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# A Qualitative Study Exploring the Perceptions of Social Workers Concerning Independent Living Programs in Conjunction with Post-Secondary Education after New Jersey Foster Youth "Age-Out" of the Foster Care System

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**A QUALITATIVE STUDY EXPLORING THE PERCEPTIONS OF  
NEW JERSEY DIVISION OF CHILDREN & FAMILY SOCIAL WORKERS  
CONCERNING INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAMS IN CONJUNCTION  
WITH POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION AFTER NEW JERSEY  
FOSTER YOUTH “AGE-OUT” OF THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM**

BY

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the  
Degree of Doctor of Education  
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2014

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SETON HALL UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES  
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APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

Doctoral Candidate, Patrick Beatty, has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the Ed.D. during this Fall Semester 2014.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this research study is to investigate the perceptions of New Jersey social workers regarding potential barriers that may exist with foster care youth maturity development, independent living programs emphasizing foster care alumni post-secondary education achievement, and social worker departmental training relating to their understanding of independent living programs.

The design of this qualitative study focused on New Jersey Division of Children & Family volunteer participants consisting of three district office manager interviews, and three social worker focus group discussions from specific geographic locations throughout New Jersey. The interview and focus group questions were developed after comprehensive research and validated by a jury of experts. The interview questions for the district office managers were designed into four components: background information, New Jersey foster youth development, New Jersey foster youth post-secondary education achievement, and the New Jersey social worker. The focus group questions for the social workers were designed into four components: New Jersey foster youth development, New Jersey foster youth post-secondary education achievement, role of the New Jersey social worker, and summary. Each component included subsidiary questions intended to produce extensive responses from the participants. The data was tape recorded and then transcribed for evaluation.

Findings of the data determined that priority needs to be focused on foster care youth personal/social development. The participants agreed that significant enhancements have been established relating to foster care independent living programs, however there is no way to precisely measure the success of these

programs. The majority of participants believed that the present New Jersey Division of Children & Family departmental training provides a mediocre understanding of the standard policies and practices pertaining to independent living programs, and also affirmed that the training is both inadequate and ineffective.

Recommendations for policy included mandatory training on the topic of independent living programs to all New Jersey social workers, an up to date uniform checklist document explaining independent living programs available to aging out foster care youth, social media/networking opportunities that associate aging out foster care youth to similar foster care alumni, and funding for aging out foster care youth psychological examinations to identify emotional and mental issues that require therapy. Recommendations for practice included random audits to ensure New Jersey Division of Children & Family practice follows policy confirming statewide uniformity, foster care youth compulsory assessment testing to correspond with appropriate social programs, and standardized statewide reports to augment future public funding.

Recommendations for future research included a research study into analysis of the uniform checklist document, standardized statewide reports, and random audits to measure the effectiveness based on current statistical information, a case study of adolescents as they progress through the New Jersey foster care system utilizing compulsory assessment testing, and a research study gathering data to determine the efficacy of the New Jersey Division of Children & Family social worker mandatory training on independent living programs.

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*But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

*- 2 Corinthians 12:9-10*

First and foremost I want to thank Jesus Christ my Lord and Savior for all the blessings I receive to do His will on a daily basis. It is only by His grace and mercy that He has bestowed on me I am able to perform all the tasks set out before me.

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to both Jesus Christ and my loving family who are my inspiration in everything I do and every choice I make.

To Jesus my Lord and Savior who has always walked with me when I faced the trials and tribulations in my life, I am eternally grateful.

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To my beautiful loving daughters Rachel (Daddy’s Best Girl) and Alexis (Daddy’s Little Monkey), I could not imagine my life being whole without you. I am so proud to be your Daddy, absolutely no earthly accomplishment I ever attain will compare to that honor. You both are such a blessing from Jesus; I love you more than words can say.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Background of the Study**

According to the U.S. Census Bureau 2005, of the approximately 500,000 children in the foster care system in the United States an estimated 24,000 foster youth “age-out” of care each year nationally and attempt to live independently. These youth are expected to succeed on their own long before a vast majority of their peers. The conversion to adulthood for youth who age-out of foster care is riddled with extreme challenges (Gardner, 2008). The older the person is when entering care, the more likely he or she is to age-out of care, Nationally, 80% of those who age-out entered foster care at 10 or older, and 50% entered at 15 or older (Freundlich, 2011). These alumni from foster care are more likely to suffer from untreated health and mental health problems, and they are less likely to graduate from high school or go to college than their peers who are not in foster care. It is estimated that as few as 10% nationally enroll in a higher education program after aging-out of the foster care system. In addition, they are often unemployed and, when employed, earn on average too little to escape poverty (Courtney, 2005).

Given their plight from childhood to adulthood it is not surprising that very few youth placed in foster care acquire the necessary resources to enter college. Youth and adolescents who spend time in foster care are much less likely to enroll in post-secondary education institutions, and those who are able to attend are less likely than other types of undergraduates to persist and attain a bachelors degree or certificate (Davis, 2006). The high school graduation rate of foster youth nationally is 18% lower

than the rest of the population, and by age 28, only 1% will have earned a two-year or four-year college degree, which severely limits their prospects (Belfield, Levin, & Rosen, 2012). One study, *Improving family foster care: Findings from the northwest foster care alumni*, noted that only 2% of the foster care alumni completed a baccalaureate degree or higher (Pecora, Kessler, Williams, O'Brien, Downs, English, White, Hiripi, White, Wiggins, & Holmes, 2005). Other research findings have suggested that it is between 5% and 10% of foster care alumni who are earning degrees at post-secondary institutions (Emerson, 2006; Wolanin, 2005). Nonetheless, the statistics for foster youth aging-out and graduating with college degree are still very low.

Research and experience tells us that youth are more likely to succeed if they are exposed to protective factors that buffer risks and improve the likelihood of future positive outcomes (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). Education is well known to be the leading predictor to achieving adult success. Education supports are essential to facilitating higher graduation rates for foster care youth in high school and post-secondary institutions (Gardner, 2008). To improve foster youth outcome the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 was passed in recognition of the need for older youth in foster care to have independent living skills, education funding, health care, housing, employment training, and most important the need to stay in foster care up to age 21 if a state offers the option (Freundlich, 2010). Additionally, the federally funded Chafee Foster Care Independence Program and the Chafee Educational and Training Voucher Program supports post-secondary educational endeavors of foster care alumni by allocating \$45 million dollars annually to individual states. It provides 18 to 21 year old students from individual state foster care systems up to \$5,000 dollars per student to

pay for higher education expenses. If the students make satisfactory progress toward a college degree or certificate, these vouchers may extend until they are 23 years old (Davis, 2006).

New Jersey is also attempting to improve the outcomes experienced by the foster care population regarding transition to adult life, economic self-sufficiency, and the achievement of educational and career goals. In 2003 former Governor James McGreevey and the New Jersey Legislature passed a law establishing the Statewide Tuition Waiver Program. Despite its name, the law does not waive the college tuition of foster youth; rather, it mandates that the state cover whatever tuition costs remain for eligible foster youth at state public colleges and vocational schools after all other federal grants, such as the Pell and the Tuition Aid Grant, are applied (Davis, 2008). During the programs inception New Jersey state officials anticipated that a few hundred foster youth would apply, but the New Jersey Foster Care Scholars Program drew only 90 young adults in its first year. By the 2007-2008 academic year the number enrolled in the program had grown six-fold to 556. Of those, 443 went on to register for post-secondary education classes and receive financial aid grants. Today the increasing popularity of the New Jersey Foster Care Scholars Program is simply a testament to its importance. Many young adults flocking to apply for assistance see an opportunity for post-secondary education that they thought they would never have. Many young adults realize a college degree is increasingly essential for success in today's competitive economy. Without it, they may risk spending their entire lives trapped in low-wage employment (Davis, 2008). The investment in the future of these young people can mean significant cost reductions to our society. With sufficient and appropriate support

and intervention, needs can be met and a return on investment realized (Cutler Consulting, 2009).

Unfortunately, the current funding for the New Jersey Foster Care Scholarship Program is in doubt. Despite the enormous growth in the scholarship program over the past few years, it is facing a federal funding cut. Chafee Education and Training Voucher funds are distributed to individual states based on the overall number of foster youth in foster care. Recently, a significant drop in the number of foster children in out-of-home placements in New Jersey has led to a 13% cut in the Chafee Education Training and Vouchers funds. The funding crunch has been exacerbated by a cut in the state's share of federal funding from \$1,066,000 to \$926,000 because the number of children in New Jersey foster care declined from 12,800 to 10,700 from 2004 to 2007, according to a report by the Association for Children of New Jersey as cited in Davis 2008. However, in 2013 the President Barack Obama Administration proposed a \$252 million incentive to encourage improvements in foster care and other child welfare programs. For 2013, the Obama Administration projected that Title IV-E Social Security Act foster care maintenance and administrative costs would be at \$4 billion nationally. Additionally, the Title IV-E John Chafee Foster Care Independence Program is set at \$140 million in mandatory funds, and specifically \$45 million for Education and Training Vouchers for youth aging-out of foster care (American Humane Society, 2013).

Historically, the mission of the child welfare agency has been to protect children from harm and not to ameliorate conditions of poverty. The child welfare system has focused its interventions not on addressing future poverty issues, but rather on services such as parenting education and counseling services (Duva & Metzger, 2010). Given

the substantial number of youth aging-out of the foster care system annually, the total cost of providing services to help them successfully transition to adulthood is extremely cost effective. Helping foster youth become stable and productive citizens will produce substantial social benefits while reducing the potential costs if these youth do not succeed (Gardner, 2008). These foster youth can be helped with effective programs that take a comprehensive approach, using a strategic combination of services, job training, and employment, along with alternative education options and skills training (Wyckoff, Cooney, Djakovic & McClanahan, 2008). For that reason, it is significant that the collection of additional information and other data will assist the New Jersey child welfare system to utilize a critical resource for young adults to achieve their post-secondary education and training goals. This resource study could make a difference by helping more foster youth achieve a college degree and become successful citizens contributing to the future of New Jersey.

Studies have found that agency investment in workforce standards – including stability and experience of case workers, lower caseloads, and higher frequencies of contact with youths – result in significantly better rates of discharge within the first 2 years (George, 1990). Despite the availability of casework services that facilitate safety, permanency, and healthy outcomes, many foster care adolescents may either not be receiving these services or may be getting them much later than they might have if they had been served by stable organizational systems with experienced caseworkers (Strolin-Goltzman, Kollar, & Trinkle, 2010). Considering that the successful transition of a foster care adolescent depends profoundly on the social worker to whom they are assigned, this research will explore the perceptions of New Jersey social workers who

are the front line advocates for these foster youths. This will establish as to why New Jersey aging-out foster youths may not be adequately developed for the transition to adult independence, or efficiently utilizing the independent living programs currently being offered to them. Gaining insight into the perceptions of New Jersey social workers makes it possible to assert their comprehension of: departmental training, what federal or state subsidies are currently available, and how to properly employ independent living programs to the aging-out foster youth. This will help create realistic and effective policy and practice changes that improve the New Jersey Child Welfare system.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Social services are unique as compared to other helping professions. Primarily, that distinction lies in the principles that are foundational to the profession (Abbott, 1995; Trevillion 2000). The psycho-social concept theory lies at the core of understanding what the social work profession is, and how social work is practiced (O'Neil, 1984). For a concept to be psycho-social means it relates to one's psychological development in, and interaction with, a [social environment](#). It involves the integration of clients' inner and outer worlds, their interpersonal relationships, and the intersystem influences on their functioning. As such, it constitutes a generic orientation that unifies two essential components in order to expand and balance them, thereby providing professionals with a broader perspective on the human condition (Coady, 2001; Hamilton, 1965; Turner, 1988).

In adopting the psycho-social perspective and broadening the unit of analysis accordingly, social workers are faced with the need to cover vast amounts of knowledge

about multiple spheres of human development, to understand the context of clients' immediate and more remote environments, and to consider the interactions between human beings and their environments (Baker, 1976; Goldstein, 1980; Haynes, 1998; Morris, 2000; Netting, 1999; Pincus, Minihan, 1973; Schneider, Shulman, 1999). Introduced into the social work discourse at the profession's inception, the psychosocial concept serves to bridge theory and practice (Hamilton, 1951; Hankins, 1930; Turner, 1978).

The literature described in Chapter II illustrates that under a contract with the Department of Health and Human Services, Westat Inc. found that the status of older foster care youth 2.5 to 4 years after discharge is "adequate at best" and that enhanced social services are needed for this population to improve their outcomes (Cook, 1994). Caught between the individual and society, social workers possess the underlying expectation that they are charged with society's tedious work (Thompson, 2000). Every day social workers in New Jersey serve on the "front lines" of foster care and provide necessary critical services to their respective clients. The conceptual framework for this study is based on the unique perceptions and experiences of New Jersey social workers as it relates to foster care and how alumni transition to adult independence.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The transition from high school to adult life can be exciting, but also challenging and frightening. There is an expectation that young adults will live independently while continuing their higher education, pursue careers, establish personal relationships, and participate in their communities (Bullis, Castellanos, Hewitt, Lehman, & Rickin, 2002;



Cameto, 2005). Add foster care to this mix of challenges for young adults and successful outcomes become significantly jeopardized. Young adults aging-out of foster care must first address basic critical needs such as housing and medical care that youth in stable situations do not have to face (Osgood, Foster, Flanagan & Ruth, 2004). All youth need connections to family, education, community, and the workplace in order to complete the process of emerging adulthood (Courtney, Hook, & Lee, 2010). The transition from teen to independent adult is a gradual process that often extends into the mid to late 20s. For most, 18 is no longer considered adulthood and most young people do not finish their education, obtain sufficient employment, and live on their own until they are at least 21. Fifty years ago, 18 year olds could get a job and settle down, but that is no longer the case (Laurance, 2012). Today, most young adults continue to receive much needed financial support and emotional support from their families well into their 20's (Freundlich, 2011). A major regional study of former foster youth found that 31% had been couch surfing or homeless; almost half had been homeless more than once; and nearly one quarter had been homeless four or more times by the age of 26 (Courtney, Dworsky, Brown, Cary, Love & Vorhies, 2011).

Foster youth alumni experience many disruptions growing up and often require extensive supports for the transition to adulthood (Massinga & Pecora, 2004). Being removed from one's home is, in itself, a traumatic event, that leads to the loss of and separation from family, friends, and neighbors. Twenty five percent of youth who age-out of foster care experience Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) double the rate for U.S. war veterans (Oldmixon, 2007). Most children want to be with their family of origin. In a recent study, over 90% of youth who were in foster care reported feeling close to at

least one biological family member, and more than 80% had contact with a biological family member at least once a week (Courtney, Dworsky, Brown, Cary, Love, & Vorhies, 2011). While in foster care, many children think about plans to reunite with their birth parents and, as young adults, often go home to visit biological family members after leaving foster care (Samuels, 2008). Research and practice show that having ongoing support from at least one permanent, caring adult can make an enormous difference in the life of a vulnerable child (Howard & Berzin, 2011).

For young adults aging-out of foster care is challenging for a variety of reasons, including: lack of family/caregiver support, confusion about available services, and lack of realistic future planning. Child welfare services typically focus on temporary child removal, as well as reducing the time spent in foster care. Nevertheless, numerous children spend considerable time in foster care, many remaining until emancipation with approximately 20,000 adolescents leaving foster care each year (GAO, 1999). Foster youth in a 2005 Midwest Study faced a broad spectrum of challenges when aging-out (Courtney, Hughes-Heuring, 2005). Almost 63% of participants were not enrolled in an education or training program, and only 11% were enrolled in 2 or 4 year college program. Fewer than half were employed and, for those who were, their employment was sporadic; rarely providing them with enough financial security. Less than 50% of participants received independent living services; approximately 25% of participants did not have enough to eat and 1 in 7 had been homeless. Nearly 50% of the females were pregnant by age 19 and were more than twice as likely to have at least one child. About 33% of participants had been arrested in the first year and 23% spent at least one night in a correctional facility (Courtney & Hughes-Heuring, 2005). It is noteworthy, that youth

who have been in the child welfare system are at higher risk for placement in juvenile justice facilities. They are arrested at a younger age, arrested more frequently, and commit far more offenses than other youth (Mendell, 2011).

Independent living programs are supposed to prepare foster youth to live on their own, but they are falling short of the goal. They need to start earlier and get foster youth personally involved in individualized planning sessions. If foster youth get the right education about how to live independently, they stand a far better chance of adult success. According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, it is believed that foster youth need skill training in five key areas: education, employment, money management, credit management, and consumer skills (Foster Care Work Group, 2003). I have not found any extensive studies specifically targeting the perceptions of New Jersey Division of Children and Families social workers regarding their understanding of department policy, utilization of social services, and the cost effectiveness associated with the Federal Chafee Independent Living Education and Training Voucher Program. I sought to examine, analyze, and assess the perceptions of New Jersey social workers regarding department policy, utilization, and the benefits of independent living programs specifically toward the relationship concerning higher educational achievement in New Jersey. Additionally, I sought determine the impact independent living programs have on the personal character development of foster youth that aged-out of the New Jersey foster care system. This analysis will assist in developing future New Jersey foster youth social program legislation by providing data for funding, the utilization practice of current policy, and to determine if there is a need for improved statewide department training.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research study is to investigate the perceptions of New Jersey social workers regarding potential barriers to foster youth development, and independent living programs emphasizing post-secondary education services available to foster youth alumni. This qualitative research study will examine, analyze, and assess whether New Jersey social workers believe that foster care independent living programs assist foster youth by supporting their educational needs for adult independence. The qualitative research methodology is intended to uncover common themes and patterns from social workers in various geographic locations in which the data will be collected and transcripts will be analyzed.

The methodology in this research study consist of three one-on-one individual interviews of New Jersey Division of Children and Families District Office Managers, and approximately 30 social workers forming three distinct focus groups of 10 individuals from specific geographic locations. It is intended that the analysis of the discussions will help to determine whether foster youth social programs are perceived to be productive and cost effective. Using this information, I aim to establish ideas that social program policy administrators can use to modify or create more efficient foster youth alumni higher education assistance programs.

## **Research Questions**

This research study will focus on components of foster care independent living programs and the perceptions of New Jersey social workers regarding how those programs impact foster youth alumni who are aging-out of the New Jersey foster care system.

The research questions are:

1. Of the aspects relating to successful transition from foster care to adult independent living (personal/social development, academic development, career development) which one does a New Jersey social worker consider a priority? Why?
2. How has foster care independent living programs made a significant step toward the advancement of post-secondary educational achievement of foster youth alumni?
3. How do social workers perceive their department training concerning foster care independent living programs and the standard practices they utilize to follow policy procedures?

### **Limitations of the Study**

This research study will be limited in terms of its range and research design. The results will be limited to three specific geographic New Jersey Division of Children and Families District Office Managers and three focus groups of social workers. The geographic locations are one urban, one suburban, and one rural New Jersey location. This research study use information through one-on-one individual interviews and the

use of focus groups to gather data. The one-on-one interviews will be limited to the professional opinions and responses from the district office managers who are a jury of experts. The focus groups will be asked the research questions regarding their personal perceptions of foster youth, foster care independent living programs, and the Federal Chafee Independence Education and Training Voucher Program. The New Jersey District Office Managers and focus groups will be created from volunteers of specific geographic northern, central, and southern New Jersey district offices. Additionally, the social workers participating in the focus group will not represent the total population of their district office.

### **Significance of the Study**

The conversion to adulthood for foster youth who age-out of foster care is riddled with great challenges. Older adolescents leaving foster care don't have the safety net that traditional families offer. Without sufficient income, youth exiting foster care are at risk for homelessness, poverty, substance abuse, incarceration, and more (Delgado, Draper, Harfeld, Riehl & Weichel, 2011). Not surprisingly, much of the research that does exist on the outcomes for foster care alumni shows that these young adults are at a much higher risk for homelessness, unemployment, illness, incarceration, welfare dependency, and sexual and physical victimization as compared to their peers (Gardner, 2008). For these reasons there is a definite need for more specific supports and social services to help them to overcome these extremely difficult circumstances. According to Wolanin's 2003 national poll, most Americans knew little about foster care

or about the policy issues related to it. Additionally, it seems that foster care is unfamiliar to most of those who staff America's institutions of post-secondary education and assist with higher education policy (Wolanin, 2005). This study was motivated by I's interest in the post-secondary education of New Jersey foster youth alumni related to their transition to adult independence. The findings of this research study can assist New Jersey policymakers with practical application of independence living programs, future state funding, and affect future mandatory statewide social worker department training.

In recent years, with the assistance of federal and state funding, foster youth are finding their way to higher educational institutions in increasing numbers (Fried, 2008). Since a significant amount of federal and state funding has been designated to the Federal Chafee Independence Educational and Training Voucher Program, I wanted to examine the viewpoint of New Jersey social workers regarding it. Currently, there is insufficient information about the attitudes and beliefs of social workers understanding of foster care post-secondary education independence living programs. The absence of reliable statistics and information relating to social workers' comprehension of foster care independence programs may prevent state advocates, analysts, and policymakers from supporting the full educational needs for one of this state's most vulnerable populations (Emerson, 2007).

Today our nation's foster care system serves more than 800,000 adolescents annually. Approximately 300,000 foster youth fall between the ages of 18 and 25 years of age. About 150,000 foster youth alumni will graduate from high school and be considered *college qualified* in society. Of these college qualified foster youth

approximately 30,000 will attend higher education institution throughout the United States. The rate at which college qualified foster youth alumni attend post-secondary education is statistically far below the rate at which their peers attend. If foster youth alumni that completed high school attended a higher education institution at the same rate as their peers, nearly 100,000 additional foster youth in the 18 to 25 year old age group would be attending (Wolanin, 2005). A research study surveyed an ethnically diverse sample of 216 college students who spent an average of 7 to 8 years, and three placements in foster care. They found that only about one quarter of these students actually felt prepared to live independently upon exiting the foster care system, and about the same percentage believed that the foster care system had sufficiently prepared them for college (Merdinger, Hines, Osterling & Wyatt, 2005). Given the lack of discourse about available post-secondary education options many foster youth alumni consider colleges and universities to be mysterious places and have difficulty envisioning themselves in such institutions (McMillen & Tucker, 1999).

Nonetheless, several studies have reported that a significant number of foster youth want to pursue a college degree (Courtney, 2010). One study, as described in the Institute for Higher Education Policy's report, *Higher Education Opportunities for Foster Youth* has explored the post-secondary enrollments of youth from foster care, but no nationally representative data has been analyzed or synthesized on foster students' progress through the post-secondary education system (Davis, 2006). The possibility exists that some foster youth whom age-out of the foster care system may not be aware of the independence living programs that are readily available to them for higher education. Therefore, it could be possible that foster youth alumni are misinformed



about the vital factors that influence post-secondary education enrollment. Overworked, underpaid, and insufficiently trained social workers who turn over frequently may not provide adequate encouragement and/or the mentoring necessary for the post-secondary educational success of foster youth alumni (Wolanin, 2005). Since New Jersey social workers play a key role in the transition of foster youth alumni toward adult success, this research study will focus on their understanding and training concerning independence preparedness and post-secondary educational achievement. This research study is qualitative in design and evaluation. The rationale for using the qualitative approach is to reach a wide ranging group of New Jersey social workers across the state.

### **Definitions of Terms**

The following terms are relevant to this study:

**Abuse.** Abuse exists when a person under the age of eighteen (18) is suffering from, has sustained or may be in immediate danger of suffering from or sustaining a wound, injury, disability or physical or mental condition caused by brutality, neglect or other actions or inactions of a parent, relative, guardian or caretaker.

(<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

**Adjudication.** The outcome of the Court's process to determine the validity of allegations made in a petition or complaint. Children and youth under Division of Children and Families supervision or in DCF custody may be adjudicated

dependent/neglect, unruly, or delinquent. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

**Administration.** The Division of Children and Families personnel responsible for management functions of the organization, including fiscal management, human resources, and service delivery. Such personnel determine organizational goals, acquire and allocate resources to carry out a program, coordinate activities toward goal achievement, and monitor, evaluate, and make needed changes in processes and procedures to improve the likelihood of goal achievement.

(<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

**Advocacy.** An act performed with or on behalf of others through direct intervention, empowerment, or representation. Case advocacy refers to actions taken in relation to a particular individual consumer. Cause, social, or systems advocacy refers to actions taken in relation to a common issue affecting a group of persons.

(<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

**Aged-out.** When a youth adjudicated dependent/neglect or unruly reaches the age of 18 or when a delinquent youth reaches the age of 19 and services or custody with Division of Children and Families are discontinued the youth is said to have “Aged-Out”. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

**Alternate location.** To contact a Division of Children and Families client at a different address. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Assault. An attempt to do bodily injury with force or violence to another person, accompanied with the apparent present ability to do so.

(<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Biological parent. The person who gave biological birth, or biologically fathered the child. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biological\\_parent](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biological_parent), 2010)

Birth family. Members of a child's birth mother's and/or birth father's families. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Birth father. The biological father of a child, sometimes referred to as natural father, may or may not be the legal father. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Birth mother. The biological mother of the child, may or may not be the legal mother. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Birth parent(s). The biological parents of a child. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Caregiver. A person who has the responsibility to care for a young person in foster care. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caregiver>, 2010)

Caretaker. Person responsible for a child's care, whether that person is a parent, legal guardian, or an adult temporarily in a parent's role, as in institutional or out-of-home settings. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Case. A continuum of services provide to a family unit in the Division of Children and Families system including: referral, investigation/assessment/ongoing family

services through closure. A documented collection of one or more situations and their required casework activities for addressing the protective and/or preventive service needs of children and their respective families.

(<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Case manager. A Division of Children and Families employee responsible for providing case management services to children under the State's supervision, in State custody, or at risk of State custody and their families.

(<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Case record. A written compilation that describes the Division of Children and Families client and the services delivered. Records can be in hard copy and/or electronic format. The case record can be used as a source of information for quality improvement or other evaluation activities, for research purposes, or to demonstrate accountability to funding bodies. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Case recordings. The ongoing chronological narrative recorded by a Division of Children and Families case manager that serves to document each contact or to document any activity related to the case. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Case worker. A Division of Children and Families individual who works with youth and their families to provide services and support, with the goal of permanent placement, or independent success for the youth.

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Case\\_worker](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Case_worker), 2010)

Centralized intake. The process in which Division of Children and Families intake case workers accept oral or written complaints, reports, or allegation of child abuse or neglect for investigation. The process includes gathering the information needed to determine if an investigation is warranted, determining the urgency of the situation and then initiating the appropriate response. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Chafee Foster Care Independent Living Act. A Federal Independent Living law (Public Law 106-169) that was enacted in 1999 to assist States and localities in establishing and carrying out programs designed to assist foster youth likely to remain in foster care until 18 years of age and youth who have left foster care because they attained 18 years of age, have not yet attained 21 years of age, to make the transition from foster care to independent living. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Chafee Education and Training Vouchers (ETV). These funds are kept separate from the funding of other Chafee Independent Living Program funds and were added to the Chafee Program to assist youth connected with the foster care system with the high cost of post high school education. Education Training Vouchers can be used for two and four year universities, vocational training programs and job training programs. Youth who meet their state's eligibility requirements for Chafee services will qualify for ETVs, with two notable exceptions. First, youth receiving ETVs can continue to qualify for the financial assistance through age 23 as long as they are still in some form of higher educational program at age 21 and are making satisfactory progress.

(<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Chafee Foster Care Independence Program. Named after John H. Chafee the U.S. Senator responsible for introducing legislation that offers assistance to help current and former youth in foster care achieve self-sufficiency. The legislation provides funds for Independent Living Programs, Education and Training Vouchers for higher education. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chafee\\_foster\\_care](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chafee_foster_care), 2010)

Chafee National Youth in Transition Database. A data collection organization reporting to the Administration for Children and Families on youth who are receiving independent living services and the outcomes of certain youth who are in foster care or who age-out of foster care. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Children. Any person under eighteen years of age.  
(<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Child Abuse. The knowing exposure of a child to or the knowing failure to protect a child from, abuse or neglect that are likely to cause great bodily harm or death and the knowing use of force on a child that is likely to cause great bodily harm or death. Specific brutality, abuse, or neglect towards a child which in the opinion of qualified experts has caused or will reasonably be expected to produce severe psychosis, severe neurotic disorders, severe depression, severe developmental delay or retardation, or severe impairment of the child's ability to function adequately in his environment, and the knowing failure to protect a child from such conduct. The commission of any illegal act toward a child, or the knowing failure to protect the child from the commission of any such illegal act towards them. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Child Abuse Agency. Any person, corporation, or agency which undertakes to or does provide any services to any nature whatsoever, including but not limited to emergency shelter care, homemaker services, or parent training services designed to prevent, or treat child abuse or neglect. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Child and Family Service Review. Each State will undergo a child and family Services Review which is an assessment for compliance with Federal requirements for child protective services, foster care, adoption, and family preservation and support services under titles IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act. The State will be assessed on outcomes for children and families in terms of safety, permanency and child and family well being, and the administration of State programs that directly enhance their capacity to deliver services leading to improved and positive outcomes. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Child-Placing Agency. Any institution, society, agency, corporation, or facility that places children in foster homes for temporary care or for adoption. A license issued to a child-placing agency shall also include all boarding homes and family day care homes approved, supervised, and used by the licensed agency as a part of its work. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Child Protective Services (CPS). A program division of the Division of Children and Families whose purpose is to investigate allegations of child abuse and neglect and to provide and arrange preventive, supportive a services. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Child Protective Services Assessment Worker. A Division of Children and Families staff person whose duty is to acquire needed services for a child and family when a case has been classified as unfounded and/or services are needed.

(<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Child Protective Services Intake. The process that Division of Children and Families staff follow in accepting oral or written complaints, referrals, reports or allegations of child abuse or neglect for possible investigation. This process involves the gathering of information to determine if the reported concerns meet the criteria for investigation and identifying the appropriate Division of Children and Families response time. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Child Sexual Abuse. The commission of any act involving the unlawful sexual abuse, molestation, fondling or carnal knowledge of a child. The employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of any child to engage in, or assist any other person to engage in any sexually explicit conduct or simulation of such conduct for the purpose of producing a visual depiction of such conduct, or the rape, and in cases or caretaker or inter-familial relationships, statutory rape, molestation, prostitution, or other form of sexual exploitation of children, or incest with children.

(<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Client. An individual who receives services from Division of Children and Families.

(<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Closed case file. Records that were maintained according to legal and/or organizational requirements that are eligible for disposition due to the termination of the



physical custody, control, supervision and/or support services of a child by the Division of Children and Families. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

**Confidentiality.** An ethical and practice principle that requires the protection of information shared within a professional client relationship. An organization that upholds confidentiality prohibits personnel from disclosing information about persons served without their written consent. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

**Confidential records.** Any public record or materials which have been designated confidential by statute and includes information or matters or records considered to be privileged and any aspect of which access by the general public has been generally denied. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

**Continuum of Care.** A service-based system of care which allows greater flexibility in designing services for the child/family, the ability to facilitate more rapid movement of the child through the service system, and the ability to “customize” the delivery of services to each child and family in the least restrictive, and most cost-efficient manner. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

**Degree of Relationship.** The relationship between the caregiver and the child. The caregiver may be related through blood, marriage or adoption. Examples include: grandparents, great-grandparents, aunts and uncles, siblings, great-aunts and great-uncles, first cousins, or great grandparents. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

**Department of Human Services (DHS).** The Department responsible for administering types of services including Food Stamps, Temporary Assistance for

Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, Child Support, Child Care, Adult Protective Services, and Rehabilitation Services. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Dependent and Neglected Child. A child who is without a parent, guardian, or legal custodian; whose parent, guardian, or person with whom the child lives, by reason of cruelty, mental incapacity, immorality, or depravity is unfit to properly care for the child; who is under unlawful or improper care, supervision, custody, or restraint by any person, corporation, agency, association, institution, society, or other organization or who is unlawfully kept out of school; whose parent, guardian, or custodian neglects or refuses to provide necessary medical, surgical, institutional, or hospital care for the child who, because of lack of proper supervision, is found in an unlawful place; who is in such condition of want or suffering or is under such improper guardianship or control as to injure or endanger the morals or health of himself/herself or others; who is suffering from or has sustained a wound, injury, disability, or physical or mental condition caused by brutality, abuse, or neglect; who has been in the care and control of an agency or person who is not related to the child by blood or marriage for a continuous period of 18 months or longer in the absence of a Court order, and the person or agency has not initiated judicial proceedings seeking either legal custody or adoption of the child; who is or has been allowed, encouraged, or permitted to engage in prostitution or obscene/pornographic photographing, filming, posing, or similar activity and whose parent, guardian, or other custodian neglects or refuses to protect the child from such activity. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Division of Children and Families (DCF). The State department responsible for providing identified youth the following services: child protective services, foster care,

adoption, delinquency programs, probation/aftercare, and treatment/rehabilitation programs. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Education and Training Vouchers (ETV's). Educational and Training Vouchers were added to the Chafee Independence Program to assist youth and young adults connected with the foster care system with the high cost of post-high school education. Education and Training Vouchers can be used for eligible two and four-year universities, vocational training programs and job training programs.

(<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Emancipated minor. A person under the age of 18 years of age who is totally self-supporting. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Emancipation. The process by which the foster youth is released from dependency status of the state funded child welfare system due to a court proceeding. Depending on the state, this action usually occurs between ages 18 to 21.

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emancipation>, 2010)

Emancipation to adulthood. When a youth adjudicated dependent/neglect or unruly reaches the age of 18 or when a delinquent youth reaches the age of 19 and services or custody with Division of Children and Families are discontinued, the youth is said to have "Emancipated to Adulthood". (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Emotional Abuse. Emotional abuse includes verbal assaults, ignoring and indifference or constant family conflict. If a child is degraded enough, the child will begin

to live up to the image communicated by the abusing parent or caretaker.

(<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Family service worker. A term used to identify the position known as the Division of Children and Families Case Worker or Case Manager. This person is principally responsible for the client case and has the primary responsibility of building, preparing, supporting and maintaining the child and family move toward permanence.

(<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Focus Group. A small group selected from a wider population and sampled, as by open discussion, for its members' opinions about or emotional response to a particular subject or area. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Focus\\_group](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Focus_group), 2010)

Formal Education. A course of study generally limited to educational institutions such as high schools, vocational/technical schools, colleges, and universities.

(<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Foster care. Temporary placement of a child in the custody of the Division of Children and Families for care outside the home of child's parents or guardian. Foster care ceases when the child is placed with individual(s) for purposes of adoption, or when petition to adopt is filed, or when the child is returned to or placed in care of the parents or relative. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Foster home. A private home which is approved by the Division of Children and Families or other licensed child-placing agency. Provides full time care for children which includes birth, adopted, and foster children.

(<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Foster parent. A person who has been trained and approved by Division of Children and Families or a licensed child-placing agency to provide full time temporary out-of-home care in a private residence for children who, for various reasons can no longer remain in their own home. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Foster youth. A child between the ages of 15 to 25 currently a dependent of the State welfare system and is currently living in a state funded residence, foster home, group home, independent living program, or residential treatment facility.

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foster\\_youth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foster_youth), 2010)

General Education Development (GED). The General Education Development Test is a test that certifies the taker has attained high school level academics skills. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Group Care Home. A home operated by any person, agency, corporation, or institution or any group which receives 7 to 12 children under 17 years of age for full-time care outside their own homes in facilities owned or rented and operated by the organization. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Guardian. Parents are natural guardians of a child. The Court may appoint a guardian for a child whose parent(s) is (are) deceased. The Court may give guardianship to Division of Children and Families following a termination of parental rights. Division of Children and Families may, act as guardian when there is no natural guardian or when a minor has been abandoned. The guardian of a child, if appointed by the Court or if acting under statute, has all the duties of a parent to provide for the

child's support, education, and medical care, subject only to the parent's, if any, remaining rights. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Health information. Any information, whether oral or recorded in any form or medium that is created, or received by a covered entity that creates, receives, obtains, maintains, uses, or transmits health information; or that relates to the past, present, or future physical or mental health condition of any individual, their participation in, or payment for such services; and that identifies the individual.

(<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Independence. The ability to exhibit self-sufficiency without State assistance.

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Independence>, 2010)

Independent Living Act or Foster Care Independence Act. Also referred to as the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, increases funds to states to assist youth in making the transition from foster care to independent living; recognizes the need for special help for children ages 18 to 21 who have already left foster care.

(<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Independent living allowance. A direct payment system designed to support eligible young adults as they gain self-sufficiency, and to promote a successful transition to adulthood. Young adults shall have the ability to readily access funds, and utilize financial management skills. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Independent living plan. A plan that consists of a series of developmental activities that provide opportunities for young people to gain the skills required to live healthy, productive, and responsible lives as self sufficient adults. The provision of

Independent Living Services is required for any child in Division of Children and Families custody age 16 years of age or older. The plan consists of the programs and services that will help a youth prepare for the transition from foster care to independent living, or a young adult attain increased self-sufficiency.

(<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Independent Living Post-Custody Services. Services that are provided to youth/young adult that have been in the custody of the State and are now between the ages of 17 and 23. Division of Children and Families Post-Custody Services and Transitional Living Services are both post-custody services.

(<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Independent Living Programs. A program designed to provide support and services to young people preparing to transition from foster care to life on their own. Services often include training for employment, education, housing, relationships, health and other daily living skills. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Independent\\_Living\\_Program](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Independent_Living_Program), 2010)

Independent Living Services. An array of developmentally appropriate services to prepare eligible youth or young adults for Independent Living, or to assist with normalizing their life experience. Provision of these services must promote a Chafee Foster Care Independent Living goal, to include educational progress, maintenance of physical and mental health care, housing opportunities, the formation of supportive adult relationships, knowledge of, and access to, community resources, the acquisition of skills to increase financial viability, and daily life skills.

(<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Institutional Review Board (IRB). A board established to review research activities in accordance with federal regulations.

(<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Interview. A purposeful conversation, usually between two people but sometimes involving more that is directed by one in order to get more information from the other.

(Bogdan & Bilken, 1998)

John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Act. A federal law providing funds to help youth in foster care transition into independent living.

(<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Juvenile. A young person under the age of 18, or as defined in the local jurisdiction as under the age of majority. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Juvenile Court. A Court with jurisdiction under State statutes to hear and decide matters pertaining to children. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Kinship Foster Care Program. Foster care placement of a child in custody of Division of Children and Families with a relative who has complied with the regulations that are applicable to other foster parents. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Legal Guardianship. Placement with a person who is charged with the legal responsibility for the care and management of the child. A legal guardian will be under the supervision of the court and will be required to appear in court to give periodic reports about the status of the child. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legal\\_guardian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legal_guardian), 2010)



McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Act 2001. Federal Law that mandates each State educational agency shall ensure that each child of a homeless individual and each homeless youth has equal access to the same free, appropriate public education, including a public preschool education, as provided to other children and youths.

(<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Medicaid. A medical assistance program for certain groups of needy individuals, which includes children in special living arrangements.

(<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Medication. A substance that is used to diagnose conditions/diseases, treat, prevent, alleviate the symptoms of disease or alter body processes to maintain health.

(<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Mental abuse. Actions directed toward a youth including, but not limited to, obscene language, racial/sexual slurs, the use of consistent negative confrontation having no treatment value, threatening harm and ordering or encouraging another to do so. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Mentor. An individual, usually older and with more experience, who provides advice and support to another. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mentor>, 2010)

Minor. Any person under eighteen (18) years of age.  
(<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD). Database implemented by Health and Human Services so that states, services providers, and advocates can assess the

impact of the Chafee Program on the lives and well-being of young people in foster care as they transition to adulthood. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Neglect. Acts of commission or failure to provide for basic needs of a child including but not limited to food, medical care, and safe living conditions. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Public Law 107-110), (NCLB). Is a United States federal law that reauthorizes a number of federal programs that aim to improve the performance of America's primary and secondary schools by increasing the standards of accountability for states, school districts and schools, as well as providing parents more flexibility in choosing which schools their children will attend. Additionally, it promotes an increased focus on reading and re-authorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Parents. The biological parents or legal guardians, except in cases when guardianship is held by an agency pursuant to a determination of abandonment or surrender of parental rights. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Partial Guardianship. The legal status of a child when the rights of at least one, but not all, parents or guardians have been terminated or are undetermined. Legal status of child when termination of parental rights of at least one, but less than all, parents or guardians of child has been accomplished by surrender or court order. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

**Permanency.** While not specifically defined in the statutes, the concept of permanency stems from a belief that it is in a child's best interests to be placed as quickly as possible in a safe environment that the child has a reasonable expectation of calling "home" throughout his or her life. The process of permanency begins as soon as the child comes into Division of Children and Families custody.

(<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

**Physical Abuse.** Defined as non-accidental physical trauma or injury inflicted by a parent or caretaker on a child/youth. It also includes a parent's or a caretaker's failure to protect a child from another person who perpetrated physical abuse on a child. In its most severe form, physical abuse is likely to cause great bodily harm or death.

(<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

**Physical Custodian.** The person in charge of a household or facility where an individual in Division of Children and Families custody is living.

(<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

**Placement.** The arrangement for the care of a child in a family free or boarding home or in a child-caring agency or institution but does not include any institution caring for the mentally ill, mentally defective or epileptic or any institution primarily educational in character, and any hospital, or other medical facility.

(<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

**Policy.** A type of position statement; a philosophy, a mission, or a general objective. Anything that establishes a guideline for users is a policy.

(<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Privacy Rule. Federal regulations enacted under Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) that establish the legal protections concerning an individual's health information. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Program. A system of services offered by an organization. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Protocols. Instruments and procedures used to accomplish a particular goal, activity, or purpose. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Qualitative research. A method designed to observe social interaction and understand the individual perspective, provides insight into what people's experiences are, why they do what they do, and what they need in order to change. (Rowan & Huston, 1997)

Records. All documents, papers, letters, maps, books, photographs, microfilms, electronic data processing files and output, films, sound recordings, or other material regardless of physical form or characteristic made or received pursuant to law or ordinance or in connection with the transaction of official business by any governmental agency. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Residential facility. A structured care facility with highly trained staff that provides services to young people to overcome behavioral, emotional, mental, or psychological problems that have had harmful impacts on family life, school achievement, and peer relationships. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Residential\\_treatment\\_facility](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Residential_treatment_facility), 2010)

Resiliency. The ability to thrive, become mature, and increase competence in the face of adverse circumstances or obstacles. (Harris-Simms, 2006)

Resource home. A private home which is approved by the Division of Children and Families or other licensed child-placing agency. Provides full time care for children which includes birth, adopted, and foster children.

(<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Resource parent. A person who has been trained and approved by Division of Children and Families or a licensed child-placing agency to provide full-time temporary out-of-home care in a private residence for children who, for various reasons, can no longer remain in their own home. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Responsibility. Ultimate accountability for one's own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. (Harris-Simms, 2006)

Risk. The likelihood or potential that a child will suffer neglect or abuse in the foreseeable or immediate future. Risk is the product of a number of independent factors in the family which may include: prior events, current injuries, child's vulnerabilities, parent care-taking abilities and the family's social and physical environments.

(<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Sealing of records. A legally mandated procedure for maintaining confidentiality and preservation of records. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Self-advocacy. An individual's ability to effectively communicate, convey, negotiate or assert his or her own interests, desires, needs, and rights. It involves making informed decisions and taking responsibility for those decisions.

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-advocacy>, 2010)

Self-sufficient. The ability to maintain oneself or itself without outside aid: capable of providing for one's own needs. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Sexual abuse. Sexual Abuse includes penetration or external touching of a child's intimate parts, oral sex with a child, indecent exposure or any other sexual act performed in a child's presence for sexual gratification, sexual use of a child for prostitution, and the manufacturing of child pornography. Child sexual abuse is also the willful failure of the parent or the child's caretaker to make a reasonable effort to stop child sexual abuse by another person. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Social worker. A licensed professional who gives children and families support. Division of Children and Families social workers play a key role in the recruitment of qualified foster parents, placing children in supportive homes, and coordinating available resources for children and families. ([http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social\\_worker](http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_worker), 2010)

Step-parent. An adult who is married to the biological or legal parent of a child, but who is not the child's legal or biological parent. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Temporary custody. The legally ordered status of a child when an adult or an agency receives physical care, control, and supervision of a child for a limited time. Temporary custody is subject to the remaining rights and duties of the parent or guardian and to any limitations in the Court's order. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Transition from care. When a young person leaves Division of Children and Families foster care, whether through reunification, adoption, or emancipation.

(<http://fostercaretoadulthood.wikispaces.com>, 2010)

Transitional living services. Transitional Living Services are considered a version of Post-Custody Services. Transitional Living Services are also considered an extension of Independent living services, and are designed to expand upon such service options for youth and young adults. Transitional Living Services may be an option for youth who are not eligible for Division of Children and Families Post-Custody Services, as services directly provided by Division of Children and Families may be mitigated by the ability of Division of Children and Families to support aspects of a young adult's overall Independent Living Plan. Such factors may include the young adult not emancipating to adulthood from state custody, educational status upon emancipating to adulthood which could affect the ability of Division of Children and Families to support continued placement via existing funding streams, loss of eligibility for services, or the youth's age. Transitional Living Services are rendered by contracted providers.

