

What We Wish We Knew:

Foster Alumni Reflect on Lessons Learned in College

By
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Abstract

Research shows that the educational attainment of former foster youth is lower than youth who have not been in foster care. There are a relatively small number of foster alumni who beat the odds and attain a four-year degree (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014; Casey Family Programs, 2010; Courtney et al., 2011; Pecora et al., 2003; Sarubbi, Parker, & Sponsler, 2016; Wolanin, 2005). This purpose of this qualitative study was to gain an understanding of how former foster youth navigate college barriers so they can continue to persist semester after semester. Former foster youth from a mid-size university in the Midwest participated in semi-structured interviews. Using Padilla's (2009) concept of how best to understand the success of students who are marginalized, a local model of student success (LMSS) was completed (2009). The LMSS highlights barriers to academic success, the knowledge a student must come to understand to overcome those barriers, and the action that needs to be taken. The findings are viewed by using Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, which helps to further illustrate the extent that former foster youth's basic needs go unmet and how this negatively impacts their academic success. Whereas all students have basic needs, the ability and the options that a student has to tend to those needs is starkly different for former foster youth. The author recommends greater campus awareness of the lives of a student who has been in foster care as well as providing opportunity for year-round housing that include all break periods. The author also recommends outreach and collaboration with the staff who work at the state's Independent Living program and the creation of a former foster youth network that enables students to connect with other students who need support navigating college and being on their own.

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My advisors, my committee, my cohort, my colleagues, my partner, my kids, my mom, my dad, my siblings, and my friends all know I write this now because of their guidance, support, and love. I respect and appreciate all of these people immensely, though it is not their names that I share. Instead, I focus on the eight students who let me into their lives and who shared a part of their past that carries a great deal of hurt and heartache. These eight went on to share their current experiences and their hopes for their future. I am humbled by their struggles and heartaches and inspired by their bravery and resilience. Their efforts in the classroom and in life are molding them to be leaders and heroes for future foster alumni who want to learn, dream, and achieve like everybody else.

My sincerest and deepest thanks to Aurora, Georgia, Rebecca, Grace, Sherika, J, Jefferson, and Samantha. You all have rung a bell that I cannot “unring.” I will now do my best to ring a few of my own.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services (2018), as of September 30, 2017, there was 442,995 youth in foster care in the United States. Of that number, 19,945 of those youth were emancipated from state custody. Those who “age-out” are now responsible for finding housing, purchasing food, paying utilities, and creating a future for themselves; the odds are not in their favor.

The Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth report found that students who have aged-out of the foster care system see college as a path worth pursuing (Courtney, Terao, & Bost, 2004), but the number who enroll is considerably higher than the number who graduate (Courtney, Dworsky, Brown, Cary, Love, & Vorhies, 2011). In a society where education is valued and viewed as a path to a brighter future, emancipated foster youth find themselves at a considerable disadvantage. Youth who are 17 to 18 years of age and who have been in the foster care system are 34% more likely to have been moved from school to school due to multiple foster care placements (National Working Group, 2014). The movement from school to school is known to hurt the overall educational experience of a child. In short, youth who age-out of the foster care system experience more educational disadvantages than their peers, which ultimately result in low educational achievements (Blome, 1997; Day, Dworsky, Fogarty, & Damashek, 2011; Pecora, William, Kessler, Downs, O’Brien, & Emerson, 2003; Pecora et al., 2006; Pecora, 2012; Salazar, Haggarty, & Roe, 2016; Unrau, Font, & Rawls, 2012; Wolanin, 2005).

Research shows that 84% of youth who have been in foster care express they would like to go to college (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014). Research also shows that only 20% of

foster youth who graduate high school enroll in a post-secondary institution, and even a smaller number graduate with a four-year degree (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014).

The educational attainment of foster alumni is essential because the future is bleak for those who do not graduate high school and go on to earn a four-year degree. Research shows that foster alumni who are burdened by low levels of educational attainment become young adults who experience a higher probability of delinquency, violence, and drug abuse (Katz & Courtney, 2017). Youth who were in foster care and have low levels of educational attainment face high percentages of homelessness, unemployment, and victimization (Rome & Raskin, 2019).

An education can provide a person greater opportunity such as steady employment, stable housing, ability to provide for their family and community engagement (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017). The overall positive effects of a community that is educated can be seen in revenue via property taxes and taxable goods versus tax dollars going out in the form of public assistance. There is a positive impact on society when education is allowed to spur human ingenuity; but human ingenuity is lost when foster youth are not afforded the same opportunity to meet their academic potential as other youth (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017).

According to a report generated by the Education Commission of the States (2017), over the last 20 years, there has been little change in the percentage of foster youth who earn a four-year degree. In 2016, there was approximately 415,000 youth in the foster care system. Less than half of these youth graduated high school or completed a GED, and of those who did, 3% successfully earned a bachelor's degree (Sarubbi, Parker, & Sponsler, 2016). The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand how a group of former foster youth at Washburn University has navigated the barriers to college. Washburn University is a mid-size university located in Topeka, Kansas.

Statement of Purpose

Children who have grown up in foster care and who have earned a bachelor's degree have faced their fair share of challenges. These children learned how to overcome barriers long before they step foot on a college campus. The purpose of this study is to learn from former foster youth who are enrolled at Washburn University and Washburn Tech. Though the number of youth who have aged-out of foster care and who have graduated college is small, their potential contribution to foster youth younger than them is significant. Those who graduate not only provide hope to others, they can also guide those who want to attain a college education. The intention of gathering this information is to increase the educational attainment of future foster youth who attend Washburn University.

Washburn University, the site of this study, is a public mid-size liberal arts postsecondary institution. The institution boasts of 200 academic programs that allow students to receive their associate's, bachelors, master's degree and/or a law degree. Founded in 1865, Washburn University was built on the ideology that education is a public good that everyone should be able to pursue (Washburn University, n.d.). Washburn University is unique in that it receives public funding from the state, the county and the city of Topeka, yet it remains governed by its own Board of Regents (Washburn University, n.d.). In 2008, Washburn University acquired Kaw Area Technical School, which would later be renamed Washburn Tech (Washburn Tech, n.d.). Washburn's population has grown to nearly 7,000 students, and of that population, 88% are residents of the state of Kansas (Washburn University at a glance, 2016).

Washburn University has an open admission policy (NCES, 2017). To be an open admission university means the institution admits any person who has a high school diploma or has completed their GED; this is the strictest definition of open admission. In the fall of 2015,

Washburn University received 1,458 new student freshman applications, and of that number 99% were admitted (Collegeportraits.org, 2017). According to Washburn University's at-a-glance section of their website, students are likely to be full-time students. By nearly 20 additional percentage points, Washburn students are more likely to be women than men; almost a fourth of the student population are minority students; and the average age of a student is 24 (Washburn University, 2016). Academically, 65% of incoming students who graduated in the top half of their class and the average high school GPA of first-time, first-year students is 3.34 (Washburn University, 2017). Of the fall 2009 group, 67% of 708 first-time, full-time students had either graduated or were still enrolled at Washburn (collegeportrait.org, 2017).

To combat low retention rates, Washburn University opened the Center for Student Success and Retention (CSSR) in 2011. The purpose of the department was, and still is, to increase the retention rate of first-time, first-year students. CSSR programs such as the Ichabod Success Institute and 15 to Finish have helped Washburn to meet their retention goals (Washburn University, 2017). According to Alan Bearman, Dean of University Libraries and the Center for Student Success and Retention, "casting a wide net" is the reason for the department's early success. The number of students impacted by that wide net resulted in an increase in student retention. Bearman goes on to say the next step is to now focus on subpopulations within the student body to gain a better understanding of how those subpopulations can best be supported.

As Director of Residential Living at Washburn University, I see former foster youth move into the residence halls in the fall, and far too often, I would see what appeared to be a disproportionate number of them leave before the year was over. I reached out to Bearman, Dean of the Center of Student Success and Retention (CSSR) and shared my concern for this group of students. Sometime later, CSSR requested official data from the University's Strategic Analysis

and Reporting/Institutional Research (SAR/IR) department regarding former foster youth's academic success in terms of persistence and graduation rate. Institutional Research was able to confirm the low success rates of foster youth at Washburn University. The focus on foster youth who attend Washburn is at its infancy, but Institutional Research was able to report that the number of former foster youth students who made up the fall 2010 – 2015 cohort was 43. The fall-to-fall retention rate for former foster youth was an average of 46.51% with an overall 6-year graduation rate of 11.76% (WU Foster Student Success Report, 2017). In comparison, the overall retention rate of the general student population at Washburn from the first to second year in the fall of 2015 was 68%, with a graduation rate of 35% (NCES, 2017). It is clear that a gap in educational attainment exists between former foster youth and the general Washburn first-year student.

Drawing from expert's system theory, Padilla (2009) developed what is called the expert model of student success (EMSS). Padilla believed that institutions should conduct their own qualitative research on underrepresented students in order to identify their barriers, the knowledge needed to overcome those barriers, and the action to be taken in order to succeed; the result is a local model of student success (LMSS). This model provides the means to uncover the barriers to success that foster youth students face at Washburn University. The mission of Washburn University highlights its intentions by stating the following: "enriches the lives of students by providing opportunities for them to develop and to realize their intellectual, academic, and professional potential, leading to becoming productive and responsible citizens" (Washburn University, n.d.). Thus, serving the population of foster care alumni is well within its mission.

The amount of research on foster youth has increased over the last decade, though much of what exists is quantitative. Research has confirmed the overall gap in educational attainment between former foster youth and their peers (Courtney et al., 2011; Day et al., 2011; Pecora et al., 2003; Wolanin, 2005). Reasons such as the number of placements, the number of school changes (Pecora et al., 2003), and the trauma experienced before and after being placed in foster care help to explain the struggle foster youth face when it comes to being academically successful (Perry, 2006). Literature that provides reasons for a foster youth's ability to achieve academic success is lacking. Information that details why foster alumni academically succeed and what barriers they have to overcome provides a better understanding of the experiences former foster youth face while at college. According to Padilla, for a University to better understand a particular group of students, the University should get to know those students within their institutional context (2009). This study seeks to address the following research questions:

- What are the personal characteristics of former foster youth enrolled at Washburn University and how do these characteristics contribute to their likelihood of persisting?
- What systems of support did former foster youth use at Washburn University to help them be successful during college?
- What barriers have foster youth observed/experienced at Washburn that have challenged their academic success?

Overview of the Methodology

The methodological approach used in this research project was a basic qualitative study. The goal of the study was to gain insight into how former foster youth overcame the barriers they experienced during college. The use of purposive sampling enabled the researcher to interview

students who best represented the intended population. The initial requirements to be a participant in the study was the completion of 24 or more credit hours and having aged-out of the foster care system. The final requirements for inclusion were just that the student was enrolled at Washburn or Washburn Tech and that they were a former foster youth. The pre-determined method to collect data was semi-structured interviews. After each interview I made notes regarding trends and questions to consider asking during subsequent interviews. Lastly, all data were analyzed and coded to track emerging themes. These themes are the primary topic in Chapter Four.

Rationale and Significance

The importance of this study lies on the impact education attainment has for foster youth and the impact retention numbers have on a university. Unlike other cohorts, such as athletes, honor students, on-campus residents, or first-generation students, the academic progress of foster youth is not tracked. Tracking students' progress while they attend college provides valuable information that enables Washburn to better direct resources. Creating awareness and tracking the academic success of foster youth, as a cohort, creates the opportunity to learn more about these students. The results of this study could assist faculty/staff in supporting foster youth more effectively. Students who are better supported are more apt to become students who achieve academically. Acknowledging barriers and providing paths to success for foster youth, a group of students who often go unnoticed, will have a positive impact on these students and for the university. Often, foster youth do not want to self-disclose to faculty, staff or students that they were in foster care for fear of being seen as less intelligent or less deserving of attention. The stigma associated with having been in foster care prevents foster youth from seeking out the resources that would support their academic progress (Tobolowsky et al., 2017). Given

Washburn's mission, the university should attempt to understand these students' backgrounds and design pathways to support them in earning a college degree. This study brings light to the experiences of foster youth during their time at Washburn and helps create awareness regarding the different challenges that foster youth face on Washburn's campus.

Nationally, the college completion of youth brought up in foster care is lower than all other groups of students, and this includes first-generation low-income students (Tobolowsky et al., 2017). This study provides an opportunity to support foster youth who attend Washburn University and to potentially help foster youth at other post-secondary institutions by way of sharing the methodology and findings of this study.

Retention numbers are a significant concern for every university in the country. For mid-size and smaller universities even a handful of students who continue to enroll can positively impact the overall retention rate. Conversely, when even a small number of students do not persist and graduate, the institution is hurt. High retention numbers are a marketing tool that colleges want to have printed in their brochures; therefore, evaluating what group of students they can help be more academically successful is a constant process.

Washburn students who have experience in foster care are not succeeding at the same rate as their peers who have no experience in foster care (Washburn University Strategic Analysis and Reporting/Institutional Research, 2017). This study's purpose was to understand the reasons behind this disparity. To aid in answering the research questions, Washburn students who have persisted past their freshman year of college and freshman who were at the beginning of their college experience were interviewed. Using Padilla's three parameter approach, the focus was to learn the barriers to academic success, the knowledge learned thus far, and the action taken to

overcome these barriers. The findings of this study could enhance Washburn's ability to offer the type of support that former foster youth need to be academically successful.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter one serves as the introduction to the study and consists of a problem statement, statement of purpose, research question, an overview of the methodology, and the organization of the rest of the dissertation. Chapter two comprises the literature review and the conceptual framework. The third chapter covers the methodology and contains information on the rationale for the research approach, research setting, research sample, data collection methods, analysis of the methods, issues of trustworthiness, limitations and a summary. The fourth chapter reviews the findings, and lastly, the fifth chapter discusses the findings, recommendations, and topic areas for future research.

There are several agencies that use acronyms that are referred to throughout the paper. The full name of each agency can be found within the text or in the list of Key Terminology (see Appendix A). Other general terms that are used by agencies and former foster youth can also be found in the same location.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The literature review takes a look at the postsecondary educational attainment of foster youth who have aged-out of the foster care system. The review begins with research on foster children and education and is followed by notable legislation that deals directly with youth who have aged-out of the system. The next section discusses findings related to barriers to success at the college-level. A review of resources and support, adjustment to college life and college level academics lead into future recommendations. Next, a brief review of Schlossberg's theory of marginality and mattering, serves as a precursor to an overview of the conceptual framework provided by Padilla's local model of student success (LMSS). Maslow's (1943) theory on motivation is discussed briefly as it serves as a supplementary guide to understanding research findings. This information is provided to lay a foundation for this study that revolves around the following four research questions.

1. What are the personal characteristics of former foster youth enrolled at Washburn University and how do these characteristics contribute to their likelihood of persisting?
2. What systems of support did former foster youth use at Washburn University to help them be successful during college?
3. What barriers have foster youth observed/experienced at Washburn that have challenged their academic success?

Foster Children and Education

In 2017, the state of Kansas had 7,192 children in foster care. A court, based on information provided by Children Protective Services (CPS), determines if a child is to be removed from their home. The determining factor that is considered by CPS is which one of the

following is more likely to happen: will the child experience more emotional harm by being removed from the home or is the child in greater danger by staying in the home (Kansas Department of Children and Families, 2018). Regardless of the decision made by CPS and the court, there is no guarantee that a child will have a trauma-free outcome.

Numerous factors influence foster youth's ability to learn. The Legal Center for Foster Care and Education reported that two main issues are trauma and school mobility (2014). For instance, the impact of neglect and abuse on foster youth makes the struggle to achieve academic success more difficult. Whether it is a foster youth's home life or removal from their home, the impact of trauma is significant. Research shows that foster youth who have aged-out of foster care are twice as likely to experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as their peers. The impact of trauma on youth manifests itself in ways such as self-recognition, brain development, attachment, lower social-emotional cognition, and communication disorder; these are a few ways in which trauma can hinder a foster youth's ability to be academically successful (Clemens et al., 2017).

The number of placements a foster youth experience has an impact on academic success (Kinarfsky, 2017; Clemens et al., 2016; Clemens et al., 2017). Each placement likely involves a new school and new teachers. Movement from school to school creates a disjointed educational experience for foster youth. Oftentimes, school records lag behind, which results in students repeating classes or placement in classes intended for students with disabilities. To put this in perspective, 44% of foster youth have been in at least three or more placements. Each time a student starts a new school is the equivalent of falling behind four to six months.

Furthermore, multiple placements tend to result in lower grades and an increased probability of dropping out of school (Kinarfsky, 2017). The more times a foster youth changes

schools, due to a change of placement, the more likely these youth are to acquire an equivalency degree (GED) versus a high school diploma (Clemens et al., 2016; Clemens et al., 2017). The significance between a GED and a high school diploma is people with a high school diploma are more likely to be employed and more likely to earn more than people with a GED (Okpych & Courtney, 2014; Clemens, et al, 2017).

For many people, a college degree is a means to a better life. An education can provide a person a better job and a higher income (Bureau of Labor Statistic, 2015), but only if they can attain that education. Foster youth know and appreciate the advantages of having an education but being a part of the most educationally disadvantaged group of students in the United States makes educational attainment an uphill battle (Piel, 2018). Higher education seems like the golden ticket that could ensure the experience of foster care does not have to leave a life-long, negative impact on youth. Postsecondary education could lead to a better life for former foster youth, but the question of how to increase the college graduation rate of foster alumni remains unanswered.

Notable Legislation

The tragic outcomes of youth aging out of the foster care system are what prompted the United States Government to pass the Independent Living Initiative in 1985. This initiative provided funding to states thereby permitting foster youth to receive assistance with independent living. More specifically, the legislation enabled foster youth between the ages of 16-21 to have access to training on practical day-to-day living skills, counseling, educational opportunities, assistance with employment, case management, and perhaps most importantly, training on the transition from being under the care of the state to being on their own (U.S. GAO, 1999). The reauthorization of the Independent Living Program Initiative (ILP) occurred in 1993. The

program allowed states to use federal funds to provide outreach programs, counseling, case management, and other educational opportunities to foster youth who had aged-out of the system. A significant flaw of the initiative was reporting the creation of an Independent Living Program was the only requirement a state had to complete. The Foster Care Independence Act (FCIA) of 1999 doubled the amount of funding to \$140 million per year. Another meaningful change brought about by FCIA allowed states to begin applying funds toward room and board. FCIA also permitted states to continue care and services to youth ages 18-21, with one of those services being to continue Medicaid eligibility until youth reach 21 years of age. FCIA also brought about a focus on measurable results such as requiring the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) create a method in which states would measure and report results of Independent Living Programs. In 2007, HHS required states to collect information on the transition of foster youth cohorts at ages 17, 19 and 21. The vision was to build a longitudinal database that would provide results regarding the impact the Independent Living Program has on youth transitioning out of state care (Courtney, 2009). An existing gap in federal legislation is the lack of a mandate requiring all states to provide care or services to former foster youth after the age of 18. Currently, states can choose whether or not to provide post-foster care services (Courtney et al., 2007).

