number of years they spent in foster care and how many non-relative placements they had (See Table 5). Lastly, data were collected describing the conditions in which foster youth left the child welfare system, including if they were adopted/reunified, if they aged out, or if they were still in extended foster care. Table 5 shows that the participants spent 1-15 years in foster care (M = 5 years). The highest percentage of youth spent between one and three years in the foster care system. The number of non-relative placements ranged from zero to over eight (M = 2.4 placements). Some students were not placed in non-relative placements because they stated that they were always in the care of a relative. The age at which the participants entered care ranged from birth to just before their 18th birthday, with the average age to enter care being 11-years-old. While birth to three years old was the most common age to enter care (36.9), the age span of adolescence (11-years-old to 18-years-old) accounted for 39.6 . The most common age to exit care (30.9) was 16-18 years old. This high percentage might be due to 18 years of age being the emancipation age in both Florida and Michigan. Youth in both states can however opt to remain in extended care until age 21. Table 5

also shows that the most common reason for leaving state care was a combination of reunification with family or adoption, with 52.4   exiting under these circumstances.

Presence of External and Internal Protective Factors

The data in this study draws attention to the various resiliency and protective factors that former foster youth rely on to achieve their academic goals. These data also help describe foster youth and give examples of the forms of external factors that are available for them. Table 6 shows that a high percentage (61.9   ) of the former foster youth in this study took advanced placement courses in high school, while only 16.7   of those surveyed were required to participate in a college-readiness program, Summer Bridge, prior to beginning their first semester. Less than half of the students reported currently having a mentor (38.1   ), but over half (61.9   ) reported that they did have a supportive parent or parents. One-third of the students (31   ) were members of a faith-based organization.

An additional protective factor was the presence of financial aid for former foster youth. To explore how former foster youth are covering the costs of tuition and living expenses, this survey asked questions regarding the forms of financial aid that students were utilizing to cover tuition and living expenses. The results show that over two-thirds (66.7   ) of the participants were receiving scholarships that were either institutional or privately funded. A total of 59   of those surveyed were recipients of either state or institutional grants, and some students noted that those grants could be used for a combination of both tuition and living expenses. The state tuition waiver is only available to students who were at one time a ward of the state of Florida and are currently attending school in Florida. Only 18 of the 22 students in Florida reported using the waiver. It is possible that not all of the students met the waiver requirements they may also have used other forms of assistance. A total of 64.3   of those surveyed responded that they

received some form of assistance with their living expenses. The most common form of assistance was the Educational Training Voucher (ETV), which is a 5,000 voucher per year awarded to full-time students from the federal government. One in three students (31) who participated in this study reported receiving the (ETV). Only students who were in foster care between the ages of 13- and 18-years are eligible for an ETV. Students reported using federal loans, grants, scholarships, and institutional living stipends to pay for their living expenses. Most students reported using a combination of two or more forms of assistance.

Support Services and Youth Academic Standings

This survey also examined the utilization of different forms of campus-based and off-campus support services by former foster youth. The participants were asked to select all the services they were currently using or had accessed in the past. The survey included questions about support services that were available to all undergraduates rather than exclusively fostered youth, such as academic advising, wellness services, and mental health counseling. Table 7 shows the utilization of support services and the academic standings of the study participants. Academic advising was the most commonly used form of support, with 88.1 of those surveyed reporting use. Over two-thirds (66.7) of the participants reported using campus housing at some point during their enrollment. More students reported accessing mental health services on campus (47.6) than campus health or wellness clinics (38.1). Half of the participants (n 21) reported utilizing assistance from an on-campus tutor through either academic assistance or their campus support program. Nearly half (47.6) of the students reported using the career center, but only 11 students (26.2) reported using the student employment office.

Off-campus or (community-based services), and food banks were the most commonly used community service, with 33.3 of the participants reporting having relied on this service

previously. Ten foster youth (23.8%) reported accessing services through the local child welfare jurisdiction and community mental health service centers. It is possible that some of the participants marked utilizing services through the child welfare system because some students in Michigan are still in extended foster care. The community health department was utilized by 16.7% of those surveyed, and three participants (7.1%) reported accessing services for addiction or substance use. It is possible that some of the participants marked utilizing services through the child welfare system because some students in Michigan are still in extended foster care.

To gain insight into the academic standing of these youth, questions were included on their academic performance. To measure this, the participants were asked about their cumulative grade point averages (GPAs). The youth were also asked how many total credit hours they had earned to measure how far they had progressed toward graduation. Additional questions were asked regarding their perceptions of themselves as students. Table 7 shows that just over a third (35.7%) of the participants were at one time placed on academic probation, and six of them had taken a leave of absence. When the youth were asked if they considered themselves a "good student" or "goal oriented," 83.3% reported "yes" to both questions.

The grade point averages of the foster youth in this study ranged from 1.0 to 3.9 ($M = 2.9$, $SD = .62$) on a 4.0 scale, with most foster youth scoring between 3.1 to 3.5, and 15 students (35.7%) falling within this category. Four students (10.5%) were below the 2.0 cumulative GPA mark, which is the benchmark for most university graduation requirements. It is noted that students in Florida do not have a minimum GPA requirement to continue using the state tuition waiver however, students in Michigan using the state foster care grant must maintain a 3.0 GPA. The amount of credit hours completed by the participants ranged from three credit hours to 166 credit hours ($M = 52.2$, $SD = 34.9$). At the time of the study, the participants were currently

enrolled in between one and 22 credit hours (*M* 11.2, *SD* 4.2). The students reported having attended college for between one and 24 semesters (*M* 5.3, *SD* 4.2). It is possible that some of the students counted summer semesters or semesters enrolled in community colleges in this tally.

Participants were surveyed about the number of campus-based support services (*M* 3.45, *SD* 0.62) and off-campus support (*M* 1.38, *SD* .854). The GPAs of these youth were gathered. The youth who participated in this study accessed an average of 3.4 campus-based support services and 1.3 off-campus services. The correlation between the utilization of campus-based ($r = -0.06$) and off-campus ($r = -0.18$) support services were both negative and not statistically significant. This finding contradicts the hypothesis that increased use of campus-based and off-campus support services would be significantly associated with GPA, such that increased service utilization would be associated with increased cumulative GPA.

Discussion

This study was guided by two distinct questions, Which student characteristics or protective factors did foster youth utilize in their pursuit of a college degree and What is the association between former foster youth s utilization of support services and academic success The implementation of campus support services specifically designed for those with foster care experience is not new. There are several well-documented programs throughout the United States to address this (Geiger, Hanrahan, Cheug, & Lietz, 2016), and the popularity of such programs is growing (Unrau, Dawson, Hamilton & Bennett 2016). While the understanding that supports for former foster youth is increasing (Rios & Rocco 2014), there remains a lack of research to guide the programmatic design. Additionally, there is still a lack of research to conclusively demonstrate that support programs are having a positive impact on the academic

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success of fostered youth. Therefore, this study sought to identify the personal characteristics and external protective factors that are associated with student success as measured by foster youth s cumulative grade point average.

The campus-based support most utilized by this population was academic advising, followed by academic assistance or tutoring. This finding suggests that former foster youth view their universities as most helpful for academic guidance and assistance. This finding is consistent with Dworsky & P rez (2010), who observed former foster youth as perceiving assistance in choosing courses and tutoring to be the most valuable service they were offered. This finding is interesting because it is contradicted by other studies, which state that financial assistance is by far the single greatest need of former foster youth in college (Emerson & Bassett, 2010 Lovitt & Emerson, 2009 Wolanin, 2005). This contradiction is possible because the youth in this study may not have perceived financial aid as a service, but rather as a type of support, like housing. The youth who participated in this study may have viewed a "service" as involving an interaction with another person therefore, the impact of services may have been more significant if the variable had included financial aid and housing assistance.

Another possible explanation for the lack of a positive association could be that this population relies more heavily on their internal protective factors and on themselves than on support services. For example, many of the participants reported having the presence of a mentor in their lives either previously or currently. Research shows that mentors can have a significant impact on the lives of vulnerable youth, particularly those where positive adult role models are not present (Ahrens, DuBois, Richardson, Fan, & Lozano, 2008). Studies that have examined the academic achievements of former foster youth have also found that stability and positive relationships with adult mentors play a critical role in the educational success of this population

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(Dworsky & P rez, 2010 A Unrau, Dawson, Hamilton, & Bennett, 2017), which was beyond the scope of the present study s aims.

In this study, the term "resilience" refers to the former fostered youth s capacity to recover from challenges, overcome barriers through motivation, and seek assistance to remain steadfast in achieving their academic goals. The protective factors refer to the youth s attributes, resources, or supports that aid them in earning a college degree. Several researchers have completed studies on the impact of fostered youth s resiliency on their achievements in education (Batsche et al., 2014 Hines et al., 2005 Rios & Rocco, 2014). High self-reliance among former foster youth is expected, considering their experiences with the foster care system. These young adults learn to protect and provide for themselves at an early age. For example, previous studies on resilience and self-reliance (Hines et al.,2005 Unrau et al.,2012) suggest that former foster youth develop an almost "survival-like" sense of self-sufficiency indicating that fostered youth s resilience may act as an academic motivator (Unrau et al., 2012 Hines et al., 2005). The youth in those studies viewed higher education as a means to avoid some of the negative life outcomes that of foster care alumni experience. The fostered youth s desire to have different lives than their parents fueled their ambitions to complete college (Unrau et al., 2012 Hines et al., 2005). This internal motivation was also found in the current study, with 83 of the participants considering themselves to be goal-oriented and good students. This demonstrated that the youth in this study were self-motivated toward achieving their academic goals.

The participants levels of resiliency and number of protective factors in their lives may explain why they used an average of only one of the off campus supports measured in this study. While this was an interesting finding, the effect size between the utilization of campus-based and off-campus services was small. The community services measured in this study were services

such as the community health department, mental health services, and addiction/substance use services. These services are typically accessed by individuals who are struggling and in need of assistance. The youth surveyed in this study may not have felt a need for these services. Additionally, participants with health coverage often seek private providers rather than community services, which were not included in the survey (Courtney et al. 2001 Hernandez and Naccarato 2010).