(<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Tuition waiver. A program provided by some states that allows current and former Division of Children and Families foster youth to attend publicly funded colleges and higher education institutions without paying tuition and fees.

(<http://www.nrcyd.ou.edu/etv/tuition-waiver>, 2010)

Vocational education. A systematic plan of instruction and hands-on application to train a youth in a skill or trade. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Waiver. Relinquishing of rights, the voluntary surrender of a right or claim. A document or formal statement giving up a right or claim, or an action indicating an intention to waive something. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Wraparound funds. Funds used to provide appropriate support for living arrangements that will lead towards permanency for children and youth in Division of Children and Families custody. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Young adult. A youth that attained at least 18 years of age and exited state custody and is receiving Independent Living Services, Division of Children and Families Post-Custody Services, and/or Transitional Living Services. (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/glossary>, 2010)

Ward of the court. A child or youth who has a guardian appointed by the Court to care for and take responsibility for them. A governmental agency may take temporary custody of a young person if the child is suffering from parental neglect or abuse, or has been in trouble with the law. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ward\\_\(law\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ward_(law)), 2010)

### **Organization of the Study**

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter I provides an overview of the research study pertaining to the intricacy of the foster care system and the obstacles that face New Jersey foster youth alumni. I will provide reasoning for why one-on-one individual interviews and focus group discussions of New Jersey social workers will be utilized. Chapter I will be divided into the following eight sections: (a) the



background of the study, (b) statement of the problem, (c) purpose of the study, (d) research questions, (e) limitations of the study, (f) significance of the study, (g) definition of terms, and (h) organization of the study.

Chapter II is a review of related literature. This chapter presents a short historical background of the foster care system and the progression of child welfare legislation. It describes certain individual characteristics and needs associated with young adults in foster care. It concentrates on the educational barriers associated with foster youths as well as the factors relating to the transition from foster care toward adult independence. The remainder of the chapter illustrates the government assistance program attempting to advance foster youth alumni and post-secondary educational achievement.

Chapter III presents the methodology of the research. Chapter III is divided into the following 11 sections: (a) introduction, (b) research methodology, (c) research sample, (d) ethical considerations, (e) informed consent, (f) jury of experts, (g) setting of the study, (h) research procedures and techniques for data collection (i) instrumentation, (j) data analysis, and (k) summary.

Chapter IV is a detailed analysis of the data collected by using the transcripts of each one-on-one interview and focus group discussions.

Chapter V summarizes the data that was collected in the research study, and it includes recommendations for future research. Chapter V is divided into the following six sections: (a) introduction, (b) summary of study, (c) findings in research, (d) implications, (e) recommendations for future research, and (f) concluding remarks.

The final part of the research paper includes the list of references and appendices.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

This section focuses on practical aspects of the foster care system. In order to provide an enhanced understanding of the issues that affect the educational experiences of foster children, literature pertaining to child welfare and developmental contexts will be reviewed. The section begins with a description of the historical framework of foster care and applicable legislation. Next, the chapter focuses on existing literature describing foster children's characteristics that relate to successful transition to independent living programs. The chapter then leads into the status of foster youth in the educational system. The chapter then provides an overview of the John Chafee Educational and Training Voucher Program.

#### **Historical Background of Foster Care**

Unprotected children have not fared well over the course of history. Children are the quintessential victims: helpless, delicate, and demanding. Infanticide and abandonment are as old as recorded history and are thought to still be commonplace in countries with large poor populations. In many instances such extreme measures were deemed necessary when, for example, there was insufficient food to go around (McDonald, Allen, Westerfelt, & Piliavin, 1997). Churches and workhouses gradually lessened the outright murder of infants in Europe after the Middle-Ages, although the vast majority of infants placed in foundling homes died in their first year. Because older

children had some economic value, that is, the work they could perform, they were indentured. Indeed they were not considered children, but rather, small adults, as far as work was concerned, except they had none of the rights of adults. In Tudor England, children reached the age of majority at 9. *David Copperfield* and *Oliver Twist* bear witness to the lives of such children in the 19th century. At that time laws pertaining to cruelty to animals were much more stringent than laws dealing with cruelty to children (Shepherd, 1973).

The first well known foster family care program in the United States was The Placing Out System of the New York Children's Aid Society. This program was established by Charles Loring Brace in 1853, with the goal of disposing of vagrant children. Children were rounded up from the city streets and obtained from institutions and shipped to rural communities in the West or South, where committees of citizens arranged for them to be taken in by families (McDonald, Allen, Westerfelt, & Piliavin, 1997). A description of the procedure makes it sound like a slave auction, and it was generally conceded that the motives of the families with whom the children were placed had more to do with self-interest than Christian charity (Kadushin & Martin, 1988). Though many of the children were not orphans, they were permanently severed from their biological families. Despite some opposition the idea caught on, and by the year 1923, 34 states contained private organizations engaged in shipping children to communities far from their homes, and it is estimated that 100,000 children were placed from New York City alone between 1854 and 1929 (Kadushin & Martin, 1988).

The evolution of foster family care is closely related to the evolution of substitute care in institutions. At about the same time that The Placing Out system came into use,

about 20 states opened public orphanages to provide temporary homes for destitute children. These orphanages were thought to be a great improvement over the almshouses, which housed not only children, but insane, senile, and diseased adults. However, for many years a debate raged over whether an institution or a foster family home was more desirable. As more and more states passed laws prohibiting the placement of children in almshouses, foster family care came into wider use. The concept of foster family care eventually won out and was recommended as the best substitute for a natural home at a White House Conference on Children in 1909 (Kadushin & Martin, 1988). Although foster family care was still held to be better for children than institutions, there were special cases when the child needed special care that a family setting could not provide (McDonald, Allen, Westerfelt, & Piliavin, 1997).

For no sooner was it established as a solution to the problem of unprotected children than it began to be seen as a problem itself, standing in the way of reunifying families. The system is blamed for maintaining children in temporary situations when the best arrangement for them is permanent placement in homes with biological or adopted parents. The longer a child is in foster care, it is argued, the more he or she becomes estranged from their biological parents thus becoming an option for adoption. There is not any guarantee that the child will stay in a single foster care setting after placement (McDonald, Allen, Westerfelt, & Piliavin, 1997). A child's first placement is often whichever home has an empty bed, which may not be the best placement for the child because it was chosen for availability rather than for the child's unique needs. So, children bounce from home to home when their needs are too challenging for the current foster providers, or when their behavior conflicts with the needs of other

children. Frequent moves adversely affect a child's ability to trust adults and form healthy attachments (Stone, 2014). He or she may be moved from temporary setting to temporary setting, each requiring enormous adjustments. Indeed, state caseworkers would sometimes deliberately move a child who was establishing strong bonds with a foster family, if that child was expected eventually to be returned to their biological home. Concern that foster care stands in the way of reunification or adoption has caused the federal government to reassess and alter its arrangements for federal funding of foster care (McDonald, Allen, Westerfelt, & Piliavin, 1997).

### **Brief Legislative History of the Child Welfare System**

Throughout the history of the United States, the child welfare system has evolved according to changing beliefs and attitudes about what role government should play in the protection and care of abused and neglected children. Early government interventions on behalf of children needing care were characterized more by practical concerns about meeting the physical needs of children than by concern about the negative impacts of abuse and neglect on children's development. As public awareness about child abuse and the damage it caused increased, the importance of child protection received greater attention by government officials (O'Neill Murray, & Gesiriech, 2004).

Historically, individual states have set their own child welfare policy agendas. Under the Constitution the federal role in child welfare was initially limited. However, the federal government's role in the modern child welfare system has increased as federal

funding augmentations were accompanied by new rules and requirements that emphasize greater accountability on the part of individual states in achieving positive child outcomes (O'Neill Murray & Gesiriech, 2004).

The expansion of the federal government's influence in shaping national child welfare policy has been punctuated by two key ideological debates. The first is a debate about the rights of state and local governments, versus the responsibility of the federal government to ensure adequate protection for all children. The second debate centers on the rights of parents versus the rights and needs of the child. For example, when the pendulum of public opinion swings toward parental rights, the goal of family preservation is viewed as paramount. Conversely, when it swings toward the rights of the child there is greater emphasis on ensuring child safety and well-being above all else (O'Neill Murray & Gesiriech, 2004).

By the early 1900s in the United States, the first state laws to prevent child abuse and neglect were passed, the first national conference on the needs of dependent children was convened, and the first federal children's bureau was established (O'Neill Murray, Gesiriech, 2004).

The Social Security Act of 1935 authorized the first federal grants for child welfare services, under what later came to be known as Subpart 1 of Title IV-B of the Social Security Act. Though relatively small, these first federal grants served as an impetus for individual states to establish child welfare agencies and to develop local programs to deliver child welfare services. Over the next several decades, the definition of child welfare services was expanded to include a broader range of services. Federal

funding for child welfare services increased, and individual states were required to match federal grants with state funds (O'Neill Murray, & Gesiriech, 2004).

The original Social Security Act also created the Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) program, in order to help individual states provide financial assistance to needy dependent children. During the 1950s, federal policy makers became increasingly aware that many needy children were being denied ADC benefits. Specifically, under suitable home or man-the-house policies, welfare agencies in many states denied aid payments made on behalf of children of unwed mothers and other parents whose behavior was deemed immoral. In most instances, the children received no follow-up services, despite their established need for financial assistance (O'Neill Murray & Gesiriech, 2004).

In 1960, in what became known as the "Louisiana Incident," Louisiana expelled 23,000 children from its welfare rosters because it was determined that their mothers had born a child outside of marriage. Although similar actions had occurred in other states, the Louisiana Incident prompted the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (DHEW), which administered ADC, to implement the Flemming Rule. Named after Department of Health, Education and Welfare Secretary, Arthur Flemming, the rule declared that individual states could not simply ignore the needs of children living in households deemed to be unsuitable. Instead, the ruling required states to either (a) provide appropriate services to make the home suitable, or (b) move the child to a suitable placement while continuing to provide financial support on behalf of the child (O'Neill Murray & Gesiriech, 2004).



The 1961 amendments to the Social Security Act established in statute the Flemming Rule. In order to assist states in complying with the ruling, these amendments made up the Foster Care component of Aid to Dependent Children. Under ADC-Foster Care, individual states received federal matching funds for foster care payments made on behalf of children who were removed from unsuitable homes. However, federal reimbursement was limited only to cases in which the child would have received ADC payments had they remained at home. The present day link between eligibility for federal foster care reimbursement and eligibility for AFDC has its roots in these amendments (O'Neill Murray & Gesiriech, 2004).

The 1962, the Public Welfare Amendments to the Social Security Act further emphasized the importance of delivering child welfare services to children whose homes were deemed unsuitable. The amendments also required individual state agencies to report to the court system any families whose children were identified as candidates for removal. Together, these provisions resulted in a growing number of children entering out-of-home placements in the 1960s. In 1967, Congress again amended the Social Security Act making these amendments mandatory for all states (O'Neill Murray & Gesiriech, 2004).

In 1974, Congress enacted the first major federal legislation addressing child abuse and neglect. In exchange for federal funding for child abuse prevention and treatment, CAPTA (Public Law 93-247) requires individual states to establish child abuse reporting procedures and investigation systems. Along with the expansion of the foster care program, the implementation of mandatory reporting laws by individual states, in response to CAPTA, resulted in rapid growth in the number of children who

were removed from their homes and placed in foster care (O'Neill Murray & Gesiriech, 2004).

In response to the concern about the high number of Native American children being removed from their families and placed outside of Native American communities, Congress enacted the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 (Public Law 95-608). Under ICWA, all child welfare court proceedings involving Native American children must be heard in tribal courts if possible, and tribes have the right to intervene in state court proceedings. ICWA also established specific guidelines for family reunification and placement of Native American children. Finally, ICWA established the Indian Child Welfare Act grant program. These grants, which totaled about \$11 million annually, were used for a broad array of child welfare services (O'Neill Murray & Gesiriech, 2004).

During the 1970s, as the number of children entering care significantly increased, so, too, did their lengths of stay in foster care. Lawmakers became increasingly concerned that many children were being removed from their homes unnecessarily, and that, once they entered foster care, inadequate efforts were being made to either reunify them with their biological families or place them with adoptive families. Concerns were also raised about the lack of oversight within the foster care system. To address these concerns, Congress enacted the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980. This legislation created Title IV-E of the Social Security Act and transferred AFDC-Foster Care to the new title (O'Neill Murray & Gesiriech, 2004).

The modern child welfare system is founded on this landmark legislation, which for the first time established a major federal role in the administration and oversight of child welfare services. Specifically, the Act,

- established the first federal procedural rules governing child welfare case management, permanency planning, and foster care placement reviews;
- required states to develop a state plan detailing how child welfare services will be delivered;
- required states to make “reasonable efforts” to keep families together, by providing both prevention and family reunification services;
- created an adoption assistance program (Title IV-E Adoption Assistance); and
- created the first significant role for the court system, by requiring courts to review child welfare cases on a regular basis.

As a result of this legislation, both the number of children in foster care and their average length of stay decreased for a brief period in the early 1980s (O’Neill Murray & Gesiriech, 2004).

In 1986, out of concern that adolescents who aged-out of the foster care system were not equipped to live on their own, Congress authorized the Independent Living Program Act. The new program, which was authorized under the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (Public Law 99-272), provided funding for individual states to

help foster youth alumni make the transition from the foster care system to independence (O'Neill Murray & Gesiriech, 2004).

Despite some improvements in foster care trends in the early 1980s, by the mid-1980s the number of children in foster care began to rise dramatically. For example, between 1986 and 1995 the number of children in foster care increased from 280,000 to nearly 500,000: a 76 percent increase. Researchers pointed to the multiple effects of the economic slowdown, the crack cocaine epidemic, AIDS, and the higher incarceration rates among women offenders.

In 1993, out of concern that states were focusing too little attention on efforts to prevent foster care placement and reunify children with their families, Congress established the Family Preservation and Family Support Services Program, as part of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (Public Law 103-66). This program provided flexible funding for community-based services to (a) prevent child abuse and neglect from occurring and (b) help families whose children were at risk of being removed (O'Neill Murray & Gesiriech, 2004).

As part of the same legislation, Congress also established the Court Improvement Program (CIP), which gives grants to the highest court in each individual state to test new approaches to improving juvenile and family court performance. The program was funded through fixed annual funding for the Family Preservation and Family Support Services Program. This was the first significant source of federal funding for child welfare-related court activities (O'Neill Murray & Gesiriech, 2004).

In 1994, in response to concern among states about the federal child welfare financing structure, Congress authorized a child welfare waiver program (as part of the Social Security Amendments of 1994, Public Law 103-432). The program was designed to enable individual states to test innovative approaches to delivering and financing child welfare services, with the goal of producing better outcomes for children. The Department of Health and Human Services was given authority to grant waivers to up to 10 states nationally. Each demonstration project could last no longer than 5 years, had to be rigorously evaluated, and had to be cost-neutral to the federal government, meaning that costs under the waiver could not exceed what the state would have spent in the absence of the waiver (O'Neill Murray & Gesiriech, 2004).

Enacted in 1994, the Multiethnic Placement Act (Public Law 103-382) prohibited individual states from delaying or denying adoption and foster care placements on the basis of race or ethnicity. However, MEPA did allow consideration of race and ethnicity in making placement decisions. Also, MEPA required states to recruit prospective adoptive and foster care families from different racial and ethnic backgrounds to reflect the diversity of children needing placement. However, in 1996 MEPA was amended by the Inter-Ethnic Placement Provisions (Public Law 104-188), which repealed these amendments. The MEPA provision now permitted routine consideration of race and ethnicity (O'Neill Murray & Gesiriech, 2004).

The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (Public Law 105-89) made the most significant changes to the child welfare provisions since they had been established in their current form in 1980. ASFA principally addressed three general perceptions about the current child welfare system:

- Children continued to remain too long in foster care;
- The child welfare system was biased toward family preservation at the expense of children's safety and well-being; and
- Inadequate attention and resources were devoted to adoption as a permanent placement option for abused and neglected children.

Key provisions of ASFA were then designed,

- ensure that child safety, permanency, and well-being are of paramount concern in any child welfare decision;
- encourage states to expedite permanency decisions for children in foster care;
- promote and increase the number of adoptions, particularly through a new adoption incentive payment program;
- establish performance standards and a state accountability system, whereby states face financial penalties for failure to demonstrate improvements in child outcomes; and
- Encourage states to test innovative approaches to delivering child welfare services, by expanding the existing waiver program (O'Neill Murray & Gesiriech, 2004).

As part of the Adoption and Safe Families Act, Congress reauthorized the Family Preservation and Family Support Services Program. The program was renamed Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) and was expanded to include funding for

(a) time-limited family reunification services and (b) adoption promotion and support activities (O'Neill Murray & Gesiriech, 2004).

The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (Public Law 106-169) replaced the Independent Living Program with the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP). In addition to increasing funding, CFCIP expanded the existing independent living program to include services for both adolescents making the transition from foster care to self-sufficiency, and former foster youth up to age 21. Authorized services for this program included: (a) financial and housing assistance, and (b) counseling and other support services needed to help foster youth successfully transition to independence. In addition, CFCIP gave individual states the option to provide continuing Medicaid coverage to certain foster youth alumni. Although the program targeted emancipated and emancipating foster youth, CFCIP was specifically designed as a service option for states, rather than a permanency option for foster youth (O'Neill Murray & Gesiriech, 2004).

The Strengthening Abuse and Neglect Courts Act of 2000 (SANCA, Public Law 106-314) was enacted to help courts to achieve two primary goals: (a) reduce the backlog of abuse and neglect cases; and (b) expedite the flow of individual cases through the court system by automating case tracking and data collection systems. SANCA provides relatively small grants to courts to fund projects that target these goals (O'Neill Murray & Gesiriech, 2004).

In 2001, Congress reauthorized and made amendments to the Promoting Safe and Stable Families program (Public Law 107-133) by increasing the authorization level

of federal funds from \$305 million to \$505 million. The amendments emphasized the importance of providing post-adoption services and substance abuse treatment. The legislation also amended CFCIP, authorizing a new educational and vocational training voucher program for foster care alumni. Finally, the amendments reauthorized the set-aside of PSSF mandatory funds for the Court Improvement Program and expanded the scope of authorized activities (O'Neill Murray & Gesiriech, 2004).

In 2003, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals issued a ruling in *Rosales v. Thompson*, 321 F.3d 835 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2003) that made many more children eligible for Title IV-E federal foster care assistance. The court rules that Health and Human Services has misinterpreted Title IV-E of the Social Security Act in denying federal foster care benefits to certain children who have been maltreated and placed with relatives outside their homes. However, in 2005 Congress passed and the President signed the Deficit Reduction Act, which overturned the Rosales ruling. The same legislation created two additional \$10 million funds for court improvement efforts (Child Welfare League of America, 2014).

In 2008, the fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act were enacted. It amended parts B and E of Title IV of the Social Security Act to connect and support relative caregivers; improve outcomes for children and youths in foster care, especially in health care and education, provide for tribal foster care, improve incentives for adoption, and enhance training access for the child welfare workforce (Child Welfare League of America, 2014).



In 2010, the Affordable Care Act was enacted. This legislation extends Medicaid coverage to all youths who exit out of care as young adults up to age 26. In addition, the prohibition of the pre-existing conditions exclusion and the expansions of Medicaid and the Child Health Insurance Program will benefit many families including those at risk for involvement in the system. This legislation also included federal support for home visiting programs which are proven effective child abuse prevention strategies (Child Welfare League of America, 2014).

In 2011, Congress reauthorized the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act and IV-B of the Social Security Act, respectively. Authorization levels were not changed for either bill. Funding for subpart 2 of IV-B, the Promoting Safe and Stable Families program did change slightly. Mandatory funding decreased slightly from \$365 million to \$345 million. A temporary \$20 million increase for the Court Improvement Program from the year before was shifted from the Promoting Safe and Stable Families baseline to the Court Improvement Program moving forward. The 2011 reauthorization of IV-B includes reinstatement of waiver authority for Title IV-E demonstration projects. This allowed the Health and Human Services to issue up to 10 waivers each year from 2012 through 2014 (Child Welfare League of America, 2014).

### **Characteristics and Needs of Youths in Foster Care**

In keeping with the suggestion of Edmund V. Mech (1994) that research on independent living follows a needs-based research agenda, there are many problems faced by youths about to leave the foster care system and the kinds of independent living services needed to address those problems (Loman & Siegel, 2000). The review

begins with what is arguably the most basic need of older youths discharged from out-of-home care. Many such youths have developmental disabilities or have emotional or health problems. Often, they have not completed high school. Their work experience is often unstable, and the employment they are able to obtain generally does not pay a decent living wage. But, these problems are to a greater or lesser extent found in the general population of 18 year olds. Most importantly, few youths in our society in this age range are ready to live independently. The norm is for people to continue to depend on parents and relatives well into their 20s, as they acquire the skills and experience necessary to be self sufficient. The term *independent living* can be used in a way that de-emphasizes the social dimension of adult life. Certain individual skills are indeed necessary to survive in modern society. Starting a bank account, cooking a meal, and driving a car are all basic skills that are usually done individually. People acquire these and many other one-person skills as they advance into adulthood, and in this sense they become independent. But in a larger sense, human beings remain dependent or interdependent all their lives (Loman & Siegel, 2000).

Younger adults who are trying to make it on their own are particularly in need of interpersonal and social supports. Self-sufficiency normally develops within rather than apart from such a context. This is no less true of former foster children than anyone else. A complicating factor for foster children is that they are often estranged in some way from the very people that most of their peers depend upon for support early in their adult lives. Most are in foster care because of abuse, neglect, or abandonment by immediate family members. Delinquents and status offenders frequently have a history of abuse, neglect, or rejection by their families or have experienced highly strained and

tenuous relationships with them. Relationships that often youths in foster care have with their families often appear to be poor. Immediate family members often visit children in placement sporadically if at all. This view of relationships between youths in foster care and their families can lead to the false conclusion that families that ignore their children should be discounted. A repeated and counterintuitive finding of research on youths who have left foster care supports just the opposite conclusion. Ties often remain with families, including extended family members, even when relationships are judged to be so poor that placement permanency goals have been changed from reunification to adoption or independent living (Loman & Siegel, 2000).

Regardless of judgments about the quality of child-family relationships, even those found to be demonstrably poor, substantial proportions of youths who age-out of foster care or are emancipated return to live with their family members and other relatives. For example, (54 %) of youths in the Westat study (Westat inc, 1991), went to live with their family or extended family upon discharge, and 38% were still living in this situation 2.5 to 4 years later. Two-thirds of the youths studied by Barth (1990) reported monthly contact with family and relatives. In the follow-up by Courtney and Piliaven (1998), 40% of the youths reported that their families had tried to help them, 46% indicated their families provided emotional support to them, and 49% agreed that they could talk with family members about problems. About one-third lived with relatives after discharge, and family members were the most common source of monetary help immediately after discharge. McMillan and Tucker (1999) reported that 26% of the youths studied were living with relatives at the time of their discharge, and 10% of the placements were not planned and included situations in which the agency could find no

other placements for the youths or in which the youths had run away from placement to live with their families. A relatively large percentage of youths 57% in the Westat study (1991) reported that they had strong concrete or emotional support networks, which included family members, after leaving care (Loman & Siegel, 2000).

Courtney and Barth (1996) concluded that for long-term residents in foster care, ignoring maintenance of kinship ties and focusing solely on preparation for independent living overlooks the reality of the post emancipation situation for many youths (DeWoody, M., Ceja, K. & Sylvester, M., 1993). In this light, the prudent course in independent living programs would be to explore resources of families and relatives for all youths in long-term care, even in cases where reunification is no longer considered a case goal. According to McMillen and Tucker (1999), an independent living plan is no reason to de-emphasize visitation between older foster youths and family members. When children are first removed from the natal home, the primary system concern is for their safety and generally family contacts are limited. Unless reunification is being pursued as a viable option, family-based services may not be provided. When such services are provided, efforts often center on counseling and therapy. As valuable as these services may be, other issues are equally or more important when looking toward discharge of older youths from out-of-home care (Loman & Siegel, 2000).

Building ongoing, supportive relationships between children and their families may require early and sustained efforts surrounding employment, income, housing, and other assistance needed by youths who return to or depend on their families after discharge. It is also true that such efforts may fail. In this light, McMillen and Tucker suggested incorporation of survival skills for coping with family problems (such as

chemical dependency, mental illness, and poverty) into training for independent living. The value of nurturing relationships with relatives is supported by outcomes associated with kinship care arrangements. Inglehart (1995) found that youths in kinship care were significantly more likely to expect to live with a relative after foster care or high school. She suggested that this kind of care may soften the effects of the foster care system as it relates to readiness for independent living. In a study of 152 randomly selected adolescents who were still in foster care, Inglehart (1994) found a relationship between the ability of youths to find help and resources on their own and whether or not they were in contact with their fathers. Courtney and Barth (1996) found that kinship care at last placement was significantly related to successful exit from out-of-home care, where unsuccessful referred to such actions as running away, incarceration, placement in a psychiatric hospital, abduction, or death. However, successful referred to reunification with family or kin, adoption, or emancipation to independent living. This suggests that being able to rely on kin may be a critical predictor of successfully negotiating with early emancipation (Loman & Siegel, 2000).

Some youths may fall back on their immediate family or other relatives when they leave care because they have no other alternatives. Another option for programs is to develop alternative support systems. Relationships with foster providers sometimes continue beyond care. For instance, in the Westat study (1991) about 9% of youths lived with foster parents immediately after discharge from foster care. Courtney and Piliaven indicated that about one third of their sample were able to stay with foster parents after they technically left foster care. A programming option is to build upon and extend the relationships established in foster care through specialized foster homes for

transitioning youths, host homes, as well as mentors inside and outside of foster homes (Loman & Siegel, 2000).

Most children in the child welfare system who have been in placement have a poor base for personal growth, given their start in troubled families. Early and repeated removals from home and multiple placements in foster homes and other facilities disrupt the continuity needed for mature emotional development. A high proportion of foster youth have emotional problems and related behavior issues. Behaviors such as truancy, running away from care, and dropping out of school are in part evidence of emotional withdrawal. Similarly, risky behavior, including unprotected sex and drug and alcohol abuse, may be signs of emotional problems. In the Westat study (1991), 38% of youths were clinically diagnosed as emotionally disturbed. Alternatively, 50% reported using illegal drugs since discharge, 25% reported having trouble with the law, and about half of these said the problem involved drugs or alcohol. Courtney and Piliavin (1998) administered a standardized mental health scale to youths who had been out of foster care and found that scores were significantly lower than those of youths in the general population. In their study, 27% of males and 10% of females had been incarcerated at least once since leaving foster care (Loman & Siegel, 2000).

Unsafe sexual behavior is especially threatening to a healthy life. Auslander et al. (1998) discussed this problem in relation to HIV prevention for youths in independent living programs. Barth (1990) cites the correlates of risk behavior generally: histories of physical or sexual abuse, neglect, family instability and disruption, poor health, educational deficits, substance abuse, and delinquent behavior. Auslander and her associates illustrated the relationship between educational aspirations and the risk

status of youths. For example, teens that planned to attend college had greater HIV related knowledge, held more desirable attitudes toward HIV prevention, and reported fewer intentions to engage in HIV-risk behaviors than teens that did not plan to attend college. They also suggest that educational aspirations can be promoted through improved life options for youths, such as saving accounts or scholarships for education. By being provided with assets that expand their life options youths may think and behave in a more conservative manner; as if they have a future worth protecting (Loman & Siegel, 2000).

Birth rates among young women leaving care tend to be quite high. In Barth's (1990) study 40% had a pregnancy shortly following emancipation, while in the Westat study (1991) 24% of males had fathered a child within 2.5 to 4 years of leaving care and 60% of the females had given birth. At the same time, about a quarter of the women in the general population aged 18 to 24 had given birth. In the Westat study (1991), girls with emotional problems and disabilities were less likely to have given birth to a child (Loman & Siegel, 2000).

As a result of educational neglect prior to entering the child welfare system and frequent changes in placement and schools subsequently, many of these foster youths are behind their current grade level. Those who have been abused or neglected are more likely to have significant educational deficits. Many have learning disabilities and/or have received special education services. A high proportion have repeated grades, and some have dropped out of school so that by the time of discharge from foster care a substantial proportion of youths have not yet reached their senior year in high school. The rate of high school completion upon discharge from foster care was

48% in the 1987-88 national research sample (Westat, 1991). This figure had risen to 54% by the time these youths were interviewed 2 to 4 years after discharge. This compares to 80% of individuals nationally in the 18 to 24 year age range that had completed high school. Barth (1990) found that just 45% of the youths in his study had completed high school. More recently, Courtney and Piliavin (1998) found that 55% of 113 Wisconsin foster care youths had completed high school 12 to 18 months after discharge from foster care (Loman & Siegel, 2000).

Some of these problems will be averted by increasing the stability of out-of-home placement and, thereby, reducing changes in schools attended. The latter is a correlate of difficulties in school and grade failure. Assessments of educational progress and problems, as well as educational plans for children are essential. This includes information gathered about disabilities and needs for special services. Assistance of various kinds is essential including tutoring, GED programs, and dropout prevention programs. Also, the assistance needs to include advocacy, particularly in helping the foster youths get educational entitlements and financial aid for school. One of the findings of Ayasse (1995), when studying programs to expedite and advocate for the education of foster children in California, was that information about foster children's educational needs was not tracked by their state caseworkers in any consistent fashion (Loman & Siegel, 2000).

Youths in foster care have the same needs as other young people to learn the skills necessary for daily living. They are at a disadvantage, however, because due to family circumstances and multiple placements they have not had the normal continuum of informal skill-learning experiences. To compensate for this deficiency, formal classes



in life skills are a principle focus of most current independent living programs. The Westat study (1991) focused on 10 general skill areas: money management, knowledge about health care, family planning, knowledge about continuing education, skills associated with employment, home management, social skills, obtaining housing, obtaining legal assistance, and finding community resources. As a rule less than half of the youths in the study (leaving care in 1987 and 1988) had received skill training in each area. The exceptions were financial (55%), housing (66%), and social skills (70%) (Loman & Siegel, 2000).

Employment rates prior to leaving out-of-home care have been found to be relatively low. For example, only 39% of the youths in the Westat (1991) study had any employment experience. At follow-up some years later, (38%) had maintained employment for one year. About 48% had held a full-time job during the ensuing period at a median weekly salary of \$205. In a follow up study, Barth (1990) found a larger proportion at 75%, to working. In Courtney and Piliavin's (1998) study, 50% of participants were employed and average wages were less than \$200 per week. In the Westat study (1991) only 17% of youths were self-supporting through their jobs. About 32% survived through their earnings coupled with other sources of income. The remaining 51% of individuals with no jobs either were totally dependent on other sources of income 44% or received state welfare (7%). Earnings will vary depending on the job market. From the standpoint of preparation for employment, however, earnings are primarily dependent on the level of education and/or skill training an individual has achieved. This is why educational programs associated with independent living are so important for youths in foster care. Also, earnings are dependent on work experience,

attitudes toward work, job search skills, and job maintenance skills. A wide array of services related to with these secondary requirements for employment have been developed to help move foster youths into the work force. These include career counseling, cooperative education, assessments for employment, apprenticeships, job search training, job coaching and counseling, supported employment, mentors, and on-the-job training (Loman & Siegel, 2000).

Mentors can be an important resource for youths transitioning from the foster care system. A 1995 study (Klaw & Rhodes, 1995), of pregnant and parenting African American teenage girls defined natural mentoring relationships as “powerful, supportive emotional ties between older and younger persons in which the older member is trusted, loving and experienced in the guidance of others”. The study found that youths who had natural mentors reported lower levels of depression than those who did not have such relationships, despite comparable levels of resources across both groups. Young mothers with natural mentors were more optimistic about life and the opportunities educational achievement could provide, and were more likely to participate in career-related activities (Massinga & Pecora, 2004).

Other recent reports on adolescent development have indicated that for youths with multiple risks in their lives, a caring relationship with at least one adult is one of the most important protective factors (Massinga & Pecora, 2004). For example, a recent *Child Trends* research brief publication reported that teens that have positive relationships with adults outside of their families are more social and less depressed and have better relationships with their parents (Hair, Jager & Garrett, 2002). Further, having a positive relationship with an adult is associated with better social skills overall,

due to the development of the trust, compassion, and self-esteem that accompany such relationships (Massinga, Pecora, 2004). In another research brief publication, Hair, Jager & Garrett reported that youths participating in mentoring programs exhibited better school attendance, greater likelihood of pursuing higher education, and better attitudes toward school than did similar youths who did not participate in mentoring programs (Jekielek, Moore, Hair, Scarupa, 2002). Further, youths in mentoring programs were less likely than their non-mentored peers to engage in such problem behaviors as hitting someone or committing misdemeanor or felony offenses. The evidence was somewhat mixed, however, with respect to drug use, and no differences were identified with respect to other problem behaviors such as stealing or damaging property, cheating, or using tobacco. Nevertheless, the research suggests that mentors can provide needed connections and supports for older children in foster care (Massinga & Pecora, 2004).

To ensure that all youth in care are afforded opportunities to learn and develop the skills necessary to be successful in life, the child welfare system must continue to invest in developing the tools, materials, ideas, practices, and policies that support the work of the caseworkers, teachers, judges, lawyers, parents, and foster parents toward improving the educational experiences of these children. The resources dedicated toward improving educational outcomes for these children is a worthwhile investment that can improve the life outcomes of foster youth, and this, in turn, can strengthen our communities, economy, and society (Research Highlights on Education and Foster Care, 2014).

## **Status of Foster Youth in the Educational System**

For every child, education is crucial to the successful transition to adulthood. Yet, about 58% of all 1992 high school graduates had at least one factor in their family background or school experiences prior to entering high school that placed them at some risk of lower educational attainment (NCES, 2003). The list of risk factors, as defined by the U.S. Department of Education includes (1992):

- changing schools two or more times from first to eighth grade (except to the next level),
- being in the lowest socioeconomic quartile,
- having average grades of Cs or lower from sixth to eighth grade,
- being in a single-parent household,
- having one or more siblings who left high school without completing, and
- being held-back to repeat one or more grades from 1st to 8th grade

Youth who have been raised in foster care are at multiple risks for educational failure. Many foster youth change schools often as a result of placement changes (Bost, Courtney & Tereo, 2004; Casey Family Programs [CFP], 2003), and regular school attendance is an issue for many foster youth (Kessler, 2004).

In addition, as Steve Christian reported as cited in Kessler, 2004, in the 2003 Children's Policy Initiative on Educating Children in Foster Care, "most of the 500,000 children in foster care bear the scars of physical and emotional trauma, such as prenatal exposure to alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, parental abuse, neglect and abandonment, exposure to violence in their homes and communities, separation from birth families, and frequent changes in foster placement". Despite these risks, some

foster youth succeed in attaining educational goals, and some excel beyond their initial goals. For all youth alumni, assistance (both financial and socio-emotional) is vital if they are to overcome the colossal barriers to achievement (Kessler, 2004). The nation's children and youth in foster care have done so poorly in school that placement in out-of-home care is considered a risk factor for education failure (Yu, Day, & Williams, 2002). The pervasive educational failure of foster care youth is a primary reason that the Education and Training Voucher Program is timely and important. Success in school can be defined by three primary measures: graduation rates, educational achievement, and future educational aspiration (Kessler, 2004).

A high school diploma or its equivalent represents mastery of the basic reading, writing, and math skills a person needs to function in society. Blome (1997) found that foster youth dropped out of high school at higher rates than did non-foster youth. Yet, there is a discrepancy in the research as to exactly how many older youth in care complete a high school diploma or general education development (GED). A report by Burley and Halpern (2001), the state of Washington found that only 59% of the foster youth enrolled in 11th grade completed high school by the end of grade 12. Scannepieco (1995) reported a 31% high school completion rate among adolescents in care, and the Westat study (1990) found 31% left care as high school graduates including a General Education Development (Kessler, 2004). McMillen and Tucker (1999) argued that these studies examined foster youth who left care before "their age-peers graduated from high school"(p.84). In addition, a study by Mallon (1998) found that 74% of the youth who left care at age 21 had completed high school or received a General Education Development. In the end, there was consensus that attaining a high

school diploma prior to leaving care was critically important. Youth who completed high school before leaving care were more likely to have a steady job (McMillen & Tucker, 1999). In addition, a high school diploma or General Education Development (GED) is a pre-requisite to higher education (Kessler, 2004).

Youth in foster care have a lower level of school achievement than other students (Prosser, 1997). Many factors affect school achievement. Reading at grade level, placement in special education classes, and school discipline are among the most commonly researched education indicators for foster youth (Kessler, 2004). The recent Midwest Evaluation conducted by Courtney, Terao, and Bost (2004), looked at a research sample of 732 foster youth from Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin, and had a comparison group of non-foster youth from the same states. The evaluation found that 37% of the foster youth had to repeat a grade, as compared with 22% in the comparison group. A similarly designed research study in Illinois found that 61% of foster youth failed a subject in the previous 2 years and 20% were on the honor roll (Shin & Poertner, 2002). Other research studies have reported the following percentages on grade or class failure:

- 36% repeated a grade in school (Casey Family Programs, 2003),
- (18%) failed a grade in school (Shin & Poertner, 2002),
- at both the elementary and secondary levels, twice as many foster youth had repeated a grade (Burley & Halpern, 2001), and
- 58% had failed a class in the last year (McMillen, 2003).

Mathematics and reading achievement test scores are important measures of students' skills in these subject areas, as well as good indicators of achievement overall

in school. Two separate studies by Shin reported on the reading abilities of a sample of youth in Illinois. The 2002 research study that had a sample of 74 youth age 16.5 to 17.5 found that 36% were categorized between grades 2 and 5 on reading level, and 24% demonstrated a reading level between grades 6 and 8. Shin's 2003 research study, that had a sample of 152 youth age 16.5 to 17.5, found that 33% demonstrated a reading level below sixth grade, 31% read between sixth and eighth grade level, 18% read between ninth and twelfth grade level, and another 18% demonstrated twelfth grade or higher reading ability. Courtney (2001) found that out of a research sample of 141 young adults who left care in Wisconsin during 1995 and 1996, that 32% were reading at or below the eighth grade level (Kessler, 2004).

Placement in special education is common for foster youth. Foster youth are more often in special education due to emotional and behavior problems, as opposed to physical disabilities. In Courtney et al (2004) Midwest Evaluation, 47% of the sample reported being placed in a special education classroom. Other studies reported slightly lower rates:

- 38% in special education classes (Casey Family Programs, 2003),
- 34% in special education classes (Shin, 2003),
- 34% reported being in one or more special education classes (Shin & Poertner, 2002), and
- 37% had been in special education classes (Courtney, et al., 2001)

Researchers also have studied how much trouble students get into at school. Indicators have included expulsion, suspension, and/or physical fighting in school (Kessler, 2004). Some of the findings are as follows:

- 67% received out-of-school suspension (28% for non-foster care comparison group) (Bost, Courtney & Terao, 2004),
- 17% expelled from school (5% for non-foster care comparison group) (Bost, Courtney & Terao, 2004),
- 73% had been suspended at least once since seventh grade, and 16% expelled (McMillen et al., 2003)
- 29% reported physical fights with other students (McMillen, et al., 2003)

The level of education that adolescents hope to achieve has been regarded as among the most significant determinants of educational attainment (Courtney et al., 2004).

Other factors that have shown to influence level of attainment are: (a) socio-economic status, (b) parents' level of education, (c) availability of age-appropriate books in the home, and (d) early school performance.

McMillen et al. (2003) interviewed 262 youth referred for independent living preparation in one midwestern county and found that 70% of their youth wanted to attend college (McMillen, et al., 2003). However, in that same study 73% of the youth had been suspended at least once since seventh grade, and 16% of the youth had been expelled from school. In addition, 58% of the research sample had failed a class within the last year, and 29% reported having physical fights with other students (Kessler, 2004).

Courtney, Terao, and Bost (2004) had similar findings in their Midwest Evaluation, a research study that interviewed 732 foster youth age 17.5 from Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin. Their findings indicated that over 70% of the sample, hoped to



graduate from college. Yet, the list of barriers this research sample faced is compelling.

Some of the additional findings from the study are that:

- 47% reported being placed in special education classrooms,
- 37% had to repeat a grade,
- 67% received an out-of-school suspension,
- 17% were expelled from school,
- many of the youth showed reading deficits, 44% read at a high school level or higher.

Given the challenges that foster youth face in the education system, is aspiration enough to help these youth attain their post-secondary educational goals? While aspiration, internal motivation, and a strong work ethic are vital to advancement, foster youth alumni need additional supports to assist them in achieving the goals in their post-secondary educational plan (Kessler, 2004).

Despite all the best intentions, when youth leave the foster care system as adults, they are typically only given a sheaf of papers that detail their complicated histories. These records are easily lost and usually incomplete, which often burden these young adults for life. To combat this difficult aspect of the transitional process of foster youth, a handful of counties in California are engaged in initiatives to make electronic records accessible to foster youth and to leverage resources for this population; an “electronic backpack” for storing important documents and information (Lazarus & Morrow, 2014).

This backpack will enable youth to build a user-friendly repository of materials that can be utilized to apply for jobs and college, prove eligibility for financial aid, update

their family health history, or connect with loved ones. As children and youth continue to age out of the foster care system, it is becoming increasingly important for public agencies to be forward-thinking and to adopt new technologies that help foster youth to make a smoother transition to adulthood (Lazarus & Morrow, 2014).

### **Factors Relating to Foster Youth Successful Transition to Independent Living**

Daining and DePanfilis (2007) examined resilience factors for foster youth during the transition to adulthood and independent living. Resilience was defined as education participation, employment history, avoidance of early parenthood, avoidance of homelessness, avoidance of drug use, and avoidance of criminal activity. They found that being female, having an older age at exit, having lower perceived stress, having higher levels of social support from friends and family, and greater spiritual support were associated with greater resilience. They recommended that state caseworkers make efforts to assist transitioning youth in identifying supportive relationships and maintaining these relationships during the transition to independent living (Hatton & Brooks, 2009).

Former foster youth find support in their families of origin -- especially siblings and grandparents -- foster families, other former foster youth, and mentors. Munson and McMillen (2009) evaluated natural mentoring and related psychosocial outcomes for youth transitioning from foster care. They found that 75% could identify a supportive, non-kin mentor, but 25% of the youth could not. They found that having a mentor was associated with fewer symptoms of depression, less perceived stress, and greater

satisfaction with life 6 months removed from foster care. The support of a long-term mentor was associated with a lower likelihood of being arrested and less perceived stress after controlling for custody status, maltreatment history, psychiatric history, and previous level of perceived stress (Munson & McMillen, 2009). Furthermore, Munson and McMillen found that mentor relationships lasting longer than 1 year were associated with fewer symptoms of depression. Munson and McMillen (2006) found that 51% of the foster youth in their study identified a non-kin natural mentor from their interactions with formal services, such as child welfare and mental health services. Greeson and Bowen (2008) conducted a qualitative study of a small sample of foster youth to better understand the benefits of natural mentor relationships. They suggested that mentors be included in the service provision process, and that they be informed about resources available to foster youth and be provided with funding to buy youth necessary instrumental items (Hatton & Brooks, 2009).

Osterling and Hines (2006) assessed a mentor training program called, “Advocates to Successful Transition to Independence”, which was designed to assist mentors in supporting older foster youth during the transition to adulthood. This mixed-method evaluation found that youths reported independent living skills improved, and youth reported better social and emotional outcomes. Some youth noted that independent living training with their advocates was more meaningful than classroom experiences due to the practical, hands-on experiences in the context of the supportive relationships. Nearly half of the mentors, 47%, were very satisfied with their mentor training, and approximately 65% were very satisfied being a youth advocate. However, advocates reported a need for a Resource Coordinator to have a central location for all

of the various resources available for youth and an information sharing network for youth advocates. In addition, mentors reported that independent living programs were inconsistent across locations, and that it was difficult for them to know what services were available. Mentors reported that some independent living programs offered good services, whereas others did not (Hatton & Brooks, 2009).

In a study of the transition to young adulthood, Kermin, Wildfire, and Barth (2002) found that males and foster youth who were not adopted or in extended long-term foster care had lower scores on a measure of personal well-being that included: alcohol and drug use, overall health status, housing instability, and community, work, and family status. Males and foster youth who were not adopted or in extended long-term foster care also scored lower on self-sufficiency, a construct that included: experiencing homelessness, employment status, receiving public assistance, educational achievement, and having health insurance. Furthermore, males and foster youth who were not adopted or in extended long-term foster care fared poorly in overall adult outcomes, including arrest after age 18, overall community involvement and overall self-sufficiency and personal well-being. It should be noted, however, that youth who transitioned out of foster care around age 18 without being adopted were also more likely to be male (62%), minorities (74%), have a family history of criminal behavior (65%), have a family history of substance abuse (71%), have a higher rate of behavior problems, and have a higher number of problems documented in placements. Thus, these youth are at risk from early childhood through young adulthood (Brooks & Hatton, 2009).