The 2008 Fostering Connections Act (FCA) allowed states to extend care to foster youth who have aged-out to the age of 21 as long as they meet one of the following requirements.

- 1) graduate from high school or acquire an equivalency degree
- 2) enroll in postsecondary institution or a vocational program
- 3) partake in a program that assists with promoting employment or helps to remove barriers to employment

4) works at least 80 hours in a month's time

5) due to medical needs is unable to partake in any of the previous 4 requirements.

FCA also requires that 90 days before a youth's emancipation from state care, a caseworker will work with the youth to develop a personal transition plan. The plan is to be as specific as possible and include different plans and resources for housing, food, employment, insurance, educational opportunities and other types of necessities (Courtney, 2009).

Though FCA was much more explicit in its requirements than previous legislation, it was not without its pitfalls. In 2014, an official U.S. Government Accountability report stated the child welfare systems struggled to meet the requirements asked of them due to the lack of participation from education agencies. In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) became law. ESSA requires state and local education agencies and child welfare agencies to work together to support the overall goal of improving the educational attainment of foster youth. For example, both agencies should work together to avoid the adverse educational outcomes that multiple placements have on foster youth. When a change of placement occurs, both agencies must consider the following:

1. Is changing to another school best for the youth.
2. If the answer is no, then the student is guaranteed transportation to school, to and from placement.
3. If a move to another school is necessary, then expedited enrollment, along with transfer of transcripts will be a priority (U.S. Department of Education et al, 2016; Clemsen et al., 2017).

ESSA also requires states to report the educational progress and outcome of all foster youth (Clemsen et al., 2017), which had not previously been the case.

Barriers to College Success for Former Foster Youth

The percentage of foster youth who want to go to college is 70%, yet the percentage of foster alumni who enroll in a postsecondary institution is 7% (Casey Family Programs, 2010). The number of youth who have aged-out of the foster care system and who have earned a four-year degree has been reported to be as low as 1% and as high as 11% (Casey Family Programs, 2010; Courtney et al., 2011; Pecora et al., 2003; Pecora, et. al, 2005; Randolph, 2017; Wolanin, 2005). The disparity between foster youth interest in college education and actual graduation rates is a problem with no current solution. National and state governments have enacted legislation, child welfare agencies have developed Independent Living Programs, and various postsecondary institutions created programs to support former foster youth's transition to college, yet, the graduation rate of foster youth has stayed relatively the same for the past two decades (Sarubbi et al., 2016).

The research of Randolph et al. (2017) shared that the college-level barriers that foster alumni were challenged by fell into one of five general areas: housing, financial issues, resources and supports, adjusting to college life, and academic demands. The researcher explores these five barriers in the next few pages.

Housing. There is a negative impact on academic success when students experience housing insecurity. In the results of the third national survey of its kind, Goldrick-Rab et al. (2018) reports that within the last 12 months 9% of college students were homeless and 36% of college students experienced housing insecurity. In this study researchers defined housing insecurity as a student who answered yes to one of six questions related to maintaining stable housing; to be considered homeless a student would need to answer yes to at least one of the five questions related to not having housing.

Being in foster care puts a person into a high-risk category for homelessness. It is approximated that 40% of 18 – 20-year adults who are homeless were once in foster care (Kushel et al, 2007). Ensuring yearlong, continuous housing is a top priority for former foster youth (Salazer, 2016). It is easy to suppose that living on campus would resolve instances of home insecurity and homelessness, though the research of Goldrick-Rab et al. reveals that one out of four on-campus students (students with housing contracts) reported that within the last year they faced housing insecurity and 8% had experienced homelessness. The majority of postsecondary institutions have residence halls, and these same halls routinely close during breaks (i.e., Thanksgiving, Winter, and Spring) (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2018; Greiger et al., 2018). To stay on campus during breaks or summer months, a student must pay for the additional costs of those additional days (Washburn, 2019). Additionally, a student may also need to meet specific enrollment requirements (Greiger et al., 2018; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2018). This report goes on to point out that homelessness is considerably more likely to impact marginalized students versus non-marginalized students. The students who experienced the highest rate of homelessness were youth who had previously been in foster care. Of the total number of students surveyed, 686 were former foster youth, and of that number 60% of them reported being housing insecure (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2018).

Finances. After emancipation, a foster alumnus is suddenly in the position to be responsible for housing, food, utilities, and other necessities. A youth coming straight from foster care does not have the same resources or support as similarly aged youth in the general population. By the age of 18, parental rights have been severed and the idea of being adopted has faded for a youth. Youth who have aged-out are likely to be challenged with finances for years to come. The struggles with educational attainment will compound the problem as foster youth may

struggle to find employment, and if employed, they are more likely to bring home lower wages than non-foster youth (Dworsky, 2005; Gypen et al., 2017). Moreover, foster alumni are more likely to bring home earnings that are below the poverty level (Hook et al., 2011). Whether a former foster youth was employed, or not employed, neither group's earnings would be high enough not to be classified as poor (Hook et al., 2011; Zlotnick et al., 2012).

Regardless of whenever a student was in foster care, or not, access to scholarships, Pell grants, and work-study opportunities are financial pathways that exist to help assist with the cost of college. Additionally, federal legislation earmarks millions of dollars to assist foster youth with college costs. On the state level, there are twenty-eight states that offer tuition assistance waivers to foster youth who are pursuing a post-high school education (Sarubbi et al., 2016). Kansas is one of the states that offer tuition waivers to foster youth who have been emancipated from the state. These youth can attend a public, post-secondary institution and have tuition waived as long as the state's requirements are met. Former foster youth are able to continue to apply for tuition waivers until the semester they reach 23 years of age (KDCF, 2019). Foster alumni struggle to graduate in the amount of time allotted by the state tuition waiver program and then they are required to find alternative methods to pay for the classes needed to complete their degree (KDCF, 2019).

Enrollment in a college or a vocational program qualifies former foster youth to receive Education and Training Voucher (ETV) funds that pay up to \$3,500 per year. Unlike tuition waivers, ETV funds can be used to cover the costs of room and board. Foster youth are eligible for these funds up until the age of 26, or for five consecutive years, whichever comes first (KDCF, 2018). Foster youth who participated in the Kansas Kids Gear Up (KKGU) program, and have met, and are meeting requirements are eligible to apply for scholarships that can total

up to \$3,000 a semester. KKGU is a federally funded program that lists its goal as working to assist youth with completing high school and a four-year bachelor's degree. Students in foster care are given priority admittance into the program (KKGU, 2019).

Due to former foster youth's lack of a safety net, a 2017 article advocated for foster youth to receive more financial and social support than other youth (Gypen et al., 2017). Most 18-year-olds in the general population have a safety net that helps them work through the challenges of learning to become an adult. This safety net is made up of various family members who, to some extent, can help them with finances, support, and guidance. Youth who have aged-out of the foster care system do not have this safety net (Greiger et al., 2018; Gypen et al., 2017). Peers of foster alumni continue to depend on the financial and social support their family can provide until they are nearly 30 years old. Research shows financial, social, and other needs challenge foster alumni until approximately 30 years of age, but unlike their peers, they do not have a family to offer the support that is needed (Gypen et al., 2017).

Financial stability helps to secure a person's basic needs are met, but the lack of financial stability makes it challenging for a student to focus on academics. This level of stress and uncertainty often leads to a lack of focus, which can lead to poor grades, which can then lead to dropping out (Greiger et al., 2018).

Resources and support. It is estimated that almost half of the youth in foster care have either emotional or behavioral issues (Piel, 2018). In a study conducted by Randolph and Thompson (2017), findings shared that students who came out of foster care felt ill-prepared for college life and the lack of support resulted in feelings of loneliness.

In order to prepare for life as an adult, former foster youth need services in order to learn how to create positive, meaningful relationships, how to be proud of their identity, and how to

learn various life skills that empower them to be a responsible adult. For foster youth, this need for services that teach life skills is frequently unmet (Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 2011).

In the month before and after aging-out the mental health services that a foster youth receives drops 60 percentage points (McMillen & Raghavan, 2009). Once emancipated, former foster youth often lack health insurance, which is problematic because it greatly limits their ability to seek help (Dworsky & Courtney, 2009). It is important to note that former foster youth may not know how to utilize services and may not have the skillset needed to make full use of resources provided by a university or the local community (Unrau et al., 2012). The weight of transitioning from foster care to college student becomes substantially more difficult if a person's mental health is compromised due to the lack of medical attention.

Depending on a student's personal experiences, different resources are needed in order for them to be academically successful. Post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD) is twice as likely to impact students who age-out of the foster care system as it is similarly-aged youth (Clemens et al., 2017). Whether a child experiences trauma before being taken into state custody, or after the state has found cause to remove them from their home, the potential for trauma exists (Kansas Department of Children and Families, 2018). There are several ways in which previous trauma can negatively impact a foster youth's ability to do well in the classroom (Clemens et al., 2017; Neal, 2017). A child who experiences chronic exposure to stress can easily change into a child who is experiencing complex trauma. The impact of trauma on a growing brain makes it difficult for a child to learn, pay attention, recall information and control their behavior (Zero to Six Collaborative Group, 2010; Perry, 2006). These same traumatic events also make it challenging

for former foster youth to make, and maintain, supportive relationships (Piel, 2018), and yet, these are the types of relationships foster youth need in order to be supported.

A significant take away from the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative's (2011) study was the finding that youth need to have a secure network of family and friends by the age of 25. This network is who supports and helps a person when life's challenges inevitably come along. Unfortunately, due to former foster youth's past experiences with disjointed and negative relationships, former foster youth struggle to build these necessary relationships.

Research shows that foster youth benefit from having a network of people who can help support them through life challenges (Ozbay et al., 2007). Research also shows that due to past experiences foster youth struggle to make these types of relationships (Piel, 2018). Youth who are in foster care, and youth were formerly in foster care, and who have experienced trauma are likely to have been failed or hurt by those who were supposed to take care of them (Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 2011). This type of cycle of distress, the type that originates from adults who say the right things, but who do not do the right things, create a great deal of mistrust in youth and make it challenging for adults who want to help and have the resources to do so. The former foster youth in this study mirror the literature in that they recognize how issues of mistrust are impeding their ability to make the types of relationships that are supportive and stable.

Adjusting to college life. According to Salazar (2012), two of the best ways for foster youth to have a successful transition into adulthood is by going to college and making use of the resources that are available or by participating in an independent living program.

Universities that integrate known needs of foster youth, such as housing, food, financial assistance, and support with navigating the overall college experience have more potential to

produce positive outcomes than broad, less specific programming (Randolph et al., 2017). Several participants of the study shared how basic needs such as housing, food and financial support are serious concerns, and many went on to recommend the university schedule workshops on these and other life skills.

Academics in college. “Experts have described foster children as one of the most educationally disadvantaged groups in United States schools,” (Geiger, Hanrahan, Cheung, & Lietz, 2016). Oftentimes, the reasons youth are put into state care become the reasons they struggle in the classroom. For example, maltreatment and/or foster care has been identified as a cause of children’s “significant” poor performance in elementary and secondary school (Crozier & Barth, 2005; Hildyard & Wolfe, 2002). Whereas these children would benefit from tutoring, advanced placement classes and educational field trips, it is not likely that they will be given the chance to participate in them (Shin, 2003). Former foster youth come to college with pre-existing barriers that impact their ability to academically achieve. Multiple placements that result in a disjointed educational experience and simply not knowing how or where to seek out resources influences how a person performs academically (Pecora et al., 2006; Wolanin, 2005). Lack of support (Wolanin, 2005) and placement in remedial classes that do not go toward fulfillment of a degree requirement (Dworsky et al., 2010) are a just a few of the bits and pieces that create barriers that end up impacting the length of time it takes to attain a degree (Kinarfsky, 2017; Piel, 2018). It is no wonder that in a comparison report of low-income, first-generation, and foster youth students it was found that even though foster youth’s grades were higher, and they attended classes more often, they would still graduate college at a slower rate than low-income or first-generation students(Greiger et al., 2017) .

Schlossberg's Theory of Marginality and Mattering

It was in 1989, Schlossberg put forth a theory to shed light on issues regarding student involvement at postsecondary institutions. Schlossberg posited that significant transitions in a person's life could create feelings of marginality. There are clear examples of when a person can feel and be marginalized, but for example, when a person makes the transition to college, they may begin to wonder if they will fit in and if they matter. Here Schlossberg leans on sociologist Morris Rosenberg's concepts on how mattering can impact a person's behavior. It was Rosenberg's research that found that adolescents would be less likely to make poor choices if they felt that they mattered to someone else. Schlossberg explores mattering on the college level and its varying impact on students and institutions (Schlossberg, 1989).

Padilla's Local Model of Student Success

"The Expertise Model of Student Success (EMSS) is based on a set of assumptions on how students experience the campus and on conceptual borrowings from expert systems theory. The end product is a local student success model (LSSM) for the subject campus that can be used to help promote student success" (Padilla, 2009, 21).

The Four Assumptions of EMSS

1. Acknowledgment that it is still unknown why one college student will graduate, but another will not.
2. Examining the campus from a college student's perspective, the campus itself presents "barriers" to their success (retention of students beyond freshman year). Not every student will experience the same number of barriers but will to some extent experience some.
3. The students who graduate are those that are "experts" at being college students. Student

expertise is made up of “compiled knowledge” which has two parts: heuristic and academic knowledge. Heuristic knowledge is informal and is the experience that the campus teaches a student and then a student will use this experience to navigate different circumstances. Academic knowledge is formal and is gathered mainly within the classroom or some other formal setting.

4. Conation is the fourth assumption and is the act of acting on something or making or taking a step that will further a student to their goal (retention of student beyond freshman year) (Padilla, 2009, p 21-28).

When the three parameters to EMSS, which are barriers to student success (retention of a student beyond freshman year), the knowledge one must acquire to overcome said barriers, and the action one takes in response to said barriers are answered by students on a local level the end result is a local model of student success. Key to this model is data collection to determine both the barriers and how students overcome them. According to Padilla, these three parameters can be utilized at any college campus and among any population or subpopulation of students. The results of this research can be used to help increase student success (retention of a student beyond freshman year) (Padilla, 2009).

The purpose of this study was to understand how former foster youth navigated the barriers they faced while attending Washburn University. The ultimate goal being to learn how to better support future foster alumni. The use of Padilla’s three parameters provided a framework that lines up with the intended purpose.

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow (1943) is the theorist responsible for the hierarchy of needs. The basis of this theory lies in a person’s motivation to obtain goals. Divided into five levels, a hierarchical

pyramid illustrates different levels of needs. The lower level of the pyramid deals with basic needs such as food and housing and the upper most level is self-actualization. A generalized concept is that one must be able to achieve the lower levels before being able to achieve higher levels. The five levels of the pyramid beginning with the bottom are physiological, safety, belonging, esteem and self-actualization. Educational attainment is associated with the uppermost tier (Learning Theory, 2019). Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs has been introduced into this study to assist with the understanding of how the lack of basic needs impacts college graduation rates among former foster youth.

Summary

Literature has shown that the outcomes of former foster youth who are unable to complete a four-year degree program are dismal. The educational attainment for foster youth is an uphill battle. The former foster youth who participated in this study provided first-hand knowledge of the barriers they face while trying to earn a college degree. Their concerns with homelessness, food insecurity, finances and lack of support are substantiated by the literature. The use of Padilla (2009) and Maslow (1943) work well and both further illustrate the importance of having basic needs met in order to achieve success in the classroom.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

Foster youth face several challenges when it comes to attaining college academic success. Despite the challenges and the daunting statistics, there are youth who have aged-out of the foster care system and beat the odds and graduate with a college degree. This study interviewed both foster alumni who are currently enrolled at Washburn University and Washburn Tech. The intent behind the interviews was to uncover barriers to academic success, knowledge gained regarding overcoming those barriers, and action taken to overcome those barriers. This study has two goals. The first goal is to pass pertinent information to future foster alumni college students who will one day attend Washburn University. The second goal is to create and implement best practices that will remove barriers to academic success for former foster youth. A basic qualitative strategy was used to unearth and understand the experiences of former foster youth in college (Merriam, 2009). The data has been gathered, analyzed, and coded. The overarching themes of this study is discussed in full in Chapter Four.

Rationale for Research Approach

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2012), quantitative research uses numbers to advance research, whereas, qualitative research explores people's experiences in order to bring depth to research. Research on foster youth is predominately quantitative and has focused on the reasons why they have historically been academically unsuccessful. Research as to why so few foster alumni attain a four-year degree is lacking. There is also a lack of understanding concerning the complexities of their college experiences. According to Merriam (2009), the primary reason a qualitative study is impactful is because of its ability to demonstrate how

people create an understanding about how the world works for them. As previously stated, the purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the experiences of foster alumni who attend college. This purpose aligns with the three main points of a basic qualitative study. Those points being (a) illustrate the way people understand their experiences; (b) how they build upon that understanding in their life; and (c) what do these experiences ultimately mean (Merriam, 2009). Completing a basic qualitative study resulted in the ability to share former foster youth's experiences in a meaningful and revealing way. It is their words and their experiences that stand to help others understand the barriers former foster youth face while earning a college degree.

Research Setting/Context

Washburn University is a public, mid-size liberal arts postsecondary institution with over 200 academic programs that allow students to receive their associate's, bachelor's, master's degree and/or a law degree. Washburn has an open admissions policy (NCES, 2017), which means it admits any person who has a high school diploma or has completed their GED; this is the strictest definition of open admission (ThoughtCo, 2017). Fall 2017 enrollment was approximately 6,500 students with 88% of those students being from Kansas (Washburn University, 2019).