Lastly, many of the participants in this study reported having supportive parents in their lives and older siblings who also attended college. These individuals are most likely serving as informal supports for these students. A study by Geiger et al. (2018) found that one of the greatest challenges that students from foster care face in college is related to family issues. This research also found that conflict and lack of support from families was a negatively related to academic progress and disrupted engagement in campus-based support. The population surveyed in this current study did not share this level of family conflict and typically reported their parent(s) as being supportive thus, family overall was viewed as a protective factor for this sample. The presence of multiple protective factors coupled with the participants high level of self-motivation and resilience are all possible explanations of why this sample was succeeding academically overall when reportedly others with similar backgrounds were not.

Limitations

Prior to discussing the implications of these findings, it is important to acknowledge the study s limitations. The first limitation was a small sample size. Although there were eight different universities included in this study, only a small percentage of former foster youth at each school participated. Future studies could benefit from including a larger sample of former foster care youth. The second limitation is that this study only included individuals who were

already registered with a campus-based support program for former foster youth. The recruitment process relied on assistance from program directors of campus-based support programs to electronically send out flyers with survey information. This eliminated the possibility of gathering survey data from fostered youth who were not enrolled in support services, which may have created bias. The choice to only include those enrolled in campus based support was intentional, but it also limits the generalizability of the study. Future studies should include both sets of students.

Another limitation in this study is that some of the services that students reported utilizing are available to the general student body, as well as former foster youth. To understand if former foster youth s utilization of support services is different from the general student population, it would be helpful to have a general student body comparison group. This step would require access to administrative data from participating universities. Universities would need to provide a detailed list of all services available to students, and future studies would need to compare universities with similar support offerings. This study did not have access to student data on persistence and graduation rates therefore, this study relied on student-reported data about their academic standing. Future studies would want to have access to administrative data to remove the possibility of inaccurate data being used and to increase validity. Additionally, to enhance the strength of future studies and more accurately represent this population, it could be valuable to include former foster youth who did not attend postsecondary education and examine their reasons for not pursuing a college degree.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

A lack of desire to pursue higher education is not one of the reasons that former foster youth graduate at lower rates than the national average (Dworsky & Perez, 2010). Lack of

assistance with the application process for admission and financial aid, however, is a reason that many former foster youth do not attend college. Foster youth benefit from many forms of support while in college, but they require assistance far before they enroll in college. Former foster youth in this study reported that assistance with the initial financial aid process and the admissions process was critical. If this type of assistance was more readily available to foster youth, it is possible that colleges could see an increase in their enrollment. This would require campus based programs to work with child welfare case managers and inform them of available services and support while foster youth are still in high school. This would give foster youth time to prepare academically and ensure that they are meeting the admissions requirements.

Additional research is needed to evaluate the services and supports former foster youth find most valuable and which are associated with academic success. To complete this task, a larger, more in-depth analysis is needed to adequately evaluate which services and forms of support former foster youth are accessing. It is important to include fostered youth who are attending universities but not accessing services or support on campus and find out why. This would require universities to keep administrative data on youth who are utilizing tuition waivers and state grants allocated to former foster youth. Once research exists on the importance that former foster youth place on services and supports, universities can begin to design programs centered around these youth s specific needs.

Further analysis is also required to assess the effects that specific services or types of support have on the academic achievements of this population. This would require researchers to track the services and supports utilized and compare them to academic data and for universities to be willing to share administrative data with researchers. Once more generalizable data exists

with accurate impact factors for individual supports and interventions, researchers can begin to implement evidence-based practices.

Conclusion

Supports that are specifically designed to assist former foster youth are growing in popularity among college campuses. However, the development of many new campus-based supports has not helped to close the achievement gap between former foster youth and their non-fostered peers, in terms of graduation rates. Due to the underutilization of campus-based support programs it is difficult to determine the effectiveness of on campus and off campus supports. In the present study, there was not a statistically significant effect between support utilization and cumulative GPA among former foster youth. It is however possible that former foster youth could benefit from increased mentorship and social connections of high-quality. Moving forward, support services need to assess this population s unmet needs and then build support services to address those specific needs. Additional qualitative data is warranted to contextualize the quality and purpose more accurately behind the youth s choice to engage in specific services. The data that is collected must include the voices and viewpoints of the fostered youth who are utilizing these services. By exploring this issue from their perspectives, researchers can assess which services are valuable to them and which are not. Additional qualitative research could contextualize the quantitative data that is collected. Such data would offer more in-depth information about the protective and resilience-related factors that these youth credit for their success.

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Table 4

Selected Background Characteristics of Sample (n = 42)

	n	
Gender		
Male	35	83.3
Female	7	16.7
Race		
African American	20	47.6
Caucasian	15	42.9
Asian	1	2.4
Other	3	7.1
Ethnicity		
Hispanic/Latino	7	16.7
Age		
18-19 years old	10	23.8
20-21 years old	17	40.4
22-23 years old	11	26.2
24 years old	4	9.6
University State		
Florida	22	52.4
Michigan	20	47.6
Family Income		
Less than 20,000	21	50.0
20,000- 34,999	8	19.0
35,000- 49,999	7	16.7
50,000- 74,999	3	7.1
75,000- 99,999	2	4.8
Over 100,000	1	2.4

Table 5

Selected Foster Care Characteristics of Sample (n = 42)

	n	
Years in Care		
1-3	19	45.2
4-6	10	23.8
7-9	9	21.4
10-12	1	2.4
15	3	7.2

Table 5, Continued

Selected Foster Care Characteristics of Sample (n = 42)

	n	
Non-Relative Placements		
0-1	16	38.0
2-3	15	35.7
4-5	6	14.3
6-7	4	9.5
8	1	2.4
Age Entered Foster Care		
0-3 years old	14	36.9
4-7 years old	4	10.5
8-11 years old	5	13.1
12-15 years old	11	23.7
16-18 years old	6	15.9
Age Exited Foster Care		
0-3 years old	9	21.5
4-7 years old	4	9.6
8-11 years old	4	9.6
12-15 years old	8	19.2
16-18 years old	13	30.9
21 extended care	2	4.8
Exit from Foster Care		
Adopted/reunified	22	21.5
Aged out of care	12	28.6
Extended foster care	8	19.0

Table 6

Internal and External Protective Factors of Sample (n = 42)

	n	
Enrolled in advance placement in high school	26	61.9
Student reports having supportive parents	26	61.9
Presence of a mentor	16	38.1
Member of a faith-based organization	13	31.0
Participated in Summer Bridge college readiness	7	16.7
Financial aid for tuition/school/living expenses		
Institution/private scholarships	28	66.7
State/institution grants	25	59.5
State tuition waiver	18	42.9
Educational Training Voucher (ETV)	13	31.0
Receive financial assistance for living expenses	27	64.3

Note. Some participants receive a combination of financial aid for tuition/school costs.

Table 7

Utilization of Support Services and Youth Academic Standings (n = 42)

	n	
On-Campus Support		
Housing	28	66.7
Residential Advisor	9	21.4
Academic Advising	37	88.1
Mental Health Services	20	47.6
Campus Health/Wellness Clinic	16	38.1
Career Center	20	47.6
Academic Assistance/Tutoring	21	50.0
Financial Aid Counseling	17	40.5
Campus Ministry	3	7.1
Student Employment Office	11	26.2
Off-Campus Support		
Community Health Department	7	16.7
Food Bank	14	33.3
Child and Family Services	10	23.8
Community Mental Health	10	23.8
Addiction/Substance Use Service	3	7.1
Other	14	33.3
Academic Standing		
Has been placed on academic probation	15	35.7
Has taken a leave of absence	6	14.3
Considers themselves a "good student"	35	83.3
Considers themselves a "goal-oriented"	35	83.3
Grade Point Average (GPA)		
1.0-2.0	4	10.5
2.1-2.5	7	16.7
2.6-3.0	11	26.2
3.1-3.5	15	35.7
3.6-4.0	4	10.5

Table 8

Correlations Between On-Campus/Off-Campus Service Use and Grade Point Average (GPA)

	n	*M*	*SD*	*r*
Cumulative GPA	42	2.90	0.62	--
Total number of on-campus support services utilized	42	3.45	1.81	-.062
Total number of off-campus support services utilized	42	1.38	.854	-.185

Manuscript 3

Perspectives of Former Foster Youth on How to Succeed in Postsecondary Education

Target journal: *Children and Youth Services Review*

Secondary journal choice: *Journal of Qualitative Social Work*

Abstract

Young adults with foster care experience encounter numerous challenges related to obtaining a college degree. To assist this population in reaching their academic goals many colleges and universities have created campus-based support programs. These programs are designed to assist former foster youth through an array of services, which range from financial aid to mentorship. However, little information is known about these programs and many of them are designed and implemented without the input of the youth themselves. This phenomenological study sought to describe and understand the perceptions of foster care alumni on the access and utilization on campus-based support. This study used in-depth interviews with 15 young adults enrolled in four-year public universities in Florida and Michigan. The findings in this study conclude that campus-based support was considered accessible and utilized by students, but it was not the only resource that foster care alumni relied on to be successful. The youth in this study defined success as earning a degree, making personal and emotion growth, and forming new connections. This study found that participants also relied on family, friends, community-based support and above all a strong sense of self-reliance.

Introduction

According to federally gathered statistics, approximately 19,954 young adults either aged out or were emancipated from the foster system last year (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). After exiting the system, many of these young adults find themselves facing homelessness, incarceration, unemployment, poverty, and other negative life outcomes (Courtney, 2009). While the long-term outcomes for many of these young adults are less than desirable and despite all the challenges they face, nearly 20 of former foster youth enroll in postsecondary education (Rios & Rocco, 2014). However, only 2-10 of those who enroll will graduate with a degree (Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010). These statistics contrast with the 33 of Americans aged 25 or older who report having completed a bachelor s degree (Ryan & Bauman, 2016).

To address the higher-education discrepancy between young adults with foster care experience and those without, the federal government and individual states have enacted several financial programs to help lessen the cost of college. Additionally, colleges and universities have created support services and programs to aid their students in adjusting to college life, being independent, and becoming academically successful.