Hines, Lemon, and Merdinger, (2005) examined the role of independent living programs versus other foster care in the transition to young adulthood with a sample of former foster youth enrolled in college in California. They found that independent living program youth were more likely to have received information about financial aid in high school and were significantly younger when they began college than the youth in other foster care. The independent living program youth also received information or training on nine other items associated with independent living, such as: opening a bank account, obtaining car insurance, balancing a checkbook, finding a place to live, and setting and achieving goals (Hines Lemon, & Merdinger, 2005). Fewer independent living program youth felt well prepared for independent living than other foster care youth in college, but more independent living program youth felt somewhat prepared for independent living than other foster care alumni in college. Independent living program youth were less likely to report having a job right after discharge from foster care than other foster care youth, yet independent living program youth reported that their economic situation was about the same as others their age, whereas the other foster care youth reported that their economic situation was worse (Lemon et al., 2005). Independent living program youth were also more likely to report maintaining contact with their past caseworkers or counselors and to be very hopeful about their future than other foster care youth. Lemon et al. (2005) concluded with recommendations for independent living program services, such as: fostering the relationship between the foster youth and one state caseworker, collaborations with other foster care parents (including group homes), and educational services that foster preparation for post-secondary education. A limitation of this study is that it did not include a comparison

group of independent living program participants who were not enrolled in college.

Thus, it is unclear what effect the independent living program had on participating youth overall (Hatton & Brooks, 2009).

In a relatively sophisticated study of a large sample of foster youth age 17 and 18 preparing to exit foster care, Keller, Cusick, and Courtney (2007) used latent class analysis to identify subpopulations of foster youth to better match foster youth with appropriate services. Although the findings of this study need replication, the results are noteworthy and provide a framework for approaching service delivery for youth during the transition to independence. Keller, Cusick, and Courtney (2007) found four distinct subpopulations preparing to transition out of foster care living in Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin. The largest groups (43%), referred to as “distressed and disconnected”, were more likely to live in non-family care, group care, or independent living arrangements; had more than five placements; had run away from a placement; reported a high rate of problem behavior; and had lower employment and higher grade retention rates than the full sample. Keller, et al. (2007) suggested that this is the group that is most likely to experience a difficult transition. They have the highest rates of traumatic experiences and few resources. Paradoxically, the investigators identified the distressed and disconnected group as having the highest needs for comprehensive services, yet, the most likely to resist assistance. Thus, whenever possible, youth who are on the path to becoming distressed and disconnected should be identified early and provided with appropriate services (Hatton & Brooks, 2009).

The second subpopulation (38%), referred to as “competent and connected”, was characterized by the highest levels of employment experience and the lowest level of

problem behaviors and grade retention. In addition, they were more likely to be living in kinship foster care or foster care without relatives and had a relatively stable placement history, but had average rates of parenthood and moderate rates of running away (Keller et al., 2007). These foster youth have much strength to build on including stable, supportive relationships, positive educational experiences, and employment experiences. These youth would likely benefit from focused services to build on their individual strengths (Hatton & Brooks, 2009).

The third subpopulation (14%), referred to as “struggling but staying”, had the lowest rates of parenthood and no reports of running away from placement, but had the highest rates of grade retention, enrollment in special education, and problem behaviors that resulted in expulsion or incarceration. These youth tended to live in foster care without relatives with an average of two to four placements. This subpopulation is the most likely to seek continuing support (Keller et al., 2007). The struggling but staying group may benefit from maintaining their stability with a gradual transition to independence with services focused on overcoming identified difficulties (Hatton & Brooks, 2009).

The final subpopulation was the smallest group (5%), and was referred to as “hindered and homebound”, which is characterized by the highest rates of parenthood and grade retention and the lowest rates of employment experience. This subpopulation had the highest rate of living in kinship foster care and tended to be in their first placement (Keller, et al., 2007). Of note for this group was their early parenthood status which may have been a primary factor in their transitional capabilities. Although this was the smallest subpopulation, because they were responsible for young children, they

may have benefited from programmatic mentors to supplement their social support network and foster self-sufficiency. In addition, this subpopulation could also benefit from programs and services for teenage parents (Hatton & Brooks, 2009).

In a review of research on independent living programs through October, 2005, Montgomery, Donkoh, and Underhill (2006) found overall support for the benefit of independent living programs on former foster youth outcomes. Is identified eight studies (seven in the United States and one in the United Kingdom) that examined independent living program outcomes by comparison with usual care, another intervention, or no intervention. While each study had important limitations (such as selective outcomes, nonequivalence of comparison groups, short-term outcomes and low response rates) the accumulation of findings suggested that independent living programs were beneficial. More specifically, nearly all of the studies reported higher rates of high school enrollment and completion and vocational school or college attendance. Several studies reported positive associations with employment outcomes. All studies reported generally favorable housing outcomes, such as living independently and paying own housing expenses. However, the associations between independent living programs and homelessness were mixed. Only one study (Lemon et al. 2005) examined health outcomes, such as access to medical care and receipt of mental health services. There were only two studies that examined criminality; one of which reported a statistically significant reduction in rates of adult criminality and the other was in the expected direction, but failed to reach significance. Finally, the results for self-sufficiency were mixed, and clear conclusions could not be drawn (Hatton & Brooks, 2009). In a more recent review, Naccarato and DeLorenzo (2008) identified 19 studies that assessed the



effectiveness of independent living services or programs. They concluded that transitional programs should focus on providing information about and access to stable housing. Services should include collaborations with local housing providers, local section-8 landlords, and subsidized rent to provide youth with an array of options to meet their needs (Hatton & Brooks, 2009).

Another important independent living program outcome identified by Naccarato and DeLorenzo (2008) was educational attainment. Overall, the identified studies found that participation in independent living programs had a positive effect on various types of educational attainment. However, the studies that compared foster youth alumni with youth in the general population found that foster youth alumni had relatively poorer educational attainment than youth in the general population. However, there were no studies that compared participation in independent living programs with youth in the general population. Thus, it is unclear if independent living program participation is associated with outcomes that foster independent living skills equivalent to the general population of young people. Important factors identified include the effects of educational stability in primary education on educational outcomes, birth family involvement in education throughout the youth's educational career; teacher's and case worker's expectations for foster youth's achievement, and the connection between child welfare agencies and schools (Hatton & Brooks, 2009).

Naccarato and DeLorenzo (2008) also examined types of placement over the transition to independent living and found that many former foster youth returned to their family of origin rather than lived independently. Thus, the implications for service providers are relatively similar to reunification in that those potential hazards and

strengths in the family should be identified and addressed to better support the youth. Furthermore, Naccarato and DeLorenzo (2008) recommended that these youth should continue to receive services until they become self-sufficient (Hatton & Brooks, 2009).

Another placement issue is the discrepancy between foster family placement and group home placement on independent living outcomes (Naccarato & DeLorenzo, 2008). Although it is likely that youth with more serious problems are placed in group homes rather than with foster families, group home placement is associated with relatively poorer outcomes. Indeed, Chamberlin and Reid (1998) found that youth placed in foster homes had significantly more positive behavior changes and fewer short term negative outcomes than youth placed in group care, although Is did not follow-up into adulthood. Thus, the implication is that independent living programs targeted toward youth in group homes should include services to meet the needs of the most troubled youth, such as intensive mental health services (Hatton & Brooks, 2009).

Importantly, it should be noted that establishing and maintaining supportive relationships beyond the family is the central task of adulthood (Berscheid, 2003). There is substantial literature documenting the effects of problematic relationships with primary caregivers on child outcomes that overlap substantially with outcomes for former foster youth. Although likely more difficult, great effort should be made to find suitable foster families for the most troubled youth and incorporate relationship building services into independent living programs, including relationship-focused therapy. Support should be provided to foster families and the youth to foster preparedness for independent living over time, especially regarding establishing healthy adult relationships that are associated with more positive outcomes (Hatton & Brooks, 2009).

Employment is another important outcome for foster youth (Naccarato & DeLorenzo, 2008). Several studies examined various employment conditions and found that, overall, former foster youth had lower rates of positive employment experiences as compared with youth in the general population. However, independent living program participants tended to have more positive employment experiences than non-independent living program participants. Implications from these studies highlight not only vocational training, but also formal training programs that result in employment. Collaborations between child welfare agencies and employers can be forged to promote long-term, stable employment opportunities for foster youth alumni. For youth not considering college, this is a viable option for becoming self-supporting over time (Hatton & Brooks, 2009).

Other issues identified by Naccarato and DeLorenzo (2008) included sexual risk prevention; consideration of the special needs of large numbers of foster youth with physical, psychological, and emotional disabling conditions; and the continued availability of services for youth who have emancipated. For example, a review of the Casey Family Program revealed that youth had higher rates of depression 6 to 12 months after leaving the foster care system than young adults in the general population (Brandford & English, 2004). However, Casey Family Program females had fewer psychiatric diagnoses, more supportive relationships, and fewer medical visits than males (Anctil et al., 2007). Casey Family Program youth with disabilities had more psychiatric diagnoses, lower self-esteem, and poorer physical health than Casey Family Program youth without disabilities (Anctil et al., 2007). These youth likely require special services to overcome disabilities, in addition to services needed to make a successful

exit from the foster care system. It appears that female foster youth generally have more successful outcomes than males (Hatton & Brooks, 2009).

Today three out of four Americans use social media and, in response, the Children's Bureau, which oversees foster care and adoption in the United States, launched a new set of videos on the website YouTube to help promote an ongoing national survey of America's foster youth. The National Youth in Transition Database tracks the outcomes of foster youth during the transition to adulthood at the specific ages of 17, 19, and 21. The National Youth in Transition Database survey marks the first time foster youth nationwide are being asked what worked in foster care, what did not, and what they would change for the better. State child and welfare agency employees have helped to promote and encourage foster youth to participate in the new survey. To support states in understanding the importance of this effort, the Children's Bureau enlisted former foster youth to share their personal experiences on video. By collecting these stories, the Children's Bureau hopes to learn how youth who have aged out of foster care are doing and what services and support they need to be successful (Garcia, 2014).

### **Federal Chafee Educational and Training Voucher Program**

The John Chafee Education and Training Voucher Program makes financial resources available to meet the post-secondary education and training needs of youth aging-out of foster care and enrolling in a qualified higher education program. The program was established in 2001 by Congress as part of a reauthorization of the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Act. The Act amended the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 by adding the Chafee Education and Training Voucher

Program as the sixth purpose of the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (Nixon & Garin Jones, 2007).

The Chafee Education and Training Voucher Program makes vouchers of up to \$5,000 per year available to young adults coming from foster care to college in order to support their costs of attending institutions of higher education, as defined in the Higher Education Act of 1965. This expands and supplements the assistance authorized in the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 to help youth transitioning out of foster care to prepare for, enroll in, and be successful in post-secondary training and education institutions (Nixon & Garin Jones, 2007).

While the overall Chafee Foster Care Independence Program has a general annual mandatory appropriation of \$140 million, the Chafee Education and Training Voucher Program authorizes up to \$60 million in discretionary funds. Unlike the rest of the Chafee Program, education and training voucher funds can only be used to provide resources for youth participating in eligible post-secondary educational and training programs. The first appropriation to the program was made in 2003 in the amount of \$42 million. From 2003–2007, the amount appropriated each year has varied from \$44 to \$46 million, with reductions caused by U.S Department of Health and Human Services administration and evaluation costs, as well as across-the-board budget cuts made by Congress. Individual states receive an annual allocation based on the percentage of children and youth placed in foster care, and they have 2 years to spend the allocated funds for each year. Individual states are then required to provide 20% of their annually allocated amount in cash or in-kind match (Nixon & Garin Jones, 2007).

As part of the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, Congress authorized states to extend Medicaid coverage to youth aging out of foster care. Some states can elect to offer the Medicaid extension to foster care alumni up to age 21. As cited in a Nixon & Garin Jones (2007) study, done by the American Public Human Services Association, 17 states have so far enacted the “Chafee option” and five more are planning to do so. The study also found that the cost of providing such care is only \$110 to \$350 per month. Other states can provide continuing health care via the extension of foster care status beyond age 18 or through other state-funded healthcare programs (Nixon & Garin Jones, 2007).

Implementation of the Chafee Education and Training Voucher Program has presented significant challenges to some states. These challenges are in relation to setting up new administrative processes in the first 2 years; identifying and informing potential voucher recipients; informing child welfare, independent living, and higher education staff; and expending all of the available funds within the 2-year time limit. From interviews with federal staff and state child welfare administrators, there is a conclude that some states have fully organized the Chafee Education and Training Voucher Program within state government or through contracting with other public or private entities, and are expending all available funds. Individual states have also made significant improvements in efforts to reach out to eligible foster youth, including American Indian youth served by tribal child welfare programs (Nixon & Garin Jones, 2007).

Stronger collaborative relationships between child welfare agencies, service providers, and higher education representatives have also contributed to more effective

implementation of the Chafee Education and Training Voucher Program. States have reported that the Chafee Education and Training Voucher Program has contributed to greater motivation and interest in attending college or other postsecondary education and training programs among youth from foster care, increased rates of college attendance, and more efforts to support the educational aspirations of those youth through additional scholarship dollars or state tuition waivers. For example, the rapidly expanding Guardian Scholars program in California, as well as other models being implemented in other individual states, provides both scholarship dollars and support services for foster care alumni attending college (Nixon & Garin Jones, 2007).

While states have made great progress over the past several years, gaps in program implementation remain an issue of concern, largely related to the ability of the individual states to collect information regarding the overall Chafee Foster Care Independence Program and the Chafee Education and Training Voucher Program. There is a need for increased investment on the part of the federal government, the states, and communities to effectively monitor the quality and quantity of services provided, as well as the outcomes experienced by foster children (Nixon & Garin Jones, 2007).

The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 requires the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in consultation with key stakeholders, to develop a set of outcomes and measures to assess the performance of individual states with respect to their effectiveness in assisting youth in making a transition from foster care to independent living (Nixon & Garin Jones, 2007). The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 requires individual states to collect data in order to track

- the number and characteristics of young people receiving services under the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (including the Chafee Education and Training Voucher Program),
- the type and quantity of services being provided, and
- state performance on youth outcome measures developed by U.S.

Department of Health and Human Services (Nixon & Garin Jones, 2007).

In 2000 and 2001, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services worked with stakeholders nationwide to develop a state performance assessment tool designated as the National Youth in Transition Database. In 2001, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services announced that it would issue a regulation on state implementation of data collection and performance assessment processes. Implementation of National Youth in Transition Database continues to be delayed as the regulatory process is completed. A Notice of Proposed Rulemaking was released for public comment in July 2006, and a final rule followed some time in 2007. Until the time as National Youth in Transition Database is released, individual states will be unable to track and report consistent information as required by federal law. This issue only becomes more urgent as advocates, state child welfare leaders, and foster care children struggle to ensure that there are adequate and effective supports for foster care alumni (Nixon & Garin Jones, 2007).

There continues to be great concern among communities about the well-being and success of youth leaving foster care, especially as it relates to post-secondary education readiness, access, and retention success. Growing private/public collaborations have resulted in the development of targeted college support programs



for students from foster care. For example, the Guardian Scholars Program model has spread to well over 20 campuses in California. Similar programs have been started in Texas, Indiana, Washington, and Florida. Chafee Education and Training Vouchers are an important part of these students' financial aid packages, and financial aid offices play an important role in outreach to eligible students as well as in Chafee Education and Training Voucher funds distribution (Nixon & Garin Jones, 2007).

Many state independent living program staff, as well as Chafee Education and Training Voucher contractor organization staff are dedicating significant time to individualized comprehensive supports for foster youth in post-secondary programs. While the need for improved data collection and performance assessment is evident, it is also clear that increased attention to, and resources for, foster care alumni is helping more and more potential students achieve their dreams of a college education and a better future (Nixon & Garin Jones, 2007).

Training and technical assistance grants for the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program and Education and Training Voucher Program are awarded competitively every 5 years, with non-competitive grants renewed annually. The most recent cooperative agreement was made for fiscal year 2010 through fiscal year 2014. The National Child Welfare Resource Center for Youth Development, housed at the University of Oklahoma, currently provides assistance under the grant to help states and tribes implement their independent living programs and involve foster youth in programming and services. Training and technical assistance requests from states have involved providing assistance with more effective implementation of state Chafee Foster Care Independence Program plans, including discussions around allowable

expenditures of both Chafee Foster Care Independence Program and Education and Training Voucher funds, permanency planning for adolescents, and educating the courts on laws affecting older youth. Assistance is provided through national conferences and meetings, on-site technical assistance, and information made available on the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Youth Development website and publications (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2012).

### **Summary**

The review of research presented in this chapter indicates that foster care and especially the needs of alumni are a substantial concern for our society today. The rapid response and supervision connected with child welfare interactions is essential in establishing the foundation for a safe and stable environment. Given the interpretation of the research it appears the policies and practices associated with foster care need to be transparent. The issues associated with foster care fluctuate within the framework of its operation, however, a common trend seems to be that modification and adjustment is necessary. The review of research suggests that facts and perception are the guides that facilitate how foster services care administer and promote success leading up to the transition toward adult independence.

This research presented in the literature review served a short historical background of foster care along with the progression of child welfare legislation to date. The research describes specific individual characteristics and needs connected with

foster care adolescents, as well as factors relating to foster care alumni transition toward adult independence. As a final point, the research illustrates how the federal government aids aging-out foster youth to achieve adult independence in along with the advantages of post-secondary educational achievement. The research suggests that foster care independent living programs linked with post-secondary education are more likely to be effective when they are properly implemented, understood, and evaluated. Chapter III will provide the methodology of this study.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

A solid education is considered the foundation for a productive future, but for young adults in foster care, education beyond high school is rarely a reality. "These youths have the desire to continue their education through college, but they are met with a number of problems throughout their education" (McMillen, Auslander, Elze, White, & Thompson, 2003, p.88). The research study will: (a) investigate and analyze qualitative data gathered from the perceptions of New Jersey Division of Children and Families social workers concerning foster care independent living program policies and how they assist in the development of characteristics needed for adult independence after youth age-out of the foster care system, (b) examine the knowledge of social workers about their understanding of independent living programs and the practices utilized concerning foster youth post-secondary enrollment and achievement, and (c) examine if there is a need for social worker supplementary departmental training regarding the purpose of foster care independent living programs.

This research study uses one-on-one individual interviews utilizing open-ended interview questions and focus group discussions. "Qualitative interviewing tends to be flexible, thereby allowing I to respond to the direction in which the interviewee takes the interview and perhaps adjust the areas of interest in the research based on significant issues that emerge in the course of the interview (Bryman & Bell, 2003)." A focus group is a group interview which has as its emphasis a particular issue, product, service, or

topic and involves the need for interactive discussion among participants (Carson, Gilmore & Gronhaug, 2001). The participants are selected due to certain characteristics they share which relate to the topic being discussed and they are encouraged to discuss/share their points of view without any pressure to reach a consensus (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Chapter III contains the research methodology, information on the population, procedures used to conduct the research and collect the data, and interview and focus group questions that were used for data analysis and summary.

### **Research Methodology**

“Research is the process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data in order to understand a phenomenon (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001, p.46).” Strauss and Corbin (1990) claimed that qualitative methods can be used to better understand any phenomenon about which little is yet known. “Researchers who use qualitative methods seek a deeper truth. They aim to study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Qualitative research can be described as an effective model that occurs in a natural setting that enables I to develop a level of detail from being highly involved in actual experiences (Creswell, 2003). By its very nature, qualitative research is non-standard, unconfined, and dependent on the subjective experience of both I and the researched (Greenhalgh, 1997).

Qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings, such as “real world settings where I does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest, but where the phenomenon of interest unfolds naturally” (Patton, 2001, p.183). Qualitative research is designed to observe social interaction and understand the individual perspective, provide insight into what peoples’ experiences are, what they do, and what they need in order to change (Rowan & Huston, 1997). Qualitative research is based on the theoretical assumptions that meaning and process are crucial in understanding human behavior, that descriptive data are what is important to collect, and that analysis is best done inductively on data collection traditions (such as participant observation, interviewing, and documented analysis) and on generally stated substantive questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

Qualitative research, broadly defined, means "any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.72). Qualitative research builds its premises on inductive, rather than deductive reasoning. Unlike quantitative researchers who seek causal determination, prediction, and generalization of findings, qualitative researchers seek instead illumination, understanding, and extrapolation to similar situations (Hoepfl, 1997). “The strong correlation between the observer and the data is a marked difference from quantitative data, where I is strictly outside of the phenomena being investigated (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001).”

Bogdan and Biklen (1982) defined qualitative data analysis as “working with the data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching

for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others”(p.149). Qualitative researchers tend to use inductive analysis of data, meaning that the critical themes emerge out of the data (Patton, 1990). The qualitative method allows a researcher to explore and better understand the complexity of a phenomenon (Williams, 2007).

### **Research Sample**

The participants in this research study are New Jersey certified social workers representing three New Jersey Department of Children and Families district offices purposefully selected geographically throughout the state. These district offices represent three different New Jersey locations: an urban setting in the northern New Jersey (Newark Office), a suburban setting in the central New Jersey (Lakewood Office), and a rural setting in the southern New Jersey (Salem Office). I considered the difference of geographical locations when selected in order to get a wide-ranging sampling of the New Jersey social workers' perceptions. All participants were full-time certified social workers with a minimum of 1 year of field experience in their respective district office. In New Jersey, newly hired social workers are required to attend mandatory training lessons during their first year of employment to become a certified social worker. Since these newly hired social workers did not have enough field experience they were not eligible for participation in the study.

In-depth interviews are optimal for collecting data on individuals' personal histories, perspectives, and experiences, particularly when sensitive topics are being

explored (Ulin, Robinson & Tolley, 2004). Three New Jersey District Office Managers from the aforementioned geographical locations volunteered for the individual one-on-one interviews because my intention for this research study is to understand their opinions as a jury of experts in the field of New Jersey social work. Social work as a profession is for those individuals with a strong desire to help improve other people's lives. Social workers assist people by helping them cope with and solve issues in their everyday lives, such as family and personal problems and dealing with relationships (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009).

Several participants allows a wider range of viewpoints to emerge and for participants to respond to these views (Bryman & Bell, 2003; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007). Focus groups are effective in eliciting data on the cultural norms of a group and in generating broad overviews of issues of concern to the cultural groups or subgroups represented (Ulin, Robinson & Tolley, 2004). Three separate New Jersey social worker focus group discussions were held with volunteers at each district office location.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Authorization to conduct one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions were obtained from the New Jersey Department of Human Services Division of Children and Families Services. New Jersey District Office Managers and social workers gave permission to be interviewed and to participate. Additionally, written consent was obtained so that participants could be recorded during the interviews and focus group



discussions. Neuman (2006) explained that “research has an ethical-moral dimension in that the researcher has the moral and professional obligation to be ethical even when the research participants are unaware about ethics”(p.94). The basic principles of ethics in research are that the ethical responsibility rests with I and includes,

- *Informed consent.* The procedure in which individuals choose whether (or not) to participate in an investigation after being informed of the facts that would be likely to influence their decisions. Deiner and Crandall (as cited in Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K., 2007;p. 51) stated that the research participant has the right to refuse to take part or to withdraw once the research has begun.
- *Right to privacy.* The greater the sensitivity of the information, the more safeguards is required to protect the privacy of the research participant.
- *Anonymity.* The information provided by the participant should in no way reveal their identity.

Neuman (2006) continued by stating that I should refrain from releasing confidential details of the research study with the published results and from making interpretations of the results inconsistent with the data. As confidentiality is a prerequisite for reliable research, anonymity of the participants was guaranteed during the data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the research process. The volunteer participants for this research study are referred to as follows: Northern (District Office Manager Northern; Focus Group Northern); Central (District Office Manager Central; Focus Group Central); and Southern (District Office Manager Southern; Focus Group Southern). Additionally,

all volunteer participants were granted permission to examine the transcripts and make amendments if necessary.

### **Informed Consent**

The participants in the one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions received a written informed consent notice approved for distribution by the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This document establishes that participation is voluntary and that all individual responses are confidential and limited only to the educational extent of the research study. Each participant was given the opportunity to sign a written consent form indicating that their participation was completely voluntary. Additionally, it will be acknowledged that all participants had the opportunity to withdraw from involvement at any time during the research study.

### **Jury of Experts**

A jury of experts was established and its members were requested to review the research questions to ensure their validity and reliability for the purposes of the study. These individuals possess extensive academic and experiential qualifications regarding the New Jersey social work system. Their annotations were utilized to enhance the one-on-one interview and focus group discussion questions. The jury of experts confirmed that these questions were appropriate to the research study.

## Setting of the Study

This research study was conducted at the specific geographic (Northern, Central, Southern) New Jersey Division of Children and Families district office building at which each volunteer worked. The date and time for each one-on-one interview session and focus group discussion was scheduled so as not to conflict with any employment duty function concerning the New Jersey Division of Children and Families.

The aim of the interview is to gather information about a particular research topic. In spite of the fact that the interview in qualitative research does not have well defined borders it has to be planned out thoroughly. An interview is a list of questions or general topics that the interviewer wants to explore during each interview. Although it is prepared to insure that basically the same information is obtained from each person, there are no predetermined responses, and in semi-structured interviews the interviewer is free to probe and explore within these predetermined inquiry areas ([Lofland & Lofland, 1984](#)).

In focus group interviews, the skill of the interviewer both as initiator and facilitator is very important. This role is called a moderator. Ideally, a researcher should be able to establish and create a rapport between participants before the discussion initiates. Additionally, I must possess executive skills which make participants confident in him/her and allow him/her to guide the direction of the conversation. I must be able to create a supportive environment, ask focused questions, and encourage the discussion and expression of different opinions and viewpoints (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

I must strive to produce a natural condition that is similar to circumstances in which participants ordinarily converse with one another concerning significant topics. The location where the interview and focus group discussions take place should be comfortable for both I and the participants (Patton, 1990). I held the one-on-one interviews in the New Jersey District Office Manager's personal office. The focus group discussions were performed at a location known by the volunteer participants as the New Jersey Division of Children and Families district office building conference room.

### **Research Procedures and Techniques for Data Collection**

Qualitative research, broadly defined, means any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The particular design of a qualitative study depends on the purpose of the inquiry, what information is most useful, and what information has the most credibility (Patton, 1990). This research study was designed utilizing a qualitative research approach so as to evaluate foster youth alumni usage of independent living programs as perceived by New Jersey Division of Children and Families District Office Managers and social workers in various geographic locations of New Jersey.

Formal letters of solicitation requesting permission and explaining the research study were sent to the New Jersey Director of Division of Children and Families and to three specific geographic (Northern, Central, Southern) New Jersey District Office Managers and social workers to request volunteers from among those New Jersey

districts. Each research participant was provided an informed consent letter regarding information on confidentiality and the details of the research study process. Each participant was asked to sign a permission release form allowing for the use of their anonymous responses during the research study. Each participant was asked to give permission for me to use an audio-tape recorder during the research study and for transcription of their anonymous responses. It was emphasized to each participant that their names were not used during the research study process. Upon completion of the one-on-one interviews and focus group sessions the audio tapes were secured in a locked box and were later destroyed upon completion of the research study. Each participant was informed of the date and time, location, length of the session, and the availability of refreshments during the process. The one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions did not interfere with the daily operations of each participant's duties associated with the New Jersey Division of Children and Families.

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2001), qualitative research is an inquiry in which researchers collect data in face-to-face situations by interacting with selected persons in their familiar settings. Three one-on-one interviews were conducted with New Jersey District Office Managers, and three focus group discussions with 10 to 12 New Jersey social workers from specific geographic (Northern, Central, Southern) locations were conducted to assess their perceptions of foster youth alumni and independent living programs. The specific New Jersey locations at which the interviews and focus groups took place represented a different type of district to ensure diversity.

Patton (1989) stated that qualitative data can produce a wealth of knowledge from a restricted number of people. During the District Office Manager one-on-one

interviews I asked open-ended questions developed from the literature review which were designed to solicit opinions that would provide differing perspectives into the area of investigation. The audio-tape recorded individual interviews with each specific District Office Manager took place in their personal office so as to provide a familiar, comfortable setting. Each one-on-one interview lasted one hour.

Focus group interviews should be considered when one is looking for a range of ideas or feelings that people have about something, wants ideas to emerge from the group, and wants to uncover factors that influence opinions (Krueger & Casey, 2000). During the New Jersey district office focus group discussions I acted as the moderator. I personally greeted each participant upon arrival and explained in detail the rules of confidentiality and requested that no individual names be used. I encouraged each participant to speak freely during the focus group discussions and advised that only one person would be allowed to speak at any given time. This created a relaxed environment that elicited responses to the questions developed from the literature review findings which were designed to solicit opinions that provided perspectives into the area of investigation. Each audio-tape recorded focus group discussion took place at the specific district office buildings conference room so as to provide a familiar comfortable setting. Each focus group discussion lasted one hour.

### **Instrumentation**

I developed an interview guide based on the research questions. These three research questions are as follows:

1. Of the aspects relating to successful transition from foster care to adult independent living (personal/social development, academic development, career development) which one does a New Jersey social worker consider a priority? Why?

2. How have foster care independent living programs made a significant step toward the advancement of post-secondary educational achievement of foster youth alumni?

3. How do social workers perceive their department training concerning foster care independent living programs and the standard practices they utilize to follow policy procedures?

As each interview and focus group discussion unfolded, I asked unique questions pertaining to the role of the participants. Interview guides ensure good use of limited interview time; they make interviewing multiple subjects more systematic and comprehensive; and they help to keep interactions focused. In keeping with the flexible nature of qualitative research designs, interview guides can be modified over time to focus attention on areas of particular importance, or to exclude questions the researcher has found to be unproductive for the goals of the research (Lofland & Lofland, 1984).

### **Interview Questions**

The questions used for the one-on-one interviews with the New Jersey Division of Children and Families Local District Office Managers were designed based on the research and the literature review. The following are the one-on-one interview questions:

<b>Background Information</b>
1.1. Why did you want to work for the New Jersey Division of Children and Families?
1.2. How many years have you worked for the New Jersey Division of Children and Families?
1.3. Why did you become a Local District Office Manager for the New Jersey Division of Children and Families?
1.4. What is the total number of foster youth in your local office district?
<b>New Jersey Foster Youth Developmental Component</b>
2.1. In your opinion, how does the New Jersey Division of Children and Families contribute to the development of personal/social characteristics, knowledge, and skills that foster youth can use toward the transition to adult independence?
2.2. With regard to New Jersey Division of Children and Families policy, what emphasis is placed on foster youth personal/social development?
2.3. With regard to New Jersey Division of Children and Families policy, what emphasis is placed on foster youth academic development?
2.4. With regard to New Jersey Division of Children and Families policy, what emphasis is placed on foster youth career development?
2.5. In your opinion, what issues need to be improved on how the New Jersey Division of Children and Families prepares foster youth for the transition to adult independence? Why?
<b>New Jersey Foster Youth Post-Secondary Educational Achievement Component</b>
3.1. In your opinion, how do the New Jersey Division of Children and Families foster care independent living programs motivate foster youth alumni to aspire to a college degree?
3.2. In your opinion, why are more foster youth alumni that age-out of the New Jersey Division of Children and Families foster care system to adult independence not utilizing independent living programs for post-secondary education?
3.3. In your opinion, is there an issue with the New Jersey Division of Children and Families policy on how to disperse information concerning foster care independent living



programs that assist foster youth alumni to obtain post-secondary education? Why?
3.4. In your opinion, how should the New Jersey Division of Children and Families improve their policies to stimulate foster youth alumni to obtain post-secondary education?
3.5. Do you believe foster care independent living programs are cost effective when it comes to the advancement of foster youth alumni, post-secondary, educational achievement? Why?
<b>New Jersey Social Worker Component</b>
4.1. Does the New Jersey Division of Children and Families require mandatory departmental training about the standard policies and practices concerning independent living programs for foster youth post-secondary educational achievement? How?
4.2. In your opinion, does geographic location play a role with the policy and procedures concerning the implementation of foster care independent living programs to foster youth alumni?
4.3. In your opinion, what have been the positive effects with the Federal Chafee Educational and Training Voucher Program? What have been the negative effects?
4.4. In your opinion, to what degree should the New Jersey Division of Children and Families be held accountable for foster youth alumni post-secondary educational achievement?

### **Focus Group Questions**

Focus groups will be utilized to assist in trying to comprehend the perspectives of New Jersey social workers concerning independent living programs as they relate to foster youth aging-out of the New Jersey foster care system and continuing their post-secondary education. Krueger and Casey (2000) conveyed that, “a focus group study is a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment “(p.144). This type of setting permits each participant the opportunity to share ideas and perceptions as well

as respond to one another's ideas and perceptions. The questions used were the focus groups with the New Jersey Division of Children and Families Local District social workers were designed based on the research and the literature review. The following were the focus group questions:

<b>New Jersey Foster Youth Developmental Component</b>
1.1. In your opinion, how does the New Jersey Division of Children and Families contribute to the development of personal/social characteristics, knowledge, and skills of foster youth toward the transition to adult independence?
1.2. With regard to New Jersey Division of Children and Families policy, what emphasis is placed on foster youth personal/social development?
1.3. With regard to New Jersey Division of Children and Families policy, what emphasis is placed on foster youth academic development?
1.4. With regard to New Jersey Division of Children and Families policy, what emphasis is placed on foster youth career development?
1.5. In your opinion, what issues need to be addressed to improve how the New Jersey Division of Children and Families prepares foster youth for the transition to adult independence?
<b>New Jersey Foster Youth Post-Secondary Educational Achievement Component</b>
2.1. In your opinion, how does the New Jersey Division of Children and Families foster care independent living programs motivate foster youth alumni to aspire a college degree?
2.2. In your opinion, why are more foster youth alumni that age-out of the New Jersey foster care system not utilizing independent living programs for post-secondary education?

2.3. In your opinion, how should the New Jersey Division of Children and Families improve policies to stimulate foster youth alumni to want to obtain post-secondary education?

2.4. In your opinion, are New Jersey Division of Children and Families foster care independent living programs cost effective in moving individuals toward post-secondary educational achievement? How?

### **Role of the New Jersey Social Worker Component**

3.1. In your opinion, does the New Jersey Division of Children and Families departmental training provide an adequate understanding of the standard policies and practices concerning the independent living programs used for foster youth post-secondary educational achievement? How?

3.2. In your opinion, does geographic location play any role with the New Jersey Division of Children and Families policy and procedures for New Jersey foster youth alumni?

3.3. In your opinion, what have been the positive effects with the Federal Chafee Educational and Training Voucher Program?

3.4. In your opinion, what have been the negative effects with the Federal Chafee Educational and Training Voucher Program?

3.5. In your opinion, should the New Jersey Division of Children and Families be held accountable for the post-secondary educational achievement of foster youth alumni? Why?

### **Summary Component**

4.1. In your opinion, if you were advising a newly hired New Jersey Division of Children and Families worker about independent living programs that advance the post-secondary educational achievement of foster youth alumni, what is the most important information you would tell them?

## Data Analysis

This research study will be qualitative in design and evaluation. The method of investigation will be specific to the New Jersey geographic (Northern, Central, Southern) locations of the one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions. The basis for employing these methods was to obtain a greater scope of New Jersey social workers. According to Patton (1989), the fundamental principle of qualitative interviewing is to provide a framework within which the respondents can express their own understandings in their own terms. According to Cohen et al. (2007), "focus groups are a form of group interview where the reliance is on the interaction within the group who discuss the topic supplied by I yielding a collective rather than an individual view – from the interaction of the group data may emerge that will represent the views of the participants rather than agenda of the interviewer" (p.244). The one-on-one interviews and focus group questions provided me with important feedback given by the participants on foster youth character development and alumni post-secondary education achievement through foster care independent living programs. A tape recorder was utilized by me to assist in gathering data. Patton (2002) stated, "As a good hammer is essential to fine carpentry, a good tape recorder is indispensable to fine fieldwork. Tape recorders do not "tune out" of the conversation, do not change what is said through interpretation, do not slow down the conversation, do not miss what is said, and allows the interviewer to concentrate on the interview" (p. 212). Transcripts of the tape-recorded, one-on-one interviews and the focus group discussions formed the data for the research study. Each participant was assigned a code number based on their

New Jersey geographical location ensuring anonymity will be maintained. I examined the responses to establish patterns and/or themes for each question. A review of the data allowed for the identification of patterns to be recorded. The responses that were not in alignment with the established patterns and/or themes of the research questions were noted.

### **Summary**

Chapter III depicts the methodology of the qualitative research study.

Included in this chapter is the research sample, ethical considerations, informed consent, jury of experts, setting of the study, research procedures and techniques for data collection, instrumentation, and data analysis. Chapter IV of this study will provide a presentation of data and summary of findings.

## **CHAPTER IV PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA**

The purpose of this research study was to investigate the perceptions of New Jersey social workers about potential barriers to foster youth development, independent living programs emphasizing post-secondary education services available to foster youth alumni, and the effect of social worker departmental training on their knowledge of such programs. The research study investigated and analyzed qualitative data gathered from the perceptions of New Jersey Division of Children and Families social workers concerning foster care independent living program policy and how it assists in the development of characteristics needed for adult independence after youth age-out of the foster care system, examined the knowledge of social workers about their understanding of independent living programs and the practices utilized concerning foster youth post-secondary enrollment and achievement, and lastly, examined if there is a need for social worker supplementary departmental training regarding the purpose of foster care independent living programs. This qualitative research study examined, analyzed, and assessed whether New Jersey social workers believe that foster care independent living programs assist foster youth alumni in supporting their educational needs for adult independence.

The purpose of this chapter is to present a detailed analysis of the data collected by using the transcripts of each one-on-one interview and focus group discussion to summarize the findings relative to the study. The research data in this chapter was collected from New Jersey Department of Children and Families District Office Manager interviews and the focus group discussions of New Jersey State Social Workers. This

chapter is divided into the following sections: (a) nature of the study, (b) presentation of data, (c) summary of findings, and (d) summary.

### **Nature of the Study**

In 2001 Congress passed the John Chafee Education and Training Voucher Program which made financial resources available to meet the post-secondary education and training needs of youth aging-out of foster care and enrolling in a qualified higher education program as part of a reauthorization of the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Act. This Act expanded and supplemented the assistance authorized in the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 to help youth transitioning out of foster care to prepare for, enroll in, and be successful in post-secondary training and education institutions (Nixon & Garin Jones, 2007).

A qualitative research methodology was utilized to uncover common themes and patterns through individual interviews and focus group sessions at specific New Jersey geographic locations in order to encapsulate the perceptions of the participants.

The purpose of this research study was to focus on components of foster care independent living programs and the perceptions of New Jersey social workers on how those programs impact foster youth alumni aging-out of the New Jersey foster care system.

In this study, three research questions were addressed,

1. Of the aspects relating to successful transition from foster care to adult independent living (personal/social development, academic development, career development) which one does a New Jersey social worker consider a priority? Why?
2. How have foster care independent living programs made significant steps toward the advancement of post-secondary educational achievement of foster youth alumni?
3. How do social workers perceive their department training concerning foster care independent living programs and the standard practices they utilize to follow policy procedures?

I interviewed three New Jersey Department of Children and Families District Office Managers according to geographic district region. In this study, the participants represented urban, suburban, and rural regions, and they were labeled as (N) North, (C) Central, and (S) South. The participants were asked a series of questions regarding four components: (a) background information, (b) New Jersey foster youth development, (c) New Jersey foster youth post-secondary educational achievement, and (d) New Jersey social worker. I also conducted three New Jersey Department of Children and Families focus group sessions according to geographic district region. The participants represented urban, suburban, and rural regions, and they were labeled as (N) North, (C) Central, and (S) South. The participants were asked a series of questions regarding four components: (a) New Jersey foster youth development, (b) New Jersey foster youth



post-secondary educational achievement, (c) role of the New Jersey social worker, and (d) summary. All of the components addressed the research questions.

### **Presentation of the Data**

Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in different locations. Three District Office Manager interviews were held in their respective offices. The focus group discussions were held in a conference room.

<b>Background Information</b>
1.1. Why did you want to work for the New Jersey Division of Children and Families?
1.2. How many years have you worked for the New Jersey Division of Children and Families?
1.3. Why did you become a Local District Office Manager for the New Jersey Division of Children and Families?
1.4. What is the total number of foster youth in your local office district?
<b>New Jersey Foster Youth Developmental Component</b>
2.1. In your opinion, how does the New Jersey Division of Children and Families contribute to the development of personal/social characteristics, knowledge, and skills that foster youth can use toward the transition to adult independence?
2.2. With regard to New Jersey Division of Children and Families policy, what emphasis is placed on foster youth personal/social development?
2.3. With regard to New Jersey Division of Children and Families policy, what emphasis is placed on foster youth academic development?
2.4. With regard to New Jersey Division of Children and Families policy, what emphasis is placed on foster youth career development?

2.5. In your opinion, what issues need to be improved on how the New Jersey Division of Children and Families prepares foster youth for the transition to adult independence? Why?

**New Jersey Foster Youth Post-Secondary Educational Achievement Component**

3.1. In your opinion, how do the New Jersey Division of Children and Families foster care independent living programs motivate foster youth alumni to aspire to a college degree?

3.2. In your opinion, why are more foster youth alumni that age-out of the New Jersey Division of Children and Families foster care system to adult independence not utilizing independent living programs for post-secondary education?

3.3. In your opinion, is there an issue with the New Jersey Division of Children and Families policy on how to disperse information concerning foster care independent living programs that assist foster youth alumni to obtain post-secondary education? Why?

3.4. In your opinion, how should the New Jersey Division of Children and Families improve their policies to stimulate foster youth alumni to obtain post-secondary education?

3.5. Do you believe foster care independent living programs are cost effective when it comes to the advancement of foster youth alumni, post-secondary, educational achievement? Why?

**New Jersey Social Worker Component**

4.1. Does the New Jersey Division of Children and Families require mandatory departmental training about the standard policies and practices concerning independent living programs for foster youth post-secondary educational achievement? How?

4.2. In your opinion, does geographic location play a role with the policy and procedures concerning the implementation of foster care independent living programs to foster youth alumni?

4.3. In your opinion, what have been the positive effects with the Federal Chafee Educational and Training Voucher Program? What have been the negative effects?

4.4. In your opinion, to what degree should the New Jersey Division of Children and Families be held accountable for foster youth alumni post-secondary educational achievement?

## ***Combined Participant Responses to Each Question***

### ***Background Information.***

***Question 1.1.*** Why did you want to work for the New Jersey Division of Children and Families?

*Response 1.1.N:* Good question. I originated from New York. I was an assistant manager, and being a single parent, my kids were getting older. I wasn't spending much time at home so I made a transition here. I was lucky to find this office and I was hired for day work.

*Response 1.1.C:* Well I think initially I wanted to work for the division because I went to school for social work, and I was interested in working with children that were abused and neglected really trying to support families, trying to keep kids in their homes instead of just placing children.

*Response 1.1.S:* Well, it's, you know, when people are growing up they always say I want to grow up to be a policeman or fireman or something like that? It's the weirdest thing because this is all I ever wanted to do. (Social Work?) Social work, and specifically back when I was a kid I think this was called Bureau of Children's Services. I wanted to be a bureau worker believe it or not. (Why?) I had no idea why, but that's what I wanted to do. I kind of have a theory why, and it's like a strange theory but, in the neighborhood I grew up in, it was sort of like a poor working neighborhood. The people in that neighborhood, if you were considered like a professional, you were either like a fireman, a policeman, a teacher, or bureau worker. I wouldn't be a firemen and policeman, and I didn't think I wanted

to be a teacher. I was kind of attracted to working with children and families, and I was like, I might be a bureau worker, and that was, that was pretty much it. Then when I went to college, my undergrad was in psychology and I was really interested in families at risk, and how do they get at risk? It was sort of the whole psychology behind that, I guess. So, even as I got a little bit older, I kind of thought about other jobs and did other jobs. When I went back to school, I didn't go to school or college right out of high school, I went back when I was 22 years old, and I went back because I wanted to go and follow what I originally wanted to do, so here I am. (So you had a desire to do this job or just fall into it?) Yes, I did fall into it. I fell into the position I'm in right now, but I had a desire to do this job.

**Question 1.2.** How many years have you worked for the New Jersey Division of Children and Families?

*Response 1.2.N:* 6 years.

*Response 1.2.C:* 26 years.

*Response 1.2.S:* I've been working for DYFS since 1996, but before that, for about 4 years, I worked for a DYFS contract for the agency. I worked with DYFS kids and DYFS workers. I didn't have connection too much to their natural family, but I worked with their field residential, juvenile population, and kids of that age, where the court system and field residential worked for field adoptions. So pretty much it was all teenagers, and this is for lack of better words. Back then they used to call them the worst of the worst cases that they could manage

in house in DYFS. They contracted those kids out and as a worker for those kids in DYFS today, we have to see our kids once a month. For those types of kids, for some of them you had to see five times a week to try to make sure they stayed on track and did what they had to do. So we were sort of like being an intensive DYFS worker, mentor big sister type thing, an advocate all wrapped up in one.

(So even before you worked for DYFS you had familiarization with the department?) Right, yes. All the contractor people would come in and we would meet with them. We were sort of like a little branch of DYFS, a little extension with their, their teenagers.

**Question 1.3.** Why did you become a Local District Office Manager for the New Jersey Division of Children and Families?

*Response 1.3.N:* Why? Well there's no other place to go except from the yard to the next step of District Office Manager. (So when you came in here, you came over as a supervisor?) No. I was already a manager. No, I came here straight from New York to a different agency. You cannot make a transfer as a worker; this is civil service, only promotion based titles. This is an administrative position so I don't need to be a civil servant. Of course somebody from a civil service can apply for promotion, and a lot of people have, but as an outsider I can only apply for the position. So I applied because I was qualified and I've been here since.