Research Sample

Padilla (2009), recommends postsecondary institutions research on the population of students they want to know more about versus trying to generalize findings from students from other universities. Thus, I utilized the process Padilla prescribes for completing a local model of student success. This process provided the opportunity to learn directly from former foster youth. Students who were formerly in the foster care system is a specific and small population of students at Washburn University; therefore, it was appropriate to use purposive sampling. The

use of purposive sampling is common in studies where the researcher would like to focus on the well of knowledge that is held by a specific population. This type of knowledge is considered to be rich in description (Patton, 2002).

Initially, the criteria to be a volunteer was (a) must be a Washburn student; (b) must have completed 24 credit hours; (c) aged-out of the foster care system; and (d) be in good standing with the University. After a few weeks of reaching out to the campus community, and asking for volunteers, the small well of potential participants ran dry. In qualitative research, the question of what the minimum number of participants is to continue a study does not have a specific answer. Many variables could potentially influence the number of available participants. Lincoln and Guba (1985), who recommend going until the point of saturation, provided the most specific answer to the question of sample size. Saturation meaning the information the researcher receives begins to be redundant. Not having reached the point of saturation, I, in conjunction with my advisor, reassessed the population's potential to participate. It was ultimately decided to broaden the requirements participants must meet, which opened the pool of who could participate. The new requirements that students needed to meet in order to participate were to have aged-out of the foster care system and to be a Washburn University or Washburn Tech student.

To ensure all bases were covered, Institutional Research Board proposals were submitted and approved by both the University of Kansas and Washburn University.

Participant Interview Protocol

There are staff members on campus that by the function of their job work with students who have previously been in foster care. For instance, the Scholarship Coordinator, The First-Generation Student Specialist and the Center of Student Success and Retention Social Worker

often find themselves supporting former foster youth. I reached out to these and other Washburn staff members and asked for their assistance with sharing the opportunity to participate in this study. Each staff member was given a letter and a copy of the consent and authorization form that provided information regarding the purpose of the study and the interview process. Staff members had the option to share information regarding this study with students via email and/or in person. If a student decided to participate in the study, they would contact me via email, and we would schedule a time for 1 ½ - 2-hour semi-formal interview. After the interview students who participated in the study would receive \$20 in Washburn BodBucks, which can be used at the dining halls, coffee kiosks, on-campus convenient store, bookstore, laundry rooms and vending machines.

The pre-approved Interview Protocol (See Appendix B) was used to maintain consistency from interview to interview and acted as a guide to ensure all necessary steps were followed. All interviews were held in the Reading Room, located in the Living Learning Center, or in my office, which is also located in the Living Learning Center. Each student had the option to choose which location. Before the interview each student was given a consent and authorization form (See Appendix C) and the time to read through all the information. Questions were encouraged, and if they had none, and if the participant decided to participate in the study they would then sign the form. Next, the use of a pseudonym was discussed, and participants were given the opportunity to choose a name in which to go by throughout the rest of the study. Once again, participants were reminded that the interview would be recorded. At this point, the semi-formal interview began. The interview consisted of 11 pre-determined, open-ended questions, which allowed for the opportunity to ask follow up questions.

Participants

The intention before the start the recruitment of volunteers was to interview ten students. The following is an account of the challenges of finding former foster youth to participate in this study. In one month, seven students had expressed interest in participating in the study, though only four completed the interview. The three students who did not participant shared the following reasons for not participating: busy/conflicting schedule, personal reasons, and had not acquired 24 credit hours. Efforts to find additional participants, who met the initial criteria, were not successful. With advisor approval, the four necessary points of criteria changed to two points of criteria. The new criteria to participate were to have aged-out of the foster care system and to be currently enrolled at Washburn University. After the change in criteria, an additional six students agreed to participate in the study, and of these, four completed the interview. The reasons for nonparticipation for the two remaining students were lack of response to scheduling a time and did not age-out of the foster care system.

The total number of students who completed an interview was eight. Seven of the eight were women, one of whom was transgender, and the remaining participant was male. Regarding classification, two students were first-semester freshman, two were second-year freshman, one student was a sophomore, and the remaining three were juniors. Of this group, two were transfer students. One of the eight participants was a first-semester student at Washburn Tech.

Data Collection Methods

Volunteers participated in one 90–120 minute long, semi-structured interview. Core questions were predetermined and asked of each participant. The semi-structured process allowed for the opportunity to ask necessary follow up questions. The scheduling and confirmation of each interview were completed via email. Participants had the opportunity to

provide their preference for a day and time. Interviews took place in the Living Learning Center, which is a large residence hall that includes spaces for classrooms, a large lobby area, and a reading room. In order to ensure the accuracy of each participant's responses, each interview was audiotaped. All participants had the option of being audiotaped; if the participant answered no, they would not have been permitted to continue to participate. Participants also had the option to stop the recording at any time during the interview. Each recorded interview was transcribed via Rev.com. Rev.com is an online application that utilizes TLS 1.2 encryption on all files and requires all transcriptionists to sign a confidentiality agreement. I was the only individual to have access to the Rev.com password. Recordings of the interviews and transcriptions were stored and handled by Rev.com. I utilized a personal laptop, which was whole disc encrypted, to store copies of the transcriptions. These copies were saved on the laptop in order to assist with the writing of this dissertation. I was the only person with password access to the laptop and/or files that are on the laptop. All interview transcripts and voice recordings will be deleted after all research requirements have been met.

Data Analysis Methods

The process of data analysis began after the first interview. Notes were made regarding various items I wanted to remember and contemplate. For example, word choice or phrases that were either repeated or were compelling for positive or negative reasons were written down to prompt me to consider the importance of the word or phrase. As the interview process continued, I reflected on the information that was shared by each participant. By answering the 11 original questions, and numerous follow up questions, these students had disclosed a part of their past that many of them preferred to keep private. It was important I acknowledged this as it helped to provide better understanding and meaning as to why it was challenging to find students to

participate in the study. Notes were taken on how students answered questions as it revealed a part of their story as well. For example, were they nervous, excited, reflective or guarded?

As transcriptions became available, a more formal process of coding began. I color-coded or made notes using the research questions as a guide, for instance, a keyword taken directly from a research question was barriers. From here anything that could be deemed a barrier, or a challenge was coded as a barrier. The category of barriers was then further broken down into either an internal barrier or external barrier. Internal barriers having more to do with a student's emotional or physical needs and would likely exist whether the student was attending college or not. External barriers doing more with challenges the University was posing for the student.

After the data were coded and categorized, I was not satisfied with the results of the analysis presented in the same way as the interviews. I reassessed, regrouped and reflected until these pieces (answers to the research questions) matched the stories that the students had shared. The final key to the analysis was the use of the different tiers of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. These tiers helped to conceptualize the responses to Padilla's three core questions of (a) what are the barriers; (b) what knowledge did students learn; and (c) what action did students take.

Trustworthiness

The worth of research is the ability to believe the results are trustworthy. Qualitative research has different strategies that researchers can implement that support the trustworthiness of their research. Merriam provides eight different strategies that can support trustworthiness. Those strategies are triangulation, member checks, adequate engagement in data collection, reflexivity, peer review, audit trail, rich, thick descriptions, and maximum variation (2009). The

strategies used to demonstrate the trustworthiness of the research include triangulation, adequate engagement in data collection (saturation), and researcher's position or reflexivity.

Triangulation. Triangulation is the use of multiple data sources (Merriam, 2009). The first example of triangulation is the use of students from various classifications. Initially, the intent was to use upperclassmen who had years of experience navigating the barriers of college, but due to the lack of participants, the criteria was reassessed and changed as necessary. The use of first-semester freshman provided a different perspective than their older peers, but responses regarding the stigma of foster care, lack of support, concern regarding finances and the desire to know and connect with other foster alumni were similar to older participants.

I was able to attend the Department of Children and Families (DCF) Independent Living Program (ILP) staff state meeting. The meeting had staff members from across the state of Kansas. As Director of Residential Living at Washburn University, I was invited to attend the meeting to discuss issues of housing with those in attendance. Though on-campus housing for former foster youth was the intended topic, the conversation grew to encompass the various challenges former foster youth face while attending college. The open discussion resulted in ILP staff members voicing similar thoughts as the former foster youth who participated in the study. For example, the need for stable housing was a shared concern, as well as, the need for additional sources of support. Both groups recommended former foster youth, who are new to college, be allowed to come to campus a few days early. These extra days would be spent getting accustomed to campus, the residence halls, and meeting staff members who work in various departments that offer free resources. Both ILP staff members and former foster youth study participants voiced the need to educate foster alumni on topics such as financial aid and money management. One difference was how ILP staff felt foster alumni would benefit from having an

off-campus mentor who could help the student navigate life after emancipation, as opposed to how former foster youth looked for a mentor who was associated with the University. Both ILP staff and former foster youth believe the support and guidance a mentor could offer is of value, though they disagree on whether the mentor should be from the local community versus the University community.

Saturation. With qualitative research, there is not an absolute ‘right’ number of participants to interview but researching until the point of saturation can serve as a justifiable equivalent (Merriam, 2009). Washburn’s Institutional Research department reported that within a five-year time frame approximately 40 foster youth attended Washburn University (Washburn University Strategic Analysis and Reporting/Institutional Research, 2017). With information on former foster youth being sparse, forty students were a point of reference regarding setting a goal for the number of students who would participate. Admittedly, eight is a small number, but within that number were shared responses. Examples of shared responses include difficulty making friends; being affected by the negative stigma associated with foster care; high turnover of caseworkers; caseworkers who were not helpful; the need for support; and desire to connect with other former foster youth at Washburn University.

Reflexivity. I enjoy learning. Researching and observing the world around me is a part of that learning process. This process helps me to understand and make meaning; it is done to create change within me. Sharing that meaning is not a priority; though occasionally, it is a function of making the world less senseless.

In general, a qualitative researcher researches and observes to make meaning with the intent to share discoveries. The uncovered information sheds light on things or people and can create change for others.

As previously mentioned, for the majority of time that it took to complete this study I was a foster parent. I did not want to research foster youth because foster care had already become a significant part of my life. One concern of researching foster youth was the connection between my children and the youth that would be interviewed would blur together and potentially move me to be driven by emotion. This did not happen. My children are very young, and this age difference helped to create space between fear and reality. Another concern was that knowledge often rings bells, and from then on, the bell cannot be un-rung. As for this fear, each student who was interviewed figuratively rang a bell that I will perpetually hear.

The lasting impact of this research was the unexpected impact the lives of these former foster youth had on my concept of bravery. In the setting of 2019 and in the United States, I did not know that for some students bravery was a skill that is necessary in order to attain a college degree. I was not aware of the countless and thoughtless ways that university faculty and staff promote a culture of ‘norms’ that former foster youth do not identify with, nor is there awareness regarding what happens next when a youth does not feel there is anything at the University in which they can identify.

Limitations and Delimitations

All research studies have limitations, and it is important to disclose those limitations in order to be transparent. Limitations for this study include the sample size, potential researcher bias, and the potential limitations students may have felt about sharing their past.

As discussed earlier, the sample size of eight can be seen as small and may cause readers to bypass this information for fear the point of saturation was lacking. My ties to foster care, via being a foster parent, could be seen as researcher bias and could negatively impact the

trustworthiness of the study. Lastly, a foster youth's past is extremely personal, and there is potential that students who participated did not disclose all relevant information.

Delimitations are items I created due to the choices made while creating the scope of the study. Choosing to research the academic attainment of former foster youth at Washburn University was based on the opportunity to gain insight into this group of students. This insight could then be used to help future former foster youth navigate their college experience.

Delimitations of this study include the initial requirement of being an upperclassman in order to participate in the study. In the midst of the interview process, it was approved to remove this requirement in order to increase the number of participants. Allowing any former foster youth to participate in the study increased the number of perspectives and improved the quality of the research.

Summary

A basic qualitative study was conducted in order to provide a close-up picture of the challenges that Washburn students, who have aged-out of the foster care system, experience during their freshman year of college. Findings gathered from this study could create avenues of success for incoming former foster youth who have a desire to obtain a college degree. The IRB process for both Washburn University and the University of Kansas were adhered to throughout this research

Chapter 4

Findings

Introduction

For this study, eight Washburn University students volunteered to be interviewed regarding both their experiences in foster care and as a college student. This chapter is presented in the following order, personal background, which consists of the biographies of each student. These biographies discuss the number of placements, reasons for foster care entry, siblings, and transitioning out of foster care. Next, is a brief section on the coding and analysis process. The next section is research questions and their relevant themes, followed by findings pertaining to that specific research question. The following four research questions have guided this study.

1. What are the personal characteristics of former foster youth enrolled at Washburn University and how do these characteristics contribute to their likelihood of persisting?
2. What systems of support did former foster youth use at Washburn University to help them be successful during college?
3. What barriers have foster youth observed/experienced at Washburn that have challenged their academic success?

The next section is about the student's reflections on what they believed their future to be at a past point in their life and how they see their future now. Lastly, a summary provides a brief overview of the covered information.

Personal Background

Aurora. Aurora is a 20-year-old, second-year freshman pre-engineering major. She was 17 when she and her three younger brothers went into state foster care. The four siblings were split between three different homes in three different towns. The cause for Aurora's placement

into foster care was abuse; Aurora's mother and stepfather are both currently in prison. Before aging-out, Aurora was permitted to see her brothers for one hour each month. After Aurora aged-out at 18 years of age, she was adult-adopted by her foster parents. She stated that without having been adopted, she would have no one.

As part of the interview, Aurora was asked to think back to when she was 15 years old and to share what she envisioned her life to be ten years in the future. Aurora shared the following.

At age 15 I was still in the middle of my abusive life. . . . At the time, I definitely saw myself in the same exact situation, raising three kids, just out of high school and working full time, probably two jobs and going nowhere with my life. I saw myself turning into the same people that abused me. Not necessarily abusing others, but just they had no motivation, they had no drive for life. Neither one of them had been to college or done anything successful with their life. I saw myself going down that same path.

Georgia. Georgia is a 19-year-old, second-year freshman social work major. Georgia went into foster care at the age of seven and by age nine was adopted. Five years later, Georgia's adoptive parents requested the state retain custody of Georgia due to behavioral issues. Georgia remained in foster care until she aged-out of the system at 18. There are two significant foster care placements that Georgia experienced that played a significant role for her; the foster parents in both placements have maintained communication with Georgia. The foster parents Georgia shared that the foster family she had when she aged-out very much considers her to be family. When asked what she thought her future held in store for her when she was 15 years old, Georgia shared the following insight to her life at the time.

I wasn't thinking that far out, but now looking back, in the state that I was in at fifteen, I didn't really see hope honestly. Because going from foster home to foster home, I didn't gain hope until I was like sixteen or seventeen.... that's all I remember. But as far as college and life goes, I did not. I knew in the back of my mind that I wanted to go to college but it was not in my view. It was just like a dream to me...a dream that would never come true. I was just holding on by a strand, honestly. I wasn't even thinking about fifteen to twenty-five. I was thinking about my here and now.

J. J is a 20-year-old sophomore who transferred to Washburn University from Butler Community College. J is a film and video major. At age 14, J was placed in the state's care. J's mother had eight children, all of whom were placed into foster care as well. J was 19 when she aged-out of the foster care system; the additional year allowed her to graduate high school. J was asked to share what she envisioned for her life ten years down the road from the age of 15. At age 15, J had spent one year in foster care, and this is what she shared regarding what she thought her life would be like at age 25.

Honestly I did not know because at age 15 I didn't even have a bed to sleep in. I did not have really a real non-chaotic household, so I did not really see myself like living past a certain age, if that's the way to say it. Because if you live in the hood, and all the stuff that goes on around you...I just probably took everything day by day. That's how that was. It was very hard, sleepless nights, sometimes you cried, sometimes you just felt like school was your only get away place. And church as well, if you were able to go to church sometimes, I was able to. I feel like faith played a big role in my life, but also being loved was something that I felt like was a void. And I felt loved, but not to the level of accepted. So like I just wanted to be able to be that person to have a better future. So I

feel like foster care was probably the only thing that really saved my life, I guess. Because it was able to ... for me to move around places and learn different life experiences to add on to this journey, because honestly, I did not expect me to be in this situation when I was older. But I feel like that it was by the Grace of God, because had I never had that experience of foster care, I don't know where I would be today at 21. I don't know if I would be working. I don't know, what I would be doing honestly. I still wouldn't know if I would even be alive, because I would not like to be going back to where I was at 15, now that I'm 21.

Jefferson. Jefferson is a direct-from-high school, 18-year-old freshmen. He is an electrical technology major at Washburn Tech and lives on campus. Jefferson is the oldest, of Aurora's three younger brothers. As previously mentioned, Aurora is a Washburn student who also participated in this study. Before aging-out, the two siblings were able to see each other and their younger twin brothers for one hour each month. Now that both students are both attending Washburn University/Washburn Tech, the siblings have access to each other and can see each other as much as each prefers.

Jefferson was among the youngest students interviewed for this study. When asked what he envisioned life would be like ten years from when he was 15 years of age, he only had to think back three years. Nonetheless, Jefferson shared the following.

Back when I was 15? Hmm. At which point? When I turned 15? Hmm. So no right there before I turned 15? Yes, I would've naturally chosen the electrician route. But I would've had to do more of what my uncle's plan is. Jump right in job force, and gain a decent amount of money, and then go into the workforce. Hey, if I would've went that route and all that, and foster care never had to pit [side of track where drivers refuel, change tires,

etc.] me. I would have a car. I would have a car and a driver's license. But I'd be missing a lot of life lessons that I learned. Currently, if I had gone through with that, I would be 20 steps backwards than where I am now. It's sad to think about it. But I'd have a car.

Grace. Grace is a 22-year-old junior forensics investigation, criminal justice/legal studies major. At age 17, Grace walked into a room to find that her mother had attempted suicide; as a result, Grace, her younger sister, and two younger brothers were put into the state's care. While still recovering, Grace's mother would contact her and blamed her for tearing the family apart. For her own best interest, Grace does not stay in contact with her biological mother.

When Grace was asked to think back to life at 15 years old and then to share what she thought her life would be like ten years later at age 25, she responded with the following.