Recent years have seen an increasing amount of research on former foster youth and their life outcomes after foster care. However, little research has been focused on the educational trajectories of these young adults. Particularly, their views on postsecondary education or the support needed to be successful in college have not been investigated. Therefore, this study presents data collected through in-depth, qualitative interviews with these youth about their experiences in postsecondary education. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of accessing and utilizing campus support services on the part of former foster youth.

Literature Review

This study is framed by three germane areas of previous research. The first relates to the trends surrounding former foster youth s matriculation to higher education. The second area of research focuses on youth s perspectives or voices as a form of contextual data. The third and final area of research is previously published data on the experiences of former foster youth in higher education.

Higher Education Among Former Foster Youth

There is little published research on the driving factors that influence the educational pathways of youth transitioning out of foster care. Their educational trajectories or life decisions after high school graduation remain virtually unknown to researchers and policymakers aside from data related to graduation rates or postsecondary enrollment rates. Several large research studies have examined the low enrollment rates within higher education among former foster youth.

stud ourtne et al. 2007 found that 77 of former foster youth had earned either a high school diploma or GED by the time they were 21 years old, compared with 89 of a nationally represented sample. This statistic is a gain from previous findings that 50 of foster youth will complete high school by age 18 (Wolanin, 2005). Courtney et al. (2007) found that, by 21 years of age, 39 of the foster youth in their study had completed at least one year of postsecondary education, compared to 59 of a nationally representative sample. A follow-up study found that, by age 24, only 6 of the former foster youth had earned a college degree Courtney, 2009 . In other studies examining the graduation rates of foster youth, this rate was found to be from 1-5 Rios Rocco, 2014 Wolanin, 2005 .

Previous research has focused on the benefits of earning a college education, and despite the fact that 70 of former foster youth express a desire in high school to attend postsecondary education (McMillen et al., 2003), enrollment among this population remains very low (Wolanin, 2005). Foster care who do persevere by completing high school and express a desire to earn a college degree are often unsuccessful because of the overwhelming barriers to enrolling and then to remaining in college (Unrau et al., 2012). One study found that, even when controlling for race and gender, former foster care youth attending 4-year colleges were more likely to drop out than low-income and first-generation students with no previous foster care experience (Day et al., 2011).

Several studies have examined the different barriers that youth with experience in foster care must navigate in order succeed in higher education. In one study, Merdinger et al. (2005) found that only one-fourth of students from foster care who enrolled in higher education reported feeling self-sufficient or prepared to live independently. This sample also reported concerns surrounding finances, mental distress, and access to appropriate healthcare. Another study examined the factors that influence former foster youth s success in higher education and found that a lack of academic and social support was a larger concern for this population than affording college (Davis, 2006). Much of the concern about the cost of attending was alleviated by federal and state funding.

Lastly, a study by Dworsky and Perez (2010) that examined former foster youth enrolled in higher education in the states of California and Washington found that, while these undergraduates are concerned with academic success and prioritized their education, the

participants were reportedly more concerned with non-academic needs such as their mental health, long-term financial stability, housing and food instability, lack of transportation, and social interactions. The results illuminated by these studies and other similar studies, are why many colleges and universities have begun creating support programs focused on outreach and student engagement (Geiger & Beltran, 2017).

Youths' Perceptions and Experiences

The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) is a federal data-collecting report that allows the Children s Bureau to draw national statistics about foster care populations (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). The Children's Bureau is the federal agency that provides monitoring of and policy guidance, funding, training, and technical assistance, related to child welfare systems. This agency also focuses on increasing the number of adoptions, and work to strengthen the foster care system. The AFCARS is the predominant resource used by states in programmatic and policy design and uses data that is reported to the federal government by individual states and child welfare agencies. While these data provide the most current trends and statistical information on children and youth in state care, they fail to illuminate the experiences and desires of those it represents. Unfortunately, the information is limited to only descriptive data, and the report provides no account of the social, personal, or other contributing factors that contextualize the experiences of foster youth in general (Courtney & Prophet, 2011).

There is limited published research examining the role of foster youth s perceptions or lived experiences either in college or after exiting care. One area where there has been some research, is in foster youth s experiences during the transition from state care to independence. A study by Del Quest et al.(2012) found their sample of foster youth who were transitioning out of

care to experience challenges with finding support services, maintaining adult relationships, and lacking the knowledge of how to reach positive life goals. Another study from Texas used focus groups to capture the voices and experiences of 33 youth who were transitioning from out of state care (Scannapieco et al., 2007). The study found that these youth s voices or desires were virtually absent in their case plans. The study also found a lack of communication between foster parents, foster youth, and case managers during the transitional period into independence. Further, the lack of communication and absences of fostered youth s input in case plans led to unmet needs and disengagement on the part of the youth. Geenen and Powers (2007) also used focus groups to gather qualitative data from 27 current and former foster youth. The results of this study suggest that a flexible, more individualized and creative approach to transitioning is needed to aid fostered youth in overcoming the substantial obstacles they encounter and successfully shift to adulthood.

Other published literature has sought to provide a more in-depth explanation of the struggles youth in foster care face during their transition to young adulthood and to contextualize previously collected statistical data. An example of one of these follow-up studies is from Samuels and Pryce (2008). This study included interviews with 44 youth in total, 24 of whom had already exited foster care, the study identified several barriers to a successful transition to adulthood. These included a lack of understanding around identity and self-reliance (Samuels and Pryce, 2008). Therefore, this findings suggest that youth s lack of understanding led to an unsuccessful transition to adulthood. Additionally, this study found that disruptions to development and the inability to meet some development milestones hindered fostered youth from ever feeling "fully grown-up" (Samuels and Pryce, 2008). Additionally, this study found that the youth s self-reliance was helpful to their survival while in foster care, but it often

hindered their ability to form close, supportive relationships, which they needed to meet their educational goals.

Another study which included 404 youth, aged 17 to 19, interviewed them on a quarterly basis for nine quarters and focused solely on the transition process of leaving foster care (McCoy et al., 2008). Participants were interviewed nine separate times throughout the study. The study aimed to understand how and why youth leave state care. The results found that foster youth, especially those with externalizing behavior problems, often exited the foster care system before they were required to, and many did so abruptly and in dissatisfaction with the system (McCoy et al., 2008).

Lastly, while most research involving foster youth s perceptions examines their transition out of care or their exit from the system, Clemens et al. (2017) conducted a Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) study to gaining a more in-depth understanding of the perspectives of 16 former foster youth on both the graduation gap and their experiences in school. The study concluded that the emotional consequences of what the study participants endured had the single greatest impact on all areas of the youth s lives, including their academic success.

Experiences of Former Foster Youth in Higher Education

The limited body of research on former foster youth s experiences in higher education has focused on a range of topics, including their transition to college, resilience and risk factors, factors that influence their educational decision-making, their social identity, their academic success, and the roles of supportive people and programs in their lives (Batsche et al., 2014 Kinarsky, 2017 Merdinger et al., 2005 Rios & Rocco, 2014 Tobolowsky et al., 2019).

To research the perceived value of higher education among former foster youth, Tobolowsky et al. (2019) completed a mixed methods study examining the perceived value of

higher education among former foster youth and the challenges they face during college. The findings of this study suggest that former foster youth s perceived value of higher education is very high and they desire to attend and graduate, but to be successful in meeting their goals they must rely heavily on multiple forms of support, such as financial aid and adult guidance. Understandably, most youth with foster care experience encounter barriers to completing their educational goals. A survey of undergraduates (n 60) engaged in campus support showed that their largest concerns were not academic, but rather related to housing, financial, and food insecurity (Kinarsky, 2017). To gain a more in-depth understanding of the educational challenges that former foster youth encounter during higher education, Rios and Rocco (2014) used a phenomenological approach to explain and describe the perceptions of 24 ethnically diverse undergraduates. The results of this study yielded descriptions of both their academic barriers and academic successes. Some of the barriers that inhibited their success included unsupportive faculty and struggles with personal relationships (Rios and Rocco 2014). Some of the academic supports encountered by studnets included caring professors, helpful counselors or therapists, supportive families, and involvement with community agencies (Rios and Rocco 2014). Several internal protective factors were also noted as contributing to their academic success, such as being goal-oriented and resourceful and having internal motivation (Hines et al., 2005).

The role of resilience among foster care alumni has been explored in several studies (Merdinger et al., 2005 Rios & Rocco, 2014 Batsche et al., 2014 Hines et al., 2005). The term "resilience" in these studies refers to the fostered youth s capacity to utilize internal motivation and learned coping mechanisms to overcome challenges and meet external goals. Hines et al. (2005) looked at the areas of risk and resilience in former foster youth and found resilience to be a key contributing factor in overcoming psychosocial adversity and in educational achievement.

Similar results were noted by Batsche et al. (2014) when they interviewed 27 former foster youth who had been emancipated from state care about their transition to post-secondary education. The results identified resilience and the youth s ability to persevere through adversity as one of the attributes that contributed to their academic and overall success.

Lastly, several dissertations have focused on the lived experience and voices of former foster youth in college (Douthat, 2013 Kenton, 2018 Sarubbi, 2019). These dissertations used a variety of qualitative methods, including profiles (Douthat, 2013) and interviews (Kenton, 2018 Sarubbi, 2019). Study goals were to provide counter-narratives to the stigma that traditionally surrounds foster care alumni as college students. The direct information taken from the lived experiences described in these dissertations contributes to understanding of the struggles and successes of this population. The common findings of these dissertations center on the academic struggles that these youth encounter, such as feeling unprepared for the rigor of a college curriculum or feeling overwhelmed by the search for academic assistance. Furthermore, many of these youth face personal struggles, such as being able to trust new people or the concerns that come with the stigma of identifying as a youth with foster care experience. Lastly, these dissertations spoke of the success these former foster earned, not only the academic success of graduating, but also the personal success of emotional well-being and strong personal relationships.

