A Future for Foster Youth

Opening the Doors for the Next Generation

MARCUS GRANT

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Source: Danilevich

Abstract

The issue of foster children aging out of care and services has been an issue for quite some time. There are many concerns related to their care and needs. While in the foster care system, services and programs are typically tailored to help support these children and get them to 18 years old. College is often available and paid for to help those aging out of foster care, but what happens to those who do not take that path? College can be stressful and challenging for students with a strong support system. Those aging out of foster care often have limited support systems. These individuals encounter many challenges in their life, and it impacts them personally as well as economically. Acknowledgment of the needs of individuals aging out of foster care and entering the adult world is a tremendous issue that must be addressed. This paper aims to explore the needs of these individuals by looking at current programs implemented to help with entering the world. Additionally, exploring new programs to help give nearing and former aging out foster children a better opportunity to learn skills that can aid them personally and professionally in the real world. By understanding the foster care system's inner workings, the research aims to elicit an understanding of the issues that have been dealt with and showcase emerging issues that threaten the futures of current foster children. There have been increasing numbers of incarcerated foster children, becoming addicts, and unemployed over the years due to a lack of programs to help them before, during, and after they age out. New strategies and programs must be implemented to prepare them for this life adjustment. Ultimately, this will allow them to gain skills, confidence, support, and the tools to help them build a successful future for themselves.

Source: Wocintechchat

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Introduction

Over the years advancements have been made to change the stigma related to foster care. Systems like aged-based group homes and trauma informed care have yielded positive results (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, "Foster Care: What It Is and How It Works"). As such, issues relating to foster care children are of particular concern, especially when looking at the economic impact that it costs Florida and the rest of the United States. In recent years, homelessness and the number of incarcerations have increased due to children of the foster care system aging out and not having an understanding of how to navigate life as an adult. Aging out is not a new issue. New procedures and early interventions should be put in place to deal with the growing number of children that are coming into foster care system. This paper aims to look at some of the programs in the United States, look into some missed opportunities, and establish a social media campaign and interactive website that will be a hub of information for youth and supportive staff and community supporters.
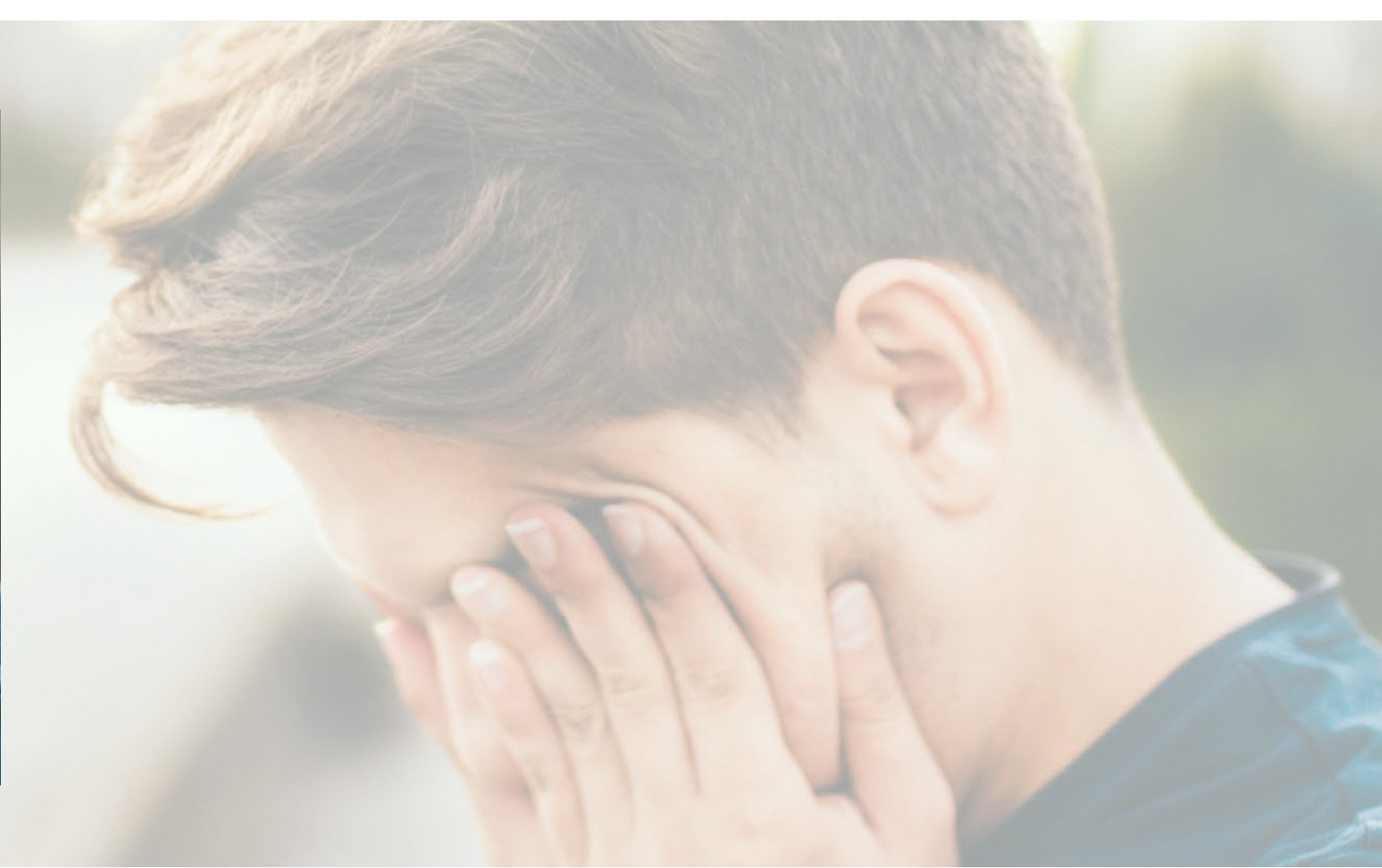