*Response 1.3.C:* That I don't know. Well you know I've come up through the ranks. I started out as a field worker. I came up through various positions and various supervisory positions and this was kind of the next step. I really hadn't done any real administrative work so I felt like this was an opportunity to learn some of that because I kind of was into direct practice. It was an opportunity to advance my skill set and my knowledge, basically.

*Response 1.3.S:* Well that's kind of a funny story. I'll try to shorten it because, I actually, I fell into it. I had no plans on being one. The reason behind that was because when I was younger, when I first came to this, I thought that would be something to aspire to. With a lot of political changes back in about 2005 a lot of different changes occurred. When you step into the role of a local office manager today your pay freezes. You don't get any compensation, no cost of living, no contract raises because there isn't a contract anymore. You don't get anything. Like whatever your salary is when you step into it, that's it, that's what you're going to be making. (You're salary as a worker? Was there a raise of any kind?) I didn't get a raise when I came into this because I was making, they told me I was already making more than most local office managers in a job that was actually technically three levels lower than a local office manager. So what they do is they made some changes that to me feel really stupid and I'll explain why. When you go to the manager you are responsible for all the people, all the families you work with in that county, your workers, the contract, and millions of dollars in money and budgets and everything. However they freeze your salary. So if you sit there for several years, you end up having people that are

subordinates to you making more than you, and people that are subordinates to subordinates making more than you. It just seems, it would just be weird for a principal of a high school to be in charge of everything, or a superintendent of a district to be in charge of everything, and you have math teachers making more money than you. You know what I mean? (What's the benefit then if it's not monetary?) There is no monetary benefit to being a manager. For me, I was what they called level 29, and at a level 29, I was making more than more local office managers currently because a lot of them have been frozen for years. So I wasn't frozen and I continued to get anniversary raises and things like that. So did everybody else in the state that is a level 29 or lower so you continue to make money. But as a local office manager you kind of just get put on the shelf and that's how much you make. I know somebody that has worked double the years I have. She is phenomenal, and she went to go be an office manager in July 2005. I make like 16,000 more dollars than her and she's been here like 34 years, and she's excellent, excellent. She hasn't got any type of compensation since 2005. Now in her office, all of her case work students make more than her. Several of the supervisors make more than her too. She has a level one worker and a field worker that make the same as her. So it's kind of like there's no, there's no monetary reward for taking that type of job. Instead we get an abundance of accountability and our head on the chopping block because as a level 29 and under you're protected by the union, but after you become Local Office Manager you're not protected by the union. There's no union protection so the reason why I think it was stupid, getting to his point, is because you have a lot of really good

people that work for the state that would be excellent local office managers who could really turn things around. Now they have this whole lawsuit thing and they're trying to change things and make great improvements. We have been doing it, but it's been, like, really, really slow. One of my theories is because you need leadership, and the good people aren't going to go ahead and just step into these leadership roles when there's no compensation, no rewards. Nothing for them to look forward to, and instead you kind of get the next level of people. I'm not saying I'm the next level of people, I'm explaining how, and why I ended up here. When you get the next level of people that might not be the best candidates, sometimes you wonder how bright they are to go put their head on the chopping block when you can stay right in the job you are in now and in 2 years you'll be making more than that and more every year thereafter. So it kind of deleted their pool of excellent candidates, and they went to the second string people, and the third string people, and sometimes the fourth string people and they wonder why the numbers aren't where they are supposed to be. Honestly, it's because they're not hiring, they're not getting the best candidates. The best people aren't applying for those jobs because of what they did. You know, they took away any type of union protection and then like your salary freezes. (Has always been, always been that way?) Nope. This started at around 2005, I think it started. (As budget cuts?) No, it's just somebody in Trenton who came up with this bright idea, and they just did that and it's been stuck there ever since. So, yeah, if you become an Area Director, same thing. Now you even have some Area Directors that have been directors for a long time and you also got brand



new baby look Office Managers coming on making a couple thousand dollars more than a director doing like a whole big area of several counties. So their whole entire system for upper management is so messed up its unbelievable. Anyway, I had no intention prior to 2005, but when it changed I said, why would I do that? If something happened on my watch and I get fired, you know, and you're not even making more money than people in your own office, like, it's just backwards to me. (It does seem that way) Yeah. So I was like why would I do that? I was a level 29, the highest I could go in DYFS without stepping out of the safety of the union and things like that. Then one day I was sent here. I'm really good at cleaning up messes and organizing things, so one day I was sent here in October 2011 to clean up part of intake. There was a couple of units that where struggling and there numbers where way out of a modified settlement agreement amount. So I was asked, and I said yes. I was asked if I would come down here, and take control and clean it up and so I did. I came down, and I cleaned it up. That took me, like, a month. Our local Office Manager here was retiring and about a week before she left I was walking into a meeting, and I got a 30 second notice that I was coming down here as the acting local Office Manager. My response was I put two fingers up like the sign of the cross and I was like oh no, like she was a vampire or something. I said, "oh no", and then finally I said, "listen I'll go down as acting, I'll clean up as best as I can to get ready for the next person, and I'll be willing to stay on and train the next person and be a mentor for them." There's no way I'm going stay down there, I'm not going take on that high level of accountability for an entire county. There's no compensation, and my

boss said, "well you just go down there and you try it on for size, and we'll talk about it later." So, I said okay. I got down here and the place was in such a mess in a lot of different ways. The way the work was being done, the way things were being organized, the way people were being used, the way people were situated throughout the building, the systems, and there were no systems. It was just a big giant free for all and nothing was getting done basically. (The office you were in before this area office was run differently?) I was in a support position for adolescents for all five offices in the area. I was kind of a mentor, working with the adolescent supervisors in the case work suits with the most difficult kids to get them what they needed and massage them through the system and get them placed if they needed to be placed somewhere or get the family services to keep them home. Whatever we needed, I sort of, I was like a gatekeeper for a lot of agencies for kids coming and going for the five local offices in our area. I think between me you and the recorder I think it was like really poorly ran here. It was just a mess and there are 46 local offices statewide and we got measured like number 46. It was yeah, it was really bad when I came here. So my work was cut out for me. I got here and I pulled everybody together, the whole office. We had a meeting and we started planning. The prior office manager was sort of like an old school person, I guess. When you're a local office manager you should be like highly respected and really hands on. That manager only managed from sitting behind her desk in her office. Where I kind of came in here with the attitude like I'm temporary let me get you fixed up. Some days I would wear sneakers and there were some days you'd see me running through the office in a pair of Socks.

Ha, ha. I kept a pair of socks in my drawer, just in case it got cold, and I would kick off my heels and put on a pair of socks behind the desk to keep my feet warm.

Sometimes I needed to run all over this office. I would put together a big clip board of stuff. As I saw people in the hall I would grab them and say "OK, I need this from you", "why is this not being done", and "tell me is there a glitch I can help you to get over that hump, that's an easy thing to fix I'll come stop by your desk and show you how to do it." It kind of was hands on, sort of like over the place mopping up this building and running around in socks or sneakers. It was a different approach from the prior manager. A complete, polar opposite approach. Before arriving here they had like 20 staff out on stress leave. People didn't want to come to work here. It was a miserable place. The spirit of this office was just deflated. I actually told my boss it's not even in the toilet, it's been flushed, and it's out in the Delaware River somewhere. The morale and the spirit when you walk in, was like you just feel all of your energy drain out of you. Like, this was just a really miserable place to even walk in the building. So we started cleaning up and people were so responsive it was fabulous. I don't know if they were happy for change but they certainly embraced it. We all just worked together and kept on keeping on, and doing our thing. We went from the last office in the state and started seeing ourselves go up on all the charts. Today we're number one office in the state. We're the number one office in the state for many things, and if we don't hit number one we're usually, like, two or three. Once in a while, we might even go as high as five, but that's still a big change. (Are you still acting, or is it official?) In mid-March I went official. We made a lot of progress and the

people saw the progress in state bar graphs and line graphs. Now we can see if there is a dip in their work in certain areas and, and stuff like that. I am always giving them out to people showing them how they were doing and I'd praise everybody. Now I got supervisors who praise their workers, and case work students who praise their supervisors. We tried to take on criticism as we moved through the cleanup. We didn't do it in a punitive way and in like, a crucifying way, we did it in a total strength based way. We focused on everybody, we weren't out to just get people, we were out to lift them up. It worked and we cleaned up tractor trailer loads of work out of this office. There were cases here that had opened 5 years ago and had just been sitting around. I was blown away that it was that bad. Yeah I still have work to do, but on the books right now in Trenton, we look excellent. I know that we're not excellent, but we look excellent compared to other offices. There's still more work to be done here to truly be in great shape and we're still working on it.

**Question 1.4.** What is the total number of foster youth in your local office district?

*Response 1.4.N:* About 120 to 129.

*Response 1.4.C:* I would say around 163 children are in foster care.

*Response 1.4.S:* We run around 300 kids that we're active with.

***New Jersey Foster Youth Developmental Component.***

**Question 2.1.** In your opinion, how does the New Jersey Division of Children and

Families contribute to the development of personal/social characteristics, knowledge, and skills of foster youth toward the transition to adult independence?

*Response 2.1.N:* Wow. Well for one thing we tried to assist these young

People, and we do have a unit specifically designed to handle adolescents or kids transitioning from adolescent into adulthood. Some have issues, personal issues, emotional issues with their parents, and they do not go back home, so they transition. They grow up in the system and we try to prepare these individuals for larger society. We make efforts to kind of assist them and provide them with independent living skills. We attach them with mentors and provide service counseling to help them deal with their everyday issues. Try to create a support system until they're 21. Although they turn 18, we don't have legal custody, but usually, any youth of that age can request to remain in the system for services, particularly if they're attending school. There's provision to support them and pay for their education. That's the kind of stuff we try to do as best that we can through the system so recidivism doesn't occur through generations.

*Response 2.1.C:* Well, we have a big initiative with our adolescents in this state. Each office has a unit that works specifically with our adolescent population. That includes reaching out to kids between 18 and 21 years old. We do a lot in terms of life skill development and try to provide those services to kids. A lot of the programs our kids are in have that component, as well as a job readiness skill set for kids who are not going to go right to work but are going to continue with their education. We try to steer them and help them to attain that goal. Our workers

are really committed to that group of kids. Like, not every worker in the building is equipped to handle the adolescents and it's definitely something that they have to love. They have to be willing to really have a lot of patience for these kids because they're young adults and they really want to go their own way sometimes. But our workers are great supporting these kids and helping them along.

*Response 2.1.S:* Okay, well, if you asked me this question a few years ago I would say that they were the forgotten kids falling through the cracks. But within the last couple years, I'm going to say the last 3 years, they acknowledged that these are our next generation of clients. They're the young parents of their own and we need to do something now like prevention I guess. So there was a whole focus on them, which was excellent, and the state developed the Office of Adolescent Services up in Trenton. So there's a group of folks where they kind of pulled together a lot of the contracts for independent living programs and transitional living programs and different types of programs for the adolescents. They have specialty adolescent workers that are in charge of different things like the expert on housing, the expert on education, the expert on like services, like drug treatment if they decided they need something like that. They have a gay and lesbian person who's an expert in services for that population or to help that population within. So they have a lot of good people working with the local offices to help the teenagers. There's a strong contribution from the agency's perspective to the development of certain characteristics through knowledge and skills. They emphasize taking an active role in foster youth transition. They

developed a lot of surveys to find out what services in different areas are lacking in services. Just last year Salem County had four beds in the entire county for independent living. In our entire county like only four kids, and it was only for males. Other kids had to be sent somewhere else in the state. Our kids would then sit on the waiting list to get that type of service, and they would get frustrated. Then, they turn 18 and close their case and leave. There still isn't enough services but they're working on it. They realize it's a problem, so they're working on it. Recently, Robin's Nest got a contract for some independent living housing which is directly across the street from us. We can literally look out our windows, our street front windows, and look into their windows. There are six apartments for aging out youth. They have to be over 18 or they could be for homeless kids that are over 18. They call this hotline and if there's an opening there they will be connected to somebody, and they will tell them in their area where there's bed openings in these programs. So if there's a kid from a South County calling they might end up across the street from us. This is excellent because we can walk across the street and go work with them and help them. (If a kid initially closes their case do they have the opportunity to re-open their case?) Yes, up until the age of 21. It happens more times than you would think. Once they get out there they realize how hard it is to be on their own when they don't have two nickels in their pocket and a place to put their head and then they realize, "oh, I'm homeless now." Yeah, they start calling pretty fast, especially when it gets cold. Oh, and there is one other thing too, we have money for them called flex funds. They're called flex funds because they're flexible that we can

pay for different social activities for these kids. It is an enrichment program for our teenagers to participate in programs for them to grow socially.

**Question 2.2.** With regard to New Jersey Division of Children and Families policy, what emphasis is placed on foster youth personal/social development?

*Response 2.2.N:* Well, figure the programs they're in right now. It's like we have a mentorship program because all these kids need somebody to guide and to help them out. Their mindset needs to evolve. We're there from wherever area they came from and stay with them so they're not drawn back to their old neighborhood and their old habits. (What does the mentor do?) A mentor kind of guides them, kind of shows them a different way, a different task. It's just that there's another world outside of that world they know. We try to expose them to new things. So they have somebody acting as a support system. Sometimes some people looked at them like a big brother type. Initially, we try to guide them and steer them in the right direction. Many of them are very independent. They have a goal in mind and what it is they need to do. All they need is a little support that we provide them so they're able to maintain things an apartment. Many of them have to be trained on how to do it on a budget while they work or they go to school. That's what we try to do.

*Response 2.2.C:* Well, there's a lot of emphasis placed on it now, I mean we have a whole adolescent unit in DCF that is constantly coming up with new programs, providing training for our staff here in the local offices to be more effective with fostering personal and social development of the youth that we



work with. Years ago it wasn't quite this way. There wasn't so much emphasis placed on this age group. They kind of really focused on the younger children, you know the babies. Now there is a big push because we have these kids that kind of fall through the cracks. If we're not there to provide them with ongoing services, especially between 18 to 21 years old, it will be harder to break that mold of getting out of the state system and supporting yourself independence. We are trying to get them on their feet to ensure that they have connections outside of DYFS that are going to support them, especially when they no longer have us to support them.

*Response 2.2.S:* Well, there's a perfect example, flex funds.

**Question 2.3.** With regard to New Jersey Division of Children and Families policy, what emphasis is placed on foster youth academic development?

*Response 2.3.N:* Well, that's a big thing because we try to support kids. We encourage them to go to school. There are programs, stipends, and grants available for kids once they leave school up to the age of 21. We even try to keep track on kids who have left the system after age 21 to see where they at because as you know, many kids go out there and they become homeless. So what do they do, they get in trouble. They get arrested and they go to jail. That's not the life for we want them to have. So, we try to encourage them as much as we can. We interview the school system, we have conferences, and even the court system is involved in a way. Sometimes the court will even order us to buy them a laptop computer or provide them with school stuff that they may need. (So it

would seem like there's a strong emphasis on academic?) Oh yeah, definitely.

We try to push those who are really interested in school. I mean, you could try to push a kid but if their not interested what are you gonna do? But the ones that are interested, we try to help them out.

*Response 2.3.C:* There's a lot of emphasis placed on that. Kids in our care are required to go to school until age 18. And the kids that are over 18 that have already completed either a GED or high school diploma are required to work and go to school part time, or go to school full time to be able to continue and receive our services. Yes, there is a big emphasis on that.

*Response 2.3.S:* Okay, well there's a law and a made-up policy written around the Educational Stability Law. So when we put kids into placement, we try keeping them in the same school district that they came from so they can keep their connections with their friends, their sports, their teachers, and mentors. We do things like that unless there's a certain situation that wouldn't be in our best interest like perhaps their parents live across the street from the school, and they terribly abused them or something like that which caused them emotional harm or something. It's a case by case status and the county decides. So that just came out within the last 2 years. Before, we would just move them, and we would put them in a foster home and they would go to school there. So, this way it keeps them connected to their own school. As a worker you're going to try to find them a home in their own school district so they just take the bus and you know be part of the school district instead of having a DYFS worker pick them up and drop them off for a while. I think it kind of helps the kids with stigmatism, you

know being stigmatized like you're a foster kid because they're not living in their parent's home. People don't need to know that they're living a couple miles away. They're still showing up at school on a school bus and they don't have to have their business out there for everybody to talk about and know that they're going through a tough time. Also, I think that it is very helpful for that we have these forms that we do and we do when our kids turn 14. When kids turn 14, we have an independent living assessment that we do. There's an academic section in there to look at their strength and weaknesses. For the weaknesses, we're supposed to get them services for that, like a tutor or work with a child study team. So that's something kind of new as well. It falls under our DYFS policy, and it's monitored so there are some checks and balances. There's a report that I can click on my computer to see who hasn't done it or if it's overdue. We do it every year while the child's in our placement. Actually, we have another form called the National Youth in Transition Database form and it's federal. There's federal money hooked to it, but you start doing it when a youth turns 17. You have to do it within 45 days of their 17th birthday. It measures everything that they need and their weaknesses for independent living. Based on that we should be providing services for them, whatever they may need to kind of tighten up those weak areas to help them be able to move forward as a successful adult. And we do that for them again when they're 19, to see how far they've come and what else they need to continue into adulthood as long as their DYFS case is still open with us. If their case is not open with us, the New Jersey Office of Adolescence actually tries to locate them and encourage them to call the hotline

to get their case back open. So there is a strong emphasis on policy when it comes to academic development from when they first come into the system to even after they age out.

**Question 2.4.** With regard to New Jersey Division of Children and Families policy what emphasis is placed on foster youth career development?

*Response 2.4.N:* If we know of what the child is interested, or has a particular interest. For example, there was a young man who wanted to go to hair design school to be a beautician. What did we do, we paid for him to go instead of him going to college. But now he's actually in college and he's getting his MBA in business administration. He wants to have his own business. So we do that, we want to encourage, we go to their school and we try to advocate for them. We make sure they try to get the kind of money they need for something even as simple as a bus pass every month, we try to advocate for them.

*Response 2.4.C:* I would say about the same. Between the academics and career development that are kind of meshed. You know? So either kids are going to go one way towards college, if they have the skills and they can manage the academic load to obtain whatever their goal. Or, we're going to try to steer them into some kind of other career opportunity that would kind of mesh with their skills, their personality, you know, their cognitive level and all of that. Sure, there are programs out there like JobCorps and things we can put kids into if they're interested in that. There are career programs that we can steer kids towards.

*Response 2.4.S:* All those forms I just mentioned, there's a whole section for career development too. They can get job training to be able to get a certain type of job, but every case is different. Actually, I have a student that is aging out who is in foster care but doesn't want to go the academic route. She's starting 12th grade, she just finished 11th grade, but this last school year, not only was she going to vo-tech for what do you call it, cooking I think it was, culinary arts. So she's going to vo-tech this year so that she could be a chef. Her grades are really good and she's even going to Salem Community College at night, and we are paying for that. She took night classes, which she got special permission to take. Last summer she took a class that we paid for after we hooked her up to get some financial aid and stuff. So when she graduates high school she's going to have her vo-tech certificate in culinary arts and a head start on college. I think she's going to have about a semester towards her 2 year associates degree. (Did she come to the agency with that advice or did someone tell her that existed?) Well, by doing those forms that I mentioned, we do them sitting down with the kids. They actually answer the questions, and they give us feedback about where they want to go in life and what they want to do. Then we try to plan the steps for them to get there. So, she wants to get her culinary arts so she knows how to cook. She wants to get her business degree so she knows how to manage her business. So, she's planning it out and we're helping her with it. (It seems like she has a specific social worker that worked with her that did that?) It's workers in our adolescent unit here in the office helping the teenagers because we don't want them to come back in the system as a parent. We want them to be able to

have a healthy stable life, and if we need to pay for your college classes to help you manage your little bistro or whatever we're going to do that because that's going to be your job and you're going to know how to do it. Hope that you're successful at it and we'll never see you in the system again. (There is apparently a pattern of generation-to-generation and you're trying to break that cycle?)

Yeah, it's generational, lots of generational stuff here. But it's kind of like a learned life, I guess? Like, it's what they're used to, it's normal. It just continues and continues. So, what we try to do here is the best for the kids who are going into placement. We know that they're our kids, we're going to raise them, and we call them, "our kids." So, as a parent, like, you know, a hypothetical parent, we need to prepare them as best as we can. We talk about it and see what the plan is, what we need to spend because that's an investment in them. There's like, funding available that we don't have to pay out of our pocket and we just have to help them with the paperwork, and there's a lot of paperwork. A lot of paperwork, like there's a big road map to follow, to get those things, and we have to steer them along that road map, but it's an investment. The time and the money you spend on these kids is an investment that is going to be cheap compared to it just continuing. (So the short term effort is better than the long term?) Absolutely, the goal is basically to put ourselves outta business, you know.

**Question 2.5.** In your opinion, what issues need to be improved on how the New Jersey Division of Children and Families prepares foster youth for the transition to adult independence? Why?

*Response 2.5.N:* Age old stories. A lot of these kids they have a lot of emotional issues, a lot of issues. A lot of times we do not really cater to that. So we look at more the problem, more than resolving the problem. If you go to the source of the problem and you just put a band-aid on it, after a while it's just going to go back the same way it was. A lot of the time we have to go outside our office. Which causes a problem for transportation and lack of time, so if you try to encourage the kids who go to school or go to work to maintain themselves to be more independent, what time do they have, and what hours do they operate? Like also, we are from 9 to 5. They are at work from 9 to 5 or they are in school from 9 to 5. We have no office services on the weekend. So what time do they have? Because that means they have to either make a decision to live with that service or not go to work or school. So they have to cater services around our schedule. So this is that kind of stuff I think we've been lacking.

*Response 2.5.C:* One of the things that we see here are the kids that are not, academically able to go on to college, or don't have the motivation, or just never had stability in their lives because it's been years and years of instability and movement from placement to placement. These kids sometimes fall through the cracks. They don't have connections, and then they turn 21 and we have to cut them off. Sometimes they end up homeless, and we have to take them to shelters. I understand they're 21 but you know, young adults now still need support. If you're not in the system, you still need the support of your family when you're that age. Some of these kids have no support. Some of them might end up on the streets eventually, I don't know, but that's concerning to me because

we're spending a lot of time and effort and then it's not progressing. I mean there are some programs, I guess some housing they could get into once they're over 21, but our services stop then. So they don't have real connections, and they don't have many supports.

*Response 2.5.S:* Okay, well, as I said, it's relatively new. The work they've been doing and so forth is a huge improvement already. I think that they need to put more focus on prevention. Like, instead of waiting until we have these kids, what can we do to strengthen these families so that we don't have to have these kids? You know what I mean, I guess kind of in a way that when we have these kids and how we're working with them. That's like our contribution towards prevention. We're kind of preventing the next generation from coming through. What can we do before these kids get to us? You know what I mean? So maybe a little bit more prevention types things, and let me see what else, oh, maybe a little bit more money and drug treatment stuff. There are a lot of kids that have drug issues, and there's not a lot of drug treatment for kids, teenagers, and especially if they are almost 18. So why do you want to wait until they are an adult and get them into an adult program, and let them suffer with this addiction for a couple of years until I can help you. You know what I mean? Because the slots that are available, like we don't have control over them, they're under a different part of the state. There's like not that many slots for so many kids. I think instead of helping the whole family that the kids came from, we need to put a focus on them as individual because they're going to be an adult soon and we



probably need to get to them faster with the help that they need. I think that would be something we can improve on.

***New Jersey Foster Youth Post-Secondary Educational Achievement Component.***

**Question 3.1.** In your opinion, how does the New Jersey Division of Children and Families foster care independent living programs motivate foster youth alumni to aspire a college degree?

*Response 3.1.N:* Again, it's just showing the kid and providing the support. While they're in high school and they're having issues you have to tell them that there is a future for you. If they show an interest to go to college, we try to provide them some kind of stipend and encourage them. There are plenty of grants available to them. We can help them apply for those grants and in the meantime we're also teaching them how to be more independent because they also have to do that. So that's the kind of stuff we do. If a kid is not really interested we try to push them, support them, and expose them to that kind of world anyway. It's not just getting to graduation, but it's also like going to the prom. You could say, "well that's not really related to school", but you know what it is, it is part of the whole social piece of it, and we should give them something to look forward to.

*Response 3.1.C:* Well, I think with a lot of that I don't know how we motivate kids. I think that the kid has to be motivated; the youth has to be motivated themselves. They have to, like I said, has had some success in school, scholastically, throughout the years. They have had to have some sense of stability at some point in their lives, or somebody pointing the way to help them.

Whether it's a mentor, family member, somebody, you know. If the youth has that, then I think with our encouragement they will succeed, because our workers work diligently with these kids. I think the case workers play a key role you know, not just with programs and where we send the kids, but to be a key person in their lives. There is strong emphasis for the case worker to support the adolescent as a young adult. If there's a goal to go to college, or even junior college, community college, whatever it is, they're very helpful in getting the paperwork done. Our social workers go over and beyond, I think, in terms of trying to help these kids try and move towards an academic goal, if that's their thing.

*Response 3.1.S:* Okay, well there is this intensive life skills camp, like an honor camp, that I helped start. The whole goal of that was to let them know how to get their education paid for, books, computers, housing, and all that kind of stuff to go to college. What I find is every year when we run these honor camps there is more than 90 of those kids who don't realize it, and they're from all over the state and when I spoke to them they couldn't even leave. Like, they were asking more questions, and I told them it's okay because I already prepackaged an information packet so that you have the directions for your life roadmap, how to drive yourself there if there's nobody around who can help you. I tell them, you can always call the adolescent unit at my office. Even if you aren't part of my local office you can still call. So there's, like, the financial federal aid packet that you can get at any library that the kids have to fill out. Okay, now the next step is family services money, Chafee Bill money, and they can apply for that. There's a

whole bunch of grants and scholarships that they're eligible for. But there's not one, one clearinghouse for them to come and access it. So, they have to find these people that know all this knowledge, and by going to the honors camp they will know that there's somebody in Trenton that can help them. Some of the kids didn't know that. Like, there were some kids from way up north, and when they turn 18, some people were closing our cases and giving them a check and saying goodbye and that's the last thing we should be doing to these kids. We should be trying to encourage them to stay open until the last day possible so that we can continue to help them and so that information is available. (It seems like that camp will be an annual thing?) We hope. (Okay, so in your opinion then is there a strong desire to motivate foster youth to aspire to achieve a college degree?) There is, but it's not all over the state.

**Question 3.2.** In your opinion, why aren't more foster youth alumni that age-out of the New Jersey Division of Children and Families foster care system to adult independence utilizing independent living programs for post-secondary education?

*Response 3.2.N:* I think it has to do with the youth's lack of interest.

Internal fortitude, do they really want to do it. I mean you have to be really disciplined and organized because you have to focus yourself because you shouldn't be so traumatized. You're not there yet, you don't comprehend, mostly didn't need for you to be doing this or if you see other people failing or you hear people talking. The culture exists that education wasn't a valuable thing. If you were raised in a family of whether you go to school or not it doesn't matter. Your

parents aren't going to do anything about it, so if you don't hold onto those values, you don't have them, then it doesn't matter what I do later on in life. You know what they call cognitive dissonance because, if I'm used to being mistreated as a child, that's how I recognize myself to be, then, now you are coming into my life saying, "Oh, no, no, no, you're a good kid everything is okay." It creates a problem for me now because, which one should I believe. My parents are telling me I'm a bad kid, and now you, a total stranger, are saying to me, "No, you have values", so it is even more difficult for them to understand. I believe adolescent kids don't really know what they want to do and how to handle the whole trust issue that come into play. So the cognitive dissonance exists because, why should I trust you, especially if there is a different ethnic background, for example. We got so many kids in our caseloads that, as a worker, sometimes you tend to steer more towards the kid who is really willing to accept the system than the one who is giving you a hard time. This one leads you more than that one, but, because that one makes it a little easier for you, you spend a little bit more time over here because you feel like you're making a difference. (More feeling of accomplishment?) Yes, accomplishment, exactly. You see, you are achieving and you're succeeding with this kid so this is the kid who really needs the assistance.

*Response 3.2.C:* I kind of alluded to the fact that some kids just aren't ready for post-secondary education. A lot of them in our system don't even have GEDs. They're not academically inclined or let's say cognitively they're somewhat limited. We're going to have a large portion of our population that just isn't going

to go to college. Maybe they will go to a vocational trade school or something like that in which we can help make that a possibility for them. (These programs support them that way?) Yeah, they do. I mean whatever their goal is sometimes we have to try to get them to reach it but it can be difficult.

*Response 3.2.S:* There are still a lot of old school social workers that will close them out at 18. I had kids at that honor camp where they said they had older siblings that closed their case at 18 and now they're really struggling. Sadly, I think it's because of the miscommunication between the kid and the worker, and it just gets frustrating. There's so much that is available to them if they don't close their case at 18 and I really don't think those kids know it. I think it's still relatively new rolling out across the state to educate the work staff that everybody needs to know what is available to these kids, so that we can get this information out there. (Which would come in training?) I think it should come in training, yeah.

**Question 3.3.** In your opinion, is there an issue with the New Jersey Division of Children and Families policy on how to disperse information concerning foster care independent living programs that assist foster youth alumni to obtain post-secondary education? Why?

*Response 3.3.N:* No, no, not at all. In fact, they meet with these youths on a regular basis, and they sit down to develop a plan for them. Based on that plan they are quite aware of the services available to them. So this information is really shared and discussed. They ask questions and they search online for all the information that is readily available.

*Response 3.3.C:* Yeah, well, these kids are in high school you know and they have guidance counselors that will help them with information during their junior and senior years to help them get into college. We pay for their college applications and provide a lot of financial support that way. (Do the guidance counselors at those schools work hand in hand with the caseworkers here?) I would hope that is what's happening. You know one of our requirements is that we have contact with those schools and do collateral work to see how the kids are doing in school and if there's any issues. I can't speak to what my specific adolescent unit does with some of these kids, but I'm assuming they're doing their school collaterals and reaching out to the appropriate guidance counselors. Particularly with our foster kids we know want to go on to college.

*Response 3.3.S:* Yeah, like I said, it's kind of piece meal. For instance, there's a website, [www.transitionsforyouth.org](http://www.transitionsforyouth.org), and it's managed out of Rutgers Institute for Families for us. It's sort of like the one stop shop where we have everything listed for these kids to take advantage of, but they don't know to go there unless somebody tells them. Unfortunately, many staff don't understand what that website is, how it works, or what they can find on there. It's like a puzzle, like you can't access this unless you did this first, and you can't get that until you do A, B, and C to get D. So there's information out there, but people don't know how it connects together. There is a process that these kids have to follow to get certain services. Maybe that's what the state needs to improve on, to make it easier for everyone involved to understand. I mean who would know about the website unless they were told about it? But then again, like I said, when the kids go to

that website they don't know the process and how things have to be done in order to be able to get the most of everything. This is where the social worker has to guide them. For example, I know there's one kid and he had a really good adolescent worker. She drove him along that little road map I explained earlier, and they utilized that whole website in order because they knew the process. That kid just graduated from Rutgers University and has a Bachelor's degree. He lived on campus all 4 years, had his books, computer, and meal card paid for, and he even got \$2500 a semester for himself. He had good communications with his social worker and they worked together to get the most for his college.

**Question 3.4.** In your opinion, how should the New Jersey Division of Children and Families improve their policy to stimulate foster youth alumni to obtain post-secondary education?

*Response 3.4.N:* Wow, there are many families out there where kids are growing up and they're not going to school on a regular basis. I think it's more a national thing than anything else. If you put something out there to encourage education providing the services particularly in hard to reach communities where services are very poor, it will still be difficult because there's a lot of drug environments. These are the target areas. Once they come here, it's a lot of work because a worker isn't a clinician. The case worker is trying to obtain information or use the policy as best that they can to guide them in achieving whatever they need to achieve. Some of these kids that are in school, are they even learning in school, are they interested, what are we doing to keep their interest up. It's an uphill

battle for a lot these and a lot of social workers. Yeah, I mean, ideally you could have all this stuff in place, but it's dependent upon the motivation of the child too. There's a good chance that if I was a kid and I grew up to go to school every day and my mother made sure I did my homework and my father was there and they went to the school to talk to my teachers and gave some interest, that would inspire me. But, if you come from a background where that atmosphere never existed and now you come into the system you don't buy into it because this is something that you find is unnecessary for you to do.

*Response 3.4.C:* Well, I think there are a lot of them. Some of the youth that were in foster care at a certain point in their lives are eligible for services even after they turn 18. They could contact the division and say, now I want the division to help me again because I want those services, and we'll provide the services and reopen their case. As long as they fit the criteria where they have been in foster care a certain point of their teenage lives. (So, it's not just foster care at any point, it had to be specifically during their teenage years?) Yeah, I believe so. I'd have to look at the policy, but off the top of my head I do not remember the exact age.

*Response 3.4.S:* I think we need training with all staff across the board, and I think that they need to be trained on everything that's available to these kids, including the process and the steps in order to be able to do this so that they don't get disqualified. A lot of kids go apply for that or that or that, but it's not order so they get disqualified. They get rejection letters for not doing it correctly. (So the improvement on training is a big issue?) We need to train staff on the



whole educational piece that's available to them. I have kids that will call this office and say I was told DYFS would pay for college. Technically it's really not DYFS that pays for the tuition, it's the federal government. There's money through financial aid if the kids want to apply. Let's just say a kid wants to apply to a university and there's an application fee of \$250, the kid will say, "I can't apply, because I can't afford that." Well guess what, if you call your high school guidance counselor and get them to write a waiver letter it's free. Now, what if you don't have a high school guidance counselor because you already got a GED? Call your DYFS worker and we'll write a waiver letter and it gets waived because you are a ward of the state. People don't know all that stuff, especially when these kids hit a road block, they kind of just stop. There's a way around every single one of those roadblocks and we have to train social workers to do that. I think we need to make up a kit to get these kids to understand.

**Question 3.5.** Do you believe foster care independent living programs are cost effective when it comes to the advancement of foster youth alumni post-secondary educational achievement? Why?

*Response 3.5.N:* Sometimes, I don't think there's enough money in the programs because I know there's a lot I have to sign off on and the stipend they receive is an invitation of how much money they get at the end of the year. That's a set price and a lot of time they max out and you have to get approval to override it. That's why many of them are encouraged to get a part time job or to get a full time job, depending on the direction they want to go. (But they are cost

effective?) Yeah, I believe so to some degree because they still provide us a kind of support for the kid.

*Response 3.5.C:* Yes, I think they are cost effective. I think that they provide these youths with services that they need. Now, whether or not it advances their post-secondary education, I'm not so sure about that.

*Response 3.5.S:* Well it all depends on the actual program. We have some programs that are phenomenal, and we have some that are not so phenomenal because maybe they're in geographical areas like far away from colleges. So it kind of makes it hard for the kid to do the transportation. I think in the old days when the state would put out any kind of living program, I don't think that they had post-secondary education in mind. I think it was more like teaching them how to take care of themselves, manage a check book, and get a job. For that purpose it really didn't matter where in the state that they were located, because it really wasn't a huge focus on education until the last few years. However, now these kids realize that education is a huge focus. They know that if you can get a college degree they can succeed. They might not have the job as the CEO of a company somewhere, but at least now they can get a higher paying job with a college degree.

***New Jersey Social Worker Component.***

***Question 4.1.*** Does the New Jersey Division of Children and Families require mandatory departmental training of the standard policies and practice's concerning

independent living programs for foster youth post-secondary educational achievement?  
How?

*Response 4.1.N:* Yes, I know that they have regular mandatory training.

I guess some training addresses the issue of post-secondary education, but if your gonna say every worker here goes through it annually I would say no. We do have training addressing those issues to keep their mind fresh on what's the best approach to help these youth. (So there is training?) Yes there is some training.

*Response 4.1.C:* Well, there are policies around with adolescents specific to the service provision. If you go and look up the policy in manuals you can find a lot of information about working with adolescents who are the aging out kids. However, it's not really policy-based, it's more practice-based. There's a lot of information provided to our adolescent units in terms of training, specific training to working with that population. Some of it is mandatory which they have to attend and some of it is not. We also approach them in forums, set up quarterly forums for adolescent workers and their supervisors to share ideas on new programs or whatever is new and happening in terms of providing services that are meaningful for this age group. I wouldn't say that it's all policy-driven, but its more practice-driven I think.

*Response 4.1.S:* No. They do have training and it's usually offered to the people that work directly with adolescents. It's advanced training and it's not considered basic training when they first get hired. If they get put into the adolescent unit,

then they get the advanced training. I went through the training just to see what was going on there and how to learn more about it. I learned more on my feet out in the community and talking to a bunch of people who knew how to fit the pieces together. The training is not mandatory. (So the training is for lack of a better term, sub-par?) Yes, unfortunately, yes.

**Question 4.2.** In your opinion, does geographic location play a role with the policy procedures concerning the implementation of foster care independent living programs to foster youth alumni?

*Response 4.2.N:* Yes, because as a city population we don't have too many services. Many a time the kids have to travel elsewhere, and sometimes you don't get the kind of turnout because they're like, this is too far for me to go. They get discouraged sometimes because this is a geographical location that's urban.

*Response 4.2.C:* No. I think there's more of a population in urban setting so naturally you're going to probably see more of those youths stay with us as they age out. I mean they're going to have more naturally just because of population you know. Here we have a lot of kids that we keep until age 21. In fact, unless they say they don't want our services when they turn 18, they're allowed to do that. I don't know what the statistics would be about that though.

*Response 4.2.S:* It does in some ways like transportation for instance. For some things geography doesn't play a role. When it comes to jobs and education

however I think geography plays a role in that. (Geographical location does play a role?) Yeah, to a point I believe it does.

**Question 4.3.** In your opinion, what have been the positive effects with the Federal Chafee Educational and Training Voucher Program? What have been the negative effects?

*Response 4.3.N:* I mean, getting the kid to apply for the grant and the whole process of it, I believe, has been successful. I haven't heard anything negative at all.

*Response 4.3.C:* I think they have been positive. In fact, Chafee funding can provide things that we can't sometimes, in terms of purchasing things. You know, it's been awhile since personally, I've dealt with Chafee funding, but I remember when I was a social worker it provided extras that sometimes the division can't to support the youth. So I think it's always been a positive thing. (Are there any negative effects?) No.

*Response 4.3.S:* Well, the positive effects are if the kids know how to access it then it's great because it helps fill in the gaps. For instance, if they're a young parent it might help them pay for childcare when they're trying to go to school. The negative effect is that they can only access Chafee funds as long as they successfully completed an independent living program up until they turn 21. (Meaning what?) You have to go through a program, and you have to finish it. Many of our programs in the state are 18 months long so they only get to utilize Chafee funds for 2 years. The negative effect is that we need to get these kids

through these independent living programs right away. Not to make them wait until they're 19, or 20 years old to start. To qualify for Chafee funds when they're 18, they can go to school and still have a little bit of time if necessary.

**Question .4.4.** In your opinion, to what degree should the New Jersey Division of Children and Families be held accountable for foster youth alumni post-secondary educational achievement?

*Response .4.4.N:* Can we really be held accountable? I don't think we should be. Well, let me not say that. Yes and no. Yes, because if we're taking responsibility of the child now we're their legal custodian. At the same time, can you really force somebody to do what they don't want to do? We can't physically force these kids to go to school and get a college education. We can only try to find ways to encourage them, to make them understand the need for higher education, be independent, and a productive citizen of this society. Actually, I'm leaning more toward no, because I don't think we should be held responsible for someone else's action.

*Response 4.4.C:* I don't think we should be held accountable for post-secondary educational achievement. I think that what we should do for the kids is help them make the right choice by doing everything we can to support that. If that means paying for applications to attend college, sitting down and helping them do whatever they need to get into college. We've paid for rent for kids in college. We've done a lot of work around keeping kids in and they receive their independent living stipend too. It's not a lot of money, but it's helped them. We're

kind of like their parents so if you're in a parent role we should be encouraging them. We want to have them be independent not be dependent on us so that's the goal. I don't think we could be held accountable for whether they choose to go on to college, but the ones that have potential we should be helping them along the way.

*Response 4.4.S:* Well, I do think that they need to put more emphasis on it. I think the last honor camp that I taught, there was some kids in there that kind of felt like they weren't worthy to go to school. They thought that they weren't smart enough, and that it wasn't for them. I said, "how many of you, took your SAT's when you were in high school?" Well, it turns out that it was none of them because they told me that they were too intimidated. Now they don't think they can go school because they didn't take that test. That is so wrong and they don't know that all you need to do is go to a community college and take the entrance exam that runs every month. If you don't do well enough to meet college entry standards you can take remedial courses until you tighten your skills up. All you have to do is take that one test and then you can go to college. Then you can get your associate's degree before going to any public state college or university in New Jersey, because it's an automatic acceptance. So they don't even know that and it's our responsibility to give them the basics. We need to give them the information they need so that they understand that they are worthy of going to college. Just because you didn't take an SAT exam, that doesn't tell you who you are for the rest of your life. (So you believe the agency is accountable?) We need to be accountable. We need to help them understand the post-secondary

educational system and how they can access it to get started. I think we should be held accountable. Because let's face it minimum wage is really making it difficult to survive out there in the real world. Now that times have changed with the economy the basics just aren't good enough. Maybe it's time to actually let them advance to where a college degree would help their situation and be proud of themselves. I mean the self esteem that would come from being able to say I got a college degree. I bet a lot of people in their family probably don't even have high school diploma. For them to be able to have that achievement just makes them so much stronger to succeed.

I wish all of our aging-out foster care system adolescents took more advantage of what we have to offer. In today's world a college education is a strong foundation to build personal success.

### **Summary of Findings**

The interview participants were asked questions related to four specific area components. The four components were: (a) background information, (b) New Jersey foster youth development, (c) New Jersey foster youth post-secondary educational achievement, and (d) New Jersey social worker. All four components addressed the three research questions.

The first area of questions focused on the background component. The district office manager participants sampled came into social work due to their own personal life circumstances, but only one expressed having an initial interest when she was growing up as a child. The experience of the district office manager participants experience



ranged from 6 years to upwards of 30 years, and they came into their current job title because it was the next logical professional advancement step. The total foster youth in each of their respective district offices ranged from 120 to 300 adolescents.

The second area of questions focused on the New Jersey foster youth developmental component. There was an agreement among the district office manager participants that in years past children may have been misguided upon reaching adolescence, specifically the college preparatory-aged adolescents who unfortunately “fell through the cracks”. As a means of both prevention and as a proactive response, the state of New Jersey has now allowed these adolescents to remain in the system longer to better prepare them for adult independence. Some examples of New Jersey state aid geared towards the transition into adulthood included payment for college tuition and materials, and both independent living and career readiness programs. All the district office manager participants agreed that there is an emphasis placed on personal/social development. The examples provided involved financial flex funds for individual basic needs, and programs involving mentorships to guide foster youth away from old neighborhoods and habits, as well as introducing new social networks so that they can gain support from peers depending on the adolescent’s individual needs (i.e.: gay and lesbian, drug hotlines and treatments). These types of independent living programs are designed to provide outlets to allow the foster youth guidance and support both personally and socially, as well as nurturing their independence while helping them achieve individual goals. All the district office manager participants were in agreement that a very strong emphasis is placed on foster youth academic development. Concerning college preparatory school-aged adolescents, every attempt is made to

keep them in their own school district, barring any extenuating circumstances. In the event a youth needs to be transferred to a different location, the youth is then transported to their current educational institution in attempt to remove any stigma or distinctive difference between him/her and their peers. Once college aged, various programs and grants are recommended by the Division of Children and Families to allow the adolescent to continue on with their post-secondary education desires. As these adolescents eventually age-out of the New Jersey foster care system, attempts are made to continue to follow up with them and their progression in order to allow for more state support if necessary. The focus on academic development is intermeshed with career development, in that similar independent living programs are set in place to specifically promote individual career ambition. Career development can be anything from advocating to enrollment in a vocational technical institution program to nurture a particular skill or interest. There was a general consensus among all the district office manager participants that there is a pattern of generation to generation dependence regarding those who are dependent upon the New Jersey foster care system. These career-oriented programs are designed to help make a foster youth a responsible adult, eventually becoming a profitable parent in order to break the generational pattern. These independent living programs are considered to be an investment by the state of New Jersey, in order to give the aging-out youth the best chance of not needing state social assistance, as well as keeping their future children out of the system. There were several district office manager participant answers regarding how adult independence can be improved. There was a general agreement amongst the district office manager participants that while the state of New Jersey is headed in the right direction for future

generations, the only answer can be prevention. Unfortunately, adolescents in the state foster care system have cases involving strong emotional issues that are too profound for the state of New Jersey to resolve. Subsequently these foster youth develop character problems leading them to physically act out, therefore, the focus becomes reactive as opposed to proactive. A clear agreement among the district office manager participants was that being proactive and focusing on prevention was, in essence, the only way there will be a long term positive effect for the New Jersey foster care system for generations to come.