Purpose of the Present Study

Although research has partially addressed the barriers to and supports for academic achievement for youth with foster care experience, little is known about former foster youth s views of the campus support programs created to assist them in being successful (Osterling & Hines, 2006 Rios & Rocco, 2014). Specifically, one area with little research is and

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understanding of how this population is gaining access to support and which aspects of the support they find beneficial. The number of on-campus support programs created to assist former foster youth to be successful is continuing to grow (Geiger, Hanrahan, Cheug, & Lietz, 2016), as are the array of ways in which colleges and universities are collaborating with other support programs both on and off campus to meet the needs of this vulnerable population (Unrau, Dawson, and Hamilton, 2016). Yet, it is concerning that many of these programs are implemented with little input by or insight into the needs of former foster youth and without the expressed interest of the youth themselves (Geiger, Piel, Day & Schelbe, 2018). Therefore, the purpose of this manuscript is to describe and understand the perceptions of foster care alumni on the access and utilization on campus-based support. This study was guided by three main research questions. The first question is, how do former foster youth learn of support on-campus services Next, what are former foster youth s perceptions of on-campus support, and what other forms of support do they rely on Lastly, how do former foster youth define academic success, and to what do they attribute their success

Methods

Sample

This qualitative study analyzes interviews conducted with 15 participants from a larger sample (*n* 42) of survey participants. The goal of the survey was to evaluate the association between student characteristics and academic success among former foster youth enrolled in 4-year public universities. Eligibility for the parent study was defined by being a former foster youth at an undergraduate level enrolled in a public, 4-year university in Michigan or Florida and receiving financial support toward education. The original sample used purposive sampling and relied upon campus support administrators to distribute electronic recruitment material to their

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program participants. The survey respondents were given the opportunity to elect to participate in a more in-depth follow-up interview. All participants who completed a follow-up interview were included in this study.

Data Collection

This qualitative study uses a phenomenological approach to respond to research questions related to the perceptions of former foster youth as to what individual behaviors and attitudes about the use of campus-based support services.

The data gathered in a phenomenological study are used to describe the essence of a phenomenon through the perceptions of the participants in terms of both what was experienced and how it was experienced (Moustakas, 1994 Neubauer et al., 2019). In this study, the phenomenological design allowed the researcher to move beyond previously learned and background data about the participants and make room for the current views and voices of the participants to guide the results (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

After receiving approval from the University of South Florida Internal Review Board and participation agreements from universities in Michigan and Florida that participated in the study, campus support program administrators were given a recruitment flyer to distribute. Prospective study participants were first contacted by their program administrators via an email with an electronic flyer attached. The recruitment flyer listed the inclusion criteria, and students who met the criteria were provided a link to participate in an online Qualtrics survey. The survey included information on the opportunity to participate in a follow-up interview (see Appendix B). After obtaining verbal informed consent, interviews were conducted over the phone. With the participants permission, interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim in preparation for

analysis. The interviews took an average of 30-45 minutes each. Interview participants were compensated with   25 gift cards for their participation.

The interview protocol consisted of 17 open-ended questions with follow-up probe questions where necessary. The interview questions were divided into two main sections: access to support services and utilization of support services. At the start of this study, all university campuses had recently closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Knowing that this would impact the services being delivered to students, several interview questions were added to address the shift to distance learning and remote/virtual services.

The idea of researcher s reflexivity is acknowledged in this study because the primary researcher was raised in a foster home during her entire childhood and therefore has personal, lived experience with the foster care system. It is understood that the researcher s reflexivity could shape the nature of the researcher-participant relationship. The research s background gave insight into the construct of the interview questions and her personal connection to this topic assisted in giving meaning and shape to the findings and conclusions of this study (Berger, 2015).

Analysis

To adhere to a rigorous process of qualitative analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2016), the researcher first read through the interview transcripts several times to become fully immersed in the gathered data and to bracket previously acquired background and statistical data on former foster youth. After reading through the transcripts, the researcher made the decision to include five additional in-depth interviews in the study to ensure saturation of responses was reached. This brought the total number of interviews from 10 to 15. Once all the data were collected, a multi-step analysis approach was used to fully evaluate the research questions. To complete this,

each transcript was initially reviewed for specific experiences and perceptions. Then the transcripts were reviewed for significant phrases that related to the research aim. Lastly, the transcripts were coded using a pattern coding method (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This allowed the grouping or summarizing of a larger set of codes into a smaller number of set codes that fit into themes.

To ensure the analysis met the standards of trustworthiness, the data were reviewed twice, first by the author and then by a secondary coder, with the intent to control for bias and include analysis to create a narrative depiction of the participants attitudes and perceptions. A first round of coding was completed with the author and second coder in ATLAS.ti Cloud. This round used open coding and help create an initial set of codes. The initial set of codes was then used by the author and second coder to separately code four interviews. The author then reviewed the results of the four interviews to ensure consistency and to write the final codebook was accurate with definitions. The final phase involved examining the data across the established set of codes and their definitions. The data were searched for patterns and divided between four themes based on the frequency of their mentioning. The four themes were reliance on self, friends and family, community support, and campus-based support. Additionally, key terms from the research questions acted as codes as well. For example, "defined success", and "recruitment to campus support". The latter codes were compiled, counted for frequency and then summarized during the analysis phase.

Results

About the Participants

The participants of this study were a subset of a larger study of former foster youth who were attending college in either Florida or Michigan. The participants in the current study from

Michigan are represented in at a slightly larger proportion than those from Florida, with one more respondent being from Michigan, but these percentages align with the larger sample. The majority of the participants were female (n 11), and African American (n 7) were the most represented with regards to race. The ages of the participants spanned from 18 to 23 years old, with the majority being over the age of 21. Table 9 shows Demographic Characteristics of Student Participants.

Study participants were at different points in their academic progress. Some of them were nearing graduation, while others were just completing their first year. At the time of this interview, all the students had completed at least two consecutive semesters at their universities. All the students were knowledgeable about the on-campus services available to them, but not all of them considered themselves to be currently "engaged" in these services. Ten students who participated in this study considered themselves to be actively engaged in a campus support program specifically for former foster youth. When the participants were asked about the presence of a support system, 11 students stated that they felt they had a strong support system, one student stated that she had "somewhat" of a support system, and three students did not consider themselves as having supportive people in their lives.

One of the most salient findings within all the codes was the central theme of self-reliance. The concept of reliance in this study refers to the foster care alumni s dependence on support from either friends and family, off-campus/the community, on-campus programs, or themselves. The thread of reliance ran through all the coded themes. This study found that the young adults who participated had two opposing needs. The first of these was a need for self-reliance and independence. The second was a need to rely on others and accept assistance. These two needs often competed and created a sense of tension for these students.

While all the students spoke of their desire to be self-sufficient, they also understood the necessity of relying on others to reach their academic and personal goals. The balance between the two dependencies was referenced by the students with a sense of reservation. Several students described their personal level of self-reliance to be exhausting.

Reliance on One's Self

While the youth resented the fact that they relied so heavily on themselves, they were also unsure how to trust or ask for help from others. One student said:

> I don't like asking for help, and sometimes I feel guilty or feel ashamed to ask for it, and then other times I just feel like I should be able to do it on my own or I know the steps to get there, and if I stumble or fall, okay, at least I know the mistakes that I made, and I don't have to make them next time. I don't like people making decisions for me, because then that way I'll never learn myself.

Another stated, "I really only ask for help if I have to. If there is no way I can do it by myself, then I ll ask for it."

Most of the students exhibited a high level of self-reliance with regards to preparations needed to attend higher education. They spoke of knowing from a young age that they needed to earn a college degree. Several mentioned a degree as their "way out of their situation." Some of the students mentioned learning individuals with a college degree earned higher salaries over their lifetimes, which became a goal for them. One student spoke about reading a poster in the YMCA restroom while in middle school that stated those with a college degree would earn a million dollars more in their lifetimes than those who did not. She said she made up her mind that day to go to college. Eleven participants remembered searching for colleges on their own, and two others stated they could not remember who, if anyone, helped them search for schools.

spoke of someone directly helping them complete admissions paperwork or taking them to look at colleges. One participant was a college athlete and spoke of bringing her older brother with her to visit schools because coaches said she needed to bring a parent with her. One student said:

> When I was younger, I had a rough life growing up and school was my escape, and I felt like my only way to get out of my situation was to focus on school and get a degree and go as far as I can in school and it would bring me out of my situation.

The present study findings suggest that the participants were very knowledgeable about the services and financial aid that was available to them. Twelve of the participants said that someone from the university reached out to them and offered support prior to attending. This was how most of the students learned about the available campus support however, two participants said that their child welfare case worker informed them about the campus support program prior to admission. These students were proactive in finding answers to their questions. Many of the students reported utilizing the foster care support program as a resource referral. The participants stated that they would reach out to their campus coaches or the program s director for referrals or assistance, but usually only after they had tried to resolve a concern themselves first.

Nearly all participants mentioned financial aid or scholarship disbursements as their single largest need for assistance. Although students were knowledgeable and proactive, the financial aid office's procedures were frustrating and enacted additional barriers for them. For example, staff s lack of knowledge about the needs of the former foster youth prevented them from completing some necessary steps to receive financial aid. Six participants said they nearly dropped out of college as they could not reach an understanding with the financial aid office. These students knew they were entitled to either a tuition waiver or scholarship but struggled

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with completing the necessary paperwork or finding an individual in the financial aid office who could assist with their unique situations. One male participant said he was told repeatedly he needed a parent to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) in order to qualify for assistance. Even after telling the financial aid officer that he was in extended foster care, the officer stated that she was not sure how she could help without a completed application.

When the former foster youth who were interviewed faced barriers to meeting goals, they became resourceful in order to find ans ers or o ercome challen es. Another strength to overcomin challenges was their reliance on internal motivations. One participant recalled a dail ritual of telling herself she was one day closer to graduating. Another said she stayed motivated by writing affirming comments on post-it notes to place where she could see them.