Oh, man. Fifteen. I don't know. I mean, I talked about, my biological mother was into law shows, and you know crime TV, and that was my thing too. Like, and I loved it. And I thought, okay, I'm going to be a fire fighter. Or I'm gonna be a police officer. Then, I was like, wait. Maybe I should go more than that. Maybe I will go to Harvard, or Yale. But, I didn't know what I needed to go into that. Like, I didn't understand, like, that was it. Like it was every...that's everybody's dream. Either to be a police officer or a lawyer, or something. But, not think that you're going to have to go to an Ivy League school to do it, almost. And so, then I thought, okay, maybe West Virginia University. Like, the biggest university for the state. And like, everybody loves it. And, West Virginia's such a prideful state like, when it comes to our college football. Just the university itself. I was excited to go, but then I thought, maybe, like how am I supposed to go? Who's gonna pay for school? How, like am I gonna be able to go to college, like the way that my life was set up, wasn't really set up for success at that time. So, I just imagined being a lawyer, being

a fire fighter, helping people. You know, being in the legal system and like, kickin' butt. That's all I knew. That's all I wanted to do.

Rebecca. Rebecca is a 22-year-old junior forensics investigation, criminal justice/legal studies major. Born in Romania and at age six, she came to the states to be adopted. Due to abuse, at age 13, Rebecca became a youth in need of care and ultimately aged-out of the foster care system at 18. Rebecca maintains communication with her adoptive mother.

Rebecca was one of the oldest students interviewed. When asked to go back to age 15 and to contemplate what she thought her life was going to look like at age 25, the difference was seven years from her current age. Rebecca shared the following insight into her life.

That time period was probably the worst for me and I really didn't even envision myself living past five years or even, at that time, that wasn't something I could even focus on or see. Twenty-five was so far that it just never popped into my mind. I, at that time, didn't want to even live to that age because I didn't know what was going on and things were so bad, at that point, of why am I even continuing to do this when I'm switching house to house and all these people in my life are changing and there's court decisions that I don't really get to be involved in or really understand because when you're 15, it's hard to understand all the court lingo, I guess. I don't know. I didn't really have a vision at all.

Samantha. Samantha is an 18-year-old freshman social work major who is originally from New Jersey. Samantha's mother came to Kansas to get away from her abusive husband, who was also Samantha's father. Samantha experienced being in the foster care system in New Jersey and Kansas. In Samantha's 13 years of foster care, she had over 40 placements. Days before the beginning of the fall 2018 academic semester, Samantha turned 18 and aged-out of the foster care system. Before attending Washburn University, Samantha was living in Wichita and

was not familiar with Washburn or the city of Topeka. Samantha's caseworker dropped her off at Lincoln Hall, a residence hall on Washburn's campus. Samantha's caseworker did not provide any information on local resources to Samantha.

For Samantha, reflecting on what she anticipated her life to look like ten years from the age of 15, she realized that the vision in her mind was not her own.

Oh man, okay. Age 15, where I was at that moment. My foster mom who was going to adopt me had high hopes for me. She wanted me to be this big shot lawyer who was going to stand up for kids. I'd love to. I see myself married and who was going to stand up and advocate for kids, be this amazing guardian ad litem who's always going to see their kids. I was going to have so many connections out here at the law school. It was going to go swimmingly. So at 25 I expected myself to start working on a master's in law or something and work my way up from there and maybe even get a doctorate. Then I was going to have this loving husband. I was also going to dress like her and sound like her and talk like her and act like her. But it wasn't my life. What I saw wasn't mine. It was more of what I was told to project, what I was pretty much forced fed the whole time. Not me, just what she wanted.

Sherika. Sherika is a 20-year-old second-year freshman psychology major who went into foster care at age two. At age five, a family adopted Sherika, and three years later her new parents asked the state to place Sherika back into foster care. She was re-introduced into the foster care system, and when asked if she knew why that had occurred, she stated that it was due to behavioral issues. When Sherika was asked to think back to when she was 15 years old and to imagine, what her life would be like at age 25, Sherika shared what she would not be doing, instead of what she would be doing.

At age 15, I thought that I . . . I wanna say I knew that I was gonna be in college, 'cause that was something I wanted. I knew that the foster care system would pay for it.

Honestly, I really don't know specifically where I saw myself, but I didn't think that I was gonna be homeless or on drugs, because I knew I wouldn't let myself do that. I won't let that happen to me.

Additional Background

Beyond the biographies that provide an introduction to each participant, it is important to note how their various backgrounds intertwine. Each participant has a distinctly individual experience, though when added with other former foster youth's experiences, there is an ability to see a more significant experience at play that deserves examination. This section of continued background delves further into the number of placements, reasons for placement into foster care, the impact of siblings and the transition into the "real world" known as aging-out.

Number of placements. The youngest a participant aged-into foster care was two, and the oldest was 17. The number of years in state care likely influenced the number of placements a youth would experience. A few participants shared personal theories on why the number of placements per youth can often be high. Sherika reasoned that a youth's behavioral issues would impact their number of placements. Having experienced over 20 different placements, Sherika attributes her number to "a mixture of behavioral issues/foster homes. They just didn't want me..." Jefferson who entered foster care at age 15, and who experienced 14 different placements in his first two weeks of state care, believes people automatically view teenage boys in foster care as troublemakers and pass on accepting them into their homes. Samantha suggested that the number of approved foster homes that are available in an area and/or state is not sufficient which then results in placements that are not good matches from the beginning.

The number of placements experienced by these eight youth stretches from one placement during their time in foster care to over 40. A few of the students did not know a specific number, or preferred not to share, but despite this lack of specific information, the number of placements shared between these eight former foster youth is over 124. These youth described a placement being anything from foster homes, group homes, and nights spent in the agency's offices, and short and long-term respite care. For Georgia, her experience with placements was simply described as, "...I went to a lot of homes, one night stands, things like that."

Reasons for entry into foster care. The reasons for entering foster care varied from neglect, abuse, and mental health concerns. Three youth were adopted while in foster care. Two of these youth were returned to the state by their adoptive parents for behavioral issues, and one youth went back into state custody due to issues of abuse. Out of eight participants, three youth communicate with at least one of their biological parents, one communicates with the adoptive mother that had lost custody of them, and one youth shared that they feel they are now ready to look into how to communicate with their mother who is currently in prison.

Impact of siblings. Six of the eight students interviewed have at least one biological sibling. Participant Grace is the oldest of four and took on the role of caretaker because her mother worked a great deal. Initially, the four siblings lived at a friend of the family which allowed Grace to continue to care for them, but weeks later the four were separated. The younger boys stayed together, and Grace and her sister lived together in a different town. The sisters grew apart as their views on their mother's mental health was seen differently by each of them. Grace had only seen her brothers a couple of times since they were separated. At this point, Grace had to choose between living with her biological grandmother, which meant going back to a family

who was not “entirely healthy,” or staying with her current foster family. She chose to stay with her foster family. When asked about the difficulty of this choice, she refers to it as the “hardest one,” but one that was ultimately best for her. Grace and her foster parents pursued adoption, but ultimately Grace learned that if ever a day came that one of younger siblings were in an accident and needed blood or an organ that she would not be called. Grace decided to forego the adoption in case this call ever came.

Aurora and Jefferson are siblings, and both participated in the study. Both of them and their twin younger brothers were placed in foster care and separated; the twins stayed together. Aurora and Jefferson have since aged-out of foster care. Aurora attends Washburn, while Jefferson attends Washburn Tech. Both siblings describe a close bond with their younger twin brothers, though both recall their roles differently. Aurora described her part in their lives by sharing the following.

I was there at their birth and changed, washed, wiped, every single thing that had to do with them being raised, I had a part in it. I was the one who woke up at 2:00 to 3:00 a.m. and took care of them. Everything that was put into them being the little tiny people that they are today, I did. I built a relationship with them to where, yes, I was their big sister, but I was basically their mother. Being put in that situation for so long and then having them ripped away from me...

When Jefferson was nine, his twin brothers were born, and he explicitly recalls that time as when he “stopped being a kid.” Jefferson shared how he fed his brothers when they were hungry and got them dressed each morning, “I became more of a mentor, more of a parent to my own little brothers...And yet, people had the audacity to say my sister was raising them. No. She was not.”

Jefferson anticipated that his perspective on who took care of the younger twin brothers and Aurora's perspective would not align, but the reason for the difference of perspective was not shared. Perhaps, there is room for both Aurora's and Jefferson's stories to be right, perhaps not, but whether Aurora and Jefferson are aware, or not, there is part of the story that is similar. Both siblings talked about their monthly visits with their younger siblings and how that one-hour meant a great deal. Both also shared the torment they felt before and after these visits. Aurora shared that when the visit was over one of the twins would bawl because time was up, and at such a young age, he did not understand why this was the new way to spend time with his family. As if confessing instead of sharing, Aurora shared, "I just wish I could tell people that there were times I couldn't go see them, because I didn't have the strength to put on that front...that it was going to be fine...I hate that people don't understand what I've been through..."

Jefferson recalls the visits as "...a three-hour car trip one way. So that means six hours round-trip just to spend one with them. One hour with the people I love, people I care about." He described the happiness he felt while being with his family for a one-hour visit then followed by a three-hour car ride home with nothing but thoughts and despair to fill his mind. "[w]hen I was there I was the happiest person on God's green earth, but when I left it would punch me ten times deeper into this despair. Over and over each month....it would get worse and worse....it would get close to the end of the visit I would get even deeper and deeper in depression....I did an excavation just digging deeper and deeper."

Transition – aging-out. Seven of the eight participants aged-out of the foster care system at age 18 and one aged-out at 19 in order to time have time to graduate from high school. Before aging-out, each participant is to complete a transition plan to ensure they are prepared for life on

their own. The transition plan is a ten-page document that is broken down in the following sections: identifying documents, education plan, housing plan, employment/financial plan, health plan, transportation plan, and connection (relationships) plan. The document also concludes with an exit interview that is completed upon release (KDCF, 2019). J specifically mentioned the process of completing a transition plan, “I feel like they only do that because honestly they just want to get rid of you....when it was my turn, and I’m going to be honest, I feel like it’s mandatory. And I feel like they just want to just get you out of the system and they don’t really care what you’re going to do afterwards.” For J, the process was a formality and not a genuine attempt to help her prepare for life on her own. Rebecca does not feel that if she had said she did not know how to do those things that it would have encouraged staff to say, “Okay, how can we fix this and how can we let you grow from it?” Several participants shared how they felt they lacked the knowledge to balance a checkbook or how to drive a car. Whereas a youth under the age of 18 is reached out to by their caseworker, once a youth in care turns 18, they are now the ones required to reach out to their new caseworker. Georgia supposed this is one way the Independent Living program teaches former foster youth to be an adult, “when I first got out of custody, I had to contact my DCF worker. I guess that’s them trying to allow us to be an adult and learn responsibilities or something like that.”

After aging-out Rebecca felt that the part of the transition from state care to college was the feeling that mistakes were not allowed. Her observation was that most students who graduate high school and go to college are not expected to leave home and not look back. Most students have a safety net to catch them in case mistakes get too big. Rebecca shared “I wish there was [does not complete sentence]....I don’t have specific people or things that are that net....”

Overall Themes

During the coding process, a list of 45 reoccurring terms was created. Initial groupings of terms resulted in the creation of the following five themes: personal background, sources of support, barriers (both internal and external), reflection, and motivation. These themes follow closely with the research questions. After considerable processing, it was decided to use Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs as a guide to further explain the barriers that former foster youth face regularly. The use of Maslow's (1943) five tiers and as a means to share the reality of foster alumni provides another dimension to their story.

Research Question One

What are the personal characteristics of former foster youth enrolled at Washburn University and how do these characteristics contribute to their likelihood of persisting?

It is a challenge to pick up on a person's characteristics in a relatively short interview. In speaking, listening and observing the eight participants during their interview, two things stood out, the first being a sense of vulnerability and secondly, each had a resilience/grit that keeps them moving forward. In the coding and analyzing process concepts such as mindset, resilience/grit, views on education and how they used fear of becoming a statistic as a motivator. Angela Duckworth, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania, whose studies on grit is considered to be blazing new trails, said in an interview that resilience and grit are closely related in that both demonstrate the ability to continue to try even if a person has failed numerous times (Perkins-Gough, 2012). Through the hardships the participants shared it became apparent that reliance and grit was as much a part of them as their name. The concept of mindset comes from Carol Dweck a professor and a researcher in the field of motivation. In the context of these former foster youth, mindset speaks to how they are motivated and how they stay motivated.

Dweck would identify this type of mindset as growth mindset. In short, growth mindset is the ability to believe you can continue to learn and there is more to you that will evolve and grow (Dweck, 2007). In creating an overall, overarching theme for these attributes, the term motivation kept coming to mind. The following are examples of characteristics that helped participants have a successful freshman year at Washburn University.

Aurora, who was abused by her mother throughout her childhood, is of the mindset that each obstacle comes with its own lesson. When Aurora struggles, she utilizes positive self-talk such as this is going to be OK, and I *will* get through this. Aurora admits the lessons do not always readily present themselves, but in due time they do. Samantha, who aged-in to foster care at five years old, gave the glass half-empty/half-full analogy and then shared what made it click for her. "...it's better to see things when it's half full because it's not like, oh I'm running out of water. I still have some water and that give me some type of life as opposed to I'm not going to have one."

Georgia, who was in foster care a total of six years, shared two examples that illustrate the mindset that keeps her moving forward. The first example is of her brother's desire for change in his life. "I look at my brother a lot and he always says that he wants to get out and he wants to stop doing the stuff that he's doing. But then again, where's your hope? Where's your motivation? Because, my thing is, there're no excuses in life. If you want something, then you go after it. I wanted to come to college, so I came. I could have made an excuse and been like no, or whatever. We can all make up excuses in life. But, you have to make up in your mind that what you want is what you're going to achieve."

The second example of Georgia's growth mindset became apparent when I listened to her talk about how she has continued to persist despite life's challenges.

I think because I had to persevere my whole life, like I had no choice but to keep going. Like you don't have time to stay stuck because you don't have time for that. What I mean by that is going through different foster homes and detaching from my biological family, that was really hard. I went through a whole year of depression because of that. It changed my outlook, it changed my trust. But, you had to keep going. You can't sit there and wallow in it. You had to keep going because you know that God has a purpose. I didn't know that then, but I knew that God had a purpose for me so I just had to keep going, couldn't stay stuck because if I stayed stuck there then I wouldn't be where I am today. Losing my family definitely helped with this because that's all I've got to say like you've just got to keep going. A lot of experiences with other foster homes taught me to keep going because some of them weren't very nice and so you just have to take the pill that you were given and swallow it and just keep going. That's how I look at it with college like I couldn't get stuck when I failed my first Psychology exam. I couldn't get stuck when I didn't make friends when I thought I would. I can't get stuck there. I can't get stuck on the financial things or things that aren't going well. You just have to keep going because either you have it or you don't.

Aurora's involvement in the GEAR UP program provided her the opportunity to attend a summit at the White House. The name of the summit was, "Beating the Odds," the odds referring to national statistics that show the likelihood of a former foster youth obtaining a college degree. The summit had a lasting impact on Aurora. At the time, Aurora recalled saying to herself, "...that's not going to be me. I'm not going to be one of those kids that goes to foster care and

then never gets a degree. I don't want that." The White House summit helped to instill motivation in Aurora and helps her to continue to persist a college degree.

Both Samantha and Rebecca mentioned how the national statistics on the educational attainment foster alumni are both daunting and motivating. Before college, Rebecca, who was born in Romania, was determined that she "wasn't going to be another statistic." Samantha and Rebecca share another similarity, the need to prove to others that they could be successful at college. Both students came to the resolve that perhaps it is not about proving everyone else wrong, as much as it is about proving to them that they could beat the odds and be a college graduate. Rebecca said the following, "I feel like, if I can prove it to other people, then I can prove to myself that I did my hardest and I graduated." For Grace, who decided to stay in foster care versus live in kinship care, had this to say about finishing college, "I can't fail. I don't want to be like my biological mother. I want to do better." A firm desire to be able to provide for herself, and one day a family of her own, keeps Grace focused on her college education.

A motivating factor for many of the participants were their views on college education. Georgia admits her freshman year had been challenging, "I didn't really want to come back because it was too difficult for the first year." Georgia recalled that since the seventh grade she knew that education was the key. Education was her way out...out of poverty and into a different future. J, who aged-out at 19, put it succinctly by sharing, "I need an education ...because I want to be able to have financial independence in the future." Sherika, who first went into foster care at age two, shared her thoughts on education by saying, "Honestly, if I didn't have one, I don't know where I would be."

Research Question Two

What systems of support did former foster youth use at Washburn University to help them be successful (during college) their freshman year?

Interviews with participants revealed sources of support that included relationships with biological parents, caseworkers, foster parents, therapists and individual members of Washburn's faculty and staff. Other sources of support included organizations and a few Washburn departments who either served as employers or resources. The following highlights participant's sources of support as they readied to come to college and once they arrived.

Sources of support varied for each participant, as did the level of support that each student received. Pre-college sources of support often were seen as part of the reason that a few students felt that attaining a college degree was feasible. Rebecca recalled how it was her last KVC caseworker who took the time to say, "You should at least see what Washburn is about." The caseworker talked to Rebecca about Washburn and even offered to bring her to a college visit. Former foster parents also offered support to Rebecca and encouraged her to consider going to college. Once at Washburn, Rebecca unexpectedly found solace in getting involved, "being involved gives you a lot of support systems, which I wasn't expecting." She noted that her involvement in Greek Life provided her with several friends and events to attend over the course of her first semester. Rebecca went on to share, "Greek life and these other organizations weren't always emotional support. They were there and that was enough for me because being in the foster care system feels so lonely already and that was my biggest fear of coming to college was being alone." Rebecca explained that loneliness was a byproduct of being in foster care. So for her, the thought of being lonely had morphed into a fear so big that it came with her to college. For Rebecca, an essential piece of getting involved was a large circle of friends that

knew her name, but not her past, “Once I had a lot of people around me and they actually knew, at least, my name, not the whole situation, that was support for me enough.” Being involved in Greek Life did provide a source of support that Rebecca needed. Rebecca further explained that the community and family feel of Washburn created opportunities for University Staff to get to know her on a personal level, which resulted in staff becoming a consistent source of support. Departments such as Counseling Services, Residential Living and Financial Aid served as both resources and support for her, “I don’t think I would be facing my senior year if I didn’t have those supports in place, or at least knew people on campus that really cared.”