I'M NOT READY!

Source: Thang

Source: Şahin

Research Problem

A significant number of individuals have limited understanding and awareness of the difficulties that foster children face after leaving the system. Additionally, there is no straightforward and centralized method of identifying the essential resources required to aid underprivileged foster youth.

Problem Statement

This research aims to determine what factors inhibit foster care children's futures and explore available options to break down some of the traumatic barriers they face. The significance of this information will provide an understanding of new systems that can be implemented, further education and training for staff and caregivers, and open the doors of communication and involvement by the community and state.
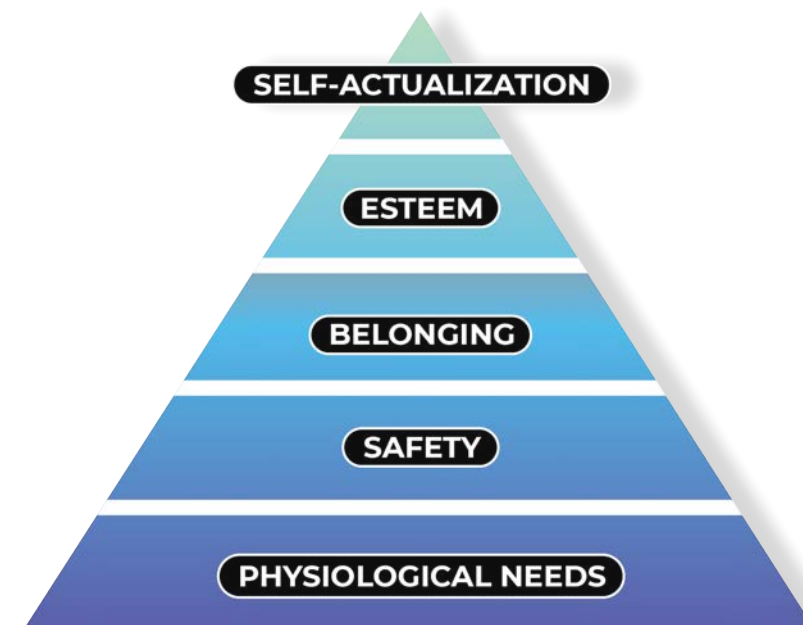
Objectives

1 Create awareness about aging out foster youth using a targeted social media and poster series that distributed to schools, caseworkers, mental agencies, divergent programs, non-profits (kids and teens), and out-of-school suspension programs.

2 Connect foster youth with programs that will allow them to grow and see a positive outcome in their future.

3 Gain the support of business owners, community leaders, and government leaders to help acquire the funding needed to create vocational skills training, educational development, and internship programs.