The third area of questions focused on the New Jersey foster youth post-secondary educational achievement component. The district office manager participants' answers varied regarding post-secondary educational achievement and how the state of New Jersey motivates foster youth to aspire a college degree. All the district office manager participants agreed that the youth has to be self-motivated regardless of the support and encouragement the Division of Children and Families provides. If the foster youth lacks the motivation within, there is little that the state of New Jersey social workers can do. However, the North district office manager placed some emphasis on the social aspect of the motivation, citing attending the high school formal prom, using it as an example of the youth finding motivation in something that may not be academic by itself but gives them "something to look forward to" regarding school. The South district office manager gave more emphasis to motivating the foster youth academically, using an "intensive life skills camp" as an example, with the focus on motivation coming from learning about various options available such as financial aid grants and assistance with filing college documentation properly. When the district office

manager participants were asked to provide opinions on why so many foster youth age-out of the New Jersey foster system without utilizing the programs discussed for adult independence and post-secondary education, there was little agreement as to a sole reason. The North district office manager stated that it was directly related to the youth's "internal fortitude", meaning if the youth lacks personal interest, the state's hands are then tied. The Central district office manager alluded to some foster youth just not having the aptitude or being academically inclined, or being too cognitively limited to succeed. The South district office manager placed the cause directly on the state of New Jersey and the social workers miscommunication that leads to the foster youth lacking awareness of what could be available to them or the consequences associated with their case being closed due to aging-out. Interestingly, when the district office manager participants were questioned about the dispersing of information regarding independent living programs and assistance for foster youth obtaining a post-secondary education, the participants had varying responses. The North district office manager was very clear that there was no problem stating that the information is always there and it is consistently being "shared and discussed" amongst office social workers and the adolescents. The Central district office manager seemed to agree that it "should be" and "hoped it was" happening, but could not speak definitively as to the information actually being given out, or in what way the information was being shared. The South district office manager was clear that the information is being "piece-mealed." The participant believed that while the information is available, if the state social worker cannot access it they would not understand how to disperse it to the foster youth or the local school districts. The issue then becomes a failure on the state of New Jersey's

part for not making the information easier for everyone involved to understand and realize how it is to be dispersed. When it came to district office manager participants offering opinions on improving the Division of Children and Families policies to stimulate foster youth into obtaining a post-secondary education, the North district office manager believed that the focus lays in specific “target areas,” meaning the poor and drug-saturated environments of New Jersey. The Central and South district office managers believed that the improvements initially needed to be implemented in New Jersey social worker basic training, then emphasized in advanced training so that one can understand all that is made available to the foster youth. Unfortunately, New Jersey foster care adolescents who attempt to apply for various independent living programs are currently getting rejected because the filing paperwork is not being completed correctly. This would be a non-issue or less of an issue if the New Jersey social workers were being properly trained about how to assist the foster youth with the process. Regarding whether state independent living programs were cost effective, the district office manager participants agreed that they were in fact cost effective, however improvements could be made particularly regarding geographical issues due to programs being too far away and the youth not having adequate transportation. Unfortunately, it seems that when some of these independent living program policy guidelines were initially established it was not with post-secondary education or with the issue of location in mind.

The fourth area of questions focused on the New Jersey social worker component. Each district office manager participant gave a different answer regarding the state training provided for policies and practices concerning independent living

programs. The North district office manager stated “yes training was in place.” The Central district office manager pointed out that while policies could be researched and referenced by the social worker, most of them were not policy based, but instead practice based. The South district office manager diverted even further and stated that, not only is there minimum social worker agency training on policy, it is both sub-par and not mandatory. Regarding the geographical importance concerning the implementation of foster care independent living programs, all three district office manager participants provided three different responses. The North district office manager gave a strong “yes,” because the urban locations get less of a turn out for various services due to the fact that they are too far away and the foster youth get easily discouraged. The Central district office manager stated “No, other than perhaps the urban locations that statistically have more foster youth in the state foster care system.” The South district office manager stayed neutral in opinion that in some way geographic location may play a role, specifically citing transportation as a potential issue. When the district office manager participants were asked about the negative effects of the Federal Chafee Education and Training Voucher Program, the across-the-board consensus was that the program has been positive for the advancement of foster youth. The only negative the South district office manager observed was that federal funds can only be accessed as long as the foster youth successfully completed independent living programs until they turned the age of 21. When discussing the degree in which the New Jersey Division of Children and Families should be held accountable for foster youth alumni post-secondary educational achievement, generally all the district office manager participants agreed that they should not be held accountable, however perhaps in the future the

New Jersey Division of Children and Families administration could place more emphasis on it.

### **Focus Group**

Three New Jersey focus groups of social workers were utilized concerning the New Jersey foster care system and foster youth. Each audio-taped recorded focus group discussion took place at the geographically specific district office buildings conference room. All the social workers who participated in the focus group discussions had a minimum of one year field experience with the Department of Children and Families.

### **Focus Group Questions**

<b>New Jersey Foster Youth Developmental Component</b>
1.1. In your opinion, how does the New Jersey Division of Children and Families contribute to the development of personal/social characteristics, knowledge, and skills of foster youth toward the transition to adult independence?
1.2. With regard to New Jersey Division of Children and Families policy, what emphasis is placed on foster youth personal/social development?
1.3. With regard to New Jersey Division of Children and Families policy, what emphasis is placed on foster youth academic development?
1.4. With regard to New Jersey Division of Children and Families policy, what emphasis is placed on foster youth career development?

1.5. In your opinion, what issues need to be addressed to improve how the New Jersey Division of Children and Families prepares foster youth for the transition to adult independence?

**New Jersey Foster Youth Post-Secondary Educational Achievement Component**

2.1. In your opinion, how does the New Jersey Division of Children and Families foster care independent living programs motivate foster youth alumni to aspire a college degree?

2.2. In your opinion, why are more foster youth alumni that age-out of the New Jersey foster care system not utilizing independent living programs for post-secondary education?

2.3. In your opinion, how should the New Jersey Division of Children and Families improve policies to stimulate foster youth alumni to want to obtain post-secondary education?

2.4. In your opinion, are New Jersey Division of Children and Families foster care independent living programs cost effective in moving individuals toward post-secondary educational achievement? How?

**Role of the New Jersey Social Worker Component**

3.1. In your opinion, does the New Jersey Division of Children and Families departmental training provide an adequate understanding of the standard policies and practices concerning the independent living programs used for foster youth post-secondary educational achievement? How?

3.2. In your opinion, does geographic location play any role with the New Jersey Division of Children and Families policy and procedures for New Jersey foster youth alumni?

3.3. In your opinion, what have been the positive effects with the Federal Chafee Educational and Training Voucher Program?



3.4. In your opinion, what have been the negative effects with the Federal Chafee Educational and Training Voucher Program?
3.5. In your opinion, should the New Jersey Division of Children and Families be held accountable for the post-secondary educational achievement of foster youth alumni? Why?
<b>Summary Component</b>
4.1. In your opinion, if you were advising a newly hired New Jersey Division of Children and Families worker about independent living programs that advance the post-secondary educational achievement of foster youth alumni, what is the most important information you would tell them?

### **Focus Group Participant Responses to Each Question**

#### *New Jersey Foster Youth Developmental Component*

**Question 1.1.** In your opinion, how does the New Jersey Division of Children and

Families contribute to the development of personal/social characteristics, knowledge, and the skills of foster youth toward the transition to adult independence?

#### *North Focus Group*

*Response 2N:* They do provide multiple services like life skills where they get a lot of training on how to really obtain skills to becoming independent even taking the bus, opening a savings account, or checking account, registering in college, how to fill out the applications, and also financial help with schools that you can get which you automatically qualify for if you turn 16 and they were in the system. (So it starts at the age of 16?) Yes, and they not only pay for schools, they help

with computers, printers. (Hardware stuff, like learning it, or purchasing it?)

Purchase, they purchase a laptop, a printer, whatever. They pay for housing.

They pay for food. This is the scholarship program. They also give us training to guide them on how to do these things. So whenever we meet with our youth, we also work with them to help them develop those skills. (So then, in your opinion you would say that the state of New Jersey is strong towards the development of Characteristics, knowledge and foster youth skills?) Yes.

*Response 7N:* I agree, but when it comes to the youth, they need to comply with the programs and the services. That's where the fault lies. I think, especially like, with the youth that have legal involvement and stuff they're not even eligible for some these programs, such as the independent living programs. So, I think that's an issue. (So, some of the independent living programs will not be available to foster children if they have legal issues?) Yes, and in addition to mental issues. Like, Axis I diagnosis, bipolar for example. I guess it depends where they're receiving the services. Especially if we're talking about life skills, because here you really do help kids that have legal involvement as long as they are at home. Some counties are flexible, but some counties are not as flexible, you know with those services. Like in here, in Jersey City, the clients have to make an appointment for our approved month and they will receive the services. Some other counties in New Jersey are really good because they actually come to their home and they come weekly. They take them out to do whatever they need to do. So it really varies and sometimes that is inconsistent for the kids because they all need different things. Some of them, you really need to go to the

home. You need to really drag them out to get them to do whatever they need to do, but some will do okay by calling and arranging appointment. I think they put responsibilities on them, so in that sense it's going to work as long as we push them. The issue is that we don't have that support with the legal system. Either the guardians have to come, or the other thing is that we as case workers have to do it for them, and it doesn't leave a lot of independency. I think they need to be able to do it for themselves. (Who are they?) The legal system. I'm going to say that sometimes the judges order these things for us to do, like transport them and to fill out the applications for them. In my opinion, it's not for us to do most of the work they should be doing, because that's when you become independent. You need to be doing that on your own. So if we are doing it for them how are they going to learn? If we are providing a lot of financial assistance to them, but we're not helping them connect to their community, where do they go and get it from? It shouldn't work that way because once we close the case they cannot call and get a check. (And that still happens?) Yeah, that happens all the time. It's constant with these adolescents. Like, if they said, "I need clothing", we have to give them clothing because its court ordered for us to do that. I mean, we are preparing them, but we're not helping them because we are supposed to be preparing them for what they are really going to face. Okay, if they're going to face the fact that they need to pay for bus transportation, for their own clothing, their own food, then how are we helping them if we are giving them money for everything? We're not pushing the envelope for them to actually do it. For example, they don't see the need to work. They'll tell you they're looking for a job

and they are applying, but they don't really try hard enough to get the job because they don't need to if we're paying for their housing, food, and clothing.

*Response 5N:* I just want to piggy back off 2N and say the problem with today's adolescents is that they know the system. They talk to one another. The adolescents talk to one another as far as what they can get from the division.

(When you say they know the system, is that because of the geographic location?) Yes, especially here in Jersey City. I'll give you an example, when we get referrals and we provide items such as a new bed and another kid doesn't have a bed, they will call in a case on themselves because they think the division can help them get a new bed. Now, if the adolescent is aging out of the program they talk about which case worker is stingy and which case worker is a pushover. They know how to play, play, and play the system. (So to answer question 1, the system the state uses now does help the foster care children?) Yes, but there are opportunities where the system can be manipulated.

### *Central Focus Group*

*Response 7C:* A lot of it depends on the youth we are working with. Sometimes you're dealing with youths 17 years old going on 5. Expectation of what they want and expectations of what they feel they can do are often different. It's hard to get because there's missing parts sometimes. You know, when they're getting out of high school on a GED they're not ready for post secondary education and everything that we have to offer. Some need a kick in their butt to realize we have a lot of things there for them. Some transition is successful with kids going to college who are taking advantage of absolutely everything that we have.

(An example would be?) I have a kid that applied to Montclair State University while he was living at a transitional type group home. He didn't think he was going to be accepted, but then he got in a month before he turned 18. He finally understood that he was capable of going to college because he was a smart kid and now he is thriving. Then I have other kids with expectations that don't know what their going to do. I don't know everything to say to encourage them, but I also don't want to cut their dreams off. (So it seems like there's a lot of evaluation on the state's part because there's so many different juveniles that come into the system. Okay, anyone else?)

*Response 5C:* I think that what we should be trying to contribute the most to support these kids because they don't have it. (Support in emotional or financial?) Both, because most of these foster care kids are hoping that those foster families are gonna still be there to support them. Unfortunately, most of our foster parents aren't supporting these teenagers. Not the kids that we have. Most of our kids are troubled and problematic and have a hard time accepting other families to be their own family. So they don't have anybody else and absolutely have trust issues. So now, they're aging out of the system and they don't have a family to go home to at Christmas and we can't give it to them either. They don't have the mom to call up and say hey I need 20 bucks can you send it to me? If it's a good social case worker though maybe then they're giving that extra support like calling them and talking to these kids at college because we end up being like their mom, dad, or whatever support they need. (So there's a prominent role then in the development of certain characteristics, as they move

from children to adult?) Yes, definitely.

*South Focus Group*

*Response 3S:* Basically we have several transitional living programs and independent living programs depending on how old the child is. With the transitional living most youth are given a mentor who works with the child one on one with setting up a bank account, getting a driver's license, the basic fundamentals of becoming an adolescent. Then, further along, there's the independent living coordinators and employment coordinators that each child gets. We work with them on building resumes, looking for jobs, how to apply for apartments, how to build credit and all kinds of things that the child needs in order to be a successful adult. (So in your opinion there are programs that are in place?) Yes.

*Response 7S:* In my opinion, I think that there are programs in place for a lot of the kids. I do feel that a lot of the kids don't get the programs because of mental health or behavioral needs when they're moved and then their program changes. I honestly feel that a lot of times our expectations for the children that are aging out aren't maybe as high as our expectations would be for our own children. We don't instill that in them as they're coming up through the system. Yes we teach them how to do a bank account and how to do this and how to do that, but with the whole tying it together sometimes they're missing a person to help them do those. (You mean that person being a mentor?) Like a mentor, but sometimes the mentors change or mentors sometimes see that as a burden for them. You

know, more like to have a parent to do that for you is different than to have a mentor to do that for you. Sometimes the case workers are connected to certain kids, and then they're not as connected with others. They have just been transferred to them or they have just started working with this kid so they don't have as many connections with that child. So there are some kids that get really great independent living, really great skill sets, all of those things, and then there are the other kids that don't get the same connection.

*Response 2S:* I also agree with that, but I think a big part of it is how the children enter into our system. Whether it's due to their character behavior or whatever, the circumstances are very crisis-orientated. It's a matter of really stabilizing them and getting them to the point where they're even able to focus on higher education. There's not a lot of outreach for our adolescents in terms of maintaining their education after turning 18. If you come from a household where education is not a primary focus, then they don't know that is the next step. Most of them believe that I've gone as far as I'm going to go, I can drop out, and I'm done with school because it's hard to sit in a boring classroom. In my opinion, it is because they are now being driven by the street. They're not gonna sit in a counseling session and talk about the issues of where they need to go in order to meet the next transition into post secondary education. They even go into adulthood with these same behaviors, the same mind sets. So it takes a special kid to really be motivated to pursue an education. We have to have the right programs where they're transitional living focuses on adult success. (So in your opinion, the responsibility is on the agency?) There's responsibility on the

agency, but there's a bigger responsibility on the high school guidance counselors. It also starts with the foster parents and all other people in their lives. So it's a whole lot of reconnecting, disconnecting, and just rebuilding, and I think a lot of work has to be done with that individual. It takes a special social worker to make the time. (Anybody else on question 1?)

*Response 5S:* I just wanted to say that there's a lot of underlying needs that don't get addressed. When they've been in the system and they do become young teens, those underlying needs weren't addressed so they don't care about being eligible for education programs. (So there is bitterness towards the agency because of things that didn't happen earlier when they came into the system?) I think they just view us as a bank account if they want to get a new wardrobe, and that's pretty much, that's the only reason why they let DYFS into their lives, just so they can get a new outfit and some shoes, not a higher education.

**Question 1.2.** With regard to New Jersey Division of Children and Families policy, what emphasis is placed on foster youth personal/social development?

*North Focus Group*

*Response 5N:* An example would be, I had an adolescent that got pregnant. Okay, and I had to take her to the abortion clinic. I, being a male, I got to teach her about the birds and bees and the difference between having a baby, and how your body changes, and everything like that. We teach them, we teach them about life, and we prepare them for that. But it's still an adolescent's choice. They live how they live, and as far as I can say, the division does a great job as



far as taking care of social development because we're trying to prepare them to be a successful adult. We try to get them on the right path to do well. So, like a stump in the road, she got pregnant. So we decided to take her to an abortion clinic. (Was that their choice, or did they encourage that?) No, it's choice, it's her choice.

*Response 6N:* We are required to do a life book for children who are getting adopted, kind of a personal photographic history of the child's placement. Photographs of them with the family, him or her with the family members, and stuff like that. A lot of times it might not get done as effectively or as comprehensively as it should be, but we're required to do that as well. I can say from experience that a foster care child that went through life skills personally grew from that somehow. I mean, if they get a chance to look at it when it was done they see how far they came.

*Response 5N:* Well to piggy back off 6N, yes, these kids do have personal growth. For example when you have a youth getting adopted we try to show them memories that they've been through like report cards, trips that they did with their foster parents, so that when they age out into adulthood they have all these things. Some children don't have that typical child lifestyle like a normal child would have with their parents, so it's the division's job to try to get normalcy for the child that can come from foster care.

*Response 2N:* It's not only that when they move from one place to the next they can bring those memories with them. They keep them by looking at the pictures of their foster parents and siblings and other kids in the same residential.

*Response 4N:* I'm having a difficult time making that connection. I mean, in my opinion, I don't really feel that there's an emphasis geared directly towards that goal. I think, as an agency first of all, we work for the government, a state agency. It's very systematic, you know what I mean. So there's a certain infrastructure and things that we do.

*Response 2N:* I think that we do a lot of things, like, for example, we keep kids in the same community as much as we can when they get placed. This definitely helps because they keep the same friends, they keep their same connections. They're probably able to still see their family. We also send them to camps. My confusion is whether it's policy or not. We have a lot of services that we provide to them that enhance their social development and personal development, especially our mentor services. I definitely know it's in policy that you have to stay within the community as long as it's in the best interest of the child. But this is also another issue because sometimes we have a lot of pressure to keep them, especially the teenagers, in the same community when we don't think it's the right environment for them to be in. Maybe moving them will provide a better outcome because when they move to a different environment, where they don't have the same bad friends and bad behaviors, they don't have the opportunity to do the same bad things. (So is that a possible negative loop hole because the system would try to increase social development by keeping them local?) Yes, then they can keep running out of their new foster home to go and hang out with the same old friends possibly doing those same criminal activities. I know that the policies are in the best interest of the child, but I believe the problem is that it's

not in the best interest of the child. We have judges and legal guardians thinking that it is in the best interest and it is what the child wants. I think that the solution will be to have everybody in the same page to understand that the well being of the child doesn't mean give them what they want.

### *Central Focus Group*

*Response 2C:* I honestly don't think policy focuses on their personal and social development. It's more of vocational, education, safety, and, you know, housing. As far as their focus, we try to help find these kids a caring adult with which they can grow more as a family type support system at times. It can lean towards a social development, but so often our focus is put on the safety that social development kind of takes the back seat according to policy, in my opinion.

*Response 7C:* Socially, we don't have independent living programs for everyone, but they do work with certain kids depending on what they're working on. It depends on how much time they're working on them. But when you get a kid coming from certain homes and the horrible way they were raised, you almost have to break them of that and you don't have time. You have to break them completely down, to bring them back up again. You know you're dealing with certain families that a lot of them are smart enough and capable of doing jobs, but socially they just don't know how to spend a lot of quality time with the kid. I could tell a kid to stop being so angry and so pissed off at the world and just accept somebody's help, but once they're feeling like an outcast and they're not the norm they begin to quit. (So central 7 you agree with central 2 that there isn't much policy when it comes to the emphasis placed on the personal or social

development skills by the department?) We could stop doing all this policy stuff and have more time to do the real stuff that we need to do so they know how to interact. I mean, the best thing we could have ever done, which we don't, is to set up somebody to come in and teach them etiquette. Their norm is every other word, the F-word, and that's just the way they were brought up, you know. If we could spend more time with them and teach them the proper techniques of how to speak during interviews, without raising your voice or yelling, give a quick one word or sentence answer, they would be more articulate. Me personally, I think policy stinks. That these kids are brought up in the streets or brought up in crappy homes and you got to break it down to their level instead of following it by the book.

*South Focus Group:*

*Response 7S:* I think that as we are looking around at each other and discussing the actual policy that's in place for personal and social development, I think we're about connecting youth with committed, caring adults, and trying to do the right things. That's the only policy I know, which is trying to link them with someone when they're aging out who's going to be following them. Unfortunately, a lot of times the social workers don't know who those people would be and the youth themselves aren't sure who those people would be. Trenton is supposed to go through the records as far back as the last 10 years. So, to then going back and looking at who those people they couldn't live with it's not happening. Whoever it is that's supposed to come from Trenton and go through all those records, find that right person, and then reach out to that right person to do the connections,

well, I don't see that occurring. (You're saying that there is a policy in effect, but it's not a strict policy that's enforced by every Alumni exiting or aging out of the system?) That's my opinion, yes.

*Response 8S:* We all know that the state of New Jersey has policies and procedures for anything and everything that we deal with and in all state departments. In my opinion, what's lacking is the implementation. I know that policy is there, it's written. However, how we should follow when it comes to actually implementing the policy, there's no concrete steps to actually do it. It is so broad that it's difficult to really follow the policy itself because of the vagueness it's written. Every child is different, every case is different. Chances are it's not that it's going to fail as a policy; it's just difficult to achieve any type of success based on the history of the clients we're dealing with. So the policy gives us a door to walk through, but once you walk through that door you don't know what to expect.

*Response 6S:* What we are basically talking about is our Lifelong Connection program. I actually have a kid right now that's going through the Lifelong Connection program with somebody who actually did come down and she's helping him go through the records to find old family members, old foster care parents, or whomever. (This is a state worker you're talking about that came down from Trenton?) Yes. Now he actually has another social worker who came down and who's working with him one on one calling different people because he will be 18 soon. He is telling her who he is requesting to go live with once he turns 18. Is it realistic? No. But she is steady calling, reaching out to older

siblings, to see if there's a possibility if this kid could go be placed with them once he turns 18 because he's adamant that, once he turns 18, "I'm out of here." He really doesn't have a plan, so I think the Lifelong Connection is a good policy program that he's working with right now.

*Response 3S:* To elaborate some on what we have been targeting recently is the youth that have mental health issues. Young adults that really can't function on their own is who we're trying to target right now, just so they will be able to identify with somebody if they decide to leave and age out. Looking at what emphasis is placed on fostering personal and social development with regard to the policy, I think that there isn't emphasis placed on it at all. Unfortunately, one of my concerns is that, while the emphasis is there, the ability to do it here in the office is not given to us. We don't have the resources here to do those Lifelong Connections, and Trenton is not able to work with every single kid that's going to be aging out. So, while there is an emphasis stating personal and social development is important, the resources aren't always available to do those kinds of things with each kid.

*Response 8S:* Again it goes back to the implementation of it all, but if it's not going to be implemented it's not going to occur.

**Question 1.3.** With regard to New Jersey Division of Children and Families policy what emphasis is placed on foster youth academic development?

*North Focus Group*

*Response 3N:* I just want to mention that there is an emphasis

through the new policy of educational stability. Basically, it is beneficial for the child to remain in the same school that they were in because it provides a sense of stability. In regards to the youth academic development, we definitely make sure that we measure the progress. I believe one of the issues is that we don't have the school on the same page that we are on. Some schools don't cooperate that much, especially if we have to do it so often. They don't mind answering your questions once like every 3 months, but if you come more often than that they seem like they do have a problem with that. Some school districts may not be as supportive as other districts.

*Response 1N:* My personal belief is that, due to taxes, some areas pay way more taxes, so they get better schools. For instance, the urban areas have a lot of subsidized housing, section 8, and things like that because people are poor. Their economic struggles are significantly different than those that live in suburban areas. (But are the policies then different for different areas in the state of New Jersey?)

*Response 1N:* They're not different, but you have the state policy and then also have the local office practice, which these are two totally different things. (Can you elaborate on that?)

*Response 4N:* Policy is the same because we are all governed by the same thing but, depending on the location of the office, things are done very differently.

*Response 6N:* Even more locally than that, depending on the immediate supervisor, things are done differently. (Can you give me an example?)

Well, for instance, I'm an investigative worker. I've switched supervisors three

times in the past year and each supervisor that I've gone through requires me to do certain things to complete my investigation, turn it in, and then either close the case or process it for a transfer. I have been required to do different things with each different supervisor in different ways. For example, a specific client of mine that I think shouldn't be moved, another supervisor thinks that he should be moved. The issue that I want to address is the fact that policy doesn't address everybody. If you are in a treatment home, then you don't get that luxury within the same school district. I was just doing some research on the policy with regard to education and what I gathered from the policy that the state has in place is that all children have the right to be educated. The quality of their education, issues that they have in school, parental and or division interaction, that's all murky, and that's where it becomes an issue in my opinion.

*Response 5N:* I believe some policies are in place where's there's a gray area and not just black and white. Policies are in place, but I feel like its main goal is to say that all children should be educated and nothing beyond that point. So, in my mind, that means you can get the child to school by state law, by division policy, but anything beyond that point is not even considered. So, to me, policies are not ensuring that our child is developing academically beyond adulthood.

*Response 2N:* I think we do have a policy in place where they have to go to school within their community. Some counties don't even have a liaison, so you lost a lot of time trying to figure it out what exactly who you have to contact.

*Response 3N:* I think, you know, policy is there, but what happens beyond that with roles or what happens in school is not clearly defined, especially when you



take into consideration the adult independence. We can talk about all these different programs providing life skills, but everybody has a different interpretation of what life skills are. For example, life skills in one program might give the child the skills that they may need to open a bank account, but another life skill may not even have that at all. I think policies indicate the child should get an education. The policy between our division and the Board of Education works and is not complicated. I think that it depends on case by case basis. Some schools don't even have people who do evaluations on a child if you feel that this child is developmentally delayed or has issues.

*Central Focus Group*

*Response 4C:* Academic development is probably one of the top aspects of what we try to focus on. I think, especially with our policy, that's one of our primary focuses. (So policy is strong when it comes to academic development.) Yeah, most certainly. When they graduate high school the emphasis is on both making sure that they have employment and obtaining either an education or vocational skills. It's kind of like a dual emphasis, and even when they're in high school we're meeting with school officials or making sure that any of the IEPs are put in place. (What's IEP stand for?) An IEP is an individual education plan. It's something put in place to make sure the youth is getting the extra help they need to meet the standard level of education that they should be entitled to. I think it's clear that academic development is an emphasis.

*Response 1C:* I agree with making policy where educational stability has laws that were passed and policy within the division to make sure that emphasizes

school. Years ago it would take a couple of weeks for children to settle in and then we'd figure out where they were supposed to be academically, but those days are gone. I think it's second to safety. I mean, safety's the number one policy priority with our agency, but education, I would have to say, is the number two.

*Response 3C:* I want to emphasize that in 4 or 5 years ago, when this policy wasn't in place, we were dealing with adolescents turning 18 and they were freshman or sophomores in school because of falling behind. We have a lot of kids that struggle with that now. They're going to be getting out of high school at 20 years of age, and they're not going to give us a lot of time to work with them.

#### *South Focus Group*

*Response 1S:* Well, I don't know that it's even emphasized, but there is an expectation. I'm sorry, I don't know that there's a policy for education. Continuing education and maintaining them to stay in school after graduation is difficult. I think that a lot of our kids drop out or are about to fail out of school. There is a policy that is in place where the school district is responsible to make sure that the child comes into school. We are responsible to make sure they're transported to school and that is mandated.

*Response 3S:* As the child gets to the age of 18 they choose to continue to receive services from us and sign a transitional plan in which they agree to either go to school or they have to be work at least 30 hours a week in order to maintain an open DYFS casework. They have to have a reason to keep their

case open. They have to be moving towards adult independence. They have to show us that they're taking this seriously and that they're not just sitting back riding the system until they turn 21. They have to have something in order so we can see that they are becoming stable. That's what the whole purpose of us working with them; we try to prepare them as best as possible for adult independence.

**Question 1.4.** With regard to New Jersey Division of Children and Families policy, what emphasis is placed on foster youth career development?

*North Focus Group*

*Response 7N:* I think it's case by case in relation to the individual.

I've had cases in the past where the major issue is completing an educational component. Many times our children don't complete high school. So then we have to look at alternative educational programs. I know when a youth has indicated to me an interest in a specific field, I try to find out what's available for them. For example, once I took a young lady to a beautician school because she was interested in doing that. But then she was able to see that it wasn't just black and white, you needed money. In addition to needing money, they wouldn't even accept her without having a GED.

*Response 2N:* Life skills definitely works on developing that so we refer them as long as they qualify. The point is, not everyone qualifies, but we do refer them to help develop a career. Being able to graduate high school is a big stepping stone for them, and we need to focus on how to help them. They will tell you they want

to go to beauty school, they will tell you they want to go college, but they're not really willing to do the work that it takes.

*Response 4N:* As per the policy for youth career development, that's where we are required to do a survey on a child. This is done to find out where they want to go and what they want to be when they age out. To achieve this goal I think we're doing the life skills, but I don't think we're following up on the plans that we set in place for our youth. I think we need to tweak that as well.

*Response 2N:* The problem is when the youth are not involved in the life skills program that is on us, but it's also a problem because this is something that needs consistency.

*Response 1N:* All of these things are intertwined. The personal, social, and academic development all filters into career development.

### *Central Focus Group*

*Response 1C:* You know, could we use more career development programs for our kids? Absolutely. Individual social workers can be creative with what paths they lead their children toward. I think some of the policy that is good is that we keep the cases open until the children are 21 now. Back in the day we didn't do that, so that in itself is giving us more opportunity to work them. (If they accept that?) Correct.

*Response 2C:* The high schools are pushing one avenue and I think that could be a disservice because failing out of college and having nothing to fall back on is tough. I mean, policy is pushing for us to address it all, but social workers have

to do it on an individual basis.

*Response 7C:* Some of these kids just aren't ready. I think some of these kids just look at life in simplistic terms as far as they don't understand the whole responsibilities of being out on your own and all. I'd like to see more of the state and the community work together to provide incentives for local businesses to provide jobs for our aging out kids because they don't have the skills to interview. I got a kid doing that now. He still has very simplistic views on how simple it's going to be living on his own, not understanding that making eight dollars an hour you're going to live in a tough area, and you're not going to be able to afford to live on your own. He still thinks he's going to pick up a room mate on the internet. Some kids are missing out on some programs that actually get in the work field and understand what it takes to work for a living.

*South Focus Group:*

*Response 8S:* I think we have policies that cover the entire gambit but who are going to implement it? You know the social workers don't have time to do it. That development needs to be transferred from the office to the school district themselves. I think the school system should have some type of communication with the social worker to look at the careers that a youth is willing to explore

*Response 8S:* Yes, we will talk with that child and if they choose to explore an area for career we will support them. But it needs to be established that this is what they want to do. Somewhere along the way the policies and procedures that we work under, somebody got paid big money to do this and that to create these policies. We have different vendors and different contracts that explore these

areas that need to be accountable for our clientele to pursue these areas of interest. (Who is an outside vendor?) For example, Robins Nest is an organization where they have an independent living program. (Are they governmental contracts?) Yes they are, and I think they get federal funding as well. They need to work with them hand in hand, one on one, to explore those areas of career development. These agencies need to come in and say, "We'll do this for you because of policy so your child will be successful."

Response 7S: I think the policies in place cover the gamut of pretty much everything that could possibly look at. I think it's the implementation that is the problem. It's a matter of engaging and then finding out where their interests are and pointing them in the right direction. The game changes depending on the situation. So it's just a matter of giving the information and putting them in a direction of what to do.

**Question 1.5.** In your opinion, what issues need to be addressed to improve how the New Jersey Division of Children and Families should prepare foster youth for the transition to adult independence?

*North Focus Group*

*Response 2N:* We definitely need to be on the same page. We need to be able to advocate with the court system so that everybody that has the power to decide on this youth and come up to the same determination or of the child. We are not here to hinder adult independence, because, if you give them

everything they ask for, then they're not going to feel that they need to go and do it, especially going to college or finding a real job. So the problem we have is providing a clear understanding of what needs to be done. We need to push them, they need to do it, and once they understand why we didn't do it for them they will accept the responsibility. We need to be able to get into their core and train them to really understand what independence is and how to achieve it. For example, none of us did it by having somebody else doing it for us. We had to learn step by step, and they need to start making sound decisions on their own. For example, like making appointments for doctors, balancing a checkbook, and paying bills on time, taking public transportation and not for us to transport them to places, being able to work and buy their own clothing. I realize that we should help, and it's not that we don't want to provide it to them, but it's just seeing them progress towards adult independence.

*Response 3N:* I think the best we can do for them is to get them to appreciate how much we are trying to help them. These young adults need to understand that what you get out of life is what you put into it. Once they realize that they control their own destiny is when they start taking pride in it.

*Central Focus Group:*

*Response 1C:* I think one thing that is critical is how the information trickles to the right people. We have a strong adolescent unit, but I worry that the people with the expertise don't bring the information to the youth. There's so much information out there that literally we don't even know all of it sometimes. We

have this wonderful information at our fingertips and unless we're the ones reaching out and explaining, it they might not ever know. Like, who's bringing it to the foster parents? Who's bringing it to those youth? I think we need more training to make sure that we are giving out the right information to the right people. Making sure it gets into the right hands because I think there are missed opportunities when the children and the families don't have the right information. (So an improvement would be the dissemination of information that filters down to more social workers than just the specific units?) Absolutely.

*Response 7C:* I also run into a problem with kids who are 18 and they age out. These kids are aging out of the program at 18, and most of the time that's right in the middle of their junior or senior year. Most of them want to move on and we can't guarantee keeping a kid in the system.

*Response 6C:* Sometimes we have to get them and transport them to a new program then, all of sudden, they turn 18 and they bail out. You know we take pride in them to get things going and moving in the right direction, but when they become legal adults they want to quit.

*Response 7C:* There's only so much that we can do and not so much when they want to get out of the program. When they want a new environment our programs won't keep them until the end of their senior year. A lot of times they're looking to move back to where they were not in the program to a point where they're more familiar.

*Response 1C:* There are always other kids waiting to get into those same programs, so you're just moving one kid to get another kid in there. It's just hard



with 18 year olds who may have some mental health issues, that are not ready for adulthood. They're just not mature enough to deal with their issues.

*Response 5C:* Like, Ocean County, there is only one transitional living program in our county. Even coming close to other counties, there is one in Monmouth County. So we are sending kids out of our county into other areas, and then when they finish there, they come back and there is not really the after care that they need. If they complete the program, they're like maybe 21 or 22 years old, and now they're trying to figure out, "where am I going?" We have lots and lots of programs in the Camden area or Trenton area, however Ocean County, with the same kind of clientele, yet we have to send our kids elsewhere. That just makes no sense and they should be developing the program here. That should be a priority, since there's a huge problem in Ocean County with transportation. If you don't have a car in Ocean County you're screwed. You have got to live where you can catch the bus. So they need to be looking into developing the programs to bring them to us, rather than us having to send our kids out to these programs. (Seems like most of the programs fall in the urban area?)

*Response 4C:* I was actually having a conversation with a Central staff member the other day and it's not uncommon for a conversation to be about identifying the programs that are successful in New Jersey. There are several programs in the state that will accept any one of our youths. Identifying programs that work and applying that would be probably the best thing that we can do, but it's not that consistent. There are several programs we won't consider because of bad experiences. There are a lot of transitional programs that have extremely

unrealistic expectations with the kids that we deal with. (Example?) Well the responsibilities, you know the certain levels of responsibility. Working 40 hours a week if they're not going to school at least part time, or working 20 hours a week if they are going to school. Responsibility, they just don't have it, and when you have to move them on, you're stuck. Sometimes they just don't have the capability of meeting these expectations, and we're forced to move them once again.

*South Focus Group*

*Response 1S:* There are programs that are in place but I guess it's specific to the actual staff taking ownership of their youth trying to advance these youth aging out. Staff committed to working with them, meeting them, arranging to have them picked up and working with them. They would have to identify one particular issue at a time. Like today, we're going to talk about banking, financial issues. So there would be a whole curriculum developed focused on those issues. I think that if every county or every local office had that in place it would help. We do rely heavily on our contracted services because we're not always equipped. I mean, that's been a real struggle for this office. (But you notice that didn't happen in every office?) Yes. Strong personal motivation by certain social workers who wanted to address and improve the transition to adulthood didn't happen in every county. I would make it a policy that it was done in every county if I could.

*Response 4S:* I think we should have a design to handle those issues. Well, if we had an entire unit divoted to addressing these areas, it would make the

transition much smoother to adulthood. I think the Department of Children and Families should establish an entire unit strictly based on career development, academic development, or vocational areas of interest for those children. (In every office to take less of the burden off the individual case worker?) Yes, in every office it would reduce our case numbers dramatically. I still feel like we need more social workers so you don't get burned out so quickly. (Would more bodies reduce the case workload?) Well, they would reduce our numbers, but then our other responsibilities would probably increase. Back in the day I may have had 53 kids on my case load, now I'm only allowed to have 25.

*Response 2S:* In terms of bringing the services to the office, I think we should contract out for the developmental training. I think if we had more in-house skills building, or having a specific person that would do that, gives us a better chance to engage with our adolescents. It's less threatening and they may see it as a positive when they can get something out of it and they know it's going to be consistent.

*Response 1C:* When I worked in the adolescent unit, I would take kids on field trips to see a play at a theater in Philadelphia, and they really enjoyed it and they were much more focused. They got a lot out of it in terms of just having an opportunity to see a real play, and most of them had never seen a play before. (You did this on your own?) Well, I did it with the permission of the office manager, and we paid for them to get the tickets. I think that there's something positive in giving these kids opportunities to get culture in their lives.

*Response 6S:* I think that bringing kids in to ask them questions, as far as, what

can we do to assist you, what is your plan, what do you really need? As far as us being social workers, well, actually, you need to do this, you need to do that, and we need to get your feedback. (And that's not done now?) I would say 100%, no.

*Response 7S:* One of the things that I think really needs to be addressed are children who are aging out. If we have a child who has abuse or neglect issues when they come into our system of care they're not going to be placed automatically in the adolescent unit. So, they're separate, they're different. The permanency unit workers don't get that same training, they don't have that same information, they don't know about it. I think that while there is a focus on the adolescents, my opinion is that a lot of times kids with behavioral issues are difficult to work with. The other thing that I think really needs to be addressed is kids who come into our system of care later than a certain age who have no access to anything. Once they turn 18 and they can't come back. So a decision is made that once they age out of the system they sign themselves away. They cannot change their mind and come back. Certain kids call and say they want to come back, but a lot of kids don't meet certain criteria to qualify to come back. Not every kid who gets signed out gets to come back. There are very strict guidelines for that. (So your improvement would be to make it so student's can comeback into the system somehow?) Yes, they should be able to come back into the system. Other ways to help these aging out youth is to maybe qualify under community services so they have the resources available to them.

**New Jersey Foster Youth Post-Secondary Educational Achievement Component.**

**Question 2.1.** In your opinion, how does the New Jersey Division of Children and Families foster care independent living programs motivate foster youth alumni to aspire a college degree?

*North Focus Group*

*Response 2N:* Well it depends on the independent living program. We have different programs and some of them will do what they need to grow as an individual, some of them will take them on a college tours and some will give them good career training. (So the youth has to show interest into it?) Interest to attend weekly training workshops to cope with the transition. They make sure to expose them to opportunities and the things that can be taken advantage of. We also have a lot of programs that is just housing basically because there's not much to become independent.

*Response 4N:* Sadly, college just isn't for most of our clients. They come from backgrounds where education just isn't emphasized. Programs or not, they just aren't interested in going to college most of the time.

*Central Focus Group*

*Response 6C:* I think the biggest thing is financial because these kids don't think they have enough money. So, if you tell them that there is a way for them to go to college with someone helping them out or paying for it they may decide to give it a shot. My kids have college loans, I have college loans, but if you follow through the system you don't have to pay for it. I think that's important for us to figure out

how to push them for it.

*Response 5C:* I feel like a lot of times we are telling these kids there's a lot of financial support out there. Having bills and things that come up that they don't have their parents to call on, it's a struggle for some. I'm sure that it's even more of struggle when they get to their college senior year and they don't have us to cover a couple checks here and there for them.

*Response 6C:* I agree, and I kind of think it depends on how much we push them. For a lot of our kids we are the only people involved with them. It depends on how far the social worker will go out of their way to get the information to the kid. However, a lot of the information we don't get it. Like, from Trenton or from training, and we kind of have to dig for it, search for it for them. It really depends on how willing and how hard you're willing to work for your clients.

*South Focus Group:*

*Response 4S:* I encourage all my adolescents to try to get a college degree. If not a college degree, then they should try to learn a vocational trade. I try to tell them about The New Jersey Scholars Program where they can apply for college tuition, living on campus, and the independent stipend while they're in college. (So these services exist, but does the department actually does motivate them?) Well, yeah, especially to aspire to get a college degree. Yes, that is the purpose.

*Response 1S:* Honestly, I don't think every social worker knows about how these programs work to get our clients all the proper information to assist them with assistance for college. We don't get enough updates concerning the information.

**Question 2.2.** In your opinion, why aren't more foster youth alumni that age-out of the New Jersey foster care system utilizing independent living programs for post-secondary education?

*North Focus Group*

*Response 1N:* We have certain programs they can stay in until the age of 23 and still go to college and have a place to lay their head for the time being until they're ready to go out on their own. Even if their case is closed, they're still getting after care services, but it's only up to the age of 23. There are so many other micro programs within the program that we don't know everything. So a kid might ask us something about a specific program and we can't even service them because we don't know everything. Unfortunately, it's a communication thing because we don't have enough information to know everything.

*Response 6N:* What's happening to me is they don't want to go to independent living programs because most of them are not close by. Then we have the mental health component not everybody qualifies for independent living. Some of them have so many behavioral issues that they just can't go because they won't do well. Most of them will be discharged the next day, and the other issue is the educational limitations of them. Some of them have below average levels of a education and even though we talk to motivate them they don't see it and they don't go for it.

*Response 7N:* I feel as though, once they age out, some children just want to control their own life. Mostly due to the personal development, due to the

experiences they had with the division, where some may be bad, some may be good. It's just a strain on them with their families, and once they turn 18 for them it's time to age out. Our youth have a history with coming from our urban area and for them being stigmatized and being labeled. When the worker comes to their school they look at us as its a bad thing.

*Response 1N:* Dealing with all the myths out there about DYFS it's not a good thing. So, once a child realizes it's a chance to get rid of DYFS from their lives, all they have to do is sign the paper. Every social case worker explains to them what their options are and what they can get, but some youth just want to be on their own.

#### *Central Focus Group*

*Response 3C:* I think it's all in the communication and how they don't know what's out there. There are enough programs and there is enough information that's out there. Recently, when we went to one of the trainings, now they're using YouTube to get information out to these kids. And I thought it was a great way to do it because they're all on YouTube now all the time. But how do you get a kid to look at something that has to do with DYFS or foster care. But there was a college student from Montclair State and she did this Youtube video telling how to get into the system and get what you can out of independent living. That was the first step and it was really interesting. I thought it was so positive in a really good way for them to go forward with trying to get the information out there.

*Response 1C:* I just have to add that it really is two-fold, and when you're looking



at studies and you're looking at what works, you really have to look at the youth that we're dealing with. Because all the programs in the world, all the policy, even if it trickles down smoothly, some of these kids are more worried about where they're going to live and getting through abuse mental health issues. I think, with all the services in the world, to some of these kids post-secondary education is not their priority. I think we're getting better at opening the door to post-secondary education, but we have to really look at the youth that we're working with.

*Response 5C:* Most of these kids aren't even taking SATs or college prep classes in high school. In my opinion, it has to be done when they're in high school because most of our kids aren't taking them. They don't even have the money to pay for the application to take them.

*Response 2C:* I think a big part is that the fact that they've changed schools so many times they haven't worked with a guidance counselor that told them their options. I think some of these kids are too embarrassed to even talk to a guidance counselor because they are stigmatized that they are in foster care. They just get pushed from grade to grade in some of the schools, and then they get out of it because they're afraid to admit that they are in foster care.

*Response 7C:* They do help the kids that aren't really focusing on college. They help them with the vocational trainings like being a home health aide, culinary arts, retail sales, and other stuff. But, if I have a kid from Ocean County and the program is in Camden County, a lot of programs will take Camden County kids first and then wait list mine for an opening to the independent living program.

*Response 1S:* I think that would actually depend on the individual's experience.

They moved around, you know, behavioral issues maybe mental health. We have a lot of drug involved adolescents, and I think it takes a real toll in their lives. (So it depends on the individual youth's personal background?) Yes, like as a child, or as a young teen, I mean, if you're exposed to bad things you're already fighting an uphill battle.

*Response 6S:* I agree, some kids don't take advantage because they have no plan, no emotional support, no one to help them, so they're basically stuck. (If an adolescent came to you that was aging out that wanted to sign off, would you as a worker try to convince them not to?) Absolutely. I you have to tell them to look at the bigger picture. You're in the system now, where are your family members? Are they reaching out to you as a support right now for you? Are they coming to visit you and taking you shopping or whatever? They're not doing that so how is the grass going to be greener on the other side? I tried to give them a broad picture, just to look at the whole big picture. I tell them that they really need to rethink your decision because you have to have a good plan. When I talk to my adolescents, I always ask them, "what is your plan?" And, if necessary, I will tell them, "you don't have a good plan", and be honest with them. I'm up front with them. (So you as a social worker try your best to influence and inspire your adolescents to continue to go to college?) Yes.