Currently, in her junior year, Grace shared how it was the support of her foster family and a few high school friends who were there to offer her encouragement before college began. Grace considers her foster family to be her real family and they are the ones who provides her with the most substantial amount of support. In particular, Grace spoke of this mom with a great deal of appreciation and sincerity, “From the very beginning she was always there. She didn’t even know me and she helped shape me. And so, if I went through something, if I didn’t know what to do she was kind of like my go-to person.” Grace listed a resource she had not used yet, but one she promised her mom that she would proactively reach out to for campus support. At the time of the interview, Grace had already set up an appointment to meet with Counseling Services. She hopes that being more mindful and proactive about her mental health will help to keep her in a good place.

When asked about sources of support, Sherika spoke of a past therapist, “She’s like a mother figure to me, and she helps me out a whole lot.” This person was also the only source of support Sherika listed as having before college. This individual is still in Sherika’s life and is available to offer support. Once Sherika started classes at Washburn in the fall of 2017, the staff

of the First –Generation program, which falls under the umbrella of Center of Student Success and Retention, have become her source of support. Lastly, Sherika listed Counseling Services as a source of support that is available to her when she needs it.

Going on her third year of college, J, shared the importance of having a support group, “having a support group is very important because you don’t want to ever feel like you’re just solo.” J created her own family of people who lend support, and it is made up of friends and former foster parents. J did share that in the months since arriving at Washburn, she has felt accepted, which in a way served as a source of support. Also on J’s list are her academic advisor and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion. J shared these as sources of support that she has come to know and appreciate. J was upfront about her need to be supported and be accepted. Whereas it was clear that J wants and needs support and ultimately wants to know that she matters, her peers within the study demonstrated this want and need in their own way. Georgia’s desire for friends and Rebeacca joining a sorority were other ways that demonstrated their desire to matter and their desire to have someone notice if they did not show up to class the next day. These are examples of how mattering plays such an important role in these student’s lives and their college experience (Schlossberg, 1989).

For Jefferson, his biological grandmother and aunts and uncles have been constant sources of support. “The next big section of support I had was KYAC through foster care,” reported Jefferson. KYAC is the Kansas Youth Advisory Council. KYAC is a state organization whose purpose is to encourage and empower foster youth to make advancements for children in state care. Jefferson is currently the Treasurer for KYAC and his excitement when discussing his involvement in KYAC is evident.

The sources of support that these former foster youth had before college was not extensive, nor did it vary greatly. Participants benefited from having foster parents who were a positive influence and who still keep in contact with them. Caseworkers were among those frequently mentioned, though unless the participant shared a specific example of support, students were more apt to believe their caseworker could have provided more and consistent support. Such was the case for Samantha who shared what it was like being dropped off at Washburn by her caseworker, “my worker just dropped me off and she was like ‘see ya.’” Once participants arrived at Washburn’s campus, the source of support that was the most common, and the most mentioned by students was Counseling Services. Individual staff member’s names were provided, many of whom work with the Center of Student Success and Retention or with Student Life.

Research Question Three

What barriers have former foster youth observed/experienced at Washburn that have challenged their academic success?

It was during the coding process that it occurred to me that participants’ barriers to academic achievement were strongly influenced by their basic needs not being met. The unfulfillment of their basic needs is what sparked the idea of using Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of Need (see Figure 1) as a supplemental guide that could bring about a deeper understanding of the barriers former foster youth face daily. Students’ concerns for their basic and psychological needs were real, and the impact of these concerns was significant. The section discusses the various barriers that were shared by participants and how Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs helps to conceptualize further the trauma former foster youth experience. This trauma occurred

during critical developmental years and now impacts their daily lives and their educational attainment.

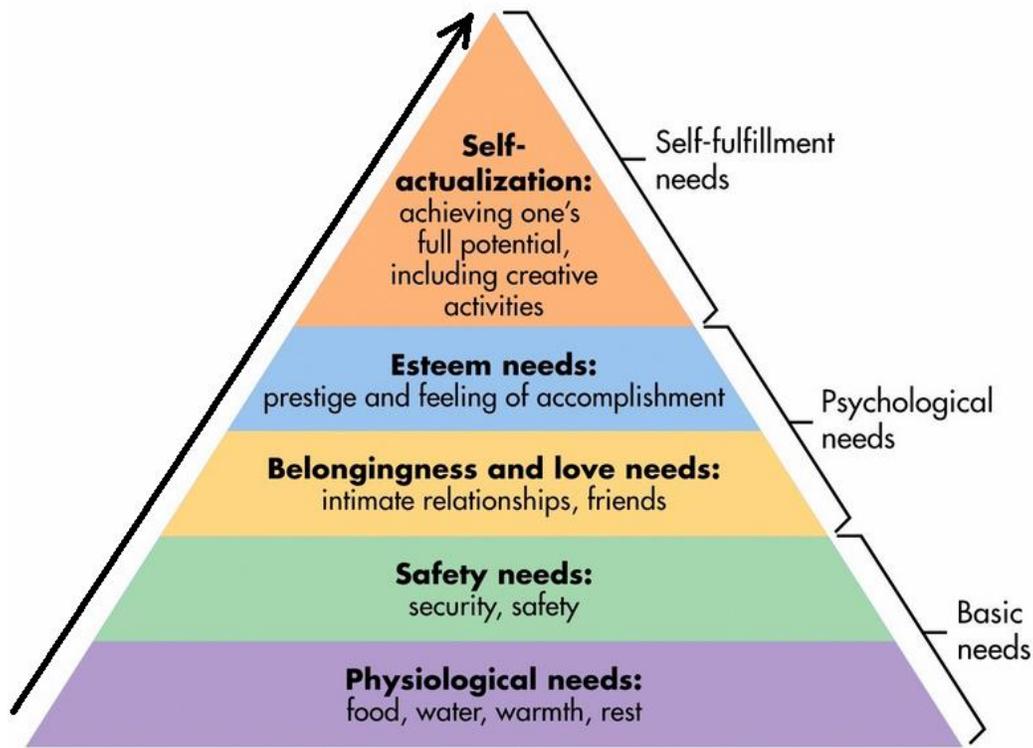


Figure 1. Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Aurora, Sherika, J, Georgia, and Samantha all shared concerns regarding housing during break periods. Break periods for Washburn University include Thanksgiving, Winter and Spring break; the residence halls close during these breaks and students who need housing pay a per day fee (Washburn University Residential Living, 2019). Sherika, J, and Georgia all shared difficulty with their meal plans running out before the semester had ended. Meal plans were depleted

quickly due to the need to purchase toiletries and over-the-counter medication at the on-campus convenience store. When Aurora was asked what support systems should be in place for former foster youth to succeed at college, she shared the following, “I think one thing that would help me, especially, is being able to help them find a place to live, whether it be on campus or off...help them to find a job that isn’t going to take all their time away from school, but can still pay for things that they need to cover on their own, because they do not have that family money that others have or they don’t have as many scholarships, or whatever, so they still have to pay for food and all those things.”

All eight participants referred to finances in some form or fashion, whether it be how Jefferson owns one pair of shoes, or Samantha wondering if friends would notice her clothes are old and do not fit well. Georgia, J., and Sherika worried about low meal plan balances, and Grace and Rebecca worried about how to pay for their last year of college because tuition waivers can only be used to the age of 23. It was clear that the lack of financial resources was a significant barrier for these students. Aurora described herself as, “not being very successful at life.” For her, coming from foster care hindered her ability to earn and save a great deal of money. Aurora goes on to say, “It gets really hard. Like right now I’m actually, currently struggling with having a full-time job and going to classes full time. I’m trying to figure out how to get out of my job, but I still need something that brings in money to pay for where I live. So, that’s definitely a barrier.” The result for Aurora is that she struggles financially. It was Rebecca who pointed out how most students have a safety net of support that comes from parents or guardians and how this was not the case for students who age-out of the foster care system – there is no one to catch them if they fall. At the time of the interview, Rebecca was nearing her 23rd birthday; former foster youth no longer qualify for tuition waiver assistance after their 23rd birthday. Rebecca had

the following to say, “I know I personally, I work a lot, but I don’t have the finances to do living expenses plus emotional health expenses, like therapy and this other stuff. Then to face a whole year of tuition...it’s a still a lot more than I would have ever imagined having to face or deal with.”

Mental health concerns came up with each participant, whether it was through the desire for more support for former foster youth in general or whether it was regarding the personal challenges that they dealt with or are still dealing with daily. For Rebecca, J, Grace, and Samantha the issue of mental health was important. Grace shared, “When it gets bad, it gets really bad, so sometimes I can’t pick myself up...I have to have a plan and my plan has to be perfect and it has to stay the same. Like nothing can interfere, but then I realize, it’s life. Some things [are] going [to] happen. And so, then I get lost. Like I don’t have a backup plan. So, it’s like, now I’m stuck. How do I get out? That’s what I’m afraid of...getting stuck. Not having a backup plan.” Anxiety, coping with stress, depression and eating disorders were among the mental health issues that were named. Washburn’s Counseling Services was identified as a positive resource by more than half of the participants. There are mental health needs that go beyond what Counseling Services can assist with, and at that point, former foster youth would need to find support in the community. The challenge with off-campus counseling support is a majority of those interviewed do not have their own mode of transportation.

Many of the other barriers that were listed fall in the area of psychological needs, which represents two tiers in Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy, belongingness and love needs and esteem needs. Regarding belongingness and love, the terms that kept coming up throughout the interviews were being accepted, belonging, trusting others, need for connection and the fear of being alone. Each of these is a specific need that could be explored more deeply, but for the

purpose of this study it is significant to examine how each of these five specific needs go hand-in-hand.

All, but two participants spoke of being alone as it pertained to college life. Both Aurora and Rebecca similarly shared how being in foster care was so lonely. Rebecca listed being alone as one of her biggest fears and Aurora, who was adult adopted by her foster family, shared, “I’d be the kind of person that would be sitting in my home alone on Christmas doing nothing because I don’t have...for me, Christmas and Thanksgiving is family time. You go spend your time with family and I don’t want to intrude on someone else’s family. So, I will be one of those people that would just be alone....its a very scary thought...” Georgia spoke of not being able to imagine going to an event on campus alone, for her, it was nearly unimaginable. For Sherika the thought of being alone in a small residence hall room reminded her of poor experiences in groups and foster homes. Samantha, who was dropped off at Washburn by her caseworker a few days before the halls officially opened in August, knew no one and literally was alone in her suite. The feelings that followed Samantha during those days before all the students checked into Lincoln hall for the new academic year are stirring.

For a moment, it was just kind of like I've never felt more alone because now I'm in a whole new environment and I can reinvent myself any way I want. I'm not in foster care anymore, but it still feels like I am. If you've been in custody, you still feel like you're in custody. It's like prison. You get out but you don't know what you're doing. All you want to do is just go back in and hope that someone's going to put the net back over you.

The feeling of being alone works closely with the need for connection and wanting to belong. Once belonging is felt then there is room for acceptance. Recommendations are discussed in full in the following chapter, but one idea these former foster youth would like to

see come to fruition is an opportunity for former foster youth to come together as a group. Participants felt optimistic that if former foster youth were brought together as a group they could provide the support for one another that many of them need. Overall, the thought is that other former foster youth will come ready to serve as allies because they share this experience that no one needs to try to explain. There was relief in the idea that they would not have to share individual stories. A cohort made of solely former foster youth who already have this base knowledge to start from provides a ready-made sense of belonging. The hope is when former foster youth are brought together various needs can be met without having to cope with peers, faculty and staff who do not understand the impact that neglect, abuse and fear can have on a person's spirit.

Each of these youth longed, and are still longing, to be known and to be worth remembering by their peers, their professors, and by society. As much as these youth may be craving personal connections, issues with trust hinder that from happening. Sherika was asked about friends, she responded by saying, "I do pretty well. I'm not quite a shy person. I can strike up a conversation with somebody if I want to. I have...growing up, I had to be very...I'm always very specific with who I let inside my bubble, so I like to sit...Well, not sit, but just observe people before I really let them...not really...'cause I'll interact with anybody, but I have to observe people to make sure that they're good people before I befriend them." Even in reading Sherika's response the sense of apprehension of connecting with someone can be detected. There's a sense this apprehension has steadily been built throughout Sherika's years in foster care. Several of the participants had their trust broken by people who were supposed to take care of them and raise them. Many of these participants felt their trust in the foster care system was trampled upon. There were caseworkers who repeatedly said they were there to help, but the

promise to help did not always come the way the youth had wanted. This lack of trust, or rather the tentative manner former foster youth approach new relationships can be a hindrance to having the connection that is desired. These youth search for meaningful friendships and sources of support that is different than their peers. For former foster youth the relationships they seek are stable and genuine; the hope is these relationships will sustain them and carry them through life's challenges (Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 2011).

Youth who are in foster care are there through no fault of their own, yet they carry the burden of choices others have made. It's hard to be inconspicuous when you are in state's care, when your address has suddenly changed and your life has been uprooted. The experience of foster care takes a toll. The eight students I spoke with have a desire to be seen as an individual beyond foster care, though for many of these students it is difficult for them to see themselves past their own experience of foster care. Without hesitation, each participant stated that yes, there is a stigma associated with having been in foster care. Participants repeated the statements or general comments they have heard or been told, "You're just like your parents" being among the harshest. Samantha shared how she has been treated due to the stigma of being in foster care, "That kid's in foster kid. Don't talk to them. They were in foster care, which means they were probably addicted to drugs or something or they had burned a store down or something. You hear these ridiculously wild stories." Samantha also shared the stigma also comes in the form of pity, "They pity you because you're in foster care...aw, you were in foster care...I'm so sorry, sweetheart." Samantha goes on to say, "I think with all the stigma and all the myths and everything...people have foster kids completely wrong. We're all just trying to feel like we belong in a family. That's literally it." Efforts to simply make a friend comes with the weight of having to decide whether or not to share their foster care experience. Grace does not

tell anyone. She feels that people use her story, as just that...an interesting story. Samantha doesn't care who knows of her experience in foster care, but that does not mean she does not have to navigate the preconceived notions of who she is. Aurora does not shy away from her foster care experience though when meeting someone new she consciously contemplates what she wants to share. This has become a point of conflict for Aurora who has worked to reclaim her own self-worth but now worries about losing a part of herself by trying to create space between her and her experience in foster care.

Students' Reflections: Looking to the Future

During their interview each participant was asked a series of questions, two of which were at age 15 how did you envision life at age 25 and the other question being, how did they envision their life 10 years from now? At the beginning of this chapter, the responses to the former question were shared and now the responses to the last question are provided.

Aurora was the first student I interviewed and she was excited to be there to share her story. Following the interview, we discussed pseudonyms and she firmly told me she wanted to use her name. Feeling obligated to ask again, Aurora confirmed she wanted to use her real name. She said she wanted to people to know who she was. She did not want her voice to be hidden. During the interview, there were moments when Aurora was expressive, reflective, proud and conflicted. When I asked her how she envisioned her future 10 years from now she was excited when she shared the following.

Well, I actually have a brand new vision. I see myself 10 years from now with my master's, and successfully in the United States Air Force. So, I have sworn in to the delayed enlistment program for the United States Air Force, meaning that I'm technically part of the air force. . . . Then, through there I want to become an officer, and hopefully a

general one day. So, to become an officer you have to have at least a bachelor's degree, and then the Air Force or the military in general is always wanting you to improve yourself. So, I hope to have my master's degree 10 years from now and be a very successful officer in the United States Air Force.

Georgia had such a natural flow to her thoughts, and her voice was instantly engaging. Whether she was describing her philosophy on not allowing herself to get stuck, the conviction she has when she speaks of her foster parents or the vulnerability she allowed to escape while discussing the difficulty of finding good friends, Georgia was authentic. When she shared what she envisioned 10 years down the road, it made sense that this is what she shared.

...my ultimate goal from my education is to be a TED Talk person, so like an inspirational speaker. Human services and communication was the closest that I could get because you have to have some type of knowledge background and experience. Having to do internships will definitely help me with that experience piece and also I have to learn how to communicate and articulate well especially as a speaker. That's why I minored in communication. I really would like to be like coming back to Washburn to speak, going to high schools, counseling centers, KVC, because I know there's a lot of students in foster care youth that have to be at KVC because they don't have home so going there and being a hope for them. I don't know, just, wherever I can speak.

Rebecca's answers were thorough, yet brief, her tone both steady and certain. In general, her demeanor was reserved. The responses shared seemed prepared, but not practiced. Perhaps, years of reflection lent itself to insight that led Rebecca to share her perspective on how other students have a safety net of support that former foster youth do not have. She did not begrudge other student's for what they had, that was not the point of her sharing this analogy. The point

was to shed light on former foster youth, as if to say either do something or give us some slack. Besides feeling that 33 is the equivalent of old, Rebecca shared what she envisioned her life to be like in 10 years.

Oh, gosh! Well, that's old! I would be old. I don't really know. I think that I really, right now have two really big passions and I don't know which one I'll got towards in the next ten years, but I currently work for Best Buy and they have been a great company and I love the co-workers that I work with. I've worked really hard to be in the position that I'm there. I could see myself going to even corporate with them, or being a team leader of the Best Buy store here in Topeka. I also really like forensics. That tells a really big story without having to say a lot of words because it's all usually fact-based. I really like that. I get to have that nerdy side of me and not be judged for it because everybody in my field that I'm currently in, or classes that I'm in with those people, are also very nerdy. It's kind of a fun time when you have a whole bunch of nerds together I also get to show my nerdiness in this field. It keeps me on my toes, too. Nothing's the same, so I think in the next ten years, I could see myself going into being a blood pattern analyst. Whether it's in Kansas, I not 100 percent sure. In the next ten years, I think I would love to own at least an acre of land and build my own tiny home and potentially have wildlife around me. I definitely would either stay in Kansas or move to somewhere nature's a big thing because that is very relaxing for me. I know I'd have, like, three or four dogs. Three, two...

Grace's candor and directness regarding foster care or having aged-out of the system, initially seemed oddly juxtaposed with her pleasant demeanor. After listening and learning of her experiences, the realization came that perhaps it was not her characteristics that were

mismatched, as it was those types of experiences should not be placed side-by-side someone's youth. Ten years in the future, Grace anticipates looking forward to the following.