Knowledge Gap

To the best of our knowledge, there are no foster care transition facilities that can help conduct in-depth screenings (physically, emotionally, mentally) assisting in proper placement for foster children. So far, the system has been designed to move children out of their negative environment and place them as quickly as possible to help reduce trauma due to the sudden disruption in their lives. Unfortuanately, this lack of checks and balances cause more harm than good.

Research has shown that there are currently 17 facilities throughout Florida that provide housing for foster children aging out of the traditional foster care system that ranges in ages from 18 to 25. Housing and basic transitional skills are offered only three facilities (Villages of Hope; Transitional Living Center; Vita Nova). These facilities provide education, support, independent living training, and personal responsibility training gearing toward foster youth.

Studies have shown "that children in foster care have higher rates of various mental health disorders, including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), depression, anxiety, oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), conduct disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), reactive attachment disorder, and behavioral problems, as compared

SELF-ACTUALIZATION
ESTEEM
BELONGING
SAFETY
PHYSIOLOGICAL NEEDS

with the general population (Greiner and Beal). Therefore, these issues make it challenging for these to children within a stable home. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is an essential resource that breaks down common threads (medical needs; belonging needs; psychological needs; self-actualization needs) that can assist in combatting some of the issues that plague foster youth and adults.

– Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a theory that breaks down a 5-tier model of human needs as hierarchical levels that include:

- physiological needs - food and clothing
- safety needs - such as job security
- love and belonging needs - friendship
- esteem - respect and recognition
- self-actualization - desire to be the most someone can be

Being able to "live your best life" is something that people often say but in reality it requires a series of elements "to launch a successful the outcome(s)". If basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing are not met then one is not able to move up Maslow's hierarchy to self-actualization. Many foster children face these barriers as they age out of the foster system. However, if interventions are implemented these children and young adults will have the opportunity to have healthy relationships, greater self esteem, and experience their potential.

Source: Tran

Significance

Source: E. Kimel

1 The research will provide insight into the foster system, specifically on children that age out as well as the effects thereafter.

2 Through this research, the community will gain a clear understanding of how they can contribute to the foster system.

3 Moreover, the analysis that is presented in this study will convey valuable information for further development of the early intervention, training, and support systems during and after the foster child ages out.

Research

Source: Tamburini

CHAPTER 2

Source: Gonzalez

Research Rationale

When children age out of foster care, coupled with ill effects due to the lack of a stable home environment while growing up, was causing newly emancipated young adults to suffer higher rates of substance abuse, mental illness, teen pregnancy, homelessness, and arrests (Armstrong). The objective of this study is to tackle this issue by developing a social media strategy and promotional materials that will act as a catalyst for a resourceful website. The website will serve as a support system that caters to aging-out youth and caretakers and offer prospects for favorable outcomes.

Research Methods

The purpose of this research was to determine what factors inhibit foster care children's futures and exploration into options available to breakdown some of the traumatic barriers that they are faced with. The significance of this information may provide an understanding of new systems that can be put in place, further education and training for staff and caregivers, and open the doors of communication and involvement by the community and state. (Refer to pages 45-60, for further information regarding Case Study and Visual Analysis)

Summary of Findings

Tens of thousands of children living in the foster care system have not been prepared for life as an adult by the time they reach the age of 18. "The goal of foster care is to ensure that children live in stable, lifelong families. Foster care is a temporary solution that ends once a parent can get their life back on track or a relative, guardian, or adoptive family agrees to raise the child involved" (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, "Foster Care: What It Is and How It Works"). The gaping problem for these children is that they do not know what they are going into. For most of these child their lives are changed within minutes one they are ripped aways from the few constants they have always known, including their parents, siblings, and extended family. Unfortunately, the dramatic change that they experience causes waves of trauma that can have life lasting effects for their futures.

For children in the foster care system who are not adopted, a big question is what will happen once they age out of the system. Many children are placed in homes with people they do not know, sometimes in completely new communities or environments, and often in group home settings. "There are 2,031 children, or 8 percent of all foster children, in group care in the state of Florida" (Today). The children may lack trust in adults due to prior traumas and may not be receptive to the adults in charge of their care. This radical change can be traumatic for these children. Due to circumstances outside of their control, "more than 85% of children in foster care have had a minimum of two different placement settings within the first 12 months of being placed in the system" (Gaille). In these situations, the children are not part of the choices made, and they have little to no control.