**Question 2.3.** In your opinion, how should the New Jersey Division of Children and Families improve a policy to stimulate foster youth alumni to want to obtain post-secondary education?

*North Focus Group*

*Response 2N:* Most of our kids have educational limitations and mental health issues and, as much as they want to go to college, they just can't handle it academically. Not everybody is college material, unfortunately.

*Response 4N:* I think that the division is utilizing the seminars to try to encourage the youth that are aging out to go to college and get a post-secondary education. I mean, it's mostly like, what can you get if you stay to the age of 21. It's like, oh you're going to be able to get this pot of gold, and it's not even explained to them in detail in the seminar that it's not an entitlement, you got to work for it. So, I think we need to just be blunt and explain it to them directly. Explain it to them in detail before they sit here and go, "yeah, we're going to ride this out."

*Response 7N:* But at some point the law guardians, the courts, and the legal system have to get everyone on the same page.

*Response 2N:* The bottom line is we need to prepare them to get to that point where they can be independent. Not just doing things for them, but letting them know that they need to be able to do things on their own.

*Central Focus Group:*

*Response 2C:* In my opinion, I don't know if there should even be a policy. My opinion is if we try to do a policy to stimulate foster youth to obtain post secondary education it could backfire where they're looking for numbers on how many of our kids have gone to school. Where I think the focus should be is on the individual kids and let's do what's best for that individual adolescent. I think a

policy would start holding us accountable for that.

*Response 5C:* Sometimes it's not a realistic goal. It wasn't until I think a few years ago that college was even something discussed among the workers. But, at the same time, I completely agree with what 2C said where it seems like everything that we do has to be based on numbers and measured by the people that are above us. Accountability is important, but at the same time, when you're being watched by your bosses, you're not trying to service your youth.

Educational wise, mental health wise, even where they're living has to be individual, otherwise it's not going to be successful. As a whole we have taken a lot of untraditional routes with making sure their educational goals are met. So, I think that looking into a policy wouldn't be a good use of our energy.

*Response 1C:* I kind of have to disagree, only because I think that there can be a policy in place. Social workers often look at how a new policy is going to affect me. What am I going to have to do now because of this new policy? I see it as any new policy that mandates better training for foster parents and better training for people who monitor kids. We're learning that, if you close your case at 18, that's going to affect your Medicaid, your Chafee funding, and many other programs to help these young adults. Maybe a policy directed around training to make sure that the youth have all the necessary information, that could be beneficial.

*Response 5C:* I think that in this day and age the focus is that a high school education isn't enough, a GED isn't enough. If you really want to move on with your life you have to break the cycle, because most of their parents haven't gone

to college either. Most of their parents haven't even probably finished high school. So, if we can get them to finish high school and be motivated enough go to college to make their life better, which should be the stimulation that's needed.

*Response 7C:* I think we should make them aware of what we know or as much as we know. Because these kids get moved around so much, that they're graduating high school later, starting high school later, they really don't have anybody.

*South Focus Group:*

Response 2S: I don't know about a policy being put in place in order to share that. As a social worker, seeing these children aging out and wanting to see them be successful we need to be more engaging because they can't see the bigger picture. They want to get back with my family and friends regardless of what failures they have been in their lives because that's still their connection. I think it's important for social workers to show up at the school and make plans to set goals with them that they can achieve academically. The opportunity has to be presented to them very clearly that they can achieve a college degree, but they have to start small. I believe it takes a lot of one-on-one, a lot of engaging, and a lot of encouragement because they may not get that where they are living before they come to us. Secondary education is about being mature enough to follow through and show up to class. So, we as social workers have a lot of work in terms of preparing them and encouraging them to really make them feel like they can be successful. Engaging to stimulate them in the sense of giving them the self-esteem that they need to do the work and encourage them that you can

achieve this.

*Response 7S:* When it comes to policy, I want to see more structure to include exposure to different things that our kids could have like going on field trips to schools where they could go see different opportunities that would be available to them. (These things aren't being done now?) I think they're being done in pockets at certain local offices, but not as a policy that stimulates them to get these things.

*Response 2S:* There used to be a big adolescent fair that was held every summer, and we would take a group of our kids to this fair. There was information for resources in the whole southern region. I don't know if they stopped doing it, but they used to have that where all the counties would come together and they would go to Hamilton High School where it was held. (So if they stopped it, you think it should come back?) Yes it should come back because the adolescents came from everywhere and they were provided so much information about going to college when they age out.

**Question 2.4.** In your opinion, are New Jersey Division of Children and Families foster care independent living programs cost effective toward the advancement of post-secondary educational achievement? How?

*North Focus Group*

*Response 3N:* Yes, I believe they are cost effective towards the advancement of post secondary educational achievement. Most of our kids want to live on campus and stay in our independent living programs. It also helps

them because they can stay there until the age of 23 if they're going to a community college and obviously there's no housing at an institution like that.

*Response 6N:* I think it depends on the program. We have different independent living programs providing different services and some are very structured and have a lot of services for this youth, and some of them don't have much. I think we need more programs that give them plenty of time to finish college because of what they go through emotionally.

*Central Focus Group:*

*Response 7C:* I think some programs are being unrealistic, they have guidelines like having to work 40 hours a week, or going to school full time and working 20 hours a week. It all depends on which kid you're talking about as far as their capabilities and expectations.

*Response 5C:* I think you have to depend on how you're defining cost and effect of success. Can they actually graduate college? I think the numbers would probably be very low. But, we need to look at the big picture, like how are they being maintained? Have they had a roof over their head? Are they getting good food? Are they able to get to a real job? Are they having contacts with their family? We don't have enough money to be able to take care of all of these kids' needs. It's not possible, it's not physically possible. Like, we have a program called Shore House. It contracts for three male beds and three female beds there. That's a lot of money for those beds, it's like \$2,000 a month and those beds are constantly filled. Not always filled with our kids, a lot of times they're

sending kids from other counties, and they're filling our beds. So, you're never going to be able to figure out the real cost effectiveness because there's not enough money, and there's not enough programs. (Basically in your opinion, the programs are cost effective when it comes to maintaining the welfare of the young adult?) Yes, more so than just the advancement or the improvement of their education.

### *South Focus Group*

*Response 3S:* I think some independent living programs are very good, but the problem is they're so limited and the waiting lists are so long. By the time your kid gets accepted, the youth has signed out or moved back to where their old connections are. (So there are actually hoops that adolescents have to go through to get into certain programs?) Yes. (What is the average length of time period for that?) For the waiting list it could be anywhere from 9 months to 18 months. (So one of the improvements would be to make the program waiting list time shorter?) Yes, or contracts need to be expanded in order for us to be able to get more beds available to DYFS. When DYFS only has two beds at a program on the waiting list, it's easier for a kid to sign out and get that bed, when they're not part of DYFS

*Response 2S:* I don't know that there's actually a measure of success. I don't know that there's anyone really looking to see who's being successful at completing the educational component. I mean, we can say, a youth graduated from high school, but is anyone really following these young adults around? How



many are actually being checked on out of the 100 we put into any independent living program that we saw go off to college? I have never seen a measure of that, and, statewide, I can't really say that it is an effective system. (So what you're saying is nobody's monitoring to see if a program is cost-effective?) Well, I'm thinking and speaking in terms of success. If we fill a bed and that person gets bounced out, somebody else is going to come and take that same bed. The money is being utilized because the bed is being paid for, but who's following and monitoring the success of these youths that we actually put in these beds? (So you can't determine if it's cost effective?) We really can't, I know that I can't. We can't measure it in terms of cost because I don't know if we are getting what we're paying for. It's sort of not a true measure because somebody else is waiting to take that same place. How do we measure success in terms of being cost effective? What are they doing to keep these youths in these beds to make sure they succeed? That is the goal of ours to get them toward transition into adulthood. There's really no measure of success, and we don't know the cost because its state contracted money.

*Response 7S:* I just want to say I know New Jersey is attempting to manage that data. That issue is a big thing coming out of the governor's office. I know a lot of our government contracts are supposed to be providing performance driven data. How are they doing? What's the performance like or are they doing well? In various meetings they talk a lot about it but I haven't actually seen any real data to come back to say this independent living program does better than this independent living program. (So nobody's actually keeping a record of this data

anywhere?) If they are they're not disseminating it within the office. So it's difficult to actually put a correct opinion on the cost effectiveness of these programs. There really isn't any data to go by and if there is you don't see it anyway.

### **Role of the New Jersey Social Worker Component.**

Question 3.1. In your opinion, does the New Jersey Division of Children and Families departmental training provide an adequate understanding of the standard policies and practice's concerning independent living programs used for foster youth post-secondary educational achievement? How?

#### *North Focus Group*

*Response 4N:* Only if you're an adolescent social worker you're probably mandated to attend these trainings. Some social workers would never even touch it, but it is definitely mandated so the adolescents have to take these training seminars. Sadly, all of us social workers don't encounter adolescent training for post-secondary education. (So this departmental training isn't part of the new employee hire training?) Correct. In the office here you have your intake unit, your permanency unit, your adoption unit, and your adolescence unit, and it is mandated by the division to go to training, but it isn't required that we work with each adolescent aging out of the system. So, usually other workers come to the adolescent unit to get the resources to help push their children forward. However, I think the training should be done across the board regardless of the unit you're

assigned. For example, if I have to learn how to do the intake unit and I've never done the intake unit I have to go to a training seminar to learn how to do it. I don't think the unit should dictate the information filtered to me so I can be a better social worker based solely on my unit assignment. Why shouldn't I go to adolescent training, or adoption training, whatever training to be a better well-rounded social worker and learn each other unit's job?

*Response 2N:* It's not only in the adolescent unit that works with these aging out adolescents. There are adolescents in every family and a lot of other social workers deal with these adolescents. Unfortunately, I really don't know our rules and our policies of why every social worker doesn't get the same training.

*Response 7N:* I agree with that, but sometimes it depends on the social worker. You cannot control all the social workers, some of them are very diligent in really wanting to help them transition more than others. (Well is that something told to you in training that if you're confused about an issue you should go to another social worker for help?)

*Response 4N:* Well, we aren't forced to do it, but we should extend ourselves to another social worker. But somewhere down the line, when you realize that you need advice on a specific issue like explaining higher education to aging out adolescents, common sense should kick in. Somewhere down the line we all have to use common knowledge and teach the child how to achieve whatever post-secondary goal they want.

*Response 2C:* In my opinion, I don't believe we really receive anywhere near enough training to get a clear understanding on what independent living programs are and the availability. I have heard that there's an array of them throughout the state and every one seems to do something a little different. Each program is different and at times I stop and think what this program is actually doing for this youth. Just, in general, I don't think we have a clear understanding on what the program expectations are. I bet if you ask social workers about a specific independent living program they will not know what the contract says and what the regulations are. I also think that the state is a little too lax in making sure the independent living programs are keeping up with what we should expect from them.

*Response 5C:* Policy shouldn't be about sitting down and reading what the policy actually says. You know, they send them to us and we get emails all the time, but policy shouldn't be just about covering administrations' asses. They should be instructing us what the policy actually is and this is how we should be doing it, not just leaving it up to our own interpretation. It shouldn't just be, well go read the policy that was emailed to you and then you will know it. Not to mention, you can't expect a DYFS social worker to follow policy if the independent living programs aren't following the same policy. However, we don't even know if they are.

*Response 7C:* We understand that we have to take a lot of grief and responsibility on these youth even though the program aren't spending 7 days a week with these youths. With all of the responsibility expected from us, I wish I

had more control over it. I also think that the programs standards should be checked on to make sure that they are following what these youth need too. You know, like the independent living skills, the educational expectations, making sure they get a therapist, not just to be there on an 8 hour shift, 5 days a week. (Do these programs mandate the same training social workers get?) No. (do they get the same emails you get?) No.

*Response 1C:* I would like to add that I definitely don't think we are there yet when it comes to training, especially if you're looking at training for post-secondary educational achievement. We're just not there yet, plain and simple. I do think it is positive that we have adolescent units in the office. I believe though that is policy. I believe that's practice, that there's an adolescent unit in every office in the state. That's something they can never go back on. If they ever want to look at post-secondary education as a priority, they have to keep adolescent units well trained. They did away with them at one point and now they are back and that's important. (Why did they go?) They were called residential units back in the day, and they felt that everyone should do everything and we didn't need specialty units anymore. Now they have all the specialty units gone. But I think that we're not there yet with the training because it takes a lot to keep the social workers current.

*Response 6C:* I guess when the adolescent unit came back into play, most of our youth were out of home and in placement, so we focused on them. Unfortunately, aging out youth seemed to get pushed to the back burner. Now it's different when we work with youth that are in independent living programs. I can actually go out

and meet with these youth and work with them to get them into college. (So are you in the adolescent unit?) Yes, I am in the adolescent unit, but I have cases that aren't adolescents also. So it's kind of all over the place. (So in your opinion does the adolescent unit get more training than a different social worker unit?) Yes, the adolescent unit does. I think there's training just for us that we have to attend.

*Response 5C:* I think that part of the deal is, as a social worker, not that many people like working with teenagers or aging out youth. Honestly, I know that I don't want to work for the teenagers, I want to work for the little kids. I was never like that, but through experience I learned it's much easier dealing with the guidelines for younger kids. I believe for the adolescent unit there is training that is mandatory which is like 40 hours a year.

#### *South Focus Group*

*Response 5S:* A lot of changes need to be made to the training. I think a lot of concentration is done on the documentation of a policy, but not in regards to the practices. Meaning, when you go through the training they teach you everything that you need to do A, B, C, to fill out this form and engage the youth. There's a lot of talk about that, but the problem lies in they're not really educating workers in regards to the programs and what those programs are, and what they allow the youth to do. For example, they don't tell you what the difference is between life skills versus after care services and what the different benefits are. Nor did they discuss to you the importance of the Chafee Bill when I went through initial

training, which is very important for us to be able to teach our youth about. A lot of workers have to learn on their own. You know, like actually researching it online yourself. However, I will say that the division does have a really good Transition for Youth website which a lot of social workers are utilizing in order to learn where those programs are and what they do.

*Response 1S:* I agree wholeheartedly about the lack training for the staff. With better, in depth training a social worker could develop into a real good functioning adolescent worker instead of having to find out on your own. I actually think that it's a disservice to the adolescent youth as well as to the worker too. I just think that overall our training fails us. We have staff meetings and we will have someone come in to speak to us, you know, but personally, I can remember calling a friend who is an adolescent supervisor and asking her, "how do I do this?" You kind of have to learn as you're going. (So you get training relatively early in your career when you first get hired, and then there is no more training after that?) With regard to adolescent aging-out youth, yeah, it doesn't cover that, it doesn't cover that at all. That has to be in-service training; a component that is not part of the new hire curriculum? (Should it be?) Absolutely.

*Response 7S:* As I said earlier, if you're an adolescent worker or you're in the adolescent unit they provide you with aging-out training. Unfortunately, I've been here several years and I've never had any aging out training because it's never been a focus of anything that I've ever had to do. I feel at a loss a lot of times for the adolescent youth when they ask me questions about aging out and I then have to call the adolescent unit supervisor or an adolescent unit social worker to

get an answer. (The training that you got when you first got hired isn't blanket training across the board for everybody?) It depends on what you get when specialized training is available. (The training concerning independent living programs is not available for a new social worker?) Yes, but it is very limited. I think that if it was afforded to everyone regardless of what their specialty was it would flow more smoothly. I think it should be broader and afforded to everyone. (So the training that you do concerning independent living programs should be done at the beginning for every worker?) Yes, sort of like in basic training.

*Response 3S:* Just because new hires get that independent living program training doesn't mean it's really going to help them because a lot of it still needs to be expanded. We have 5 days of training and not once did they talk about independent living programs in basic training. I think that in the beginning there should be a component of aging out services provided to all new staff.

*Response 1S:* I believe basic training should be just that, basic. However, then the social worker should be sent to advanced training which then includes a component solely on understanding independent living programs.

**Question 3.2.** In your opinion, does geographic location play any role with the New Jersey Division of Children and Families policy procedures for New Jersey foster youth alumni?

*North Focus Group*

*Response 7N:* Absolutely, absolutely, absolutely, absolutely. (Can you



elaborate?) The suburban and rural areas have so many more resources and programs dealing with aging out, independent living programs where they extend to ages 22, 23, and 24. Whereas in the urban areas, I think there's only 1 program that can extend 1 more year after 21, and there's only five spaces in that program. Then I have youths in other independent living programs, such as like Philipsburg, New Jersey, where they can stay for a couple of years after 21 if they choose to. (So you're saying urban areas will have five spaces and rural areas may have more?) Oh yes, much.

*Response 3N:* Or they might have more programs in that area. Here you might have one program where in another area there might be four or five different programs the more south of the state that you go. So one program and five beds compared to five programs and 25 beds. Not to mention the out of county waiting list, like, if you want to refer them to a certain place where there is a these waiting list it might take years.

*Response 1N:* Part of that is that in urban areas the population is usually higher than rural areas, so what happens a lot of times is if we use the same approach systematically and a lot of the resources are over saturated. They're either over saturated or they don't really meet the needs of the client, so it varies. You know, it's always been said that up in Sussex area, like northern New Jersey, there's more sexual abuse cases as opposed to here we have more of drug and mental health issues going on. You know, it's weird, but it varies from county to county on how many people have certain case loads. You can get 10 cases, or you can get 100 cases, but I think one thing you have to factor in is a socio-economic

status of these different areas. So, as I mentioned, some of those issues that might plague Sussex County don't even appear here in our county. So it's different and it could be socioeconomic statuses that affect how the majority of cases come out. (So the urban youth come in contact with things that other counties youth don't?) Correct. (Just because of geographic location?) Yes, geographic location and socioeconomic status.

*Response 3N:* I have to say that even on a legal aspect, legal representation has a major effect on how a case is treated with the courts. Using the socioeconomic aspect of an individual the more money you have the stronger the representation in court. Whereas, in urban areas people don't have that so they just get the pool attorneys.

#### *Central Focus Group*

*Response 5C:* I think we've kind of already answered some of that. I believe that there aren't enough independent living programs in our area. I don't know if it has to do with policy or policy across the state, but it's seems that they are developing more programs elsewhere.

*Response 2C:* I want to agree with that, most of these aging-out services aren't in our county. Our average travel time for a youth is probably about an hour away. I was in an office where the adolescent unit did all these things for youths but that's because they're all located in their county like 5 minutes away. The ones that are further away don't have the same supports geographically. It makes our job so much more difficult. If 15 kids that all live in this county compared to 15

kids that live in every other county, we would have to put them on a waiting list because in-county usually comes first.

*Response 7C:* Then there's also the issue of finding them placement or a transition living program in an urban area because there is no waiting list and then that's not fair to these youth that they have to stay in that element when nobody else wants to come to an urban area.

### *South Focus Group*

*Response 5S:* No. (So the same policies and procedures that are done in the south will be the same as the central and north?) No, I disagree. (Why?)

*Response 7S:* I think that there the policy may be the same, but the procedures are much, much different. Working with a youth from Salem County and the programs available here are much different than youth who are in Camden, Newark, or North Jersey, where there are many different services available. The procedures are different. I believe that they have a lot more programs and resources available in northern New Jersey than are available in southern New Jersey. If you look at just the southern New Jersey area; Cumberland County, Gloucester County, and Salem County, there aren't as many independent living programs down here. But if you go 2 hours north, you'll find there are numerous ones. But, then again, do you want to move your Salem County youth up to Newark, New Jersey for an aging-out independent living program. Is that really in the best interest of that child? You talk about a culture shock. However, it's like taking some youth from Essex County and putting them down here in Salem

County. Then again, maybe they would think, “where the heck did you put me there's nothing down here?” So the procedures are very different, and it's not just because of geographic location, but also because the resources are not provided to our area. So the policy's the same, but the procedures are different.

*Response 4S:* Because of the geographical location as a social worker I don't want to take the youth somewhere that can hinder their transition to adult independence.

*Response 7S:* Honestly, an opportunity in Newark may not be open to my youth here from Salem County. Some of those programs that are available in Central and Northern Jersey are not available to youth here. (Why?) They're just not open; they're open to that geographic location first come first serve. I think that if you have a youth here from a southern county the only opportunity that they have is being convinced to attend college. Certainly I think geographic location plays a role to a certain point, but we need to provide resources that are not available in other parts of the state to keep these youth motivated to obtain a college degree. (So based on geographical location the resources aren't the same for the Division of Children and Families because of different areas?) Yes.

*Response 1S:* I was just going to say that because this is not a real resource rich community here in Salem County we kind of suffer in that aspect. I believe that geographic location handcuffs you as a social worker to perform your job more efficiently.

**Question 3.3.** In your opinion, what have been the positive effects with the Federal

Chafee Educational and Training Voucher Program? *North Focus Group*

*Response 4N:* We don't really utilize the Chafee voucher program. Usually it comes from the independent living programs that the children reside at so, but we've been told that Chafee funds would be the last stop. We have to utilize everything statewide before even touching Chafee funds. I think it's still a work in progress because even the social workers that utilize the independent living programs more often don't even understand everything about it. The social workers in this office are still calling the Office of Adolescence to figure out how to utilize the money, how to get the money, and how to do the official paperwork to get the money for these youth started. So, in my opinion, it's still a work in progress, even though it's been around for many years.

*Response 2N:* I think it's a good thing because with that Chafee money, it can really help them do a lot of things until they turn 21. My issue is how many hoops do they have to jump through to have access to that money? (Anybody else here utilize the Chafee Bill at any time during your experience working as a social worker?) No. (Ok).

*Central Focus Group*

*Response 2C:* I mean, I think it's getting a little more accessible but it wasn't always clear. Do these kids access it, but it seems more often now there's a point person in the Adolescent Unit that only kind of handles that and we can always call her concerning some of our kids. From what I understand the youth have a limited amount of money to spend, but there have been several occasions where

a youth needs to make a big purchase and exhausts all the money quick. I do think the Chafee Bill is real beneficial and since the money is available up until 22, it gives the youth a nice head start. I believe it has a limit of \$4,000 and they're not letting them to go through it all at once. I think that is frustrating for the youth when they want something now, and they need it now, but with that policy they have to work to try to access it. (Anybody else here utilize the Chafee Bill at any time during your experience working as a social worker?) No. (Ok).

*South Focus Group*

*Response 3S:* I've seen a lot of positive things come out about it. A lot of youth have been able to counterbalance certain academic scholarships or money for college books and even purchase special things that they may need. You know I have even heard that they open up the funds to recreational activities too sometimes. I've had youths go away on church groups for overnight stays and get to go places and do things that they normally wouldn't be able to do because they don't have the money. So I definitely heard a lot of good things that a youth can use with that Chafee fund money. It helps them become more independent. They're able to utilize those Chafee funds to open an electronic bank account or even gas account, paying their security deposit to have a place of their own to rent. (Anybody else here utilize the Chafee Bill at any time during your experience working as a social worker?) No. (Ok).

**Question 3.4.** In your opinion, what have been the negative effects with the Federal Chafee Educational and Training Voucher Program?

*North Focus Group*

*Response 1N:* Well a negative effect is I don't think there's any track in place if they're going to be utilizing this money. While a case is opened we can definitely keep a check and balance system, but once we close a case who is going to be calling them to make sure they have access to these Chafee funds?

*Response 6N:* I've heard the word Chafee thrown around a lot and I'm guessing that it applies to secondary education, but the specifics of the program I just do not have them. The negative would be that not enough state social workers understand how the Chafee Bill even works.

*Central Focus Group*

*Response 7C:* I don't know if it has changed lately, but I know I had an issue a couple of years back concerning the Chafee Bill and a youth that wasn't in an independent living program. I had a youth that was in a program called Project House which was transitional living facility. They didn't have access to those funds because they don't need it for housing. However it did help him get a laptop computer for college. It was like, I'm scrapping for these Chafee funds just so he can do his college work and that was the problem. (They have Chafee funds but it's difficult to get them at times?)

*Response 3C:* I believe in order for the youth to have access to those Chafee funds they have to participate in their aftercare program. These aftercare programs that have independent living programs don't always have that contract, so they can't duplicate services. So, I think if a youth is receiving independent

living services at a state program they can't go and get independent living services from another aftercare program that has a contract for federal Chafee funds.

*Response 4C:* I don't know that it's necessarily defined as a negative effect, but one of the issues I had working with the federal Chafee program is the qualifications for being considered for it. The youth has to be in placement in order to receive Chafee funds, and what we consider a fine placement can sometimes be different among what the contract providers consider good. One simple change for access to Chafee funds should be how they are more applied on an individual basis, especially when the youth wants to go to college and wants to be successful. There should be no barriers or hoops for them to get these funds whatsoever. (Is that because it's a federal program compared to a state program?) Actually, that's a good question, I really don't know, I don't know what the rules are for that. (Well do they have to follow a federal guideline?) Yeah I believe so; it is based on federal guidelines.

#### *South Focus Group*

*Response 2S:* I would have to say just not being appropriately informed about it, not getting enough information on it. (As a social worker?) Yes definitely as a social worker. The agency as a whole is just not well informed about exactly what the Chafee Bill program is. We can go read about the policy and all that, but just making that information readily available to the social workers isn't enough. We need to know more about how it works and understand it to properly share it with



our aging out youth. I think we need more information explained to us more often. (You mean to make it part of your training?) Absolutely as part of our training in order for us to share the information and be equipped to guide our youth concerning the accessibility to it.

*Response 4S:* It's sad to say this, but I have been working here 6 years as a social worker and I know nothing about it except hearing it used in conversations. I don't know anything about the Chafee Bill or what a youth can actually access from it.

*Response 1S:* Unfortunately, that does seem to be the issue concerning the Chafee Bill amongst state social workers in the office.

**Question 3.5.** In your opinion, should the New Jersey Division of Children and Families be held accountable for foster youth alumni post-secondary educational achievement? Why?

*North Focus Group*

*Response 1N:* I definitely think that DCF should be held accountable for educational achievements, especially if a child has been in our custody for a substantial amount of time. Obviously it's our obligation to make sure that that youth is educated as much as they can be as a youth. However, on the flip side, I would have to say once they age out of the system and they are not interested in receiving our services anymore, then that's on them. If we as a division put all our ducks in a row and we've done everything that we were supposed to do for

them but the youth is resistant to continuing on for a college degree, then why should we be held accountable for that?

*Response 5N:* I'm sorry, but we certainly cannot be held liable for a youth aging out of the system who doesn't want to go to college. What it really comes down to is if they really did receive the education to be able to handle college material. The fact that we can be liable despite our providing reasonable efforts to get the youth prepared for post-secondary education doesn't account for their desire to actually attend college. The truth is that ultimately it's their decision. We just can't force them and we cannot be held liable if we did our efforts and they still didn't go.

*Response 3N:* I think it's a double-edged sword, I think that to some extent DCF should be held accountable, but at the same time so should the educational system. Provide an alternative to post-secondary education and offer some type of skills training like working with their hands and learning a trade profession.

*Response 1N:* I have to agree that DCF should take accountability, but the system is just not designed that way.

### *Central Focus Group*

*Response 7C:* I would love to have more control of my case assigned youths, but I have so many I just can't do it my way. Once I'm allowed to do it my way then I'll take responsibility.

*Response 1C:* I do not think that we should be held accountable for aging- out foster youth's post-secondary educational achievement. The reason why is they are considered adults and we cannot make them do what they don't want to do. At that point they are legal to make their own decisions. As a state agency we already have so many responsibilities that it wouldn't be fair to make us accountable for that. I don't think it would be fair to the agency and put that kind of responsibility on us as social workers. What I do think we should be held accountable for is making sure they have all the information to go to college if they choose too. It can't become a numbers game showing how many aging-out youth we sent to college. That's not fair to the staff or the agency as a whole, but I do think we're on the right track when it comes to making sure that they have the right information.

*Response 3C:* Back 20 years ago we didn't have aging-out foster youth even considering going to college. Honestly, it wasn't even thought about. Only in the past 5 years have I seen more and more aging-out foster youth wanting to go to college. I don't think we should be accountable for how many do go. I mean our successes as a state human services agency shouldn't just be about numbers. It's really about getting our aging-out youth to feel that they can be successful and independent.

#### *South Focus Group*

*Response 3S:* I would say it depends on what the situation is. If the social worker has documented their efforts, engaged them, informed them, and try to steer

them, and all that's documented, then no, I don't feel that we should be. However, if we as an state agency aren't educating our youth and giving them that exposure and encouragement, then I think, yes, in that sense we should be. (Are you doing that now?) Educating them yes, and providing them all the available resources, but of course it is on a need to need basis. We have pamphlets we're giving them to read, we show them websites they can go to where they can access different services, different funds, and what they are qualified to receive. I think in that sense we have made strides to improve their transition to independence. We also have training seminars which enables us to communicate with other offices and find out what they're doing to bring that information back to our office.

Response 8S: I agree that once we cover all the bases then we can't be held accountable for their success or their failure. We are here to provide and disseminate all information we can and wish them the best. To let them know I'm available for you, I'll put you on the right path, I'll give you the right contacts, I'll try to make the transition process manageable, but I don't think we should be held accountable after that transition occurs.

### **Summary Component.**

**Question .4.1.** In your opinion, if you were advising a newly hired New Jersey Division of Children and Families worker about independent living programs that advance foster youth alumni post-secondary educational achievement, what is the most important information you would tell them?

*North Focus Group*

*Response 4N:* Honestly, to just relax and have patience. To have patience because it's a lot of telephone calling. Sometimes it's a lot of begging and pleading on our behalf with abuse cases. If you don't have the patience at to do this job correctly then it's not going to work.

*Response 1N:* I would definitely tell a new hire that they have to get to know their youth. You need to try and figure out where your youth mentally and give them literature or sign them up for life skills. We have to make sure that they understand the all opportunities that they have.

*Response 2N:* I will say make sure you always do what the court order says and be able to advocate for your youth and be supporting of their goals.

*Response 7N:* I'd advise them to create relationships with the all the social workers and understand the independent living programs involved with their youth. Try to make a connection so you're working as a team together.

*Central Focus Group*

*Response 6C:* Don't just assume the youth is doing what they said they would do. You need to have weekly or in some cases daily contact with the youth. I mean you can't just assume that these programs are going to be doing that. Understand that just because they say they are independent living programs you have to be involved with these aging-out youth no matter what. (So keep an avenue of communication open between the social worker and the aging out independent adult?) Yeah, there are so many things out of your control so you

really have to keep the communication going because it's going to fall back on the case worker anyway.

*Response 4C:* I think as a social worker assigned a teenager near aging out, they don't need to pay as much attention to them because they are older, when in fact, it's really the opposite. The adolescents have a foster parent that's being responsible for them, whereas most of our soon to be aging-out teenagers don't, so we need to pay that extra attention to them. You have to put more effort into it because they need us more really.

*Response 3C:* For a new social worker, if one of your foster kids is going into some kind of program try to link them to whatever services you can, because you need to build the support system around them. Kind of take the pressure of yourself and give them room to grow.

#### *South Focus group*

*Response 2S:* What I did is I shared information about the Chafee Fund. I started with that and just talking about the benefits of the program and having my workers and I go over the policy and reading and reviewing what that entails.

*Response 7S:* I would really start with the basics because I think that we think that everyone kind of knows what independent is. I think I would start by just explaining what it is and that there are different components to independent living programs. There are people say independent living programs but what they mean is getting independent living skills. There's a big difference, and sometimes we kind of interchange a lot of things and it can be confusing. Make sure that

they understand what independent living actually means and how to achieve it.

*Response 6S:* I would let a new social worker know that some of our aging- out teenagers have this perception that if you're educated or successful you're a sell out, you no longer have street credibility. That's what's been going generation to generation, so it may be difficult to try and get that perception out to start working toward being successful by going to college. (So street credibility is valued more than educational achievement to foster youth?) Sadly, in some families yes, it's a cultural thing. Until they start seeing an influx of individuals who actually became successful by going through 4 years of college they will not tend to recognize our role model. With that it's a cultural mindset that needs to be adjusted and changed if they want to have something in the future to maintain some type of livelihood.

*Response 1S:* I was just going to say, as a new social worker I would just try my best to just expose them to resources so they can try to get that information on their own. Try to direct them to all the resources available for their caseload.

### **Summary of Findings**

The focus group participants were asked questions related to four specific area components. The four components were: (a) New Jersey foster youth development, (b) New Jersey foster youth post-secondary educational achievement, (c) role of the New Jersey social worker, and (d) summary. All four components were designed to address the three research questions.

The first area of questioning focused on the New Jersey foster youth developmental component. Regarding how the state of New Jersey contributes to the development of personal/social characteristics, knowledge, and skills of foster youth toward the transition to adult independence, the North focus group participants pointed out multiple services, like life skills training, to become independent, and how foster youths with legal trouble or mental health issues were disqualified from many state services. A North participant believed that while the services were available there were multiple problems concerning it, including, but not limited to, the reactionary response to how funds are being spent, geographical inconsistencies, and the manipulation of the state foster care system by the foster youths themselves. The Central focus group participants generally agreed that while New Jersey state services are available, the foster youths need more emotional support that seems to fall to the state social worker to provide, in addition to meeting realistic goal setting standards regarding their transition to adulthood. The South focus group participants pointed out issues regarding how the state of New Jersey responds to foster youth diagnosed with mental health issues. Unfortunately, it seems that many state programs disqualify these adolescents because the expectations for these aging-out foster youth are not as high as the expectation for stable, aging-out foster youth. Current state programs are in place to teach foster youths basic responsibilities, such as how to open and manage a bank account, pay monthly bills, create a resume, and interview for a job, however generally it seems the foster youths seem to be missing a mentor who will help them “with the whole tying it together.” With regard to New Jersey Division of Children and Families policy and what emphasis is placed on foster youth personal/social development, the



North focus group participants had differing opinions. Most participants believed that the foster youth would make their own choices despite the social workers best efforts to encourage them to make practical social and personal decisions. Several participants cited the state of New Jersey's requirement of nurturing personal memories, maintaining family ties, and providing them with a sense of being part of their community. One example discussed was providing the foster youth with family photo albums, particularly for those foster youth that are slated to be adopted. Another example was keeping a foster youth in the same community when they get placed because they can keep the same friends, same connections, and familiarity of their surroundings. The Central focus group participants were in agreement that no Division of Children and Families policy focused on social and personal development at all. The South focus group participants also agreed that there did not seem to be any policy, and, if a policy did exist, the state of New Jersey was failing as it pertains to its implementation regarding social workers. With regard to New Jersey Division of Children and Families policy and what emphasis is placed on foster youth academic development, the North focus group participants agreed that this was tied to geographical location. For varying reasons some urban school districts are more supportive than others concerning foster care and obviously some urban districts have better school systems than others. Whereas the Central focus group participants believed that academic development is probably one of the top aspects of what the state of New Jersey tries to focus on particularly when it comes to policy. Some examples provided by the participants included that when a foster care adolescent graduates from high school the emphasis is on both making sure that they can gain employment or have the option to pursue a post-secondary education or

alternatively learn a vocational skill. The South focus group participants stated that, while it was unclear if academic development was emphasized, there certainly is an expectation. An example cited by a participant was that as the foster youth gets closer to the age of 18, if they choose to continue to receive services from the state, they will have to create a signed transitional plan in which they agree to either go to college or they have to be employed at least 30 hours a week in order to maintain an open Division of Children and Families case. With regard to New Jersey Division of Children and Families policy and what emphasis is placed on foster youth career development, the North focus group participants believed strongly that it depended on the individual foster youth. However, all participants felt it was important to assess each child and attempt to help them as much as possible to reach their own goals based on the adolescent's ability. The Central focus group participants were also in agreement with the North focus group participants and even added that more career programs should be in place statewide. Conversely, the South focus group participants believed strongly that the career development programs currently in place already "cover the entire gambit" of options available to the aging-out foster youth when considering which direction they should go. The participants felt that the problem with career development was that it needs to be transferred from the Division of Children and Families office to the school district, and the school system should then have some type of communication with the state social worker to look at careers the aging-out foster youth is willing to explore. Regarding what issues need to be addressed to improve how the New Jersey Division of Children and Families should prepare foster youth for the transition to adult independence, the North focus group participants again focused on

the foster youth's desire, mindset, and internal motivation. The Central focus group participants opined that improvements could be made in the dissemination of independent living program information that filters down to the state social workers, and that these programs should be developed in all counties removing the ongoing transportation issue for programs only being run in specific areas of New Jersey. Interestingly, the South focus group participants pointed out that while there are state programs currently in place, it ultimately should come down to the individual social worker taking ownership and responsibility for the aging-out foster youth's transition. Conversely, only one South participant felt that the Department of Children and Families should establish an entire unit strictly based on academic development, career development, or vocational areas of interest for those aging-out adolescents because this would remove the social workers "burden" and lower the caseload of aging-out foster youths they are responsible for at any given time.

The second area of questions focused on the New Jersey foster youth post-secondary educational achievement component. Upon discussion of how the New Jersey Division of Children and Families foster care independent living programs motivate foster youth alumni to aspire a college degree, the North focus group participants affirmed that while there were several programs focused on post-secondary education, "sadly, it isn't for most of our clients" due to the fact that they lack personal interest or motivation. The Central focus group participants concentrated on the financial restraints on aging-out foster youth and the cost of education, with one participant stating, "that if you tell them that there is a way for them to go to college with someone helping them out or paying for it they may decide to give it a shot." Another

participant felt that the financial burdens that college can cause are sometimes too great for them to finish by a certain age. Thus, they will no longer be able to receive certain monetary benefits after a certain age forces them to drop out before achieving their college degree. Yet another participant offered that the problem lies within the lack of agency training and information dissemination to the aging-out foster youth because there are programs and other benefits that may not be utilized to counter financial burdens due to their lack of knowledge. The South focus group participants agreed that while they believed programs are available, the information and training for the case workers to provide to the adolescent is not readily available to them should an aging-out foster youth decide to aspire towards a degree. With regard to why aren't more foster youth alumni that age out of the foster care system utilizing independent living programs for post-secondary education, the North focus group participants had varying opinions. One participant stated that if a foster youth was close to aging out and interested in an extension of benefits or information on what would be available to them they would not be able to get all the information because no one case worker has it because there is too much to keep updated on new policies and/or programs and benefits without proper training. Another participant offered that the physical distance from any particular program was sometimes too far to participate in it. Another participant claimed that mental health problems or behavior issues could render the foster youth ineligible. The Central focus group participants agreed that there was a problem with communication, although they offered different reasons as to where the problem begins. The foster youths are not receiving enough information regarding what is available and many had not been able to have personal attention given to them regarding college specifics. They

also pointed out that because some cases involve abuse and mental health issues, the priority just is not about attending college, as there are too many other more immediate issues that need to be dealt with. The South focus group participants conversely believed there was no one particular answer or hurdle preventing the foster youth from continuing their education. They offered that because of the stigma attached to being in foster care many alumni just opt out in order to disassociate from the state and gain independence. Regarding a policy to stimulate foster youth alumni to want to obtain post-secondary education, the North focus group participants were clear that most of their clients simply would not be initially successful in college, so all that could be done would be to “be blunt” and make it clear to them that if they wanted a college degree they would have to work hard for it because it would not be handed to them. The Central focus group participants had a split response, whereas half of the participants felt that there should be no policy, as it was “not realistic”, the other half believed there should be a policy in place, however, that policy should be focused on the social workers themselves to make sure that the aging-out foster youth had all the necessary information. The South focus group participants were not sure that the issue was about making a policy as much as how it is structured. The consensus participant opinion was to concentrate more on social networking for young adults in order to foster a sense of unity and excitement about going to college. However, if a policy was in place it should be focused on financials in order to transport the adolescents through the Southern region (or other regions of New Jersey) bringing them together in a job fair of sorts, allowing information to be passed to the masses, ensuring that everyone has the same information. With regard to foster care independent living programs being cost effective

toward the advancement of post-secondary educational achievement, the North focus group participants believed that generally they are cost effective because they help foster youth alumni stay in the state foster care system until the age of 23. The Central focus group believed the opposite of the North focus group in that they were not cost effective due to the programs themselves. Participants felt programs set “unrealistic guidelines” which set many aging-out foster youths up for failure. Some participants cited guidelines that mention the adolescent being required to work 40 hours a week, or going to school full time and working 20 hours a week, which in many cases was not within their capabilities. The participants also opined that some independent living programs were cost effective when it came to maintaining the welfare of the young adult, however many were not geared toward the advancement of their higher education. The South focus group participants pointed out that some independent living programs were very good, but the problem is they were so limited and the waiting lists were so long. Some waiting lists were anywhere from 9-18 months. The independent living programs would be more cost effective if the program waiting list time was much shorter or contracts were expanded in order to be able to get more beds available to the Division of Children and Families. Currently, there is no measure of success or way of knowing if the independent living programs are successful because there is no performance driven data or statistical comparisons to measure the cost verses reward. The state funding pays for a bed to be filled and, should one youth no longer use the bed, it is immediately refilled by another foster youth. It would be difficult to actually put a correct opinion on the cost effectiveness of these independent living programs given there really is no analyzed data for the state social workers to go by.

The third area of questions focused on the role of the New Jersey social worker component. With regard to whether departmental training provides an adequate understanding of the standard policies and practices concerning independent living programs used for foster youth post-secondary educational achievement, the North focus group participants believed that departmental training was only mandated for state social workers assigned specifically to the Adolescent Unit. New hires in training also get very limited information about what independent living programs are and the most up to date programs currently being utilized for aging-out foster youth. One participant pointed out that many state social workers are forced to rely on each other's knowledge and common sense due to the lack of adequate departmental training concerning independent living programs. The Central focus group participants offered that in their opinion, they do not believe they really received anywhere near enough departmental training to get a clear understanding of what independent living programs are and the availability requirements. Further, it is believed by most participants that the information passed through policy, which is most often done by email, is solely for the sake of removing liability from the Division of Children and Families administration, as opposed to ensuring that social workers have an understanding of the new information, any policies, and what is available to them. Most deficient and ineffective is that the communication being given to the state social workers is not being passed along uniformly; subsequently, the result most often is that they are unable to be on the same page with each other when it comes to the issue of independent living programs. The South focus group participants were in strong agreement that the departmental training was incompetent and unproductive. One participant stated that a lot of changes needed

to be made to the departmental training concerning independent living programs, not just concentrating on the documentation of a policy, but in regard to the actual practices. Regarding independent living programs that focus on post-secondary education for aging-out foster youth, the South pointed out the same issue as the North: only new hires receive the most current information. With regard to whether geographic location plays any role with the New Jersey Division of Children and Families policy procedures for New Jersey foster youth alumni, the North focus group participants gave an enthusiastic “absolutely” response. One example of why they felt their location played a role was that the suburban and rural areas have many more resources and programs dealing with aging-out independent living programs that extend to ages 22, 23, and 24. Whereas the urban areas only offer one program that may extend up to 1 more year after age 21 and on average there are usually only five spaces available to many adolescents opting for that program. Another reason why geographic location plays a role is that the population in urban areas is usually higher than in rural areas, so their resources are always over-saturated, or they do not really meet the specific needs of the client. The Central focus group participants believed that the urban areas would have a harder time with placement into independent living programs for aging-out foster youth due to higher populations, as well as waiting lists that give preference to aging-out foster youth from local areas verses an urban area. The South focus group generally believed location did not make a difference as it pertained to Division of Children and Families policies and procedures. Interestingly, one participant felt that rural areas had more difficulty when offering aging-out foster youth post-secondary educational opportunities as compared to urban and suburban areas because most state colleges



and universities are located in those areas, making transportation easier for them. With regard to any positive effects of the Federal Chafee Educational and Training Voucher program, the North focus group participants stated that they do not utilize the program. While they could see the benefits of the program, it was still a work in progress; however, they simply did not have enough experience with it, so they were not able to offer much of an opinion. The Central focus group had one participant offer that the Federal Chafee Bill is real beneficial to aging-out foster youth and since the funds are available up until age 22 it gives the adolescent a nice head start, however no participant has ever utilized it to date to offer any other information. The South focus group had only one participant offer an opinion based on office conjecture, but said they had heard a lot of positive things come out about it. Some examples of the positive he has seen were: foster youths have been able to counterbalance certain academic scholarships or money for college books, foster youth can purchase special things that they may need for college, and the funds are open up to recreational activities, such as going away on church groups for overnight stays and going to places and doing things that they normally would not be able to do because they do not have the money. It certainly helps them to become more independent. The aging-out foster youth is able to utilize those Chafee funds to open an electronic bank account, a gasoline account, or even pay the down payment for their security deposit to have a place of their own to rent. With regard to any negative effects of the Federal Chafee Educational and Training Voucher program, the North focus group participants were clear that a major negative was not enough state social workers even understand how to access it, thereby rendering it useless. The Central focus group participants felt it was difficult to

fill out the required forms and to understand how to access it for the aging-out foster youths, as well as when or under what circumstances the foster youth was eligible to utilize it. The South focus group participants agreed that the biggest issues were the lack of knowledge, understanding, and training amongst the state social workers.