> I'm the oldest of four. So, when we did get put into the system, it was me looking after my siblings, it was me handling everything, so I was already used to having a whole bunch of responsibilities and stuff to take care of. So, by the time I actually aged out and was by myself, I already knew, Okay, this is what you need to do to get by. I knew when it was something important that's what I had to focus on, and when I had to sacrifice other things. So, I knew what my priorities are and that is what motivated me. So, it really started young. Like I said, I had to be driven because I had no choice

Reliance on Friends and Family

Two-thirds of study participants reported having close relationships with some of their biological family members, including grandparents, siblings, and some biological mothers or fathers. Four participants who were interviewed mentioned they currently lived with their biological mothers, as on-campus housing had closed due to COVID-19. One student said she speaks frequently with her biological father and he would send money when financially able.

A few students who stated that they had contact with their biological parents also said that they did not frequently rely on them for emotional support because they had previously found their support to be inconsistent. The same held for financial support. Some students said their grandparents or parents would send them money when they could, but this source of financial support was inconsistent.

The youth interviewed in this study reported that, due to the inconsistencies in the support that their biological families provided, other individuals they met in college played a key role in not only their academic success, but also their personal wellbeing. When asked who they relied on most for support, one student responded, "On a daily basis, it would probably be my boyfriend right now, because I see him every day, but I do have a plethora of other people that I know that I can reach out to if I needed.

Several youth stated that they did not feel as though they had a strong support system when they first went to college, and this forced them to create strong relationships and to seek out individuals who they not only bonded with, but who could also be helpful. One student told of being contacted by an intern at the campus support program about the services the program offered shortly after arriving to college. When she went to the center to meet with the intern, she said she hit it off with her,"and the student reported that she had remained close friends with this individual ever since. The student even credited her relationship with the program s employee as the reason that she had stayed in school for as long as she had. Another example came from a female sophomore who said that she didn t really have many close relationships when she arrived at her school because most of her friends had stayed behind in her hometown, which forced her to become close to her roommate. Even though they do not live together anymore, she now considers the former roommate to be her closest friend.

Reliance on Campus Support Programs

The aim of campus support programs for former foster youth is to provide students with the support and resources necessary to reach their academic goals and earn a degree. This study found the participants relied on their universities and campus-based support programs for both formal and informal forms of support with varying levels of dependence. It is important to note some services the students reported utilizing on-campus are available to all students**.**

Based on interviews in this study, academic tutoring and advising along with resource referral were the most frequently used services on campus. Many students reported not receiving their actual tutoring services through the foster care support program, but that tutoring was arranged by either the program director or their campus coach. Several students discussed choosing courses with their program director and meeting with their point person in the support program for informal academic advising prior to meeting with their actual academic advisor. One student said she felt it was helpful to talk through her plans for the future and make sure she was taking the right courses with her campus coach before she went to meet with her academic advisor. Another explained that she first spoke with the program director when considering a switch to her academic major. She recounted how the director listened, talked about why she wanted to switch, and what it meant for her graduation timeline. She explained the director even looked up future jobs in that discipline to ensure this was a field in which she could see herself building a career. This form of academic advising is completed more informally by the campus support program.. It is usually completed during a scheduled check-in between mentor and student. It gives the student the ability to speak more generally about their future and academic goals prior to formal academic advising appointments, which are completed outside of the program. In this study, students relied heavily on their campus-based support program for referrals or assistance with other services both on- and off-campus.

The most reported request was for assistance dealing with the financial aid office. Nearly all students reported seeking assistance to complete financial aid paperwork. Several students said the program director acted as a liaison between them and the financial aid office. One student even told of a time when they felt they were not making progress and worried about their sttatus as a student being compromised because of financial aid, so they reached out to their campus coach for support. Students also sought referrals for mental health providers, help with housing, and internship placements. When asked why she consulted her coach, one participant said, "They give me insight and information that I don t have to help further my career." Another said, "When it comes to coping skills and learning how to deal with things, they help."

Lastly, the study found that students reliance on campus-based support waned as they progressed through their academic journey. Two thirds of students reported relying more heavily on the program s assistance when they first enrolled in college. When students were asked during the interview about the services they accessed on-campus, many responded with comments such as, I used to go to counseling there," or "When I first started, I would see my coach almost every week. Now, not so much." As youth progressed through college, some became more reliant on other forms of support, like off-campus counseling, academic mentors, and roommates or significant others. These findings may be the result of an increased number of upperclassmen moving off- campus. This finding may also be the desired outcome of an effective campus support program. Students who were more actively engaged in support early in college may acquire the skill set to be more self-sufficient as they near graduation.

Reliance on Off-Campus Support or Community-Based Agencies

All participants in this study reported receiving some level of support from off-campus or community-based providers. This support came in the form of therapists, case workers, foster

youth support groups, social service agencies, medical practitioners, and food banks. Several youth in Michigan remained in their state s extended foster care system, extending their eligibility for traditional foster care support until they turned 21 years old. Therefore, these students reported having regular contact with their case workers and continued support from the local branch child welfare jurisdiction. Moreover, five out of the eight Michigan students reported receiving assistance through outreach from a program called Foster Future Success Michigan. This program partnered these students with a community mentor who assisted them in accessing community-based support, like internships, employment, and networking events.

Another service participants reporting seeking through community-based providers was mental health services. Seven students interviewed said they were seeking mental health treatment at an off-campus location. Four students said they continued to utilize their therapists off campus because they had formed trusting relationships with them and did not want to switch providers. One student was quoted saying, "I have insurance, so I would really just rather go to my own therapist and not the one at school, plus I really like my lady." Another said she seeks mental health services off-campus because she is a psychology major and many classmates work at the on-campus clinic, so she prefers the anonymity of off-campus providers.

During the interview, students were not asked directly if they utilized medical or health services on campus, but several students did volunteer that their medical doctors were off campus when asked about what services they used in their community. Almost half of the students mentioned they attended college either in the same town or very near to where they grew up. Thus, they continued going to the same medical providers they utilized prior to college.

This study found that, overall, the students who participated in the interviews were as reliant on the services and support provided off-campus and through their community as they were on the campus-based services.

Youth's Perception of Academic Success

The youth in this study reported a commitment to earning a degree. All participants mentioned graduating as part of achieving academic success, but they also mentioned other aspects of success. Other aspects included finding emotional well-being, maintain strong relationships and findings peace with past traumas. Eight students reported participating in campus activities or becoming involved in causes they were passionate about as part of being academically successful. Four students reported success as being able to fully care for one s needs and one participant said, "I know I am successful when I can not only take care of myself, but those I love too." Another defined success as, "no longer having to struggle to enjoy my life."

Discussion

This study found campus-based support was considered accessible and utilized by students, but it was not the only resource that foster care alumni relied on to be successful. Study participants also utilized off-campus support, like mental health providers and health care services. The youth relied on the support and guidance offered to them from friends and family, but above all they relied on themselves. The years spent in foster care built within them a strong sense of self- reliance. The youth were appreciative of the personal relationships they made with their campus mentors or campus coaches they valued them as much as the tangible support they received, like financial aid, housing, or gift cards.

Lastly, this study found the concept of academic success for former foster was not defined only by earning a degree or graduating from college. While these youth were academically motivated and said that a degree was important to them, their perceptions of success also involved achieving stable mental health, practicing a career they were passionate about, becoming actively involved in hobbies, and reaching forgiveness.

Recruitment by Campus-Based Support

The participants in this study varied in their responses regarding recruitment for campus support. While some students reported being approached prior to enrolling, others stated they were never contacted by anyone at their university offering support and any support they received was at their own request. The inconsistency in recruitment methods is aligned with previous literature findings (Geiger et al., 2018), which report recruitment of foster care alumni in both higher education and wraparound support services is often noted as a programmatic challenge. The students in this study who were offered support services and assistance prior to enrollment and became actively engaged in services earlier reported a higher reliance on their support program and a stronger connection to campus-based services. Students who were eligible for services based on their foster care status but were not approached by campus-based support reported being more reliant on themselves and community-based providers.

It is well documented 70 of youth in foster care report a desire to attend postsecondary education (Courtney et al., 2007 McMillen, Auslander, Elze, White, & Thompson, 2003). It is also reported only 20 enroll in college and between 2-10 graduate with a degree (Day, Dworsky, & Feng, 2013 Dworsky & Perez, 2009). The data in this study found students who showed a desire and ability to attend college and were assisted with the enrollment process by campus-based support felt more connected and supported in college overall.

Additionally, multiple participants in this study credited the assistance they received from their campus-based foster care support program for their persistence in college. This finding supports the idea that stronger recruitment efforts among programs and institutions would be one component of narrowing the gap between aspiration and enrollment in higher education for former foster youth (Kirk & Day, 2011). A study at Arizona State University found that the use of pre-college recruitment, through a summer bridge program helped foster youth in adjusting to college life and had benefits throughout college (Geiger et al., 2016).

Youth's Perceptions of Support

The youth who participated in this study had two distinct classifications for support. The first category was the support perceived by the youth as "necessary" or need-based. The second category of support was perceived as personal or mentoring related. The fact that financial aid, food, and housing were considered "needs" by the students is not surprising. The literature lists these same three needs as barriers and among the leading causes of why former foster youth fail to complete higher education (Day et al., 2011; Dworsky & Perez, 2010; Kinarsky, 2017). The financial responsibility of covering the cost of college can be overwhelming for nearly all young adults. For those students without the privilege of family support, the financial costs can seem impossible. The youth who participated in this study reported that consistent and sufficient financial support from their families was rare; therefore, the costs of college and living expenses fell squarely on their own shoulders. Similar results have also been found in previous literature (Samuels & Pryce, 2008; Wolanin, 2005), and they corroborate why financial assistance from campus-based support programs is critical to these students as well as why these students rank financial stability as their largest concern.

Housing and food insecurities were also an area of necessity for the participants. While not all the students lived in campus housing, they still relied on their support programs for living stipends, scholarships, or financial aid to cover the cost of rent. This finding is shared by Unrau et al. (2017), who found that stable and secure housing ranked as one of the largest concerns for former foster youth in college. When issues with their housing arose, the students viewed it as essential to seek assistance from their campus-based support programs. Additionally, the students relied on their programs for assistance with covering the cost of meal plans. This study s finding about the necessary support participants rely on shows that former foster youth do not take covering their basic needs lightly. A study by Towbolowsky et al. (2019) found that the foster care alumni in their study reported worrying daily about meeting their basic needs.