...I'm gonna be graduated. I'm gonna be working for the FBI or CIA in some Intelligence Analysis or crime scene investigating. Hopefully, maybe married. Maybe a kid. Don't know yet. I'm gonna be living comfortably. I'm gonna be living happy and I'm gonna have...I'm not gonna say I'll have myself together, but more together than I have now. Maybe living in the east coast, that'd be nice.

Sherika's interview took the least amount of time. Her answers were short. Of the eight students interviewed, Sherika had been in the foster care the longest, since the age of two. It was wrong to anticipate the length in state's care would be reflected in the length of an answer. You cannot miss something that you never had is a saying that is often said, and though there are likely many times where this saying is true, Sherika shows that is not always the case.

I see myself with my cosmetology license. I'm doing hair. Living comfortably, 'cause I'm great at saving money. Basically, the work that I'm doing here in college paying off. I'm going to cosmetology school, and eventually I want to be able to own my own business, but I don't know if by the age of 29, I'll be able to do that. But I do enjoy doing hair and nails and stuff like that. I think that's what I'll be doing, and I'll be enjoying it.

Guarded, J shared her experience in foster care, but in a controlled way. Her legs crossed opposite of me and her shoulders set in the same manner. J's interview was a reminder that though she was there voluntarily, it did not necessarily mean she was ready to clear off the dust on subjects she may have neatly packed away. In a calm, matter-of-fact way J shared that it had been, and still was, a constant struggle to be accepted as a transgender woman. With respect to a life filled with challenges that was motivated to survive versus thrive, it makes sense that the

brain creates it's own coping mechanisms. Looking 10 years down the road, J shared a vision filled with faith and a one-challenge-at-a-time type of attitude.

At 21, I envision my life that I'm finishing up my education and doing what I need to do, but at 31 I imagined myself in a career, maybe married hopefully and just happier.

Because I'll be an adult in 10 years. I know that's going to be like, to us right now, that's like a long time away, but eventually . . . if we're fortunate, I feel like we can make it to 31, of course. So I'm optimistic about my future. I don't know where God's going to take me, but I just feel like my faith will be able to decide or my fate and my destiny is decided for me already, so I just follow the path, get my education done and whatever decisions I need to make or life decisions for my career, my job, my place of residence, any of that kind of stuff, that will come when it comes. I cross those bridges when they get there. I don't want to ever worry about that stuff while I'm still in college, trying to worry about my next exam.

As I prepared to start the interview with Jefferson, he asked if he could get a copy of the transcription and then he decided he would record the interview, as well. This is what opened the door to his sharing that he publicly speaks about foster care. It was evident he enjoyed this responsibility. During his interview there were times where the public speaker in Jefferson provided a response and there were also a few times where he allowed himself to be vulnerable such as when he discussed his grandmother. Jefferson is pursuing a one-year certification at Washburn Tech to be an electrician. He will complete his program in May. When thinking of where he will be in ten years, he had this to share.

Well, I'm not totally sure career wise, because I'm constantly changing how I'm gonna do things, but I do know I will probably, definitely continue to be a speaker I love doing

that. I see me being successful. I know some people could easily say that's a pipe dream, could be, anyone could think that, but I truly do.

The interview with Samantha was longer than most, though time was a non-issue as Samantha came across as a natural storyteller. She navigated telling her truth from the numerous placements to her family's background of violence with apparent ease. It was while discussing the topic of her having her own children that Samantha perked up and seemed happy. The importance of having children came up again when Samantha shared what she envisioned her life like at the age of 28.

I see myself with three kids and may or may not be paying off student loans. I see myself with either a two-story or three-story home, living room, basement, regular area, and an upstairs, in the kitchen dining room, and then dining room dining room. I see myself cutting people's hair but also having a CNA, just certification so I can live a double life with different types of jobs. Maybe just being a beautician or just a regular stylist, but I see myself going to every school performance for my kids and pushing them to be the best person that they can be, even with the given circumstances of what's happening in their daily lives. I just see myself being, more importantly, a mother more than anything else, caring for her kids. That's literally all I've ever wanted and that's what I see the most. For many, the difference between what they envisioned at age 15 versus age 25 was plain to see and provides another example of growth mindset (Dweck, 2006). At the time of these interviews each of these students were facing several different challenges and it would have been easy to begin to give in to the doubts that have come to accompany each of them, but they have yet to give in to those doubts. Their mindset keeps them from it.

Summary

The findings from eight former foster youth interviews provided insight that could not be garnered in another meaningful way. Former foster youth see education as a way to a better life, yet barriers riddle their journey. Barriers such as the desire for acceptance, belonging, a need for connection and the fear of being alone are carried around like patched up luggage by these eight former foster youth who are waiting to find a place they can stop to unpack without being thought of as less for having a background they did not create. The ability to find and create a positive relationship that might assist with these barriers is impeded by the lack of trust these eight have earned the right to have. These eight found themselves in foster care because the trust they had that they would be safe, have enough food to eat and that their needs would be taken care of somehow dissipated. The uncertainty of multiple foster and group homes, caseworkers who come and go, and a system that creates transition checklists that have no follow up further breaks down the idea that trust can easily be replenished. Former foster youth who have aged-out of the system are asked to trust the various resources that are provided in the community and on a college campus, but by this time, it is not about asking for their trust, it is about helping them to build their ability to trust. It is about a different approach all together.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Introduction

Former foster youth have the lowest level of educational attainment of any other group (Tobolowsky et al., 2017). The purpose of this study was to focus attention on former foster youth who are attending Washburn University and who are persisting. The number of former foster youth who do persist is small but taking the time to learn from this group can be an important part of helping others to persist as well.

Review of Findings

Three research questions guided this study. Eight participants and eleven pre-determined interview questions later produced rich data and insight into the experiences of former foster youth at Washburn University. Significant ground has been made in regard to answering the research questions. A review of the findings is shared question by question.

The search for the personal characteristics of former foster youth found that resilience/grit, mindset, shared views on education, and a fear of failing motivated these students to pursue a degree or certification at Washburn University or Washburn Tech. These characteristics were discussed in chapter four under the umbrella of motivation.

Research question two asked what systems of support are needed by former foster youth in order to be successful their freshman year. Of those interviewed, there were four upper-level students, two second-year students and two first-year students who participated. When asked about sources of support outside of Washburn, it was apparent that life's circumstances had stunted the potential size of their lists. Foster parents and caseworkers were the sources most students shared, though dissatisfaction toward caseworkers further limited their resources. One

student maintained regular contact with members of their biological family, but most did not. In regard to sources of support on campus, students were able to list a few resources and employers: Counseling Services, First Generation Bods, Maybee Library, Office of Diversity of Inclusion and Residential Living. A handful of students provided names of staff members of who they felt were particularly helpful as a source of support. There were also participants who were able to list one to two campus resources, though the extent to which these resources were utilized varied from knowing the resource existed to frequent use of the resource. Albeit not surprising, the longer the student had been at Washburn the more likely it was that they had further developed a source of support. In their first semester at Washburn, Samantha and Jefferson, reinforced this perception. Samantha shared how surprised she was to find out how helpful and supportive the Residence Hall Coordinator of her building had been during their first interaction. Jefferson received a Washburn email that contained valuable information that he wishes he had known before he arrived on campus.

Findings regarding barriers that foster alumni experience at Washburn were significant. Significant meaning the notion to use Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs to elucidate student barriers resulted in deeper understanding. Many of the barriers facing former foster youth would be present whether the student was enrolled in college or not. Legitimate concerns regarding stable housing, food scarcity, financial independence, being alone, need to belong and simply trying to feel good about yourself is compounded by the move to a new, college environment. This situation creates a struggle that results in low academic performance.

Aging-out and higher education: How college works when you don't have what you need, this would be a fitting title for a book that these eight former foster youth would have liked to have read before they started college. They wish they had known how to find their classes, how

to budget wisely, how to make friends and how to keep from failing. Admittedly, many of these worries are typical of an average first year student, though many first-year students have at least one family member who had previously attended college or have enough social capital that would enable them enough space to not feel like they were going it alone. At best, a former foster youth may have foster parent/s that is knowledgeable and can assist with navigating college, but oftentimes there is not someone to offer this type of support.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as a Supplemental Guide

Padilla's (2009) local model of student success is useful in that it requires direct communication with the specific group of academically achieving, yet underserved students, that college or university administration want to know more about. The goal of this model was to gain insight into the experience of former foster youth and use the data to assist future students with similar backgrounds. The answers to the following questions create the content of a local model of student success, 1) what are barriers to success, 2) what knowledge is needed in order to bypass each barrier, and 3) what action was taken in order to be successful. In actively processing the numerous barriers that foster alumni face it occurred to me to use Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs as a supplemental guide to the findings gathered for the LMSS. Whereas the data gathered from the LMSS could stand alone, incorporating Maslow's (1943) needs helps to add an additional layer of depth to the findings. This next section breakdowns the process of using Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs to illustrate the findings of the local model of student success.

Physiological Needs

The first tier of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs is physiological needs such as shelter and food. Not having these basic needs met easily creates barriers to success. When students

were asked about items that may act as barriers to their success concerns regarding homelessness and food scarcity were among that list. According to Padilla, once a barrier is known, it is important to identify what knowledge is needed to overcome that barrier. In this circumstance, there are both long-term and short-term knowledge that can assist in overcoming this specific barrier. One long-term solution to homelessness is to get an education with the hope it enables a person to get a steady, good-paying job. A short-term solution for the concern of homelessness would be to know what resources are available in regard to finding immediate housing and food. The third and last step is what action is needed in order to overcome the barrier. Once again, there is both a long and short-term action that can be taken. In the long-term, the action that needs to be taken in response to needing an education is to attend college. The short-term action to finding immediate housing is to live on campus. This same flow and explanation can be used to work through the barrier of food scarcity. This process can be seen in Figure 2 that is below.

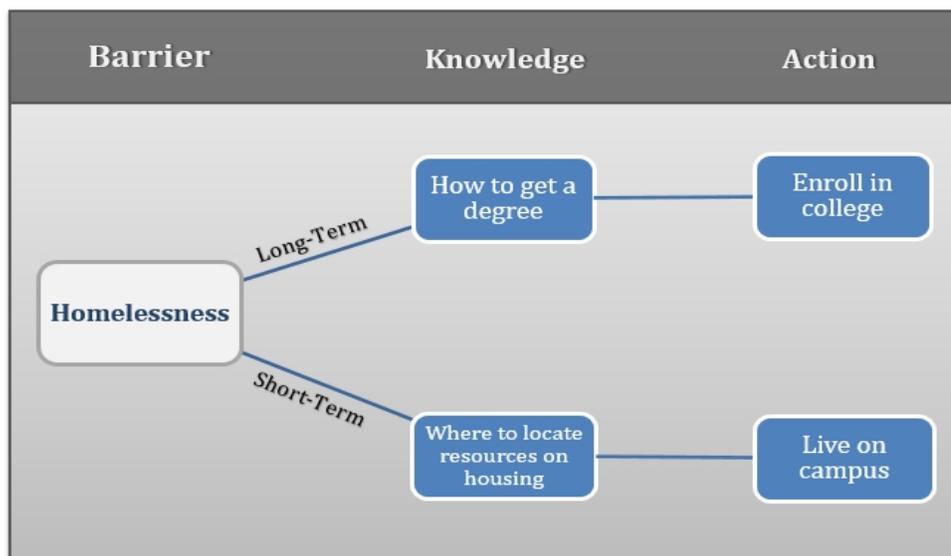


Figure 2. Homelessness (and food scarcity) as a barrier. Process of foster alumni managing homelessness and food scarcity.

Safety Needs as Barriers

Maslow (1943) believed that a person's desire to feel safe and to have stability in their life would fall in the category of safety needs. During interviews, former foster youth shared concerns regarding mental health, finances and fear of being alone; these three fall under safety needs.

Mental health. Many of the students discussed mental health as it pertained to themselves and other former foster youth. In the category of safety needs, the barrier would start with mental health concerns. Students who have attended Washburn for a longer period of time identified that the knowledge needed was to get help via therapists or counselors. As a Washburn student they could rely on campus resources or, as a former foster youth, they could rely on their state issued medical card. The action step to dealing with mental health concerns is to maintain necessary doctor/therapy appointments, continue to take medications as prescribed by their medical professionals, and to know when to reach out for assistance. Figure 3, which is found below, illustrates this process.

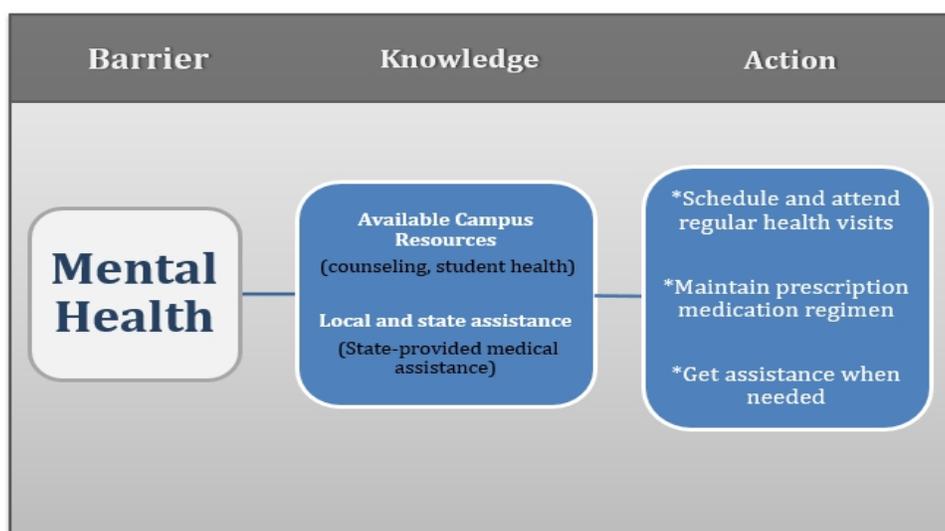


Figure 3. Mental health as a barrier. Process of foster alumni managing issues with mental health.

Finances. Most all participants of the study shared their concern regarding finances. Whether the worry was about paying for rent or tuition, finances were a consistent worry that was perpetually unresolved. Finances as a barrier can create both an immediate and long-term need. In the long-term, in order to create a life that is more financially stable, the knowledge is seen as getting an education. The short-term resolve is the availability and/or possibility of state tuition waivers, ETV funds and financial aid (please see Figure 4 below). Working while in college is also a potential resolve to the barrier of finances. The action that needs to be taken by students is to apply for the tuition waivers, ETV funds and financial aid. To get these funds a student has to take action. The same is true for finding employment; a student must apply for various job openings until they are offered a position.

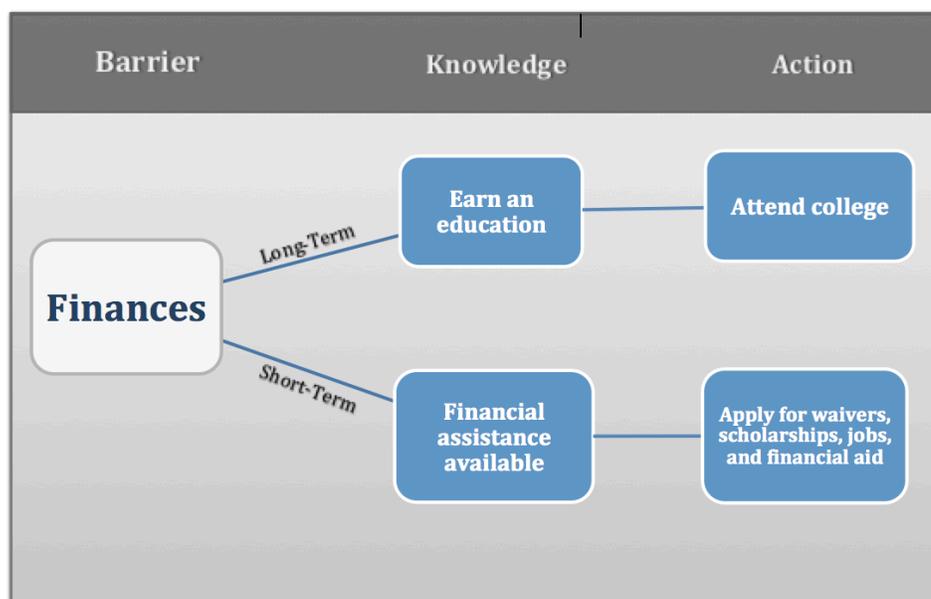


Figure 4. Finances as a barrier. Process of foster alumni managing finances.

Fear of being alone. Another concern that a majority of the students discussed was the fear of being alone. The lack of family support combined with dealing with traumatic childhood experiences (ex. neglect and abuse) has ingrained in these students the fear of being alone. Students are sent to college and told to make friends. Universities provide numerous programs so students can get to know each other, but no one is provided the knowledge on how to make friends. For former foster youth the knowledge that would assist with the fear of being alone would be to make friends and make connections, but there is a gap between knowing what you need to do and actually doing it. Here, the action step listed by a couple of students was to get involved in student organizations. Another action step that was shared was to hide parts of their past in order to fit in with their peers. Figure 5 is below and further illustrates this process.

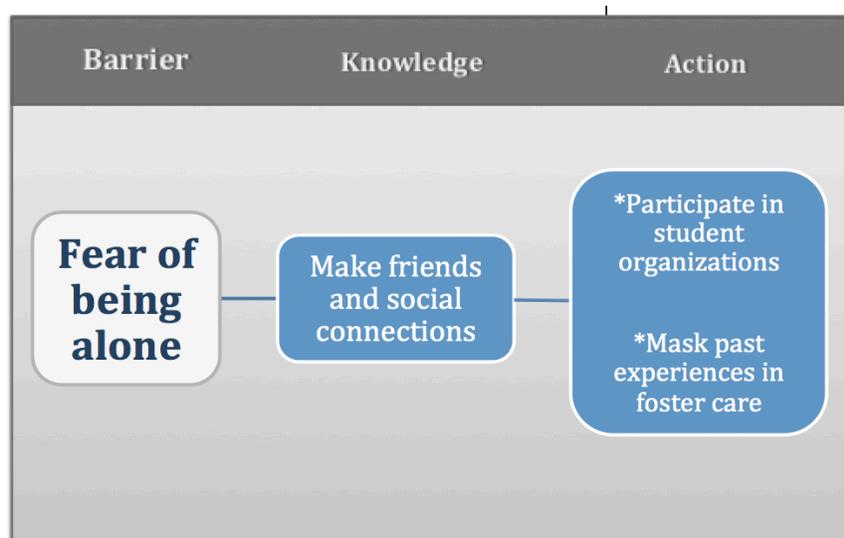


Figure 5. Fear of being alone. Process of foster alumni managing the fear of being alone.