Participants believed that they needed to know more about how the Federal Chafee Educational and Training Voucher program works to properly share it with aging-out foster youth. With regard to the New Jersey Division of Children and Families being held accountable for foster youth alumni post-secondary educational achievement, the North focus group participants believed that the Division of Children and Families should be held accountable for all educational achievements, especially if an adolescent has been in the state system for a substantial amount of time. However, while it was their obligation to make sure that that adolescent is educated as much as possible, once they age out of the foster care system and they are no longer interested in receiving state services, the responsibility should be placed solely on the individual. The Central focus group participants shared the opinion of those in the North and offered that the reason why is because they are considered legal adults and the state of New Jersey cannot make them do what they do not want to do. At that point, they are legally able to make their own decisions. As a state human services agency they felt they already have so many responsibilities that it would not be fair to make social workers accountable for post-secondary education success. Nonetheless, they readily agreed that they should be held responsible for ensuring the aging-out foster youth have all the information available to them in order to make a knowledgeable decision for themselves. The South focus group participants believed that if the state social worker has documented all their

efforts, engaged and informed the aging-out adolescent, and tried to steer them toward pursuing a college degree, then they should not be held accountable. One participant summed up the group's opinion as, "We are here to provide and disseminate all the information we can and wish them the best. To let them know I'm available for you, I'll put you on the right path, I'll give you the right contacts, I'll try to make the adult independence transition process manageable, but I do not think we should be held accountable after that transition occurs."

The fourth area of questions focused on the summary component. With regard to advising a newly hired New Jersey Division of Children and Families social worker about independent living programs that advance foster youth alumni post-secondary educational achievement, the North focus group participants offered that a new hire should just relax and have patience, create relationships with the all the state social workers in the office, get to know their individual foster youths, and understand the independent living programs involved with their aging-out foster youth in order to make a connection so you're both working as a team together. The Central focus group participants offered that the new hires should not assume the foster youth is doing what he or she said they would do, have weekly or in some cases daily contact with the foster youth, and not just believe that the state programs are going to be doing that; communication is key. If a new state social worker were to be assigned a near aging-out foster youth teenager, perhaps the thought would be that he or she would not need to pay as much attention to them because the teen is older, however, it is greatly the opposite. The younger, foster youth adolescent has certified foster parents that are responsible for them daily, whereas most of the soon to be aging-out foster youth

teenagers need extra attention for the transition to adulthood and independence. The South focus group participants explained that as far as advice they would start with the basics because it is assumed that everyone sort of knows what being independent means. They would start by just explaining what it actually is and that there are different components to independent living programs. “There are people in independent living programs but what they essentially mean is providing independent living skills. There's a big difference and sometimes we kind of interchange a lot of things and it can be very confusing.” One participant offered that they would “just try to do my best to expose them to resources so the aging-out foster youth can be able to try and get more information on their own, and try to direct them to all the resources available for their caseload.”

### **Summary**

In this chapter, the nature of the study, presentation of data, and summary of findings were presented. Chapter V of this study provides a summary and recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER V SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The purpose of this research study was to investigate the perceptions of New Jersey social workers regarding identifying potential barriers that may exist with foster youth development, independent living programs emphasizing post-secondary education services available to foster youth alumni, and social worker departmental training on their knowledge of such programs. The research study investigated and analyzed qualitative data gathered from the perceptions of New Jersey Division of Children and Families social workers concerning foster care independent living program policy and how it assists in the development of characteristics needed for adult independence after youth age out of the foster care system, examined the knowledge of social workers about their understanding of independent living programs and the practices utilized concerning foster youth post-secondary enrollment and achievement, and lastly, examined if there was a need for social worker supplementary departmental training regarding the purpose of foster care independent living programs. This qualitative research study examined, analyzed, and assessed whether New Jersey social workers believe that foster care independent living programs assist foster youth alumni in supporting their educational needs for adult independence.

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the information collected and make recommendations for future research. This chapter is divided into the following sections: (a) introduction, (b) summary of the study, (c) findings in the research, (d) implications, (e) recommendations, and (h) concluding remarks.

## **Introduction**

In Chapter 1 of this study, I presented: (a) the background of the study, (b) the statement of the problem, (c) the purpose of the study, (d) the research questions, (e) the limitations of the study, (f) the significance of the study, (g) the definitions of terms, and (h) the organization of the study. In Chapter 2, I presented a review of the literature. In Chapter 3, I presented the methodology for the study. This chapter was divided into the following sections: (a) introduction, (b) research methodology, (c) research sample, (d) ethical considerations, (e) informed consent, (f) jury of experts, (g) setting of the study, (h) research procedures & techniques for data collection, (i) instrumentation, (j) data analysis, and (k) summary. In Chapter 4, I provided the presentation and analysis of the data. In Chapter 5 I provide: (a) an introduction, (b) a summary of the study, (c) findings of the research, (d) implications, (e) recommendations for policy changes, (f) recommendations for practice changes, (g) recommendations for future research, and (h) concluding remarks.

## **Summary of the Study**

New Jersey social workers have the burden of accountability in managing the obligations of adolescent foster youth every day. There is intensified strain placed on New Jersey social workers regarding awareness and understanding of the fundamentals essential to balance a secure living environment in conjunction with developing a basis for attainment toward adult independence.

The literature review for this study suggested that there has been significant

progression over the years in foster care, including the capacity to provide independent living programs for the needs of aging-out foster youth. However, the subject of foster care independent living programs needs the data to assess their general efficiency and accomplishment. For this reason, there is no doubt that additional research has to be completed in the area of evaluating the success of foster care independent living programs.

This study was to examine the perceptions of New Jersey social workers regarding foster youth transition to adult independence, the post-secondary achievement through the assistance of foster care independent living programs, and the New Jersey Division of Children and Families training on the policies relating to the practices utilized by state social workers. It was proposed that the analysis of their perceptions would assist them in understanding the impact of independent living programs upon their agency as well as providing guidance toward a future course of action. On account of the responsibility allocated to New Jersey social workers, the Division of Children and Families administrators must comprehend the importance of their role in overseeing the influence concerning these adolescents for transition to adult independence.

### **Findings of the Research**

Research question 1 asked participants to relate transition from foster care to independent living. The district office manager participants were in agreement that there is an emphasis placed on personal/social development. It was clear that at the managerial level, there was a shared opinion that while the state of New Jersey is

headed in the right direction for future generations, the answer seemed to be prevention through positive support relations. These research findings were consistent with Hatton and Brooks (2009) who recommended that state caseworkers make efforts to assist transitioning youth in identifying supportive relationships and maintaining these relationships during the transition to independent living. As it pertains to the focus group participants, again there was a clear consensus that the emphasis needs to be placed on personal/social development. These findings were also consistent with those of Hair, Jager, and Garrett (2002), who stated that teens that have positive relationships with adults outside of their families are more social, less depressed, and have better relationships. Additionally, these research findings were consistent with those of Loman and Siegel (2000) who found a high proportion of foster youth have emotional problems and correlative behavior issues. The focus group participants agreed that greater emotional support and mentoring on their ends are needed, as well as a faster response time on the part of the state of New Jersey to diagnose foster youth mental health issues. These research findings were consistent with those of Massinga and Pecora (2004) who found that youth who had mentors reported lower levels of depression than those who did not have such relationships.

Most of the participants in the district office managers' interviews as well as the focus group sessions believed that the foster youth would make their own choices despite the social workers best mentoring efforts to encourage them to make practical personal and social decisions. However, it was felt that aging-out foster youths might utilize independent living programs more often if they were provided the information concerning availability, which is consistent with the research findings of Massinga and



Pecora (2004), who suggested that mentors should provide needed connections and supports for older children in foster care, along with the research findings of Loman and Siegel (2000), who concluded that being provided assets that expand their life options foster youths may think and behave more conservatively as if they have a future worth protecting.

As it pertains to current New Jersey Division of Children and Families policy, the interview participants were in agreement that no policy specifically focuses on social and personal development at all, or if a policy did exist, the state of New Jersey was failing as it relates to its implementation. These research findings were consistent with that of Loman and Siegel (2000) along with the Westat study (1991) which focused on 10 general foster care skill areas: money management, knowledge about health care, family planning, knowledge about continuing education, skills associated with employment, home management, social skills, obtaining housing, obtaining legal assistance, and finding community resources. As a rule, less than half of the foster youths in the Westat study received skill training in every area. The focus group participants supposed that foster care life skills training should be expanded because social development cannot only be about the basic necessity of foster youth to survive, but also should include focusing on creating a skill set for aging-out foster youths to excel. These research findings were consistent with McMillan and Tucker (1999) who suggested incorporation of “survival skills” into training for independent living.

Research question 2 asked the participants were asked if foster care independent living programs facilitated post-secondary education achievement for aging-out alumni. While all interview participants agreed that the adolescent has to be

self-motivated, if the foster youth lacks motivation there is not much the social workers can do. The focus group participants were split as to where the emphasis to improve foster youth motivation should be placed. The North focus group felt as though it was the social motivational aspect that needed focus, citing the example of going to school proms and dances; whereas the South focus group felt that the academic motivational aspect needed to be stressed, using the example of the intensive life skills camp which focuses on learning about the various post-secondary education paraphernalia available like financial aid grant assistance and completing college documentation properly. The findings are consistent with the research of Lemon, Hines, and Merdinger (2009), who found that independent living program youth were more likely to have received information about financial aid in high school, and were significantly younger when they began college than youth in other foster care.

Upon inquiry as to why so many adolescents age out of the New Jersey foster care system without utilizing the independent living programs discussed in Chapter 4, there was little to no agreement among all participants as to a sole reason. The reasons offered varied from cultural influence based on geographic location, the foster youths internal fortitude or desire to be successful, the foster youth just not having the aptitude or cognitive abilities to thrive academically, and the state social workers miscommunication leading to the aging-out foster youth's lack of awareness as to what independent living programs are available to them. Specifically focusing on the New Jersey state social workers lack of communication regarding the dispersing of accurate information relating to independent living programs, there was disagreement amongst all the participants as to whether this was, in fact, an issue, and those who

acknowledged it as an issue did not agree as to where responsibility for the failure actually lays.

Regarding opinions on policy changes to simulate foster youth into obtaining a post-secondary education, there were participant suggestions to focus on target areas. These target areas are the urban destitute and illegal drug saturated environments of New Jersey where graduation rates are very low. Additionally, improvements needed to be implemented in New Jersey social worker basic training emphasizing on the benefits of independent living programs to high school aged foster care students. The research findings are consistent with those of Montgomery, Donkoh, and Underhill (2006), who found that nearly all studies on the subject of independent living programs reported higher rates of high school enrollment and completion, and vocational school or college attendance. There was also focus group participant agreement that when some of the independent living program policy guidelines were established it was not with an intention toward foster care alumni post-secondary education attainment. As a result, current policy guidelines do not account for the location of certain programs or the distance needed to be traveled by the foster youth in order to participate.

Upon discussion of how the New Jersey Division of Children and Families foster care independent living programs motivate foster youth alumni to aspire to a college degree, the interview participants agreed that if foster youth understand what funding is available to them, they would be motivated to utilize the programs. The North focus group participants felt their clientele lacked the personal interest and desire. The other two focus groups said that it was a matter of financial restraints, however if the foster youths had been provided the information that the state of New Jersey could have

assisted them in eliminating those financial restraints, they “may have given it a shot.” The consensus of the focus group was recognized that independent living programs designed for alumni post-secondary educational achievement were available; however, caseworker accessibility to the information, along with mandatory departmental training to be able to provide dependable one-on-one attention was not readily available to them should foster youth inquire. The research findings are consistent with that of Lemon, Hines and Merdinger (2005), who concluded that recommendations for independent living program services should be obligatory, and should include fostering a relationship between the foster youth and one state social worker, collaborating with foster parents, and providing educational services that encourage preparation for post-secondary education.

Regarding why more foster youth alumni are not utilizing independent living programs, there was an agreement among all participants that reliable, constant mentoring interaction, along with the dissemination of current available information was a huge problem. Nonetheless, there was total agreement amongst all participants that it is the responsibility of the New Jersey social worker to make every effort to manage the aging-out foster youth’s anxiety to the best of their professional ability. These research findings are consistent with that of Munson and McMillan (2006), who found that mentor relationships lasting longer than a year were associated with fewer symptoms of depression. Additionally, there was opinion that perhaps the aging-out foster youth were not utilizing independent living programs because they no longer wanted the stigma and would rather disassociate from the New Jersey foster care system in order to gain individual independence.

Upon discussion of whether or not there should be policies in place to stimulate foster youth to want to obtain post-secondary education, there was not much agreement among the participants. It was clear that the issues concerning the difference in opinions stemmed from the inability of state social workers to put into effect a policy to counter the lack of communication about independent living programs, or the aging-out foster youth's personal motivation as mirrored in earlier discussion.

When discussing if these independent living programs are cost effective, the interview participants felt as though they were; consistent with the research findings of Naccarato and DeLorenzo (2008), who identified studies that suggested that participation in independent living programs had a positive effect on various types of educational attainment. However, the focus group participants supposed that the programs established "unrealistic guidelines" which, in turn, set many aging-out foster youths up for failure. The focus group participants also opined that most programs were cost effective when it came to maintaining social welfare affairs, however many were not geared toward foster care alumni completing a college degree, in part due to the very limited availability of program opportunities, resulting in being placed on long waiting lists, and age limitations restricting access when accepted.

Whatever the case may be, currently there is no measure of success or way of knowing if the independent living programs in New Jersey are beneficial, since there is no performance, data, or statistical comparisons to measure the cost verses reward.

Research question 3 asked participants about their departmental training concerning independent living programs and the standard practices they utilized to

follow procedure. There was no consensus among the participants regarding the state training provided for policies and practices concerning independent living programs. The responses ranged from firm “yes there is training in place,” to “the training is not mandatory and if it is available it is subpar at best.” However, it should be noted that generally policies referenced and followed are usually practice-based, not policy-based.

When discussing the geographical importance concerning the implementation of foster care independent living programs, there was a disagreement with one interview participant who stated that location was not an issue. However, the other two interview participants alleged that since urban locations statistically have more foster youth in the state system, the need for more social programs and funding is allocated to those specific areas. The focus group participants agreed that geographic location absolutely plays a role because the population in urban areas is usually statistically higher than rural areas, so their resources are always over saturated or they do not meet the specific needs of the client.

Regarding the federal Chafee Education and Training Voucher Program, the interview participants’ consensus was that the program has been positive for the advancement of foster youth post-secondary education nationally. On the other hand, the negative is that New Jersey department training concerning the specifics of the program was not provided to all the state districts. The focus group participants had very little to say about the federal Chafee Educational and Training Voucher program because none of the participants ever used the program, however they had heard positive things in other areas of the country. The negative effects were fairly obvious: lack of training, knowledge, and comprehension amongst the focus group participants in

that they did not utilize the program, thereby rendering it ineffective. The research findings are consistent with those of Nixon and Garin Jones (2007), who intended that gaps in program implementation remained an issue of concern, largely related to the states' abilities to collect information regarding the overall Chafee Foster Care Independence Program and the Chafee Education and Training Voucher Program.

All participants agreed that they should not be held accountable for aging-out foster youth post-secondary educational achievement. Generally there was agreement that New Jersey social workers should not and cannot be held accountable for foster care alumni educational achievements so long as the social workers did all they were capable of doing to assist the foster youth. This opinion mirrors earlier dialogue that the New Jersey social workers cannot compel a foster youth to do anything they are not interested in or motivated to do themselves.

With regard to whether departmental training provided an adequate understanding of the standard policies and practices concerning independent living programs, all participants affirmed that the training was nowhere close to sufficient. Furthermore, the focus group participants suggested it was both inept and unproductive. Additionally, the focus group participants felt that only Division of Children and Families new hires received the most current and updated information on independent living programs.

The last area discussed was in regard to advising a newly hired New Jersey Division of Children and Families social worker about independent living programs that advance foster youth alumni post-secondary educational achievement. Most of the

focus group participants agreed that the best advice for a newly hired state social worker was to assist the foster care adolescent who was about to age-out of the system, and not just focus on the young children. They should provide the aging-out foster youth extra attention in meeting their needs for transition into adult independence. The research findings are consistent with those of Nixon and Garin Jones (2007), who noted that while the need for improved data collection and performance assessment was evident, it was also clear that increased attention to, and resources for, foster care alumni was helping more and more potential students achieve their dreams of a college education and a better future.

### **Implications**

The research concerning the perceptions of New Jersey social workers relating to foster care and aging out independent living programs suggests that the majority of New Jersey geographic districts are not efficiently prepared. Most, if not all, New Jersey social workers sampled for this study responded with ambiguity concerning the adulthood needs of foster youths and/or the knowledge of foster care aging out social welfare support programs. The details necessary to provide helpful guidance to aging out foster youth involves specialized departmental training that did not appear to be standard for all state social workers throughout New Jersey.

A structured, statewide, foster care system is imperative to the success of an aging-out foster youth becoming an independent adult. Consequently, in New Jersey there is no information at present on how social worker practices are being administered



or utilized by aging-out foster youth on a consistent basis for achievement statewide. These practice variations may be the result of New Jersey social workers becoming hesitant to adhere to the Division of Children and Families policies with regard to aging out foster youth.

Based on the research findings of this study, in addition to pertinent research contained in recent literature, the implication is that New Jersey social workers must be pragmatic when managing aging-out foster youth to achieve adult independence. New Jersey social workers must properly document their actions in addressing the developmental maturity needs of a foster care adolescent. New Jersey social workers need to understand how to make the most of aging out independent living programs for post-secondary education by means of requisite departmental training. Once proper training is officially completed by all New Jersey Division of Children and Families social workers they may be able to effectively administer aging out foster youths and utilize social networking procedures within their geographic district.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are based on the results and conclusions of this research study. The findings were drawn from the three primary research questions and 18 supplementary questions presented to three district office managers in conjunction with 15 supplementary questions presented to three focus groups of social workers currently working for the New Jersey Division of Children and Families.

## Policy Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this research, the following recommendations for policy are suggested:

1. Annual mandatory training on available independent living programs to make certain social workers are cognizant of all of current options. This training should include annual refresher seminars and courses, updated information on programs/funding changes along with training to include new legislation.
2. New program requirements to ensure uniform application of current options, regardless of the New Jersey social workers personal assessment of the aging out foster youths ability or skills. This could be a “spreadsheet” of all available options that the worker could apply to each youth.
3. A standardized checklist form to ensure the complete submission of all available funding options and programs. This should be adhered to by all New Jersey social workers with information on independent living program applications of programs or funding options.
4. The use of a mandatory “waiver” option informing each aging out foster youth what social services are currently available prior to them “aging out” of foster care. This would require them to legitimately decline these options, should they choose, therefore eliminating the prerequisite of the New Jersey social worker not informing the youth.
5. An active use of social networking options for aging out foster youths to associate and/or connect with similar foster youths in comparable situations. This

should include information sharing and organization of possible social outings with peers and mentors alike in order to nurture social and interpersonal skills.

6. Testing should be required with a specific focus on those with emotional and mental issues for allocation of proper funding for group counseling and individual therapy sessions.

### **Practice Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusions of this research, the following recommendations for practice are suggested:

1. Random audits of New Jersey social workers progress in dealing with aging-out foster youths. This would allow the assessment as to the uniformity of procedural implementation. This audit should emphasize training and official procedure to ensure practice follows policy therefore ensuring statewide uniformity.
2. There should be a compulsory assessment testing to gain insight into each individual foster youth's strengths and weaknesses for developing needs including: emotional, social, academic, and vocational areas. This would allow the New Jersey social workers to guide the foster youth to specific programs that are appropriate for assisting them with a deficiency.
3. New Jersey social workers should submit standardized statewide reports so information can be collected and analyzed. This information can then be

assessed for conclusions to be drawn to determine if independent living programs are cost effective in order to increase future funding to allow better allocation.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on the findings and conclusions of this research, the following recommendations for future research are suggested:

1. A research study to see if New Jersey Division of Children and Families policy practices are being followed by all social workers statewide.
2. A case study of adolescents as they progress through the New Jersey foster care system in order to gauge the success rate of the recommended compulsory assessment.
3. A research study into analysis of the recommended New Jersey standardized statewide reports in order to have a data driven appraisal of the effectiveness of funding and program application.
4. A comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of the uniform application of programs and funding regarding the recommended spreadsheet based on comparison of current statistical information contrary to future rates.
5. This study could be replicated by gathering data from New Jersey Division of Children and Families District Office Managers and Focus Groups of

social workers perceptions to gauge the effectiveness of mandatory training and testing knowledge of independent living programs and funding options available to aging out foster youths leading to post-secondary educational achievement success.

6. A research study on current foster youths to classify information as to what they believe their developmental needs are and how they are being addressed while in the New Jersey foster care system.

### **Concluding Remarks**

There is a widespread notion that it takes a village to raise a child. Although the source is unknown, it is believed to be an African proverb or an aphorism from a Native American tribe. Nevertheless, the expression appears to be particularly accurate. For some adolescents, their village includes time spent in the New Jersey foster care system. During this time period it is the state of New Jersey's responsibility to assist in developing the character of these foster youths. Throughout this progression, New Jersey social workers turn into mentors, role models, and friends who direct foster youths to recognize and take on the responsibility of becoming a productive member of society.

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of New Jersey social workers regarding the achievement of foster care alumni, independent living programs, and the role of the New Jersey Division of Children and Families state agency. Surely the state of New Jersey as a whole experiences the effect of foster care on a daily

basis, but, more importantly, an emphasis on concern for aging out foster youths should be the focus for the future. Prejudiced opinion will continue to permeate society concerning New Jersey foster care until measures are taken to improve the aging-out process for foster youth so that they can become resourceful independent adults.

Even though the primary focus of this dissertation was to determine the perceptions of New Jersey social workers and their role in assisting aging-out foster youths within their geographic district, the implications of this study are apparent. Information gathered from interview sessions and focus group discussions led to the conclusion that more research has to be done in the area of foster care independent living programs in conjunction with post-secondary education. In order for New Jersey Division of Children and Families to initiate policy and practice changes, data must show that foster care independent living programs are cost effective and maximize positive influence for aging out foster youth in New Jersey.

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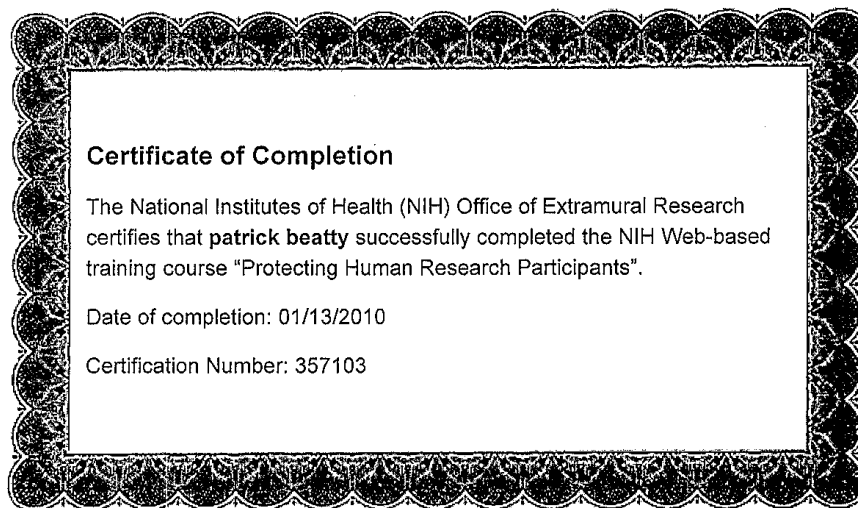


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## Appendices





APR 18 2012

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

Approval Date

**Researcher Affiliation**

The researcher, Patrick Beatty, is a graduate student at Seton Hall University, College of Education and Human Services, working on a doctoral dissertation in the Department of Education Leadership, Management and Policy for the degree of Ed.D.

**Purpose and Duration of the Research**

The purpose of the study is to investigate the attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of New Jersey Division of Children & Family District Office Managers, and social workers concerning foster care independent living programs in conjunction with post-secondary education after New Jersey foster youths "age-out" of the New Jersey foster care system. The expected duration of the District Office Managers' participation will be limited to a sixty minute session consisting of a face-to-face interview conducted by the researcher. The social workers' focus group discussion is expected to take sixty minutes and will be conducted by the researcher.

Expiration Date  
APR 18 2013

**Procedures**

Once written acknowledgement is received, stating social workers' willingness to participate in the study, district office managers will be contacted in order to describe the process, time and date for the interview and focus group discussion of social workers. The procedure for the interview is that the researcher will meet the district office manager at his or her office for a single sixty-minute interview session. Eighteen identical questions will be utilized in each of the three interviews of district office managers. Data will be recorded and transcribed from interviews only upon written consent.

The procedure for the focus group discussion will be that the researcher will solicit social workers from the districts of the district office managers who agreed to participate in the study. The first ten social workers to respond to the letter of solicitation will be selected to participate in the study. The social workers will then be contacted again via a letter sent to their district office, informing him/her of the date, time, and place of meeting for the focus group discussion. The focus group discussions will be led by the researcher and will allow social workers to speak freely on foster care independent living programs through fifteen guided questions.

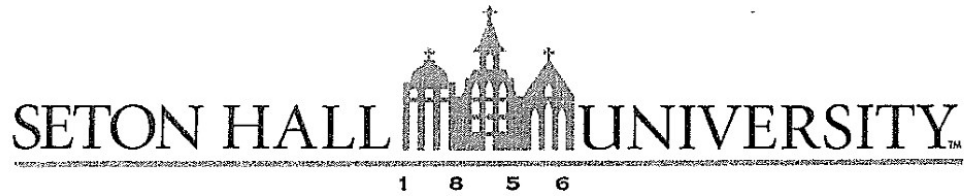
No aspects of the research procedures are experimental in nature.

**Instruments**

No questionnaires or surveys will be utilized in this study. An interview of district office managers will consist of the researcher asking eighteen open-ended questions pertaining to the background, opinions, and experiences of those participants. The open-ended interview questions will explore how foster care independent living programs impact the post-secondary educational achievement of New Jersey foster youth.

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400 South Orange Avenue • South Orange, New Jersey 07079-2685





Focus group discussions will allow a group of social workers to speak freely on how foster care independent living programs impact the post-secondary educational achievement of New Jersey foster youth through fifteen guided questions. An indicative sample of the type of questions that the participants will be asked would be:

A. In your opinion, how does New Jersey foster care contribute to the development of personal/social characteristics, knowledge, and skills of New Jersey foster youth toward the transition to adult independence?

B. In your opinion, how do foster care independent living programs motivate New Jersey foster youth alumni to aspire a college degree?

C. How does the New Jersey Division of Children & Family mandatory departmental training provide participants with adequate understanding of the standard policies and practice's concerning foster care independent living programs utilized for New Jersey foster youth post-secondary educational achievement?

#### Voluntary Nature

Participation in this study is purely voluntary, and the participant has the option of withdrawing from this study at any time that he/she wishes. Refusal to participate, or discontinuing participation at any time, will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled.

#### Anonymity

There is no anonymity for the one to one interviews conducted in this study. The identities of the interview participants will be known only to the researcher. However, the information gathered through the interviews will be used solely for the purposes of analysis and the confidentiality of the interview and of the district will be preserved. No identifying information will be shared with any other individual without the interviewee's express consent. To maintain accuracy and confidentiality, each interview participant will be identified by a coded system. All responses to the focus group discussions will remain anonymous. The participants of the focus groups will be identified by a coded system.

#### Confidentiality

All information that will be shared will be confidential and will be only used for purposes of this research study. The identities of all participants will be kept strictly confidential. In the subsequent analysis of data the participants will be identified solely by geographic number code. No mention of any participant's name will be included in the dissertation. If any circumstance ever required that other confidential information be disclosed, the researcher is required to have the participant's permission in advance.

Expiration Date  
APR 18 2013

Seton Hall University  
Institutional Review Board

APR 18 2012

Approval Date

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**Confidential Records**

All raw data gathered from responses will be confidential. The researcher and his faculty advisor/mentor will have access to review the raw data including recordings, logs, notes, or other research materials that may contain confidential information. No other individual will have access to this information. Only the researcher will do all of the transcriptions of taped interviews and focus group discussions. All raw data will be safely stored and locked in a fireproof cabinet in the researcher's home for a period of three years upon completion of the research study and then be destroyed.

**Risks or Discomforts**

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts from participation in this research study.

**Benefits**

A direct benefit of this research is that participants will have the opportunity to reflect upon their understanding of foster care independent living programs and their impact on the post-secondary education of New Jersey foster youth alumni.

A potential benefit of the knowledge expected to result from this study is that New Jersey policy makers will be able to better evaluate practices utilized governing foster care independent living programs and make possible changes.

**Remuneration**

No remuneration, financial or otherwise, is being offered for participation in the study. Participants will not be required to incur any type of expense as a result of this study.

**Compensation/Medical Treatments for Injured Participants**

There is no risk of injury for participation and no compensation will be offered.

**Alternative Procedures**

There are no alternative procedures or courses of treatment that might be advantageous to the participants as a result of this study. There is no risk of injury for participation in this study.

**Contact Information**

For any pertinent information regarding this research, or the participants rights, please use the following contact information:

Patrick Beatty, Researcher  
Seton Hall University  
College of Education and Human Services  
Department of Education Leadership, Management and Policy  
Jubilee Hall - 407  
400 South Orange Avenue  
South Orange, NJ 07079-2685  
(973) 761-9397

Seton Hall University  
Institutional Review Board

APR 18 2012

Approval Date

College of Education and Human Services  
Department of Education Leadership, Management and Policy  
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Expiration Date  
APR 18 2015



Dr. Anthony Colella, Ph.D., Researcher's Faculty Advisor/Mentor  
Seton Hall University  
College of Education and Human Services  
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Jubilee Hall – 407  
400 South Orange Avenue  
South Orange, NJ 07079-2685  
(973) 761-9397

Seton Hall University  
Institutional Review Board

APR 18 2012

Approval Date

Dr. Mary Ruzicka, Ph.D., Director  
Seton Hall University  
Office of Institutional Review Board  
400 South Orange Avenue  
South Orange, NJ 07079-2685  
(973) 313-6314  
(973) 275-2361 (fax)

Expiration Date  
APR 18 2013

**Permission to Use Audio Tapes**

All interview and/or focus group discussions will be tape recorded using audio tape only. Participant's written signature in the space provided on the last page of this form indicates permission to audio tape the interview and/or focus group discussion. During any audio taping, all participants will be identified by a code number. Only the researcher and his faculty advisor/mentor will have access to, and/or listen to the audio tape recordings. All audio tapes will be transcribed solely by the researcher. All audio tape recordings will be safely stored in a locked fireproof cabinet in the researcher's home for a period of three (3) years upon completion of the research study and then be destroyed.

**Copy of Informed Consent Form**

All participants will be provided with two (2) copies of this Informed Consent Form before participation begins. Please sign and date both copies. Return one (1) copy to the researcher, and keep the other copy for your records. The researcher will retain a copy of this document for at least three (3) years following the conclusion of this study. Signing this Informed Consent Form acknowledges that I have read and understand the material above and agree to participate in the research study.

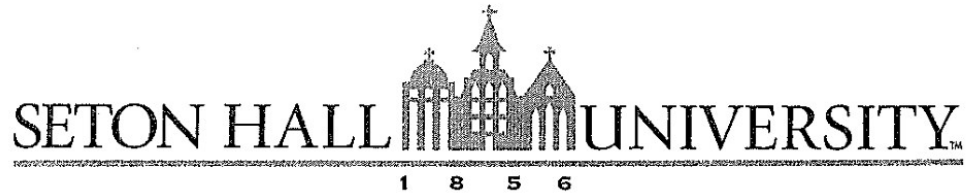
\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant (Please Print Your Name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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*I give my permission for this interview and/or focus group discussion to be audio taped according to the aforementioned provisions.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant (Please Print Your Name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Seton Hall University  
Institutional Review Board

APR 18 2012

Approval Date

Expiration Date  
APR 18 2013

College of Education and Human Services  
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OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL  
REVIEW BOARD

SETON HALL UNIVERSITY

April 18, 2012

Patrick Beatty  
331 Justison St, Apt 704  
Wilmington, DE 19801

Dear Mr. Beatty,

The Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board has reviewed and approved as submitted under expedited review your research proposal entitled "A Qualitative Study Exploring the Perceptions of New Jersey Division of Children & Family Social Workers Concerning Independent Living Programs in Conjunction with Post-Secondary Education After New Jersey Foster Youth "Age-Out" of the Foster Care System." The IRB reserves the right to recall the proposal at any time for full review.

Enclosed for your records are the signed Request for Approval form and the stamped original Consent Form. Make copies only of this stamped Consent Form.

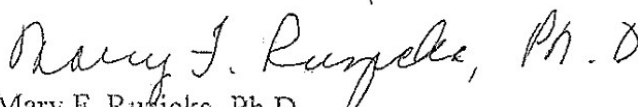
The Institutional Review Board approval of your research is valid for a one-year period from the date of this letter. During this time, any changes to the research protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to their implementation.

According to federal regulations, continuing review of already approved research is mandated to take place at least 12 months after this initial approval. You will receive communication from the IRB Office for this several months before the anniversary date of your initial approval.

Thank you for your cooperation.

*In harmony with federal regulations, none of the investigators or research staff involved in the study took part in the final decision.*

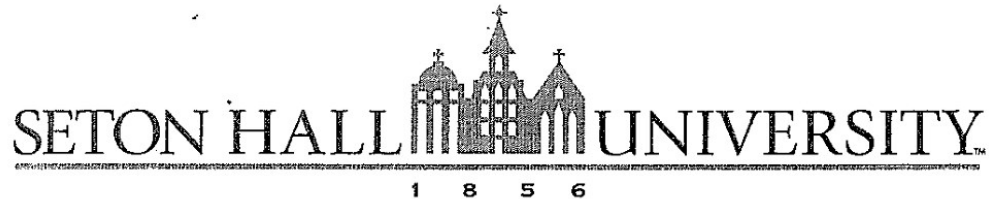
Sincerely,

  
Mary F. Ruzicka, Ph.D.  
Professor  
Director, Institutional Review Board

cc: Dr. Anthony Colella







March 20, 2013

Patrick Beatty  
331 Justison St, Apt 704  
Wilmington, DE 19801

Dear Mr. Beatty,

The Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your Continuing Review application for your research proposal entitled "A Qualitative Study Exploring the Perceptions of New Jersey Division of Children & Family Social Workers Concerning Independent Living Programs in Conjunction with Post-Secondary Education After New Jersey Foster Youth "Age-Out" of the Foster Care System".

You are hereby granted another 12-month approval, effective April 18, 2013, for data analysis only.

If any changes are desired in this protocol, they must be submitted to the IRB for approval before implementation.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Mary F. Ruzicka, Ph.D.

Mary F. Ruzicka, Ph.D.  
Professor  
Director, Institutional Review Board

cc: Dr. Anthony Colella





March 17, 2014

Patrick Beatty  
331 Justison St, Apt 704  
Wilmington, DE 19801

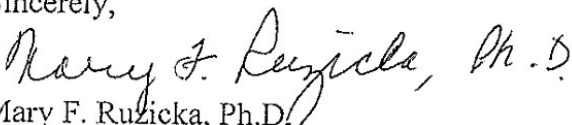
Dear Mr. Beatty,

The Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your Continuing Review application for your research proposal entitled "A Qualitative Study Exploring the Perceptions of New Jersey Division of Children & Family Social Workers Concerning Independent Living Programs in Conjunction with Post-Secondary Education After New Jersey Foster Youth "Age-Out" of the Foster Care System".

You are hereby granted another 12-month approval, effective April 18, 2014, for data analysis only.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

  
Mary F. Ruzicka, Ph.D.  
Professor  
Director, Institutional Review Board

cc: Dr. Anthony Colella

Please review Seton Hall University IRB's Policies and Procedures on website (<http://www.provost.shu.edu/IRB>) for more information. Please note the following requirements:

**Adverse Reactions:** If any untoward incidents or adverse reactions should develop as a result of this study, you are required to immediately notify in writing the Seton Hall University IRB Director, your sponsor and any federal regulatory institutions which may oversee this research, such as the OHRP or the FDA. If the problem is serious, approval may be withdrawn pending further review by the IRB.

**Amendments:** If you wish to change any aspect of this study, please communicate your request in writing (with revised copies of the protocol and/or informed consent where applicable and the Amendment Form) to the IRB Director. The new procedures cannot be initiated until you receive IRB approval.

**Completion of Study:** Please notify Seton Hall University's IRB Director in writing as soon as the research has been completed, along with any results obtained.

**Non-Compliance:** Any issue of non-compliance to regulations will be reported to Seton Hall University's IRB Director, your sponsor and any federal regulatory institutions which may oversee this research, such as the OHRP or the FDA. If the problem is serious, approval may be withdrawn pending further review by the IRB.

**Renewal:** It is the principal investigator's responsibility to maintain IRB approval. A Continuing Review Form will be mailed to you prior to your initial approval anniversary date. **Note:** No research may be conducted (except to prevent immediate hazards to subjects), no data collected, nor any subjects enrolled after the expiration date.

*In harmony with federal regulations, none of the investigators or research staff involved in the study took part in the final discussion and the vote.*

Office of Institutional Review Board

Presidents Hall • 400 South Orange Avenue • South Orange, New Jersey 07079 • Tel: 973.313.6314 • Fax: 973.275.2361 • [www.shu.edu](http://www.shu.edu)

Patrick Beatty  
Seton Hall University  
College of Education and Human Services  
Jubilee Hall – 407  
400 South Orange Avenue  
South Orange, NJ 07079-2685

**Letter of Permission to Solicit Volunteer Participants**

Dr. Cassandra Simmel  
Lead Consultant for Research & Evaluation  
Office of Performance Management and Accountability  
New Jersey Department of Children & Family  
50 East State Street  
PO Box 717  
Trenton, NJ 08625-0717

Dear Dr. Cassandra Simmel,

Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Patrick Beatty and I am a doctoral candidate at Seton Hall University in the Department of Education Leadership, Management and Policy program within the College of Education and Human Services.

I am currently attempting to complete my doctoral dissertation and my particular area of interest is post-secondary education of New Jersey foster youth alumni. Specifically, I am interested in researching the extent to which New Jersey social workers perceive how foster care independent living programs impact foster youth alumni personal achievement after “aging-out” of the foster care system.

I am requesting formal permission to ask for anonymous volunteers so that I may continue my qualitative research study. With your permission, I will collect qualitative data utilizing one to one interviews with area district office managers, and conduct focus group discussions with area social workers from three (3) distinct geographic (Northern, Central, Southern) Department of Children & Family locations throughout New Jersey. I wish to assure you that all qualitative data will be kept strictly confidential and will be stored in a locked fireproof cabinet within the researcher's home upon completion. I am hoping that you will grant me the opportunity to obtain this valuable relevant qualitative data to complete my research.

In order for me to proceed further under the specific guidelines set forth by the Seton Hall University Instructional Review Board, I am required to have a signed permission document from the Director of the New Jersey Department of Children & Family on official letterhead stating that I may seek volunteer participants. Once permission is officially granted, I will then be able to request for volunteers so that I may continue my qualitative research study. I am enclosing a self-addressed stamped envelope for your convenience to place the granted written permission document to be returned to me by United States Postal Service and be part of my dissertation.



If you need further information concerning this request please contact me direct on my cell phone at (856) 340-8593, or by my personal email at [patricklbeatty@yahoo.com](mailto:patricklbeatty@yahoo.com).

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Beatty', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Patrick Beatty  
Doctoral Candidate, Seton Hall University

State of New Jersey  
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES  
DCF Research Review Committee

## DCF Research Review Committee Protocol Part I: Overview of Procedures

**Purpose:** The Department of Children and Families (DCF) Research Review Committee is responsible for ensuring that research requests are reviewed, approved, and monitored in accordance with relevant NJ State and Federal laws and regulations. The Committee's procedures are pertinent to research requests involving access to DCF clients (children and adults), and field staff as well as confidential DCF client data.

The Committee is composed of staff from the Office of Information Technology and Reporting, the Office of Continuous Quality Improvement, and the Office of Legal Affairs and Licensing. The Committee is chaired by the Director of the Office of Continuous Quality Improvement. This Committee reviews research requests in a timely manner and notifies the applicant about whether or not the project can proceed.

As the State's lead public child welfare agency, DCF's Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) is, by law, the repository of information regarding the reported incidence of child abuse and neglect. As a result, DYFS is frequently the recipient of requests from outside (i.e., non-agency) researchers in the academic and advocacy communities for permission to gain access to DCF/DYFS client case files, workers, or clients themselves in order to conduct child welfare research. State laws and regulations provide explicit protection of the confidentiality of case-specific identifying information maintained by DCF/DYFS and its staff.

The purpose of this protocol is to outline the procedures to be employed by DCF/DYFS in assessing these requests and the conditions that must be satisfied for DCF/DYFS to grant access.

### Definition of Pertinent Terms:

- **Outside Researcher:**

An outside researcher is any person or entity with an academic or professional interest in studying child welfare or family service cases, practices, outcomes, or issues, who is not employed by DCF/DYFS.

- **Bona Fide Research:**

The research must be sincere in design and have a purpose in which:

- The goal(s) of the research are sound, achievable, and





feasible;

- The research design is scientifically valid and defensible and is appropriate to the goal(s) of the research; and
- The results of the proposed research will contribute significantly to the body of existing information on the subject.

**Evaluation Criteria for Research Investigations and Data Sharing:** DCF evaluates requests for research projects that involve primary data as well as secondary data collection and analyses. These requests are evaluated in the context of the Department's mission to serve vulnerable children and families in New Jersey. Researchers must explicitly discuss how their proposed project meets the priorities of one or more of the three DCF Divisions:

1. *Division of Prevention and Community Partnerships (DPCP):* The primary goal of DPCP is to build a continuum of child abuse prevention and intervention programs that are culturally competent, strengths-based, and family-centered, with a strong emphasis on primary child abuse prevention. More information is available at: <http://www.state.nj.us/dcf/prevention/>
2. *Division of Child Behavioral Health Services (DCBHS):* This Division serves children and adolescents with emotional and behavioral health care challenges and their families. DCBHS is committed to providing services based on the needs of the child and family in a family-centered, community-based environment. More information is available at: <http://www.state.nj.us/dcf/behavioral/>
3. *Division of Youth and Family Services:* This Division is New Jersey's lead child protection and child welfare agency, whose mission is to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and to support families. More information is available at: <http://www.state.nj.us/dcf/divisions/dyfs/>

In addition, research project proposals are evaluated on the basis of their potential demands on DCF's personnel and resources, how they might affect service delivery to clients, as well as on their potential contribution to families and children involved with, or at risk of involvement with, child welfare services.

The Committee obtains feedback from the Division Directors about the potential impact of the research on their personnel and services. The final proposal review criteria pertain to examining the extent of the proposed project in terms of its scope and duration.

**Publicly Available Data and Information:** Currently, there are statistics and information available on the DCF website that do not require permission from DCF for access and usage. Several links to these resources are found on the homepage of the DCF Website



under Child Welfare Statistics and Data:

<http://www.state.nj.us/dcf/home/childdata/index.html>

**Application Process for Requests for Access to Confidential Data and/or Conducting Data Collection with Families, Children/Youth, and Staff involved with DCF:**

Researchers from universities, other State or Federal agencies, research institutes, or other entities need to complete an application to apply for access to client data and/or to actively collect data from individuals involved with DCF. The instructions for these applications are available on the DCF Website. Only researchers with established Institutional Review Boards (IRB) are eligible to apply for data collection or access to data. A research project cannot be approved by DCF until IRB approval has been received.

When completing the application(s), researchers are required to discuss the rationale, approach, value, and benefits of the proposed research project. When discussing the benefits of the research proposal, they must identify the potential value to DCF, the children, the community, and to the State. Also, they are required to identify any potential obstacles and complications that could potentially arise from the proposed project.

**Doctoral Student Research Requests:** Doctoral students seeking data access for purposes of completing dissertation theses are eligible to apply, provided that they have documentation from their Committee Chair that he or she will oversee the handling of the data and/or data collection. Doctoral students must complete the application and follow all of the same guidelines discussed in the application **AND** must also provide a co-signer on the application proposal (e.g., dissertation committee chair).

**Applications:** For an application, click on the appropriate link below:

Part II, for research projects involving direct access to clients (children or adults) and/or staff:

<http://www.state.nj.us/dcf/home/childdata/directaccess.doc>

Part III, for research projects involving only client records or data:

<http://www.state.nj.us/dcf/home/childdata/clientdata.doc>



State of New Jersey  
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES  
DCF Research Review Committee

**Part II: Application for Proposed Research Projects  
Involving Access to DCF-Affiliated Staff, Programs, Families,  
Children and Youth**

**Access to Clients:** Research projects that call for direct access to, or observations of, research participants to gather data, require a higher level of scrutiny than those that involve secondary analysis only. In most cases, fully informed consent and minimal risk to the participants are mandatory elements, but there are a few grounds for exemption, which an IRB may consider (e.g., see CFR 46.101).