The second classification of support that this study reported was a personal relationship or mentorship support. Each of the participants reported feeling gratitude and appreciation for the assistance they received from their support program to cover their basic needs. While the necessary supports were not taken lightly by the participants, the support they spoke of most often was the personal relationships they had with their campus coaches or program advisors. Some students referred to this person by name throughout the interview and mentioned them as the person they turn to for advice or personal assistance. The participants in this study stated that their mentor or campus coach had been the biggest source of support for them in college. The current study shares findings with Dworsky and Perez (2010), which concluded that what was most valuable to former foster youth in college was having a consistent and reliable person to turn to for support. Similarly, (Bruster & Coccoma, 2013) reported that having an adult mentor instilled academic self-efficacy among formerly fostered youth in college and aided them in making positive life decisions.

Children who are placed in foster care suffer a disruption in the continuity of their care. Due to frequent placement changes, the adult decisionmakers in their lives are often replaced. John Seita, whom the Seita Scholars program at the University of Western Michigan is named after, referred to this disruption as a loss of "family privilege" (Seita, 2001). For many children who grow up in foster care, the loss of family privilege means that they enter adulthood without the benefit of a consistent adult to are searching for a mentor to support them through their collegiate studies and why so many of them reported being reliant on their campus coaches or program administrators.

The questions that remain and deserve further investigation are: What specific traits or skillsets are needed to be an effective mentor for former foster youth   and Is there a difference between the role of mentor and that of campus coach   Lastly, how can campus support program address the lack self-advocate among former foster youth and how can they assist these youth in developing a skillset around self-advocacy

It is still unclear which aspect of the relationship with their advisors these youth are drawn to and benefit most from: the role of positive adult support person or their ability to act as a resource referral and liaison for meeting their basic needs. Furthermore, the impact of these relationships on enrollment and graduation rates is still unclear. The perceived value of mentorship from the viewpoint of foster alumni and the impact that mentorship has on the lives and academic success of these youth are two areas which warrant additional research. Additionally, a framework model exists on the topic of self-advocacy for students with disabilities and could be adapted to meet the needs of former foster youth (Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer & Eddy, 2005). Future research is needed to develop a similar type framework or adapt an existing one, to effectively address the needs for self-advocacy among former foster youth.

Academic Success and Contributing Factors

Most studies define academic success as graduating from college and earning a degree. However, for the youth who participated in this study, earning a degree was only a portion of what success meant to them. These students reported achieving stable mental health, practicing a career they were passionate about, becoming actively involved in hobbies, and being able to maintain strong, positive relationships with others as their definitions of success. They all shared a sense of pride in how far they had come already in their lives. For many of these students, earning a degree signified they had overcome their past or had "gotten out of their old life." To achieve academic success, the participants reported being resourceful, independent, hard-working, and self-sufficient. The presence of internal motivation, or an urge to carry out one s goals regardless of presented adversities, is a finding that this study shares with several other research efforts (Rios & Rocco, 2014 Yvonne A. Unrau et al., 2012).

 In addition, they credited using campus-based supports such as tutoring, writing labs, and remediation courses and workshops. Nearly all the participants reported having at least one empathetic educator who assisted them when they needed it. They spoke of how valuable a supportive professor was to their academic progress. Not only did these professors offer extra course assistance, they also gave encouragement and academic advice beyond their courses. The important role that empathetic and supportive educators play in the academic progress of former fostered youth is also found in the literature (Rios & Rocco, 2014).

The youth in this study also credited their support programs, and more specifically their academic advisors and campus coaches, as playing vital roles in their academic success. Most importantly, they viewed these individuals as assisting them with personal concerns, which allowed them to the focus on their academics.

Participants viewed their support as indirectly assisting them in meeting their academic goals but noted these individuals as contributors to their success. Previous research on postsecondary success for former foster youth has focused solely on the academic achievements of this population and specifically on graduation rates (Day et al., 2011 Yvonne A Unrau et al., 2017). Researchers have gathered administrative and qualitative data to examine barriers and strengths that former foster youth related to graduation, yet more information is needed on non-academic outcomes and successes achieved during their time in college. Access to this data would improve the quality and variety of services offered. By fully understanding the goals these young people hope to achieve during their time in college, programs could better implement specific types of support to help these students reach those goals.

Conclusion

This study found specific supports provided by campus-based programs, like financial aid, housing, and mentorship, are viewed by former foster youth as vital and are relied upon frequently to achieve academic success. This study also found former foster youth were reliant on themselves and multiple forms of off-campus support to achieve desired goals, which did not always center on college graduation. Lastly, fostered youth in this study viewed earning a degree as important but felt reaching personal goals during their time in college was equally valuable.

The perceptions and viewpoints presented in this study will provide insightful data and recommendations that can strengthen campus-based support programs and create effective ways of assisting former fostered youth to achieve their definitions of collegiate success. The findings act as beginning for more qualitative research to fully understand the perspectives of fostered youth and capture the voices of all former foster youth, a larger study with more diverse participants is needed. Additional research should include youth from a variety of states and postsecondary institutions and youth who are and are not engaged in campus-based support.

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Table 9

Demographic Characteristics of Student Participants (n = 15)

	n	
Race		
African American	7	47.0
White	4	27.0
Hispanic/Latino	3	20.0
Other	1	7.0
Gender		
Male	4	27.0
Female	11	73.0
University State		
Florida	7	47.0
Michigan	8	53.0
Years in Foster Care		
1-3	8	53.0
3-5	3	20.0
6-8	3	20.0
9	1	7.0
Age		
18-19 years old	2	13.0
20-21 years old	6	40.0
22-23 years old	7	47.0

Conclusions and Recommendations

Young adults with foster care experience face many barriers in the pursuit of higher education. They are resilient, motivated, and hard-working, but they need assistance to reach their educational goals. The findings of this study highlight the unique needs and strengths of foster care alumni during their years in college and reveal new insights into how higher education institutions are supporting their success. While programs to support this population are growing, many are created in the absence of input from either the foster care alumni themselves, or the administrators with the responsibility of meeting the needs of these students. The study findings call for a more collaborative process that includes the former foster youth in the design and implementation of campus-based support. The findings also confirm the need for more research into how best to meet the multi-layered, various needs of this vulnerable population.

This first exploratory study provides an overview of the on-campus services and supports that are offered to undergraduates with foster care experience. Most of these programs were created with the single mission of meeting the unique needs of foster care alumni and helping them transition to adulthood while achieving their academic goals. This study contributes to gaps in the literature by providing a description of the services currently available to fostered youth along with the facilitators and barriers to delivering support from the vantage point of those charged with administering campus services for former foster youth.

The specific support services that were offered by these programs spanned four main areas of concentration: academic support, financial support, assistance with essential needs, and referrals to assistance outside of the program. In addition to describing the support services offered, three additional key findings in this study were illuminated. First, there was a distinction between universities that offered support that was uniquely designed to meet the needs of foster care alumni and those that served fostered youth by grouping them with other high-risk student populations. The latter were unable to fully meet the needs of the students, and the program administrators that participated expressed a desire for explicit programs to aid former foster youth on their campuses.

The second finding was a breakdown in cross-collaboration between certain university offices, faculty members and the foster care support programs. This led to frustration on the part of the students and unfamiliarity about the support programs among university faculty and staff. University staff and faculty members could better support former foster youth s resilience and postsecondary attainment by having a broad awareness of students coming from the foster care system. Efforts should be given to creating humanizing classroom environments, nontraditional assignments, and pathways for reciprocal relationship building. The Office of Diversity and Inclusion, or the Student Affairs Office at most Universities are well-positioned to offer impactful training to faculty and staff. The institutions or campus-based support programs should offer interdepartmental training on nontraditional students, and have ongoing assessments of the breadth, depth, and inclusivity of their policies and programs.

Lastly, this study found that program administrators level of engagement with students varied greatly between universities. Administrators with a high level of engagement reported offering a assistance both within the scope of the programs aims and on a more personal, almost parental level. This level of engagement stemmed from the personal connections that these administrators had with the students they helped and had worked to build over time and through trust.

This study illuminated several areas that warrant further research. The first is the need for more long-range impact studies focused on the utilization of campus-based support. There is also a gap in the literature surrounding the support offered to non-university students with foster care experience. This calls for the inclusion of more postsecondary education options, such as examining the needs of students attending trade schools or community colleges. While some community colleges do offer campus-based support, there remains an absence in the literature documenting the types of services and their impact on academic performance. Finally, this study concludes that campus support programs for foster care alumni should offer professional development to other university offices to better inform them of the needs of these students and to improve cross-collaboration on campus.

The second descriptive study used survey data to examine the characteristics of foster care alumni as students and the external protective factors that these students rely on for support. The survey also collected information on the students utilization of campus-based and off-campus supports. In addition, the study examined whether there was a correlation between the use of those services and the students academic success in the form of grade point averages.

The key findings in this study were that the participants did possess certain protective factors at a high rate and considered themselves to be good students and goal oriented. The

students reported the utilizing both campus-based support and off-campus support to meet their needs. The study did not find evidence to conclude that utilizing either campus-based or off-campus support services positively impacted the participants grade point averages. This study also found that campus-based support programs would be more beneficial to fostered youth and more commonly utilized if they supplied the protective factors that not all former foster youth have, such as mentorship and social connections. Moving forward, support services need to assess this population s unmet needs and then build wraparound services to address those specific needs. Additional quantitative and qualitative research is needed to evaluate which services and supports this population finds most valuable and which have an association with academic success. To fully examine this topic, researchers would need access to university data on student persistence and academic success rates.

The third phenomenological study sought to describe the perceptions of foster care alumni on accessing and utilizing campus-based support. The findings in this study conclude that campus-based support was considered accessible and utilized by students, but it was not the only resource that foster care alumni relied on in order to be successful. This study found that the participants also depended on family, friends, community-based support, and, above all, a strong sense of self-reliance. Lastly, the fostered youth who participated in this study provided their definition of academic success: They viewed earning a degree as important but felt that reaching personal goals during their time in college was equally valuable.