Love and Belonging Needs as Barriers

Love and belonging needs are more about being a part of a family or group of friends that stays connected and provides love and support. This level is heavily based on the value of relationships. Students shared how they longed for the feeling of acceptance, connection and

belonging somewhere. Feelings of being alone are at odds with issues of trust. It was clear that students had reflected enough on these worries to know that the difficulty they have with trusting others impedes their ability to have what they longed for.

Acceptance and issues of trust. When the barrier is acceptance and issues with trusting others the knowledge learned to overcome that barrier is counseling/therapy. The action step piece of acceptance and issues of trust proved to be a challenge for the students. Those interviewed knew what they ultimately wanted yet they knew their life experiences prompted them to create walls, which made it a challenge to trust anyone. Moreover, the students understood the importance of trust in building relationships and how that could negatively affect the acceptance they desire, they still fell short of understanding or sharing what could assist them with this struggle. In this case, based on the overall knowledge gained from all those interviewed and based on my professional student affairs experience, the knowledge and the action needed for this pathway was introduced by me, the researcher. Figure 6 below uses red text to illustrate input provided by the researcher. The knowledge provided as necessary to overcome barriers of acceptance and trust is counseling and therapy. The recommended action step for students is to

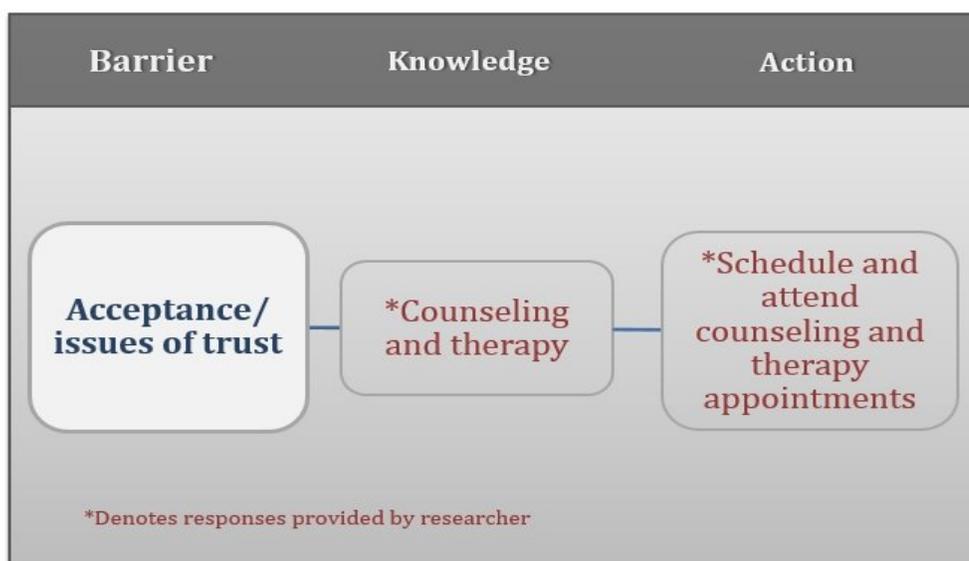


Figure 6. Acceptance/issues of trust as a barrier. Process of foster alumni managing barriers of acceptance/issues of trust.

schedule and attend counseling and therapy appointments.

Feeling alone. For the barriers of feeling alone, belonging and the need for connection the path is the same even if for some the goals are different (see Figure 7 below). It is important to note the difference between the fear of being alone and feeling alone. The fear of being alone is more about having someone present for reasons of safety. Feeling alone is about having connections with others, so if you wanted to reach out to someone you could versus the feeling that there is no one to reach out to. The knowledge needed to overcome these barriers is to make friends. Once again, making friends is not always easy, but nonetheless, the action shared that students needed to take is to get involved in student organizations and live on campus. Both options have increased the opportunity to get connected and to find necessary support.

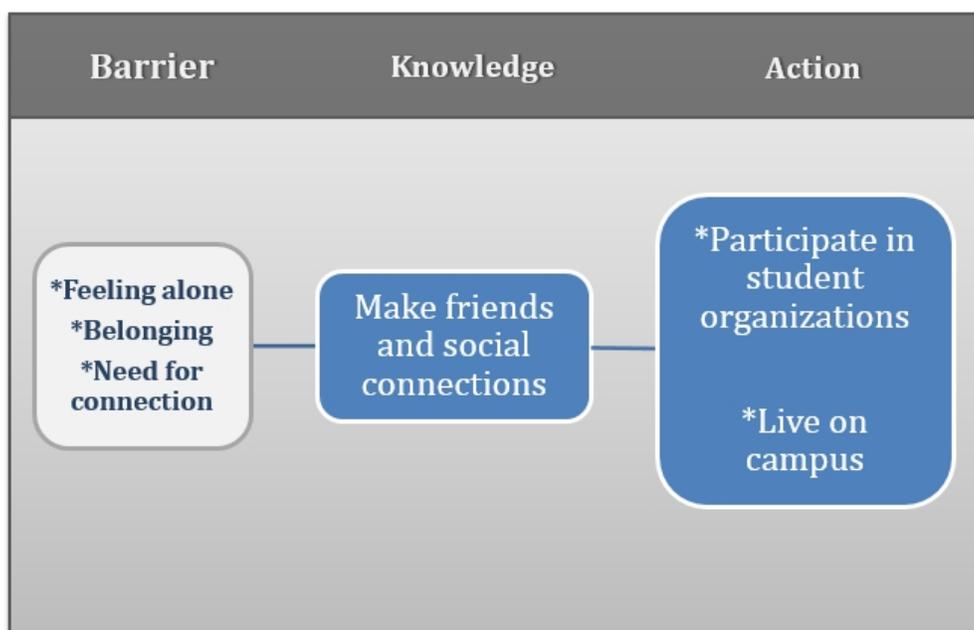


Figure 7. Feeling alone/belonging/need for connection. Process of former foster youth managing the fear of being alone, longing to belong, and the need for connection.

Esteem Needs as Barriers

The fourth level of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs is esteem needs. Esteem is broken up into two halves. One half is the need for personal esteem, the need to feel good about oneself. The other half is the need to be acknowledged and respected by others. In the category of esteem, students shared concerns with their own self-esteem and level of confidence. They had questions regarding their own identity and how that fit into everyday society, but more importantly, how did that fit into the people and culture at Washburn University. A common trend among the participants was their desire to succeed; yet it was their fear of failing that they carried with them to every class, meeting, and activity. The barrier of failing acts like a yoke that holds them back from succeeding. If the yoke had a name it would be the stigma of foster care. For these students it is something they can never seem to shake off.

Esteem and confidence. In regard to creating a pathway to process esteem and confidence as a barrier, one student suggested that students should build on known strengths while at college. The action would then include applying themselves on academics (please see figure 8 below). When identity serves as a barrier (figure 9), the knowledge to overcome that barrier is acceptance. The action to be implemented would be to choose a college that is accepting and supportive. The pathway for fear of failing as a barrier leads to knowledge of not allowing yourself to get stuck in the things that do not go right. The action that students take to overcome the fear of failing is to keep moving and to keep showing up (please see figure 10 below).

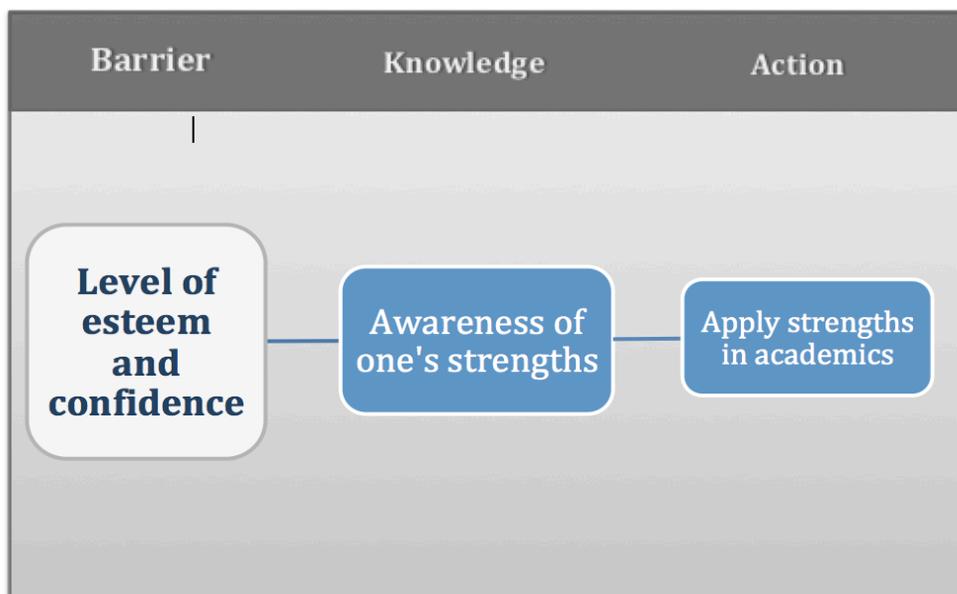


Figure 8. Esteem and confidence as barriers. Process of foster alumni managing issues of esteem and confidence.

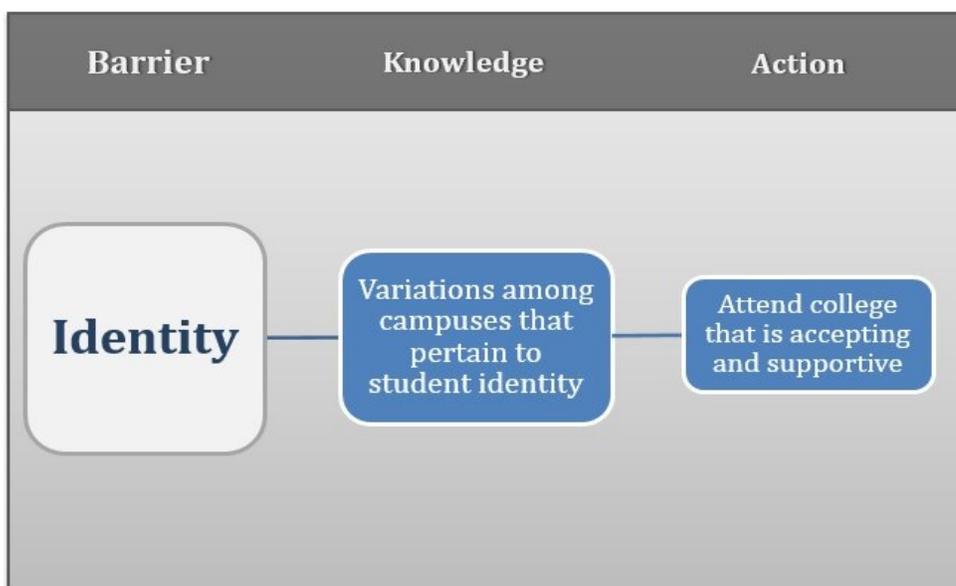


Figure 9. Identity as a barrier. Process of foster alumni managing issues of identity.

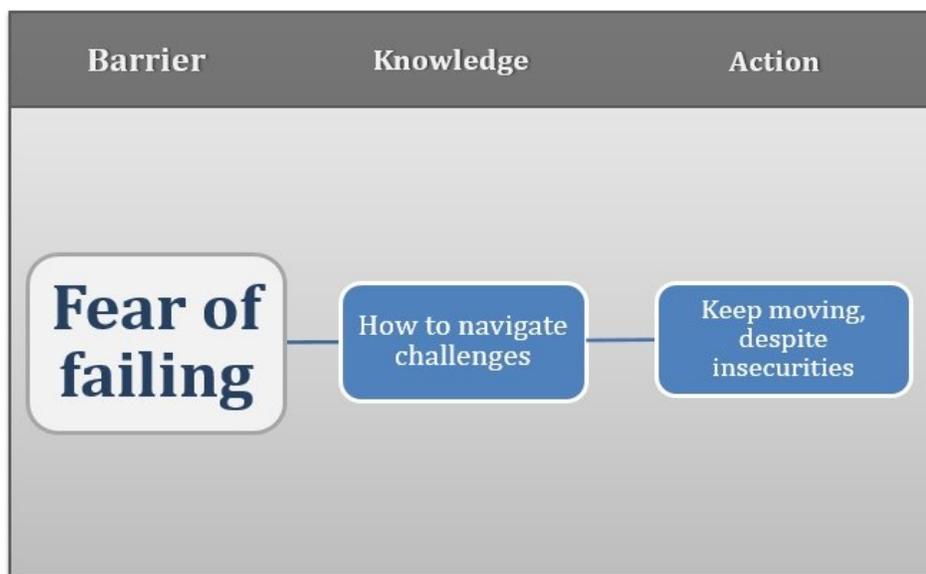


Figure 10. Fear of failing as a barrier. Process of foster alumni managing the fear of failing.

Self-Actualization Needs as Barriers

The last level, or rather the uppermost top to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs triangle is self-actualization. For a student to reach this level would mean they would have reached their full potential. All of the former foster youth who were interviewed agreed that the negative stigma of what it means to have been in foster care is pervasive. It exists in false notions such as foster youth do drugs, they are bad kids, they have had dealings with the law, they are dirty, they are not academically inclined, they are less, and unfortunately, the list goes on. By observation it was construed that the stigma associated with foster youth was not just held by what others mistakenly believe, but also by what foster youth fear others have come to believe about them. The stigma associated with foster care is a barrier that hinders a student from reaching their full potential and reaching self-actualization (please see Figure 11 below). The knowledge to overcome this barrier is to educate faculty, staff and students on foster care and foster youth. The

action step is to volunteer to speak and share their experiences in foster care and at Washburn University.

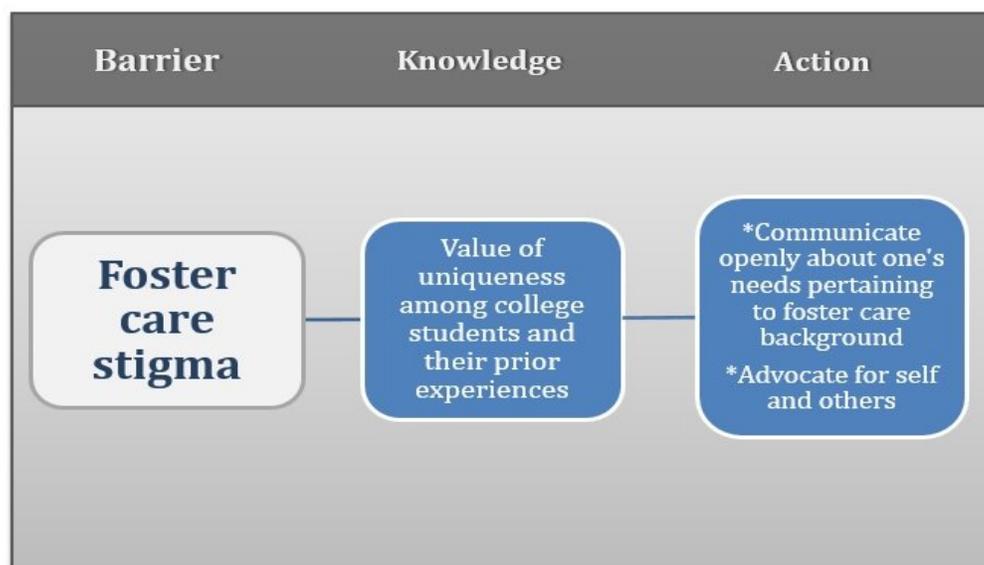


Figure 11. Stigma of foster care as a barrier. Process of foster alumni managing the stigma of foster care.

Reflection on Use of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Including Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs shed a clearer light on the plight of former foster youth who are looking to higher education as a way to stop the family cycle of hurtful experiences. The path to self-actualization and to a college degree is littered with challenges such as unresolved emotional issues, fears and mental health concerns. Universities who want to see an increase in the graduation rate of former foster youth need to view the situation from a different perspective. The use of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs in combination with Padilla's (2009) local model of student success was the equivalent of presenting information in three-dimension versus two-dimension. This added dimension allows others to see the barriers

that are blocking the educational attainment of youth who have aged-out of the foster care system in a new, impactful way.

Limitations

Throughout the writing of this study a list of limitations was maintained in order to help identify either methods or concerns that others in the future could take into consideration. In all there are three limitations, which include sample size, ability to identify personal characteristics and my background as a foster parent.

The issue of sample size was a concern prior to the start of the study. The cause for concern was due to the uncertainty regarding the number of former foster youth who attend Washburn University. Institutional Research and the Scholarship Coordinator confirmed that over 40+ former foster youth were currently attending Washburn. Once flyers were posted and information decimated in person to various staff members who work closely with former foster youth, a few students responded and were interviewed and this was followed by days and weeks of not having students to interview that met all of the original criteria to participate in the study. There were students who were second year freshman who did not qualify and a handful of freshmen who were forthcoming with their experience in foster care. Through conversations with my dissertation advisor, it was agreed to open up the criteria by dropping the number of hours that had to be completed in order to be part of the study. In the end, the variety of perspectives provided meaningful insight, but it is necessary to share that even if you know the number of former foster students on campus, it does not mean that any of them want to share their deeply personal experiences. The findings of this study indicate they are former foster youth who do not want to self-disclose for fear of being labeled, fear of dredging up past memories, or fear others consider them less than.

The first research question asked what personal characteristics a former foster youth needs in order to be academically successful. The limitations in not the research question, as much as it was to not have a consistent method in which to categorize personal characteristics across the board. For instance, my own bias or developed knowledge in resiliency theory could have impacted the ability to see a participant's high level of emotional intelligence. This example is for reference only and is not based on actual occurrences.

Race, ethnicity, or social class were not discussed in this study. This was not intentional, though it is important to note that these topics were not mentioned by any of the volunteers, nor were questions asked of them that dealt with these topics.