New Jersey law, *N.J.S.A. 9:6-8.10a.d.*, permits the Department to release records and reports to any person engaged in a bona fide research purpose provided that no names or identifying information shall be made available. In those circumstances where such information is essential to the purpose of the research, by law, permission to release the records and reports must be obtained from the Director of the Division of Youth and Family Services. The DCF Research Review Committee, in consultation with Division Directors (e.g., DPCP, DCBHS) relevant to the proposed research project, will make recommendations to the DYFS Director about the proposed research project.

**Note:** Certain types of research cannot be allowed with children in DCF custody, even with consent, such as medical, pharmaceutical, or cosmetic experiments.

**Required Assurances:** The following are required mandates for research studies involving DCF data and/or access to populations:

- The Principal Investigator(s) and research team agree to furnish DCF a copy of the findings, conclusions, final report, and/or journal articles **prior to publication or dissemination.** (Note: This does not imply you need DCF's permission to publish your results, only that you must first furnish DCF a copy for purposes of review and comment.)

However, if anyone representing DCF serves as an author on the work product, the product will need to be reviewed by DCF Executive Staff and approved by the Department's designee, as determined by the Commissioner. This review process must occur prior to publishing or disseminating the product. Substantial time must be allotted for this review process.

- The Principal Investigator(s) and research team agree to abide by all appropriate State laws and Federal regulations regarding confidentiality and safeguarding of any data or records they access, review, obtain, or maintain in the course of conducting this research. **No identifying information** about any of the research participants or programs is to be divulged or referenced in any published materials, presentations, or other public forum.



To ensure compliance with this mandate, researchers are required to signify their agreement and acknowledge that any disclosures of confidential information could result in penalties pursuant to Title 9.

- Because it is strictly prohibited, the Principal Investigator(s) and research team agree not to share or transfer the data collected or analyzed with anyone not affiliated with the approved project.
- In the event a participant has an adverse reaction as a result of participating in the study, the Principal Investigator(s) and research team agree to promptly notify the appropriate DCF Supervisor or staff member.
- During the term of the research project, all project data must be stored on the hard drive of the Principal Investigator's desktop computer, in his or her locked office at the university campus location, or in an approved location. It is not permissible to store the data on laptops or take the data home. It is prohibited to store data on thumb drives, flash drives, portable external hard drives, DVDs/CDs, or use copiers, fax machines, or other hardware that contain hard drives. When the project has been completed, **the desktop computer hard drive that contained the data must be destroyed and not merely wiped clean.**

#### Submitting Research Applications to DCF:

- Please answer all questions on the following pages.
- Sign, date, and submit the separate "Required Signatures" page via fax to Dr. Cassandra Simmel at 609-984-0507.
- Submit the remainder of the completed application with the required "Attachments" as **one document** in PDF format.
- Send the completed application via email to: [cassandra.simmel@dcf.state.nj.us](mailto:cassandra.simmel@dcf.state.nj.us)
- Once DCF receives the **completed** application and the **signed** and dated signature page, the DCF Research Review Committee will conduct its review. In most situations, it will take approximately one month to complete the review process.
- If you are working with anyone at DCF on this project, list the name, title, and contact information for that person.
- If you have any questions about assembling the application, please contact Dr. Cassandra Simmel at [cassandra.simmel@dcf.state.nj.us](mailto:cassandra.simmel@dcf.state.nj.us)





State of New Jersey  
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES  
DCF Research Review Committee

**Part II: Application for Proposed Research Projects  
Involving Access to DCF-Affiliated Staff, Programs, Families,  
Children and Youth**

**Required Questions:** Complete all questions and attach and label all appropriate documents.

1. **Is this proposal:**  New  Amended  Renewal
  
2. **Name and title of the Principal Investigator:** [Patrick Beatty, Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice, Cecil College One Seahawk Drive North East MD 21901]
  
3. **Title of the Research Proposal:** [A qualitative study exploring the perceptions of New Jersey Division of Children & Family social workers concerning independent living programs in conjunction with post-secondary education after New Jersey foster youth "age-out" of the foster care system]
  
4. **Academic, Agency, or Institutional Affiliation:**  
  
Street Address: [Seton Hall University, College of Education and Human Services, Department of Educational Leadership, Management and Policy, 400 South Orange Avenue, South Orange, NJ, 07079-2685]  
Work Telephone Number: [973-761-9397]  
Fax Number: [973-275-2361]  
Email Address: [patricklbeatty@yahoo.com]
  
5. **Does your agency, institution, or university have an established Institutional Review Board (IRB) in compliance with Title 45 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Part 46? Is it registered with the U.S. Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP)?**  
  
 Yes  No
  
6. **What is the IRB's assurance number?** [00001223]
  
7. **Have you applied for IRB approval/exemption for your proposed project?**  
  
 Yes Attach a copy of your IRB's approval or exemption of your proposed project.  
No attachment  
 No Explain on what basis you claim exemption from IRB review? [Enter]
  
8. **Reason for proposed study:**  
  
 Dissertation/Thesis  
 Other student research  
 Faculty research  
 Pilot study/Demonstration project



Other, describe: [Enter]

9. If your research receives any grant funds, list each funding agency and grant number: [Not Applicable]

**Required Attachments:** Label and attach the following to your application (check if attached):

**Attachment A: One page overview of the entire study.** See attached

**Attachment B: 15-20 page synopsis of the following:** See attached

- a. Rationale and purpose of study;
- b. Proposed methodology;
- c. Specific DCF data that you intend to access and how they will be used (as aggregate data; case level variables);
- d. A complete description of all data collection instruments, if you are requesting access to DCF client or staff populations for data collection purposes. Also, include copies of all instruments in an appendix;
- e. Approximate timeline for when the data are needed;
- f. A description of how you plan on recruiting participants;
- g. A copy of the consent form for all participants specifying:
  1. The time commitment that research participants will assume once they are involved, and
  2. What financial or in-kind compensation participants will receive, if any;
- h. How the anonymity of the participants and the confidentiality of the data will be maintained;
- i. Brief overview of the qualitative or quantitative analysis plan;
- j. The intended benefits of the study, including a specific discussion of how the results will benefit New Jersey and DCF;
- k. The potential consequences of the study; and
- l. Dissemination plan for study results.

**Attachment C: What materials, staff time, and other resources will DCF need to provide for you to accomplish your proposed project?** See attached

**Attachment D: Credentials of the Principal Investigator.** See attached

**Attachment E: Names, titles, and credentials of Co-Investigators, research assistants, and others who will participate in the proposed study and/or have access to the data.** See attached

**Attachment F: Statement of Assurances.** See attached

Send the completed application and attachments as one PDF via email to:  
[cassandra.simmel@dcf.state.nj.us](mailto:cassandra.simmel@dcf.state.nj.us)



State of New Jersey  
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES  
DCF Research Review Committee

**Part II: Application for Proposed Research Projects  
Involving Access to DCF-Affiliated Staff, Programs, Families,  
Children and Youth**

**Required Signatures:**

**Title of the Research Proposal:** [A qualitative study exploring the perceptions of New Jersey Division of Children & Family social workers concerning independent living programs in conjunction with post-secondary education after New Jersey foster youth "age-out" of the foster care system]


Principal Investigator: [Enter name]

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Co-Principal Investigator: [Enter name]

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Doctoral Student Investigator: [Patrick Beatty]

Signature:  Date: 11/7/11

Doctoral Student Advisor: [Dr. Anthony Colella]

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax signed signature page to Dr. Cassandra Simmel at 609-984-0507



**Part II: Application for Proposed Research Projects  
Involving Access to DCF-Affiliated Staff, Programs, Families,  
Children and Youth**

**Required Attachments:**

**Attachment A: One page overview of the entire study.**

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, of the approximately 500,000 children in the foster care system in the United States an estimated 24,000 foster youth "age-out" of care each year nationally and attempt to live independently. These youth are expected to succeed on their own long before a vast majority of their peers. Education is well known to be the leading predictor to adult success. Given their plight from childhood to adulthood it is not surprising that very few youth placed in foster care acquire the necessary resources to enter college. Youth and adolescents who spend time in foster care are much less likely to enroll in post-secondary education institutions, and those who are able to attend are less likely than other types of undergraduates to persist and attain a bachelors degree or certificate.

The purpose of this study is two-fold. The first purpose of this study will investigate and analyze qualitative data gathered from the perceptions of New Jersey Division of Children & Family social workers concerning foster care independent living program policy and how it assists in the development of characteristics needed for adult independence after youth "age-out" of the foster care system. The second purpose of this study will examine the knowledge of social workers about their understanding of independent living programs and the practices utilized concerning foster youth post-secondary enrollment and achievement, and examining if there is a need for social worker supplementary departmental training regarding foster care independent living programs.

Interview questions and focus group questions were developed after thorough research. The qualitative data gathered in this study will examine the components of foster care independent living programs and the perceptions of New Jersey social workers on how those programs impact foster youth alumni who "age-out" of the New Jersey foster care system. The responses to interviews and focus group discussions will be analyzed to determine if there are common trends, patterns, and concerns between Department of Children & Families District Office Managers and social case workers as it factors into foster youth alumni decision making for post-secondary education.

A potential benefit of the knowledge expected to result from this study is that New Jersey policy makers will be able to better evaluate practices utilized governing foster care independent living programs and make possible changes. This is a coursework requirement to complete my doctorate in Education Administration and Supervision at Seton Hall University in South Orange, NJ.





**Attachment B: 15-20 page synopsis of the following:**

**a.** *Rational and purpose of the study;*

The purpose of this study is two-fold. The first purpose of this study will investigate and analyze qualitative data gathered from the perceptions of New Jersey Division of Children & Family social workers concerning foster care independent living program policy and how it assists in the development of characteristics needed for adult independence after youth "age-out" of the foster care system.

The second purpose of this study will examine the knowledge of social workers about their understanding of independent living programs and the practices utilized concerning foster youth post-secondary enrollment and achievement, and examining if there is a need for social worker supplementary departmental training regarding foster care independent living programs.

**b.** *Proposed methodology;*

The New Jersey Department of Human Services Division of Children & Family District Office Managers who agree to be interviewed possess vital information regarding New Jersey foster care for his or her specific geographic district. Interviews with three District Office Managers intend to answer research questions one and two. First, of the aspects relating to successful transition from foster care to adult independent living (personal/social development, academic development, career development) which one does a New Jersey social worker consider a priority? Why? Second, how has New Jersey foster care independent living programs made a significant step toward the advancement of post-secondary educational achievement of foster youth alumni?

Additionally, New Jersey social case worker focus groups will be used to address the third research question, how do social workers perceive their department training concerning foster care independent living programs and the standard practices they utilize to follow policy procedures? Social workers will address this question because of their departmental training within their respective geographic district. The third question, will allow social workers who volunteered to participate in a focus group discussion to analyze and discuss their perceptions on foster care independent living program policy practices.

The participants chosen for this research include three New Jersey Department of Human Services Division of Children & Family District Office Managers and three focus groups of social workers (each focus group consists of six to ten social workers). This researcher chose three District Office Managers by sending out letters of solicitation to specific geographic (one from northern, central, and



southern) areas of New Jersey. The first three District Office Managers to respond to the letter of solicitation were chosen. The focus groups were selected from the same geographic district of the District Office Managers who agreed to participate in the study.

Qualitative design will be used to analyze New Jersey foster care independent living programs. The analysis, interpretation, and reporting of data will be based upon the findings gained in the interview process and focus group discussions. The interviewer will utilize a standardized open-ended interview with identical questions for each responder. By doing so, this will limit the amount of variation between responses of New Jersey Department of Human Services Division of Children & Family District Office Managers and provide the evaluator with more comprehensive data. This data will be analyzed to see common trends, themes, and concerns of a District Office Manager as it may factor into the policy of independent living programs. An analysis of the District Office Managers' responses to central issues will be utilized to group together important findings. To ensure the confidentiality of each of the respondents, the researcher will use coded responses broken into three categories of District Office Managers. The researcher will segment the information and establish themes to make judgments that provide variations in the reliability of diverse conclusions. The interview questions of the District Office Managers will be broken down into the following three categories: foster youth development, foster youth post-secondary achievement, and the role of the social worker. By analyzing each area, the researcher will be able to assess the policy practices of New Jersey foster care independent living programs.

Focus group protocols will be developed to assist in understanding New Jersey social worker perceptions as it relates to independent living programs. Fifteen open-ended questions will be posed to three geographic groups of social workers.

Once the three District Office Managers are selected and committed to volunteering in the study, a follow up phone call and letter will be sent out confirming our conversation and informing each District Office Manager of the details and process involved in conducting the study. Interviews and focus group discussion dates will then be set up on a convenient basis for the researcher, District Office Manager, and social workers.

- c. *Specific DCF data that you intend to access and how they will be used (as aggregate data; case level variables);*

Three one-on-one interviews will be conducted using New Jersey Department of Children & Families District Office Manager's, and three focus group discussions of six to ten New Jersey social workers from specific geographic (Northern, Central, Southern) locations to assess their perceptions of foster youth alumni



and independent living programs. The researcher will use these specific New Jersey locations to represent various New Jersey districts in order to gain data from diverse profiles.

During the New Jersey district office focus group discussion the researcher will act as the moderator. The researcher will personally greet each participant upon arrival and explain in detail the rules of confidentiality requesting that no individual names be used. The researcher will also encourage each participant to speak freely during the focus group discussion and advise that only one person will be allowed to speak at any given time. This will create a relaxed environment that will elicit responses to the questions developed from the literature review findings which are designed to solicit opinions that will provide perspectives into the area of investigation.

Each audio-taped recorded interview and focus group discussion will take place at the specific District office Manager's personal office and the district's conference room as to provide a familiar comfortable setting. Each interview and focus group discussion will be expected to last no more than one hour.

- d. *A complete description of all data collection instruments, if you are requesting access to DCF client or staff populations for data collection purposes. Also, include copies of all instruments in an appendix;*

Each research participant will be provided an informed consent letter regarding information on confidentiality and the details of the research study process. Each participant will be asked to sign a permission release form allowing for the use of their anonymous responses during the research study. Each participant will be asked to give permission for the researcher to use an audio-tape recorder during the research study and for transcription of their anonymous responses within the research study. It will be emphasized to each participant that their names will not be used during the research study process. Upon completion of the one-on-one interview and focus group sessions the audio tapes will be secured in a locked box and later destroyed upon completion of the research study. Each participant will be informed of the date and time, familiar location, length of the session, and the availability of refreshments during the process. The one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions will not interfere with the daily operations of each participant's duties associated with the New Jersey Division of Children & Family.

- e. *Approximate timeline for when the data are needed;*

The approximate timeline to gain access and complete this research is proposed for either the month of December 2011 or January 2012 depending on approval from the State of New Jersey Department of Children & Families Research Review Committee.



f. *A description of how you plan on recruiting participants;*

New Jersey Department of Human Services Division of Children & Family District Office Managers will be recruited via United States mail through a letter of solicitation throughout the northern, central, and southern geographic areas of the state of New Jersey. The first three District Office Managers, one from each specific geographic area of the state of New Jersey, to respond to the letter of solicitation agreeing to participate in the study will be selected. Once three District Office Managers, (one from northern, central, and southern geographic areas of New Jersey) agree to participate in the study, social workers in their respective districts will be recruited via letters sent out to their district office by the researcher. Letters will be sent out to the social workers of those specific districts of the District Office Managers who agreed to participate in the study. This letter will inform the social workers of the proposed study and duration of the study. The first six to ten social workers to respond to the letter agreeing to participate in the study will be utilized.

g. *A copy of the consent form for all participants specifying:*

1. *The time commitment that research participants will assume once they are involved, and*
2. *What financial or in-kind compensation participants will receive, if any;*

Patrick Beatty  
Seton Hall University  
College of Education and Human Services  
Jubilee Hall – 407  
400 South Orange Avenue  
South Orange, NJ 07079-2685

Informed Consent Form

Researcher Affiliation

The researcher, Patrick Beatty, is a graduate student at Seton Hall University, College of Education and Human Services, working on a doctoral dissertation in the Department of Education Leadership, Management and Policy for the degree of Ed.D.

Purpose and Duration of the Research

The purpose of the study is to investigate the attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of New Jersey Division of Children & Family District Office Managers, and social workers concerning foster care independent living programs in conjunction with post-secondary education after New Jersey foster youths “age-out” of the New Jersey foster care system. The expected duration of the District Office Managers participation will be limited to a sixty minute session consisting of a face-to-face interview conducted by the





researcher. The social workers focus group discussion is expected to take sixty minutes and will be conducted by the researcher.

#### Procedures

Once written acknowledgement is received, stating social workers' willingness to participate in the study, district office managers will be contacted in order to describe the process, time and date for the interview and focus group discussion of social workers. The procedure for the interview is that the researcher will meet the district office manager at his or her office for a single sixty-minute interview session. Eighteen identical questions will be utilized in each of the three interviews of district office managers. Data will be recorded and transcribed from interviews only upon written consent.

The procedure for the focus group discussion will be that the researcher will solicit social workers from the districts of the district office managers who agreed to participate in the study. The first six to ten social workers to respond to the letter of solicitation will be selected to participate in the study. The social workers will then be contacted again via a letter sent to their district office, informing him/her of the date, time, and place of meeting for the focus group discussion. The focus group discussions will be led by the researcher and will allow social workers to speak freely on foster care independent living programs through fifteen guided questions.

No aspects of the research procedures are experimental in nature.

#### Instruments

No questionnaires or surveys will be utilized in this study. An interview of district office managers will consist of the researcher asking eighteen open-ended questions pertaining to the background, opinions, and experiences of those participants. The open-ended interview questions will explore how foster care independent living programs impact the post-secondary educational achievement of New Jersey foster youth.

Focus group discussions will allow a group of social workers to speak freely on how foster care independent living programs impact the post-secondary educational achievement of New Jersey foster youth through fifteen guided questions. An indicative sample of the type of questions that the participants will be asked would be:

- A. In your opinion, how does New Jersey foster care contribute to the development of personal/social characteristics, knowledge, and skills of New Jersey foster youth toward the transition to adult independence?
- B. In your opinion, how do foster care independent living programs motivate New Jersey foster youth alumni to aspire a college degree?
- C. How does the New Jersey Division of Children & Family mandatory departmental training provide participants with adequate understanding of the standard policies and practice's concerning foster care independent living programs utilized for New Jersey foster youth post-secondary educational achievement?

#### Voluntary Nature

Participation in this study is purely voluntary, and the participant has the option of withdrawing from this study at any time that he/she wishes. Refusal to participate, or



discontinuing participation at any time, will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled.

#### Anonymity

There is no anonymity for the one to one interviews conducted in this study. The identities of the interview participants will be known only to the researcher. However, the information gathered through the interviews will be used solely for the purposes of analysis and the confidentiality of the interview and of the district will be preserved. No identifying information will be shared with any other individual without the interviewee's express consent. To maintain accuracy and confidentiality, each interview participant will be identified by a coded system. All responses to the focus group discussions will remain anonymous. The participants of the focus groups will be identified by a coded system.

#### Confidentiality

All information that will be shared will be confidential and will be only used for purposes of this research study. The identities of all participants will be kept strictly confidential. In the subsequent analysis of data the participants will be identified solely by geographic number code. No mention of any participant's name will be included in the dissertation. If any circumstance ever required that other confidential information be disclosed, the researcher is required to have the participant's permission in advance.

#### Confidential Records

All raw data gathered from responses will be confidential. The researcher and his faculty advisor/mentor will have access to review the raw data including recordings, logs, notes, or other research materials that may contain confidential information. No other individual will have access to this information. Only the researcher will do all of the transcriptions of taped interviews and focus group discussions. All raw data will be safely stored and locked in a fireproof cabinet in the researcher's home for a period of three years upon completion of the research study and then be destroyed.

#### Risks or Discomforts

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts from participation in this research study.

#### Benefits

A direct benefit of this research is that participants will have the opportunity to reflect upon their understanding of foster care independent living programs and their impact on the post-secondary education of New Jersey foster youth alumni.

A potential benefit of the knowledge expected to result from this study is that New Jersey policy makers will be able to better evaluate practices utilized governing foster care independent living programs and make possible changes.

#### Remuneration

No remuneration, financial or otherwise, is being offered for participation in the study. Participants will not be required to incur any type of expense as a result of this study.

#### Compensation/Medical Treatments for Injured Participants

There is no risk of injury for participation and no compensation will be offered.

#### Alternative Procedures



There are no alternative procedures or courses of treatment that might be advantageous to the participants as a result of this study. There is no risk of injury for participation in this study.

#### Contact Information

For any pertinent information regarding this research, or the participants rights, please use the following contact information:

Patrick Beatty, Researcher  
Seton Hall University  
College of Education and Human Services  
Department of Education Leadership, Management and Policy  
Jubilee Hall - 407  
400 South Orange Avenue  
South Orange, NJ 07079-2685  
(973) 761-9397

Dr. Anthony Colella, Ph.D., Researcher's Faculty Advisor/Mentor  
Seton Hall University  
College of Education and Human Services  
Department of Education Leadership, Management and Policy  
Jubilee Hall – 407  
400 South Orange Avenue  
South Orange, NJ 07079-2685  
(973) 761-9397

Dr. Mary Ruzicka, Ph.D., Director  
Seton Hall University  
Office of Institutional Review Board  
400 South Orange Avenue  
South Orange, NJ 07079-2685  
(973) 313-6314  
(973) 275-2361 (fax)

#### Permission to Use Audio Tapes

All interview and/or focus group discussions will be tape recorded using audio tape only. Participant's written signature in the space provided on the last page of this form indicates permission to audio tape the interview and/or focus group discussion. During any audio taping, all participants will be identified by a code number. Only the researcher and his faculty advisor/mentor will have access to, and/or listen to the audio tape recordings. All audio tapes will be transcribed solely by the researcher. All audio tape recordings will be safely stored in a locked fireproof cabinet in the researcher's home for a period of three (3) years upon completion of the research study and then be destroyed.

#### Copy of Informed Consent Form

All participants will be provided with two (2) copies of this Informed Consent Form before participation begins. Please sign and date both copies. Return one (1) copy to the researcher, and keep the other copy for your records. The researcher will retain a copy of this document for at least three (3) years following the conclusion of this study. Signing this Informed Consent Form acknowledges that I have read and understand the material above and agree to participate in the research study.



---

Participant (Please Print Your Name)

---

Signature of Participant

---

Date

*I give my permission for this interview and/or focus group discussion to be audio taped according to the aforementioned provisions.*

---

Participant (Please Print Your Name)

---

Signature of Participant

---

Date

- h.** *How the anonymity of the participants and the confidentiality of the data will be maintained;*

The subjects will be coded according to position. The data will be stored on tapes and secured in a locked box in my possession. The data will be analyzed using cross-case analysis. The data will be tape-recorded. The tapes will be destroyed three years after completion of the study.

- i.** *Brief overview of the qualitative or quantitative analysis plan;*

The researcher will develop an interview guide based on the research questions. As each interview and focus group discussion unfolds, the researcher will ask unique questions pertaining to the role of the participants. Interview guides ensure good use of limited interview time; they make interviewing multiple subjects more systematic and comprehensive; and they help to keep interactions focused. In keeping with the flexible nature of qualitative research designs, interview guides can be modified over time to focus attention on areas of particular importance, or to exclude questions the researcher has found to be unproductive for the goals of the research.

<<<<<( Interview Questions )>>>>>





The questions used are designed based on the research and the literature review that impact the one-on-one interviews with the New Jersey Division of Children & Family District Office Managers:

1. Background Information
  - 1.1 Why did you enter the field of social work?
  - 1.2 How many years have you worked in the field of social work?
  - 1.3 Why did you become a District Office Manager for the New Jersey Division of Children & Family?
  - 1.4 What is the total number of foster youth in your district?
2. New Jersey Foster Youth Developmental Component
  - 2.1 In your opinion, how does New Jersey foster care contribute to the development of personal/social characteristics, knowledge, and skills of foster youth toward the transition to adult independence?
  - 2.2 With regard to New Jersey Division of Children & Family policy what emphasis is placed on foster youth personal/social development?
  - 2.3 With regard to New Jersey Division of Children & Family policy what emphasis is placed on foster youth academic development?
  - 2.4 With regard to New Jersey Division of Children & Family policy what emphasis is placed on foster youth career development?
  - 2.5 In your opinion, what issues need to be improved on how to prepare New Jersey foster youth for the transition to adult independence?  
Why?
3. New Jersey Foster Youth Post-Secondary Educational Achievement Component
  - 3.1 In your opinion, how do foster care independent living programs motivate foster youth alumni to aspire a college degree?
  - 3.2 In your opinion, why aren't more foster youth alumni that "age-out" of the foster care system to adult independence utilizing independent living programs for post-secondary education?
  - 3.3 Is there an issue with the New Jersey Division of Children & Family policy on how to disperse information concerning foster care independent living programs that assist foster youth alumni to obtain post-secondary education?  
Why?
  - 3.4 In your opinion, how should the New Jersey Division of Children & Family improve their policy to stimulate foster youth alumni to obtain post-secondary education?
  - 3.5 Do you believe foster care independent living programs are cost effective when it comes toward the advancement of foster youth alumni post-secondary educational achievement?



Why?

4. New Jersey Social Worker Component
  - 4.1 Does the New Jersey Division of Children & Family mandatory departmental training provide social workers with adequate understanding of the standard policies and practice's concerning independent living programs for foster youth post-secondary educational achievement?  
How?
  - 4.2 In your opinion, how does geographic location play a role with the policy procedures concerning the implementation of foster care independent living programs to foster youth alumni?
  - 4.3 In your opinion, as a social worker what have been the positive effects when utilizing the Federal Chafee Educational & Training Voucher Program?  
What have been the negative effects?
  - 4.4 In your opinion, to what degree should New Jersey social workers be held accountable for foster youth alumni post-secondary educational achievement?

<<<<<( Focus Group Questions )>>>>>

The questions used are designed based on the research and the literature review that impact the focus group discussions with the New Jersey Division of Children & Family social workers:

1. New Jersey Foster Youth Developmental Component
  - 1.1 How does New Jersey foster care contribute to the development of personal/social characteristics, knowledge, and skills of foster youth toward the transition to adult independence?
  - 1.2 With regard to New Jersey Division of Children & Family policy what emphasis is placed on foster youth personal/social development?
  - 1.3 With regard to New Jersey Division of Children & Family policy what emphasis is placed on foster youth academic development?
  - 1.4 With regard to New Jersey Division of Children & Family policy what emphasis is placed on foster youth career development?
  - 1.5 What issues need to be addressed to improve how the New Jersey foster youth alumni should be prepared for the transition to adult independence?
2. New Jersey Foster Youth Post-Secondary Educational Achievement Component
  - 2.1 How do foster care independent living programs motivate foster youth alumni to aspire a college degree?
  - 2.2 Why aren't more foster youth alumni "aging-out" of the New



Jersey foster care system utilizing independent living programs for post-secondary education?

2.3 How should the New Jersey Division of Children & Family improve their policy to stimulate foster youth alumni to obtain post-secondary education?

2.4 Are foster care independent living programs cost effective when it comes toward the advancement of foster youth alumni post-secondary educational achievement? How?

3. Role of the New Jersey Social Worker Component

3.1 Does the New Jersey Division of Children & Family departmental training provide social workers with adequate understanding of the standard policies and practice's concerning independent living programs used for foster youth post-secondary educational achievement? How?

3.2 How does geographic location play a role with the way policy procedures are implemented to New Jersey foster youth alumni?

1.3 As a social worker, what have been the positive effects when utilizing the Federal Chafee Educational & Training Voucher Program?

3.4 As a social worker, what have been the negative effects when utilizing the Federal Chafee Educational & Training Voucher Program?

3.5 Should New Jersey social workers be held accountable for foster youth alumni post-secondary educational achievement? Why?

4. Summary Component

4.1 If you were advising a newly hired social worker about foster care independent living programs that advance foster youth alumni post-secondary educational achievement, what is the most important information you would tell them?

j. *The intended benefits of the study, including a specific discussion of how the results will benefit New Jersey and DCF;*

The researcher intends to use this qualitative information to complete my doctoral dissertation. The researcher seeks to examine, analyze, and assess the perceptions of New Jersey social workers regarding department policy, utilization, and the benefits of independent living programs toward the relationship with higher educational achievement in New Jersey. Additionally, this qualitative research study will seek to determine the impact independent living programs has on personal character development of foster youth that "age-out" of the New Jersey foster care system. The analysis may assist in developing



future foster youth social program legislation by providing data for funding, the utilization practice of current policy, and to determine if there is a need for improved department training.

k. *The potential consequences of the study;*

There are no anticipated consequences, risks, or discomforts from participation in this research study.

A direct benefit of this research is that participants will have the opportunity to reflect upon their understanding of foster care independent living programs and their impact on the post-secondary education of New Jersey foster youth alumni.

A potential benefit of the knowledge expected to result from this study is that New Jersey policy makers will be able to better evaluate practices utilized governing foster care independent living programs and make possible changes.

l. *Dissemination plan for the study results.*

This is a coursework requirement to complete my doctoral dissertation in Education Administration and Supervision at Seton Hall University in South Orange, NJ.

**Attachment C: What materials, staff time, and other resources will DCF need to provide for you to accomplish your proposed project?**

I will need DCF staff to volunteer their time to accomplish my proposed project.

Patrick Beatty  
Seton Hall University  
College of Education and Human Services  
Jubilee Hall – 407  
400 South Orange Avenue  
South Orange, NJ 07079-2685

Letter of Solicitation to Participate in the Interview Session

Dear New Jersey Division of Children & Family District Office Manager,

My name is Patrick Beatty. I am a doctoral candidate at Seton Hall University in the Department of Education Leadership, Management and Policy program within the College of Education and Human Services.





I am currently attempting to complete my doctoral dissertation and my particular area of interest is post-secondary education of New Jersey foster youth alumni. Specifically, I am interested in researching the extent to which New Jersey social workers perceive how foster care independent living programs impact foster youth alumni personal achievement after "aging-out" of the foster care system.

At three (3) distinct geographic (Northern, Central, Southern) Department of Children & Family locations throughout New Jersey, I would like to individually interview a total of three (3) district office managers, and conduct three (3) social worker focus group discussions in order to investigate how New Jersey Division of Children & Family social workers perceive policy and practices concerning foster care independent living programs in conjunction with post-secondary education of New Jersey foster care alumni.

The expected duration of the district office manager participation will be limited to a sixty-minute session consisting of a face-to-face interview conducted by the researcher. The interview session will take place in the district office manager's personal office during lunch break.

Once I receive written acknowledgement from you stating your willingness to participate in the research study, I will contact you to discuss the process, time and date for the interview. The procedure for the interview is that I will meet you at your personal office for the sixty-minute interview session. I have prepared eighteen questions for the interview and will ask the same questions to you and two other district office managers within the selected subject group in order to complete this study.

I assure you that participation in this qualitative research study is voluntary and that you may withdraw at any time.

Your name and identity will remain anonymous. You will be identified solely by a geographic coded system. Furthermore, I will assure that the information that you share will be held strictly confidential and will only be used for purposes of this research study.

Transcripts and audio tapes will be safely stored in a secure fireproof cabinet in my home for three years upon completion of this research at which point, the transcripts and audio tapes will then be destroyed.

I encourage you to participate with me in this research study. I am confident that the interview session will be engaging and productive as I believe the process of reflection on foster care independent living programs will be beneficial for you and the district office. Additionally, the interview session will provide feedback for New Jersey Division of Children & Family administrators of perceptions regarding foster care independent living program knowledge, policy, and procedure. The findings of this research study can be helpful for future New Jersey Division of Children & Family foster care programs as proven through research endorsed by New Jersey social workers.

If you decide to participate in the interview session, please sign below and place this document in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope provided for this purpose to be returned to me by United States Postal Service and then be part of my dissertation.



At the interview session, please be advised that you will have an opportunity to read over the Informed Consent Form and then sign and date it. All district office managers will receive a completed signed and dated copy of the Informed Consent Form before participation begins.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Patrick Beatty  
Doctoral Candidate, Seton Hall University

*I agree to participate in this research study as is indicated by returning the enclosed letter signed and dated.*

---

Participant (Please Print Your Name)

---

Signature of Participant

---

Date

Patrick Beatty  
Seton Hall University  
College of Education and Human Services  
Jubilee Hall – 407  
400 South Orange Avenue  
South Orange, NJ 07079-2685

Letter of Solicitation to Participate in Focus Group Discussion

Dear New Jersey Division of Children & Family Social Worker,

My name is Patrick Beatty. I am a doctoral candidate at Seton Hall University in the Department of Education Leadership, Management and Policy program within the College of Education and Human Services.

I am currently attempting to complete my doctoral dissertation and my particular area of interest is post-secondary education of New Jersey foster youth alumni. Specifically, I am interested in researching the extent to which New Jersey social workers perceive how foster care independent living programs impact foster youth alumni personal achievement after “aging-out” of the foster care system.



At three (3) distinct geographic (Northern, Central, Southern) Department of Children & Family locations throughout New Jersey, I would like to individually interview a total of three (3) district office managers, and conduct three (3) social worker focus group discussions in order to investigate how New Jersey Division of Children & Family social workers perceive policy and practices concerning foster care independent living programs in conjunction with post-secondary education of New Jersey foster care alumni.

The expected duration of the social worker participation will be limited to a sixty-minute focus group discussion conducted by the researcher. The focus group session will take place in the district office conference room during lunch break.

The first ten (10) New Jersey social workers in your district office to respond will be selected to participate in the study. If you are one of the first ten New Jersey social workers to respond, I will contact you via a letter sent to your district office informing you of the date, time, and location of meeting in your building for the focus group discussion. The focus group discussion will be a group interview led by the researcher and will allow you to speak freely on foster care independent living programs through fifteen guided questions.

I assure you that participation in this qualitative research study is voluntary and that you may withdraw at any time.

Your name and identity will remain anonymous. You will be identified solely by a geographic coded system. Furthermore, I will assure that the information that you share will be held strictly confidential and will only be used for purposes of this research study.

Transcripts and audio tapes will be safely stored in a secure fireproof cabinet in my home for three years upon completion of this research at which point, the transcripts and audio tapes will then be destroyed.

I encourage you to participate with me in this research study. I am confident that the focus group discussion will be engaging and productive as I believe the process of reflection on foster care independent living programs will be beneficial for you and the district office. Additionally, the focus group discussion will provide feedback for New Jersey Division of Children & Family administrators of perceptions regarding foster care independent living program knowledge, policy, and procedure. The findings of this research study can be helpful for future New Jersey Division of Children & Family foster care programs as proven through research endorsed by New Jersey social workers.

If you decide to participate in the focus group discussion, please sign below and place this document in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided for this purpose located in the main office of your district to be returned to me by United States Postal Service and then be part of my dissertation.

At the focus group discussion, please be advised that you will have an opportunity to read over the Informed Consent Form and then sign and date it. All participants will receive a completed signed and dated copy of the Informed Consent Form before participation begins.

Thank you for your consideration.



Sincerely,

Patrick Beatty  
Doctoral Candidate, Seton Hall University

*I agree to participate in this research study as is indicated by returning the enclosed letter signed and dated.*

---

Participant (Please Print Your Name)

---

Signature of Participant

---

Date

**Attachment D: Credentials of the Principal Investigator.**

I have an A.A. degree in Arts & Sciences and an A.A.S. degree in Law Enforcement from Gloucester County College in Sewell, NJ. I have a B.A. degree in Law & Justice from Rowan University in Glassboro, NJ. I have an M.S. degree in Environmental Protection & Safety Management from Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia PA. I have an Ed.S. degree in Education Administration and Supervision from Seton Hall University in South Orange, NJ.

I have twenty years of New Jersey Police Training Commission certified law enforcement experience as a police officer with the Wildwood City Police Department, Deptford Township Police Department, and the New Jersey Department of Human Services Police Department. I am an Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice at Cecil College in North East Maryland directing programs in Law Enforcement, Corrections, and Paralegal Studies.

I have completed the required coursework for the doctoral program in Education Administration and Supervision at Seton Hall University in South Orange, NJ.

**Attachment E: Names, titles, and credentials of Co-Investigators, research assistants, and others who will participate in the proposed study and/or have access to the data.**

Dr. Anthony Colella, Ph.D., (Principal Investigator's Faculty Advisor/Mentor)





Seton Hall University  
College of Education and Human Services  
Department of Educational Leadership, Management and Policy  
Jubilee Hall – 407  
400 South Orange Avenue  
South Orange, NJ 07079-2685  
(973) 761-9397

- ❖ DCF personnel who have already given the Principal Investigator verbal permission to volunteer as a participant in the DOM interview session of the research study include:
- ✓ Essex County – Newark Northeast LO # 564
- ✓ Ocean County – Ocean North LO # 672
- ✓ Salem County – Salem LO # 760

**Attachment F: Statement of Assurances.**

To Be Determined



From: Cassandra Simmel [[Cassandra.Simmel@dcf.state.nj.us](mailto:Cassandra.Simmel@dcf.state.nj.us)]  
Sent: Tuesday, December 20, 2011 11:26 AM  
To: Patrick L. Beatty  
Cc: Sharon Aitken  
Subject: DCF research

Hi Patrick,

The DCF Research Review committee met last week and we have reviewed your modifications to your original proposal about a qualitative study on the DYFS perception of aging out youth. We have approved your proposal and you can now move forward with the project. We will be in contact next year to see how your progress is coming along.

In your modified proposal, you asked that we give our written permission to you to contact select Local Offices. You may use this email notification as the official communication from our office, granting our approval for you to contact these LOs. As such, I am copying Sharon Aitken, the assistant to Christine Norbut-Mozes, the Assistant Commissioner so she can have this on file.

Please let me know if you have any further questions.

Thanks,  
Dr. Simmel

\*\*\*\*\*

Cassandra Simmel, MSW, Ph.D.  
Lead Consultant for Research & Evaluation  
Office of Performance Management and Accountability  
NJ Department of Children and Families  
[Cassandra.Simmel@dcf.state.nj.us](mailto:Cassandra.Simmel@dcf.state.nj.us)<<mailto:Cassandra.Simmel@dcf.state.nj.us>>  
{Newark} 973-648-4471  
{Trenton} 609-888-7097

This E-mail, including any attachments, may be intended solely for the personal and confidential use of the sender and recipient(s) named above. This message may include advisory, consultative and/or deliberative material and, as such, would be privileged and confidential and not a public document. Any Information in this e-mail identifying a client of the Department of Human Services or the Department of Children and Families is confidential. If you have received this e-mail in error, you must not review, transmit, convert to hard copy, copy, use or disseminate this e-mail or any attachments to it and you must delete this message. You are requested to notify the sender by return e-mail.

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Patrick Beatty  
Seton Hall University  
College of Education and Human Services  
Jubilee Hall – 407  
400 South Orange Avenue  
South Orange, NJ 07079-2685

## Letter of Solicitation to Participate in the Interview Session

Dear New Jersey Division of Children & Family District Office Manager,

My name is Patrick Beatty. I am a doctoral candidate at Seton Hall University in the Department of Education Leadership, Management and Policy program within the College of Education and Human Services.

I am currently attempting to complete my doctoral dissertation and my particular area of interest is post-secondary education of New Jersey foster youth alumni. Specifically, I am interested in researching the extent to which New Jersey social workers perceive how foster care independent living programs impact foster youth alumni personal achievement after “aging-out” of the foster care system.

At three (3) distinct geographic (Northern, Central, Southern) Department of Children & Family locations throughout New Jersey, I would like to individually interview a total of three (3) district office managers, and conduct three (3) social worker focus group discussions in order to investigate how New Jersey Division of Children & Family social workers perceive policy and practices concerning foster care independent living programs in conjunction with post-secondary education of New Jersey foster care alumni.

The expected duration of the district office manager participation will be limited to a sixty-minute session consisting of a face-to-face interview conducted by the researcher.

Once I receive written acknowledgement from you stating your willingness to participate in the research study, I will contact you to discuss the process, time and date for the interview. The procedure for the interview is that I will meet you at your personal office for the sixty-minute interview session. I have prepared eighteen questions for the interview and will ask the same questions to you and two other district office managers within the selected subject group in order to complete this study.

I assure you that participation in this qualitative research study is voluntary and that you may withdraw at any time.

Your name and identity will remain anonymous. You will be identified solely by a geographic coded system. Furthermore, I will assure that the information that you share will be held strictly confidential and will only be used for purposes of this research study.

College of Education and Human Services  
Department of Education Leadership, Management and Policy  
Tel: 973.761.9397  
400 South Orange Avenue • South Orange, New Jersey 07079-2685



Transcripts and audio tapes will be safely stored in a secure fireproof cabinet in my home for three years upon completion of this research at which point, the transcripts and audio tapes will then be destroyed.

I encourage you to participate with me in this research study. I am confident that the interview session will be engaging and productive as I believe the process of reflection on foster care independent living programs will be beneficial for you and the district office. Additionally, the interview session will provide feedback for New Jersey Division of Children & Family administrators of perceptions regarding foster care independent living program knowledge, policy, and procedure. The findings of this research study can be helpful for future New Jersey Division of Children & Family foster care programs as proven through research endorsed by New Jersey social workers.

If you decide to participate in the interview session, please sign below and place this document in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope provided for this purpose to be returned to me by United States Postal Service and then be part of my dissertation.

At the interview session, please be advised that you will have an opportunity to read over the Informed Consent Form and then sign and date it. All district office managers will receive a completed signed and dated copy of the Informed Consent Form before participation begins.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Patrick Beatty  
 Doctoral Candidate, Seton Hall University

*I agree to participate in this research study as is indicated by returning the enclosed letter signed and dated.*

---

Participant (Please Print Your Name)

---

Signature of Participant

---

Date

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Seton Hall University  
College of Education and Human Services  
Jubilee Hall – 407  
400 South Orange Avenue  
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## Letter of Solicitation to Participate in Focus Group Discussion

Dear New Jersey Division of Children & Family Social Worker,

My name is Patrick Beatty. I am a doctoral candidate at Seton Hall University in the Department of Education Leadership, Management and Policy program within the College of Education and Human Services.

I am currently attempting to complete my doctoral dissertation and my particular area of interest is post-secondary education of New Jersey foster youth alumni. Specifically, I am interested in researching the extent to which New Jersey social workers perceive how foster care independent living programs impact foster youth alumni personal achievement after "aging-out" of the foster care system.

At three (3) distinct geographic (Northern, Central, Southern) Department of Children & Family locations throughout New Jersey, I would like to individually interview a total of three (3) district office managers, and conduct three (3) social worker focus group discussions in order to investigate how New Jersey Division of Children & Family social workers perceive policy and practices concerning foster care independent living programs in conjunction with post-secondary education of New Jersey foster care alumni.

The expected duration of the social worker participation will be limited to a sixty-minute focus group discussion conducted by the researcher.

The first ten (10) New Jersey social workers in your district office to respond to this letter will be selected to participate in the study. If you are one of the first ten New Jersey social workers to respond to this letter, I will contact you via a letter sent to your district office informing you of the date, time, and location of meeting in your building for the focus group discussion. The focus group discussion will be a group interview led by the researcher and will allow you to speak freely on foster care independent living programs through fifteen guided questions.

I assure you that participation in this qualitative research study is voluntary and that you may withdraw at any time.

Your name and identity will remain anonymous. You will be identified solely by a geographic coded system. Furthermore, I will assure that the information that you share will be held strictly confidential and will only be used for purposes of this research study.

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Transcripts and audio tapes will be safely stored in a secure fireproof cabinet in my home for three years upon completion of this research at which point, the transcripts and audio tapes will then be destroyed.

I encourage you to participate with me in this research study. I am confident that the focus group discussion will be engaging and productive as I believe the process of reflection on foster care independent living programs will be beneficial for you and the district office. Additionally, the focus group discussion will provide feedback for New Jersey Division of Children & Family administrators of perceptions regarding foster care independent living program knowledge, policy, and procedure. The findings of this research study can be helpful for future New Jersey Division of Children & Family foster care programs as proven through research endorsed by New Jersey social workers.

If you decide to participate in the focus group discussion, please sign below and place this document in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided for this purpose located in the main office of your district to be returned to me by United States Postal Service and then be part of my dissertation.

At the focus group discussion, please be advised that you will have an opportunity to read over the Informed Consent Form and then sign and date it. All participants will receive a completed signed and dated copy of the Informed Consent Form before participation begins.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Patrick Beatty  
Doctoral Candidate, Seton Hall University

*I agree to participate in this research study as is indicated by returning the enclosed letter signed and dated.*

---

Participant (Please Print Your Name)

---

Signature of Participant

---

Date

College of Education and Human Services  
Department of Education Leadership, Management and Policy  
Tel: 973.761.9397  
400 South Orange Avenue • South Orange, New Jersey 07079-2685

Seton Hall University  
College of Education and Human Services  
Dissertation Defense Result

Candidate Name: DATRICK BEATTY

Date: 10/15/14

Department: Ed. Leadership, Management + Policy

Program:

Traditional Ed.D

Executive Ed.D (Cohort # \_\_\_\_\_)

Higher Education

A QUALITATIVE STUDY EXPLORING THE PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL WORKERS CONCERNING INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAMS IN CONJUNCTION WITH POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION AFTER NEW JERSEY FOSTER YOUTH "AGE-OUT" OF THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM.

Dissertation Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Mentor: ANTHONY J. COLELLA, PH.D.

Defense Result:

Pass

Pass with Minor Revisions

Pass with Major Revisions

Did not Pass

Mentor Signature: 

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