The findings of this study will hopefully be used to motivate similar research, which will in turn provide data for future program design and service implementation. To fully understand the perspectives of fostered youth, a larger study with more diverse participants is needed. Additional research should include youth who are not participating in support services as well as

youth from a variety of states and diverse postsecondary institutions. In addition to a more diverse sample population, future research should include more longitudinal tracking of the educational outcomes of youth from foster care. This should include fostered youth during their later stages of high school until five years post-graduation from college.

To assist youth from foster care in reaching their educational goals, there are multiple levers state policymakers should utilize to support college enrollment and degree attainment. State funding for programs such as campus-based support for fostered youth, underserved student populations scholarships, and broader financial aid policies would undoubtedly positively impact the education trajectories of former foster youth.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Notice of Informed Consent to Participate in Research
Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study

Overview. You are being asked to take part in a research study. The information in this document should help you to decide if you would like to participate. The sections in this Overview provide the basic information about the study. More detailed information is provided in the remainder of the document.

Study Staff. This study is being led by Bonnie Brown, who is a doctoral student in the College of Behavioral and Community Sciences at the University of South Florida (USF). This person is called the Principal Investigator. Other approved research staff may act on behalf of the Principal Investigator.

Study Details. This study is being conducted at public universities in Michigan and Florida and is supported by the department of Child and Family Studies at USF. The purpose of the study is to gain an understanding of the array of services offered to foster care youth. Additionally, this study aims to evaluate the accessibility and utilization of services from the viewpoint of the students using them. These goals will be researched by using an electronically delivered survey and with personal interviews with university personnel and students.

Subjects. You are being asked to take part because you meet the study criteria as a student using on-campus support services, which assist foster care alumni. Your experience and input on this subject matter is a pivotal component to the research of this study.

Voluntary Participation. Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to participate and may stop your participation at any time. There will be no penalties or loss of benefits or opportunities if you do not participate or decide to stop once you start.

As a University Student. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your student status, course grades, recommendations, or access to future courses or training opportunities.

Benefits, Compensation, and Risk. There is no cost to participate. This research is considered minimal risk. Minimal risk means that study risks are the same as the risks you face in daily life.

Confidentiality. Even if we publish the findings from this study, we will keep your study information private and confidential. Anyone with the authority to look at your records must keep them confidential.

Why Are You Being Asked to Take Part? Student participants are being asked to participate because they offer a valuable perspective on the effectiveness of programs. A large component of this study is capturing the viewpoint of the students who utilize on-campus support services. Student feedback will be used to evaluate the accessibility and usage of these programs.

Study Procedures. During the survey you will be asked to: Complete an online survey and submit the survey. You do not have to participate in this research study. You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There

will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study. Student participants and employees, who choose to participate or not, should know their participation will not affect their student status (course grade) or job status.

Risks or Discomfort. This research is minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

Compensation. Survey participants will be compensated with a 20 Amazon gift card, if they complete the entire survey.

Privacy and Confidentiality. We will do our best to keep your records private and confidential. We cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Certain people may need to see your study records. These include:

- The research team, including the Principal Investigator.
- Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study. For example, individuals who provide oversight on this study may need to look at your records. This is done to make sure that we are doing the study in the right way. They also need to make sure that we are protecting your rights and your safety.
- Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates this research.
- The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and its related staff who have oversight responsibilities for this study, and staff in USF Research Integrity and Compliance.

If completing an online survey, it is possible, although unlikely, that unauthorized individuals could gain access to your responses. Confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. No guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet. However, your participation in this online survey involves risks similar to a person s everyday use of the Internet. If you complete and submit an anonymous survey and later request your data be withdrawn, this may or may not be possible as the researcher may be unable to extract anonymous data from the database. Your personal information collected for this research will be kept as long as it is needed to conduct this research. Once your participation in the research is over, your information will be stored in accordance with applicable policies and regulations. Your permission to use your personal data will not expire unless you withdraw it in writing. You may withdraw or take away your permission to use and disclose your information at any time. You do this by sending written notice to the Principal Investigator at the following address: bjbrown2 mail.usf.edu. While we are conducting the research study, we cannot let you see or copy the research information we have about you. After the research is completed, you have a right to see the information about you, as allowed by USF policies. If you have concerns about the use or storage of your personal information, you have a right to lodge a complaint with the USF IRB.

Contact Information. If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, call Bonnie Brown at (941) 928-9062. If you have questions about your rights, complaints, or issues as a person taking part in this study, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638 or contact the IRB by email at RSCH-IRB usf.edu. We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not let anyone know your name. We will not publish anything else that would let people know who you are. You can print a copy of this consent form for your records. I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by proceeding with this survey, I am agreeing to take part in research, and I am 18 years of age or older.

- o I agree and consent to participate in this survey (1)
- o I do not agree and choose not to participate in this survey (2)

Appendix B: Qualtrics Survey Questionnaire

1. In order to be included in this study, students must:
   - Be enrolled in a public university in Michigan or Florida with a school-issued email address
   - Have spent time in the foster care system
   - Be at least 18 years old
   - Be receiving financial assistance towards their education
   - Be willing to complete all questions in this survey and fill-in necessary blanks

     o No, I do not meet the study inclusion criteria (1)
     o Yes, I meet the study inclusion criteria (2)

2. What is your date of birth
   - Month/day/year (1)

3. How many years did you spend in foster care
   - Number of years (1)

4. At what age did you enter and exit foster care
   - Age entered (1)
   - Age exited (2)
   - Still in extended foster care (3)

5. What university do you currently attend
   - University (2)

6. What gender do you identify as
   - Male (1)
   - Female (2)

7. Are you Hispanic or Latino
   - Yes (3)
   - No (4)

8. What race do you identify as
   - White (1)
   - Black or African American (2)
   - American Indian or Alaska Native (3)
   - Asian (4)
   - Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (5)
   - Other (6)

9. In which state do you currently attend school
   - Florida (1)
   - Michigan (2)

10. Did you grow up in the same state you attend school now
    - Yes (1)
    - No (2)

11. What is your family s income level
    - Less than 20,000 (1)
    - 20,000 to 34,999 (2)
    - 35,000 to 49,999 (3)
    - 50,000 to 74,999 (4)
    - 75,000 to 99,999 (5)
    - Over 100,000 (6)

12. What is your current employment status
    - Employed full time (40 or more hours per week) (1)
    - Employed part time (up to 39 hours per week) (2)
    - Unemployed and currently looking for work (4)
    - Unemployed and not currently looking for work (5)
    - Self-employed (6)
    - Unable to work (7)

13. What is your current occupation
    - Current occupation/student (1)

14. Please explain the types of financial assistance you receive towards the cost of your education.
    - All forms of financial assistance you receive (1)

15. Please explain the type of financial assistance you receive for your living expenses. (Housing, stipends, rent assistance...)
    - All forms of financial assistance you receive (1)
    - I do not receive any financial assistance for living expenses (3)

16. Do you have a vehicle
    - Yes (1)
    - No (2)

17. What is your marital status
    - Single (never married) (1)
    - Married, or in a domestic partnership (2)
    - Widowed (3)

- Divorced (4)
- Separated (5)

18. Do you have any children
   - Yes, number of children (1)
   - No (3)

19. Which best describes your exit from foster care
   - I was adopted at age number (1)
   - I aged out or transitioned out at age number (2)
   - I am still in extended foster care (3)

20. If you were adopted, which best describes your adoption
   - I was adopted by a foster parent/non-relative (1)
   - I was adopted by a relative, relationship to relative (2)
   - This question does not apply to me (4)

21. Were you raised in a single-parent household
   - Yes, relationship to you (1)
   - No (3)

22. How many different foster care or non-relative placements did you have
   - Number of different placements (1)

23. Is English your primary language
   - Yes (1)
   - No, primary language (2)

24. What year did you graduate from high school
   - Graduation year (1)

25. Did you repeat any grades in school
   - Yes, grade repeated (1)
   - No (3)

26. Did you receive any special accommodations in school or where you enrolled in Special
   Education
   - Yes, explanation (1)
   - No (3)

27. How many different schools from kindergarten to high school did you attend
   - How many Elementary Schools   Number of schools (1)
   - How many Middle Schools   Number of schools (2)
   - How many High Schools   Number of schools (3)

28. Did you have a court-appointed guardian or mentor prior to college
   - Yes, explanation (1)

- No (3)

29. Do you currently have a mentor
    - Yes, explanation (1)
    - No (3)

30. Do you consider yourself to have supportive parents or parent
    - Yes (1)
    - No (2)

31. Do you consider yourself to be goal-oriented or do you practice setting goals
    - Yes (1)
    - No (2)
    - Somewhat (3)

32. Have you ever used any of the following services on-campus Check all that apply.
    - On-Campus Housing (1)
    - Assistance from a Resident Advisor (2)
    - Mental Health Services. Student Counseling Services (3)
    - Wellness of On-Campus Health Clinic (4)
    - Academic Assistance or Tutoring Services (5)
    - Financial Aid Counseling (6)
    - Academic Advising (7)
    - Career Center (8)
    - Student Employment Office (9)
    - Campus Ministry (10)
    - Other, explanation (11)

33. Have you used any of the following community support services Check all that apply.
    - Community Health Department (1)
    - Food Banks (2)
    - Children or Family Service Centers (3)
    - Community Mental Health Center (4)
    - Addiction or Substance Use Support Group (5)
    - Other, explanation (6)

34. Are you a member of faith-based organization on-campus
    - Yes, denomination (1)
    - No (2)

35. Are you a member of a faith-based organization off campus
    - Yes, denomination (1)
    - No (2)

36. Are you involved in any on-campus organizations or groups
    - Yes, list of organizations or groups (1)

- No (2)

37. Are you involved in any other off-campus organizations or groups
    - Yes, please list all organizations or groups (1)
    - No (2)