Research has shown that the longer children are in foster care and the more frequently they return to the system, the more work it will take to break through their trauma and prepare them for life after foster care (How PTSD in Foster Children Impacts Long-Term Outcomes | FosterVA). Additionally, "When youth "age out" of the child welfare system with limited connections or without the support of positive, caring adults, they may have an increased risk of facing unstable housing or homelessness, lack of employment and job training, problems with physical health, behavioral health, and general well-being, lack of access of health care, justice system involvement, and lack of social connection" (Young Adults Formerly in Foster Care: Challenges and Solutions | Youth.gov). Some may wonder what is being done to help prevent these problems from occurring. Programs like Learn4Life and LifeNet can intervene during and after a child ages out of the system. These current programs have been implemented to help empower, teach life skills, and help break down traumatic barriers so that the children involved can have a more enriched life. This literature examines what contributes to the failures of the foster care system in supporting children who age out of the system by diving deep into what foster care is, what barriers plague the foster children who get stuck in this system, and the effects of aging out of the program. It also looks at what is being done to help combat the increasing number of children in foster care in the United States.

Source: Xing

How many children are in the foster care system? As of 2022, 381,176 (Youth in Care 2011-2022 - Who Cares: A National Count of Foster Homes and Families) children are in care with family, foster homes, or group homes. The number of children in care could fill five football stadiums. This fact is an astonishing number of children. However, compared to the number of children in the United States, they make up about 3 out of every 1,000 children in the United States (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, "Child Welfare and Foster Care Statistics"). Yes, that is not a lot, but up to 50% of that group will end up in prison. Take a step back; why do children end up in foster care? Children enter foster care because they or their families are in crisis. Oftentimes, these children — who range in age from newborns to teens — have experienced unsafe conditions, abuse, neglect, or have parents who are unable to care for them. As a result, these children are removed from their parents' care (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, "Foster Care: What It Is and How It Works"). It is not so cut and dry when it comes to these children's realities before they enter the system. According to Adoption.com, there are eight reasons why children enter the foster system:

1. Abuse – This is typically the most common reason. Children victims of physical or sexual abuse must be removed from their homes immediately and placed into foster care to be protected.

2. Neglect - An issue like this occur when a child is without basic needs such as food, clean living, or necessary medical care. Children are often left alone without these necessities for long periods.

3. Illness – A parent's health can leave a child vulnerable. When this occurs, it becomes a serious problem for the child because there is no one to take care of them and provide them with basic care needs.

4. Incarceration – In cases of incarceration, placing the child with family is option one. Unfortunately, if all attempts to place the child/children with family are exhausted, the last resort will be to place them in foster care.

5. Death – If the parent passes away, attempts to place the child with family with be done first, with foster care as a last option.

6. Drug Abuse – Parent(s) that suffer from drug abuse tend to abuse, neglect, and/or become incarcerated. Therefore, children are placed in foster care to give the parent(s) the chance to get treatment for their issues and work toward reunification.

7. Child's Choices – In most cases, the parent(s) are at fault for children placed into the foster care system due to lack of proper child care. However, children can be their own worst enemies by breaking the law, running away, and having truancy concerns. Their actions place their fate into the hands of the courts, and they determine if foster care is a better and safer option,

8. Voluntary Placement – a less common option for a parent is to relinquish their rights. This option allows the child to grow up in a healthy and positive environment. Parents that choose this option are stuck and/or in crisis.

Any scenario is unfair and devastating for any child's long-term status. Unfortunately, the foster system is the only place to help pick up the pieces in most cases. How do you fight the uphill battle of a mentally, emotionally pinned child in a corner? The simple answer is to surround the child with support, resources, and guidance.

It is important to understand that foster children are mental, emotional, and socially wired differently than a child that comes from a normal family setting. Knowing that any foster child has psychological and physical needs is important for their growth and maturity into adulthood. Therefore, to grow a successful program, we must know how to connect with foster children on many levels. They, foster children, need to know that people will be there to support them and put them on the right path. This fact is a huge stepping stone in understanding how to make that a reality. According to Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review, Children's environment plays a significant role in defining their specific needs and how they can be satisfied (Deci and Ryan 2012; Harper and Stone 2003). Adverse experiences prior to care, out-of-home Placement, and living in foster care cause children to develop specific needs (Berrick and Skivenes 2012). (Steenbakkers et al.). Caregivers and supporters must fully understand what a foster child is going through. This knowledge will aid in creating programs that will positively affect and reduce the need for foster care services.