As this study was intended to support former foster youth while they pursue their academics at Washburn, this topic was not fully developed. Participants spoke little about academics. Georgia shared that she failed her first psychology test and she had to keep going. Aurora shared how she felt she had to choose between working to pay the bills and going to class. The students' basic needs overshadowed academics and whereas this was a significant find for this study, there is clearly much more to learn.

As lead researcher on this study it is important to share that besides being a Washburn employee that I have been a foster parent for approximately five years. I did not serve as a foster parent to any of the students who were interviewed. As a foster parent there was lingo and reference to agencies that needed no explanation, but there were no tangible benefits to being a foster parent and working on this research topic. At most, the challenge was the level of personal and emotional understanding that came with working with toddlers who had been placed into the state's care and to be able to appreciate the long-lasting impact that can have on a youth throughout their lifetime.

Implications of the Results for Practice

There were numerous takeaways that came from meeting with these youth and encouraging them to share their challenges at Washburn and to offer recommendations for improvement. The following implications are based on those meetings.

Early university outreach to the various agencies, that work with children, who have been placed in state care, would allow former foster youth to be introduced to the opportunities that a college education can provide and the various resources that are available that work to support former foster youth while at college. Additionally, this is an ideal time for former foster youth to begin building connections with faculty and staff who can serve as mentors and a source of support. Many former foster youth who may have issues with trust would benefit from continuous interactions with the same staff member/s as findings show it is a challenge for youth to come to college and to trust someone who they just met.

It is clear the issue of stable and safe housing challenges former foster youth. Once a student is emancipated from the state, it is the youth's responsibility to secure housing. A concern that was brought forward by those interviewed was that Washburn's student housing contract does not include housing for break periods such as Thanksgiving, winter, spring and summer breaks. Students can sign up to stay on campus during these break periods, but there is an additional cost and these unforeseen costs can be problematic for former foster youth. Residential Living should respond to these concerns by reaching out to DCF and student caseworkers in an effort to create a pathway for housing that includes break periods and provides options for payments that work for both former foster youth and the University Business Office. Additionally, students who live on campus are required to have meal plans, but concerns were voiced regarding running out of meal plan funds prior to the end semester. It should also be

pointed out that there are days that hot food options are not available during break periods. These concerns regarding the availability of food while on campus should be addressed at the same time as break housing issues.

Without an intimate knowledge regarding mental health or the on-campus Counseling Services department, the greater good would not be served by making specific recommendations about the types of care that should, or should not, be provided to former foster youth. The better option is to recommend that Counseling Services, Student Health Services and the Psychology Department's Psychology Clinic be made aware of the finding of this study. It is recommended that the staff in these offices discuss the concerns that have been voiced and to create recommendations of their own. Once this group creates a support plan or a strategy to assist former foster youth, it is recommended that a standing committee, or working group, be created in an effort to put recommendations into action.

There was an assumption by many of the former foster youth who were interviewed that the university knew who they were and could widely share this information. This assumption seemed to stem from a lack of understanding as to why the university does not provide more services that are created with them in mind, or at the very least, has taken the former foster youth population into consideration. When it was suggested that a WU101 class of former foster youth be created, it was based on the assumption that the University would know which students to include in the class. The recommendation for a support group also assumed that the University would know in advance which students to contact. As previously mentioned, the vast majority of faculty and staff do not know a student was in foster care unless the student self-discloses, which oftentimes, the student is not comfortable doing. As a function of their job there are a few staff members who know the names of the former foster youth population on campus. The scholarship

coordinator who provides and takes state tuition waivers is one person who knows and perhaps has the quickest access to a current list of former foster youth who are attending Washburn. Along these lines, the University Bursar works with DCF to receive payments for former foster youth who are currently enrolled. The office coordinator in Residential Living also works with DCF to in regard to housing deposits and general housing options and costs.

When students complete a FAFSA, question number 53 asks if they were in foster care, but not all students complete the FAFSA, and the Financial Aid Office is not able to share a list of students who said yes to this specific question. Institutional Research was able to go back and track the persistence of former foster youth students at Washburn. It is unknown what markers were used to identify the students who were used to populate this information. Once again, there is not a known way for a complete and accurate list of former foster youth to be created and shared with departments (ex. Center for Retention and Student Success and departments under the umbrella of Student Life) who would best be in the position to discuss, brainstorm and create programs that align with the specific needs of a youth who has been in foster care. It is recommended that Institutional Research continue to track the academic progress of former foster youth and share the results more widely. It is recommended that staff within the Center of Retention and Student Success and Student Life reach out to DCF and the state's Independent Living program and acknowledge a former foster youth's option to maintain privacy, but also acknowledge there is a need to better assist former foster youth who want to further their education by attending Washburn University or Washburn Tech.

Those interviewed for this study recommended that a Washburn former foster youth support group/network be created. The thought process behind this idea was to create a place where former foster youth could go and feel comfortable about who they are. For these students,

a support group/network would provide an environment where the stigma associated with foster care is not a concern. There would not be a need to wonder if someone would understand and respect their experiences. This setting would allow students to talk and to support each other through the challenges that come from being emancipated and that come from attending college.

There was also a recommendation to invite former foster youth to come to campus a few days earlier than other students and have them go through a “Campus Life Orientation”. The term campus life is used to clarify that New Student Orientation days that are offered throughout the summer are steered toward academics and a Campus Life Orientation would be steered more toward topics such as how to get engaged, how to make friends, and how to ask for help. This orientation would allow opportunity for meetings to be set up with different campus resources and provide one-on-one instruction on how to do check out equipment at the residence halls, how to budget money and time, how to talk to roommates, and how to step outside their comfort zone for the purpose of learning new things and creating positive relationships. There are a variety of staff members and faculty that could work together to make this orientation a reality. An additional outcome of hosting such an orientation is this would allow former foster youth to begin to build a network of support with other foster alumni and with the faculty and staff that can assist them throughout the year.

The last recommendation that was provided by this group of students was to create campus awareness about foster care and former foster youth. These students battle the stigma of having been in foster care and they battle the assumptions that many faculty, staff, and students make when they get asked about their parents, when they get asked about where they are going during the break, and when they are in the classroom and asked to share what others do not know about them. Assumedly, none of these situations are done or asked to be hurtful, but they are

asked in a state of unawareness. It is asked because the assumption is that all students basically have the same upbringing and childhood experiences, which is not the case. The students interviewed recommended creating workshops and various other opportunities for others to learn about neglect, abuse and how judgment is often unfairly transferred from parent to child.

Recommendations for Future Research

It is clear that there is much work to do in order to better enable and empower former foster youth to earn a college degree. This study loosely followed the steps needed to complete a local model of student success, but not all the recommendations that Padilla suggested were completed. One step that could be useful for Washburn in the future is to go through the same process of asking students about barriers they have faced while at Washburn, the knowledge needed to overcome those barriers and what action should ultimately be taken, but to do so with a representative sample of the University's student population. This information would offer comparisons that could provide insight to both groups of students. Additionally, this LMSS process could be done for other sub-populations such as first-generation students, athletes, and the list goes on and on.

Future research could focus on the success of former foster youth who had a personal/mentor type relationship with a faculty or staff person on campus versus those who do not. The results could prove beneficial in regard to the academic success of a student who was in foster care and could also demonstrate the need for faculty and staff to reach out earlier to high schools or group homes that house foster youth. These connections could be in the form of mentors who help the student navigate college access and who can then act as a source of support.

Additional future research could assist the state in streamlining current requirements and confirming that state funds that are provided for different former foster youth initiatives are wise investments. To be clear, investing in the education of former foster youth is a wise investment; the research recommended is to confirm that the methods, practices and opportunities provided for the advancement of the education of former foster youth are working as intended. For example, before a youth is emancipated from the state, the caseworker reviews a state transition checklist with the youth. The purpose of the checklist is to ensure the youth have gained the necessary skills to be out on their own. What is the outcome of these checklists, should the checklists be updated, and should the youth be provided the opportunity to complete the checklist anonymously?

Lastly, it is recommended to further explore the use of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs as a supplemental guide to better understand the results of a local model of student success. According to Maslow (1943), the ability to earn an education would be one way to reach self-actualization, yet former foster youth have numerous barriers that fall in the first four tiers of the hierarchy of needs. Theoretically, a person who is not able to resolve barriers in these first four tiers is not be able to reach self-actualization. This being said, there are former foster youth who do complete a college degree, but that is not to say Maslow's (1943) theory must be wrong, it is to say more attention needs to be given to those barriers along the way. Few former foster youth complete a college degree. Both Padilla, in fashioning a method to discover barriers to academic success, and Maslow (1943) in illustrating what type of things make it difficult to reach a person's full academic potential, provide glaring insight as to why. It is not enough to just know why former foster youth do not academically succeed, or do not reach their full potential, the next part of the journey is to resolve the barriers.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to interview former foster youth who are persisting toward a degree and learn from their experiences with the hope of passing along information to incoming former foster youth and help them to academically achieve. Eight former foster youth were interviewed and there was much to learn from their experiences. The findings of this study provide information that can be shared with future students who have aged-out of the foster care system, and also provides data that can inform those who work and support former foster youth. Now, the University's barrier is low graduation rates for former foster youth students. The knowledge to help overcome that barrier is in the understanding that these youth have experiences unlike many other students. These students fear of being alone, being homeless, being hungry, being unaccepted, being judged, being misunderstood, being mentally unwell, being financially unstable, and fear of failure is their daily reality. The action is to do something different. University programs are largely based on how the greatest number of students can be reached and positively impacted. If the goal is to increase the number of former foster youth who earn a degree, then it is time to reassess the programs, and reassess their purpose.

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Appendix A

Definition of Key Terminology

Aged-Out – a term used to describe a child who was in state custody and was not able to find permanent placement before the age of 18. At age 18, these youth are emancipated from the state and no longer in their care.

Caseworker – A staff member who works for the Independent Living Program and assists and supports foster youth who have aged-out of foster care and who are working on obtaining the education and skills necessary to be self-sufficient.

Center of Student Success and Retention (CSSR) – Department at Washburn University that was developed in 2011. The purpose of CSSR is to support students with their transition from high school to college with the primary focus being their freshman year.

DCF – Department for Children and Families (Kansas specific)

Foster Care - Out-of-Home placement of a child in DCF custody in a licensed or approved facility (http://content.dcf.ks.gov/ees/keesm/appendix/x-6_definitions_7-17.pdf).

Former Foster Youth – a youth who has been in the foster care system at one point in their life.

Foster Alumni – a youth who has been in the foster care system until the legal age of 18.

Independent Living Program (ILP) – is a service provided to foster youth who are 14 years and older. The program assists youth with the transition from a life in foster care to life after they have been emancipated and are no longer in state care.

<http://www.dcf.ks.gov/services/PPS/Pages/IndependentLivingProgram.aspx>

KVC – Agency, formerly known as Kaw Valley Center. KVC is a nonprofit organization that along with other areas, work in child welfare. (Kansas specific).

Success –Specific to this study, success is defined by a student’s movement from their freshman to their sophomore year, specifically determined by enrollment in their sophomore year of college.

Tuition Waiver – The state of Kansas enacted a law that provides the opportunity for youth who have aged of foster care to continue their post-high school education through the offering of tuition waivers.

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Introduction

Good morning (or afternoon). My name is Mindy Rendon. Thank you participating in this study. This is a semi-formal interview, which questions deal with your experiences at Washburn University and foster care. There is no right or wrong answers. It is your personal experience that I would like to learn more about, so feel free to discuss whatever you would like to share.

Audio Recording Instructions

I will be tape-recording our conversation using Rev.com. The purpose for the recording is to ensure that I am fully present with our conversation and not trying to take notes at the same time. Additionally, the recording is to ensure that any details you share will be correctly reported. This conversation is confidential, and comments will only be paired with a pseudonym, not your name. Do I have permission to tape-record this interview? (consent form also needs a signature in order to proceed)

Confidentiality

A pseudonym will be used throughout the report. Information that you share will only be associated with the pseudonym that you have provided or will be discussed in regard to the group as a whole. At this time what pseudonym would you like to choose, or would you prefer that I assign you a pseudonym that will be taken from the most popular names of 2017 – BabyCenter.

- Participant would like to choose the following pseudonym _____.
- Participant would prefer that the primary investigator/researcher assign them a pseudonym.

Consent Form Instructions

The first thing to do is for you to read and sign the consent form.

(Once the signed consent form is returned the voice recorder app will be turned on.)

Interview Questions

1. First, please tell me a little bit about yourself and your experience with foster care.
2. Please describe successes you have had, while in college, that helped you to successfully navigate your freshman year of college (success in this instance is defined as eligible to enroll and attended your sophomore year at Washburn)?
3. How have your experiences in foster care, or other life experiences, contributed toward the progress you have made toward obtaining a college degree?
4. At age 15, please describe how you envisioned yourself 10 years down the road (at 25)?
5. Please describe any sources of support, outside of Washburn, that you had in place prior to starting college? And are those still in place?
6. Please describe any support system/s Washburn has in place that you have utilized since you began college.
7. What support systems should Washburn put in place that would help foster youth be more successful?
8. Describe any types of challenges and/or barriers you have experienced since you first arrived at Washburn.
9. Describe the biggest fear you have experienced while being at college?
10. What worries or concerns, if any, did you have about going to college? Why?

11. At your current age, please describe how you envision yourself 10 years down the road?

Debriefing

Thank you for your time and for sharing your story with me. The purpose behind this study is to understand the experiences of students who have aged-out of the foster care system and who continue to persist. The findings and recommendations of this research will be shared with Washburn faculty/staff and could assist future former foster youth, who choose to come to Washburn in the future.

Once again, thank you for your time. If you have any questions in the weeks to come, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you.

Appendix C

Consent and Authorization Form

Introduction

The Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You may refuse to sign this form and not participate in this study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. If you do withdraw from this study, it will not affect your relationship with this unit, the services it may provide to you, or Washburn University/University of Kansas.

Purpose of Study

Students who have aged-out of the foster care system see college as an opportunity to brighten their future, and therefore; see it as an option worth pursuing. Unfortunately, of the number of foster alumni who enroll in college, few actually graduate. Research shows that students who persist from their freshman to sophomore year of college improve their chances of earning a degree. The purpose of this study is to interview foster alumni who are still currently enrolled at Washburn University. These interviews will be conducted in an effort to better understand the college experience/s of youth who have aged-out of the system and draw upon those experiences to help future foster alumni navigate their freshman year of college and continue to persist toward graduation.

Procedures

You will be asked to participate in a 1 ½ – 2 hour-long interview. Each interview will be audiotaped and will be transcribed via Rev.com. Rev.com is an online app that utilizes TLS 1.2

encryption on all of their files and requires that all their transcriptionists sign confidentiality agreements. Only the primary investigator will have the password that would grant access to all information dealing with interview transcriptions. Interviews will be recorded to ensure that the information that is shared is properly captured, interpreted and disclosed. You have the option of having the recording stopped at any time during the interview. You also have the option of not having your interview recorded, in which case, you will not be able to participate in the study. The last few minutes of the interview each participant will be given the opportunity to take a brief five question, yes or no answer anonymous questionnaire. Completing this brief questionnaire is optional.

All information pertaining to this study will be stored on a laptop that is whole disc encrypted, and the only person with access to the password will be the primary investigator. All transcripts of interviews will be deleted immediately after all the necessary signatures have been received that officially finalize and approve all documents that have been produced using the information from this research project.

Risks

There are no anticipated risks associated with this study beyond those in everyday life.

Benefits

Potential benefits to you will not be direct, but after examining the gathered information there is potential that information you, and that others provide, could be used to assist other foster alumni navigate their freshman year of college and also assist faculty and staff better provide services for incoming students who have experience in foster care.

Payments to Participants

Participants will receive \$20 in Washburn University BodBucks on their ICard within 24 hours after completing their interview. If the interview falls on a Friday or a holiday, the funds will not be placed onto their account until the next business day. BodBucks can be used at any of the Dining Services operations, on-campus vending machines and washer and dryers within the residence halls (must be a resident of the hall in order to utilize machines). Participants may choose to withdraw their consent to participate at any time throughout this process. Please note that participants who withdraw prior to the beginning of their interview will not be eligible to receive \$20 in BodBucks. Participants who choose to withdraw their consent after the interview process has started will receive \$20 in BodBucks. Investigator/s may ask for participant's social security number in order to comply with federal and state tax and accounting regulations.

Confidentiality

Throughout the research project participant's legal name will not be associated with any information they chose to share. A pseudonym of the participant's choice will be used to represent them, and their identifiable information will not be shared unless (a) it is required by law or university policy, or (b) a Participant gives written permission. Participants may also choose to forego the use of a pseudonym.

Refusal to Sign Consent and Authorization

Participants are not required to sign this Consent and Authorization form and they may refuse to do so without affecting their right to any services they are receiving, or may receive, or the ability to participate in any programs or events that are affiliated with Washburn University or the University of Kansas. However, if a participant refuses to sign, they cannot participate in this study.

Cancelling this Consent and Authorization

At any time, prior to or during the participation of this study, a participant may decide to withdraw their consent to participate in this study. To withdraw consent to participate, please provide a written request to:

Mindy Rendon

1801 SW Jewell

Topeka, KS 66621

Please be aware that information shared prior to receiving an official request to withdraw may be used or disclosed in the manner that was originally provided.

Participants may be withdrawn from the study without their consent, if it is found that they do not meet the needed requirements.

Questions about Participation

Questions about procedures should be directed to the researcher(s) listed at the end of this consent form.

Participant Certification

I have read this Consent and Authorization form. I have had the opportunity to ask, and I have received answers to any questions I had regarding this study. I understand that if I have any additional questions about my rights as a research participant, I may email or call by using the following information:

Washburn University

irb@washburn.edu

or

University of Kansas

(785) 864-7429 (x 1) or (785) 864-7385

email irb@ku.edu

or

Human Research Protection Program (HRPP)

University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road

Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7568

I agree to take part in this study as a research participant. By my signature I affirm that I am at least 18 years old and that I have received a copy of this Consent and Authorization form.

Type/Print Participant's Name

Date

Participant's Signature

Authorization to Audiotape Interview

I agree for the researcher to audiotape my interview. Please note, that you may request that the recording be stopped at any time. Information regarding the process in which interviews will be recorded and later deleted can be found in the Procedures section located above.

Type/Print Participant's Name

Date

Participant's Signature

Researcher Contact Information

Mindy Rendon

Susan Twombly, Ph.D.

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