38. What is your grade point average this semester
    - Semester GPA (1)

39. What is your cumulative grade point average
    - Cumulative GPA (1)

40. Have you ever been placed on academic probation
    - Yes (1)
    - No (2)

41. Do you consider yourself to be a good student
    - Definitely yes (1)
    - Probably yes (2)
    - Might or might not (3)
    - Probably not (4)
    - Definitely not (5)

42. Are you a transfer student to your current university
    - Yes (1)
    - No (3)

43. How many semesters have you been enrolled at your current university
    - Number of semesters (1)

44. Did you enroll in college directly after high school
    - Yes (1)
    - No, explanation (2)

45. Have you ever taken a leave of absence from courses
    - Yes, number of semesters on leave for (1)
    - No (3)

46. Do you have older siblings that attended college
    - Yes, number of siblings that attended college (1)
    - No (3)

47. Did you take College Preparatory or Advanced Placement courses in high school
    - Yes (1)

- No (2)

48. Did you participate in a Summer Bridge Program or Summer Readiness Program at your university
   - Yes (1)
   - No (2)

49. How many credit hours are you currently taking this semester
   - Number of credit hours (1)

50. How many total credit hours have you earned at your university so far
   - Total number of credit hours (1)

51. How many credit hours do your still need to graduate
   - Number of credit hours remaining (1)

52. What major are you studying
   - Major (1)

53. What are your plans for after graduation
   - Explanation (1)

54. Is there any additional information you would like to share about your experience being a former foster care youth enrolled in higher education
   - No (1)
   - Yes, explanation (2)

55. Follow-up Interview Participation:
   If you are interested in participating in a follow-up interview regarding your opinion on access and use of support services for former foster care youth, please provide your email address. This follow-up interview is voluntary and not necessary to receive compensation for this survey. Your interview will be confidential. There is additional compensation available for participating in the follow-up interview.
   - Yes, I would like to participate in a follow-up interview and my email address is: email address (1)
   - No, thank you (2)

56. Please provide your university-issued email address, and an electronic Amazon gift card will be sent to that address. In order to be eligible, you must have completed all questions. You do not need to provide your name.
   - Enter your email address: email address (1)

University Program Director Interview Protocol

Interview Details

University: _____   Date: _____   Time: _____

Participant's
Name: _____

Participant's
University Title: _____   Interviewer Phone Number: _____

Participant's email: _____

Notes: _____

Questions to Ask Personnel

Domain #1   Role

Question:

1. What is your current role at your university?

    • Probe: what college/department is that position in?

2. What is your direct involvement with Foster Care alumni students?

3. How did you come to have these responsibilities with FCA students?

    • What other groups of students do you assist? And how do you assist them?

4. What brought you to pursue this career path?

    • What training, education, past experiences do you have?

5. Do you feel that youth how have spent time in state care have unique need as undergraduates?

    • If so, what are they and how are they different from traditional undergrads?

Domain #2 Services

Questions:
1. What are some of the specific services your university offer foster care alumni?

2. Is there are certain framework or set of principles that your program is designed around?

- What specific services are part of these programs?

- Have you been able to continue offering these services now that your campus has moved to only distance learning? Since Coronavirus?

3. What are the eligibility requirements for access to these programs?

4. Do you partner with other programs or services on your campus to meet the needs of this population?

5. When foster care alumni have needs or concerns who do they go to?

- How do FCA typically find out about your program?

6. What are some of the most frequent concerns or issues that FCA come to you with?

7. How do you meet those needs?

8. Have your students' needs changed since they are now distance learning?

9. What are some of the needs that students come to you with and you are not able to assist them with?

10. What are some of the barriers to meeting student's needs?

11. Overall, would you say that foster care alumni on your campus are getting their needs meet?

Domain# 3   Impact

Questions: 1.   What trends have you noticed in regard to this population have you noticed over time?

• Did those trends or the changing needs of students influence the services or programs offered?

2.   Do you feel the services offered impact their academic performance?

• Do you feel that the move to distance learning since Coronavirus will have an impact on persistence and graduation for the students in your program?

• Do you collect feedback from FCA about services?

3.   Do you notice a different in academic performance and social adaptions to students who are engaged in services and those that are not?

• Why do you think some who are eligible choose not to engage in services?

Domaine#4   Data Collection

Questions: 1.   Do you feel it is important to collect data on foster care alumni students?

• If so, why do you think it is important?

2.   What type of information do you collect on Foster Care Alumni?

3.   Whose job is it to collect and record the data?

4.   Who is included in your data collect?

- Do you break apart or collect separately adopted from youth who have aged out?

- What is the data collected used for?

Appendix D: Student Participant Interview Protocol

Student Interview Protocol

University: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

Participant's
Name: _____

Participant's Study
Identity Number: _____ Interviewer Phone Number: _____

Participant's email: _____

Notes: _____

Questions to Ask Personnel

Domain #1   Accessing Support Services

Question: 6.   When did you first start thinking about going to college?

7.   Why did you think it was important to go to college?

8.   How did you choose which schools to apply to?

9.   Why did you choose to enroll at the school you are currently attending?

10. Can you explain your process of enrollment?

- Did someone help you with this process?

11. How and when did you first learn about support for foster care alumni?

12. What services were you told were available to you?

Domain #2 Utilizing Support Services

Questions:

12. Do you feel you have a support system or supportive people in your life?

- Who do you rely on for support?

13. Do you consider yourself to be an independent type person or self-sufficient?

- If the answer is yes >Can you give an example of this?

- If the answer is no>Why do you think that is?

14. Do you use on-campus support services?

- Which services do you use?

- How often do you use them?

- Why do you use them?

15. When you have an academic question, such as one about courses or financial aid, how do you know where to go for assistance?

- Do you feel that they are helpful?

16. When you have a personal concern, such as physical or emotional, how you where to find assistance?

17. In what ways are the support services at your University are meeting your needs?

18. Are there needs or concerns that your University can not help you with?

- Can you give an example of one?

- Why do you think they can't assist with this?

19. What do you think it means to be successful as a University student?

20. How could your University improve at helping you be successful?

21. Do you feel that students who are alumni of the foster care system have unique needs?

- Can you give an example of what some of those needs are?

Additional Notes

Appendix E: IRB Exempt Notice

UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH FLORIDA

EXEMPT DETERMINATION

March 20, 2020

Bonnie Brown
1567 Eastbrook Drive Sarasota, FL
34231

Dear Mrs. Brown:
On 3/19/2020, the IRB reviewed and approved the following protocol:

Application Type:	Initial Study
IRB ID:	STUDY000396
Review Type:	Exempt 2
Title:	Understanding Campus Support Programs: How Universities Are Assisting Foster Care Alumni Achieve Success on Their Campuses
Funding:	None
Protocol:	IRB Protocol Version #1 03.09.2020.docx

The IRB determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review. In conducting this protocol, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Please note, as per USF policy, once the exempt determination is made, the application is closed in BullsIRB. This does not limit your ability to conduct the research. Any proposed or anticipated change to the study design that was previously declared exempt from IRB oversight must be submitted to the IRB as a new study prior to initiation of the change. However, administrative changes, including changes in research personnel, do not warrant a modification or new application.

Ongoing IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about

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University of South Florida / 3702 Spectrum Blvd., Suite 165 / Tampa, FL 33612 / 813974-5638

whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit a new request to the IRB for a determination.

Sincerely,

Various Menzel
IRB Research Compliance Administrator

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Appendix F: Participant Recruitment Flyer

RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS FOR A RESEARCH STUDY

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA
USF RESEARCH & INNOVATION

Researchers are interested in understanding the barriers to **student success** for **former foster care youth** enrolled in college.

You are welcome to participate in the study if you:

- Have previously spent time in the **foster care system**
- Receive **financial assistance** towards your education because of your **involvement** with **foster care**
- **Speak, read** and **understand English**
- Are **over** the age of **18 years old**
- Have **access to the internet**, through a computer, smartphone or tablet
- Currently enrolled in a University in Michigan or Florida

This **voluntary study** is a combination of an online survey that is estimated to take **15-20 minutes to complete,** and a **follow-up interview** which will take **60-45 minutes.** The interview will ask participants to answer a variety of questions about your experience **accessing** and **using on-capmus support services** for former foster care youth.

Participants who meet All of the study's inclusion criteria and fully complete this survey will each receive a $20 Amazon gift card. If a follow-up interview is completed a $25 Amazon gift card will be issued upon completion of a phone interview.

To learn more about the study and complete the online survey, please visit https://bit.ly/2UVpan9

Particpanting in this study is your choice and will not impact your services or standing on campus.

About the Author

In 2004, Bonnie Brown graduated from High Point University with a bachelor s degree in elementary education. She began her teaching career as a passionate and motivated teacher. In the years that followed, she enjoyed a productive and rewarding tenure with the Sarasota County school district. During her years as a teacher, Bonnie continued her training and became a special education teacher. Her desire to reinforce the best teaching practices and her enthusiasm for school administration led her to earn a master s degree in 2011 from the University of South Florida. She brought her passion for teaching and knowledge of educational administration to her position as a clinical teaching supervisor and adjunct professor in the College of Education at the University of South Florida in 2011.

During her years as a teacher and as a school administrator, she was continually called on to assist the most vulnerable students in her schools. One population she was particularly passionate about was students living in the foster care system. Bonnie s internal motivation for assisting foster care youths did not begin when she was a teacher or even an adult, but rather when she was a young child. She was born and raised in a foster home, and alongside her biological parents she welcomed dozens of foster children into her own home, four of whom later become her adopted siblings. The lived experiences, triumphs, and struggles of the foster children she grew up with remained with her into adulthood and her career. In 2014, Bonnie became a guardian ad litem and educational surrogate for youths in state care. During this time, she noticed firsthand, as a school district employee and a child welfare volunteer, the educational struggles that youths from foster care were facing.

Out of a desire to help foster care youths overcome their educational disadvantages, Bonnie began to look into doctoral programs that would aid her in her research. In 2018, Bonnie enrolled in the College of Behavioral and Community Science s interdisciplinary doctoral program at the University of South Florida, with a concentration in child and family studies. During her doctoral studies, she continued to focus on the educational disadvantages of youths with foster care experience. This research area later became the focus for this dissertation study.