Foster children have difficulty transitioning into adulthood, but this can be helped by understanding all the components involved in helping the issue. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is an essential tool that can benefit foster children. The question is, how does this theory work? The theory works on basic needs, moving psychological needs, and finally landing on self-actualization (achieving one's full potential). Knowledge and implementation equal personal growth for foster children. Providing a stable and predictable home environment where foster youth feel protected, and an established routine may help reduce the stress or anxiety they may be experiencing during a crisis. For instance, providing a physically and emotionally safe home environment for foster

youth is vital, as there has been an increase in severe cases of child abuse since the coronavirus pandemic (Williams). A journal written by the National Library of Medicine looked into the needs of foster children and found that Maslow's hierarchy of needs was essential for finding the right methods to help correct some of the issues with foster children. Maslow's theory looks into a child's psychological safety, belongingness, self-esteem, and self-actualization needs. This article delved into those particular areas but altered them because the categories were not sensitive enough to incorporate all the information and distinguish between various topics. The following breaks down each category as examined in the article:

- Medical Needs - Needs regarding physical health, physical development, and treatment and identification of medical conditions
- Belongingness Needs - Needs regarding relationships with others, such as (foster) parents and peers, and related constructs, such as attachment and permanency
- Psychological Needs - Needs about (individual) psychological phenomena such as self-esteem, mental health, autonomy, and coping
- Self-actualization Needs - Needs about learning, education, leisure, and employment.

Based on the information and findings, they came to the following conclusion. "Children should be assessed and screened for medical conditions by a multidisciplinary team of health professionals (Kaltner and Rissel 2011; Ogg et al. 2015; Rodrigues 2004), which should be administered as soon as a child comes into foster care (Chernoff et al. 1994; Steele and Buchi 2008)." Nevertheless, not all children receive a medical examination (Rodrigues 2004). Nathanson et al. (2009) argue that screening is important when entering care and throughout the foster care period. Lastly,

many studies have identified a major gap between the medical issues of children in foster care and the services provided (Feigelman et al. 1995; Hill and Watkins 2003; Kaltner and Rissel 2011)" (Steenbakkers et al.).

When is the optimal time to step in and start guiding foster children? Should foster children be placed in different learning environments to help them with core study and life skills? The foster youth need help and guidance. An article produced by the University of Redland aimed at The Senior Seminar Program. The Senior Seminar is a path that allows youth (in the process of graduating and beyond) to get scholarships and grants for vocational training and college. Just imagine the impact this can have on a child that is lost. Children's environment plays a significant role in defining their specific needs and how they can be satisfied (Deci and Ryan 2012; Harper and Stone 2003). Adverse experiences prior to care, out-of-home Placement, and living in foster care cause children to develop specific needs (Berrick and Skivenes 2012). So many children are lost, but children that are a product of the foster system and do not have the proper support suffer so much more. Foster children miss out on having a mother or father bond. The lack of connection causes trust and communication issues. Therefore, this disruption bleeds into their education journey. Yes, money is being thrown at the psychological and emotional barrier of foster children. However, it takes creating the right program and finding the right educators, giving them all the right resources, and putting them into a position where they can impact the most.

"Approximately 40% to 47% of foster youth receive special education services (Geenen & Powers, 2007; Westat, Inc., 1991), and they are significantly more likely to be identified as having emotional disturbances and physical disabilities, as compared to non-foster youth (Stone, D'Andrade, & Austin, 2007)." (Quest et al.) In 2006 research was conducted on seven children (three boys and four girls) to learn about the experience of foster kids in a special education learning environment. Here are the findings of the research:

Source: Ragfelt

• John was 15 years of age, in the 10th grade, experienced six placements in 11 years, was separate from his siblings, had a special education label of autism, and attended an alternative high school. John recalled his education experience," the alternative school as a waste of time and a place where little learning was going on. They teach really low grades, so I get annoyed with it. They don't have no algebra or anything because they are always teaching low stuff because they have kids who have disabilities and stuff there" (Quest et al.). Once John was placed with his grandparents, he ran away for a few days due to the adjustment to another new setting. While on the run, he became exposed to drugs, physical violence, and other criminal activity. Fortunately, the experience was short-term. Afterward, "John did not get into trouble, providing a stable place for him to live (even after he ran away), or just helping John feel supported and valued, his life would be on a very different trajectory if not for his grandparents" (Quest et al.).

Source: Aisvri

• Kathy was 17 years of age, in 12th grade, had been in foster care for two years, and had limited contact with her biological family. As Kathy gets closer and closer to transitioning out of foster care, she has become more anxious and nervous that she does not know what

will happen afterward. However, has had a glimmer of hope with her current Placement. "I haven't had to go from home to home to home to home to home because my parents were willing to put up with my crap so I could be a better person, and help me benefit and help me to be who I am" (Quest et al.). Kathy has stopped living in the moment and diverted all her energy to simply finishing school, but she still has concerns regarding her future after foster care.

Source: Engelsen

- Joe was 17 years of age, in 11th grade, had been in foster for three and a half years, had lived in 14 foster homes, had never met his biological family, and attended high school general education classes. "I've never stayed in one place longer than three years. Never had one set of friends for longer than three years" (Quest et al.). Despite his circumstances, Joe has found stability with his current placement. "They are always around if you need help or something, and they are funny to boot" (Quest et al.). Joe's positive experience with his foster family has led him to a good place with his education. I want to do what I have to do go to college, and in order to do that I have to pass high school. In order to do that, I need to keep my grades up" (Quest et al.). Joe believes "the past three years seemed to provide a foundation for his self-confidence, self-reliance, and goal orientation" (Quest et al.).

Source:
Creative Christians

- Greg was 17 years of age, moved to an alternative school in the 11th grade, had limited communication with his parents (his mother was in a psychiatric facility, and his father had been in and out of recovery programs), and plans to emancipate when he turns 18. Greg had been in countless counseling sessions and placed in 20 different homes since he was five. He is a product of neglect and drug abuse. Greg has been adamite about no longer being in foster care. His day finally came, "I just walked in there and talked to the judge and stuff, and she said, okay, I'm dismissing you. It took 20 minutes to get out of everything" (Quest et al.). "Greg's story is a stark example of the outcomes when a youth abruptly jumps from youth to adulthood without the opportunity to take confidence-building steps and knowledge for adult life" (Quest et al.).

Source: Ninaber

- Debbie is 17 years of age, placed into foster care at seven due to sexual abuse. She has been in 13 foster homes, has very limited contact with her biological family (especially her father and brother, and wants to graduate from school with a diploma (not a modified GED). She was reluctant to answer when asked about staying in foster care or aging out. However, she did express interest in the police academy and that remaining in the foster system may provide her with a better outcome. As the interview continued, Debbie opened up about things she would like to see changed in the system. "I think they could make the foster kids meet their parents before they go in. When they got there, no one dropped them off. They had to get there by themselves — no caseworker, no nothing. She readily admitted she would not have been successful at these without the help of her foster mother" (Quest et al.). Despite the positive influence that her Placement and foster mother had, she openly admitted that once she ages out, she will reconnect with her biological family.

Source: Richer

• Janey is 17 years of age and in the 12th grade; she was placed into foster care at the age of nine due to sexual abuse, has regular contact with her biological family, and will be transitioning from residential care to foster care when she turns 18. She calls her interaction, before foster care, with her biological positive and negative. However, now the situation is much different, "They really hate me. I don't know, and ever since I got into foster care, they have looked at me differently because I'm a foster kid. Some of them think they are better than me, just because everything I went through never happened to them" (Quest et al.). In her eyes, her family was not loving, but she accepted them for who they were. As Janey went through the foster care process, she found a supportive person as her mentor of five years. At one point, Janey considered being placed with her but felt that she would not be comfortable with an American family. Despite the ups and downs of Janey's life, she decided to stay in foster care to graduate. "I really want to prove the point to her that I know I can graduate" (Quest et al.).

Source: Bialasiewicz

• Amy was 15 years of age and had been in four placements for over 5.3 years. Amy was very bright, scoring very high on the ACT, which led to her receiving several college invitations. While she was doing well on tests, she was skipping school and drinking. She figured if she acted out enough, she would have a chance to return to her biological mother. These issues caused tension between her and her foster parents. Unfortunately, the foster parents got fed up and implemented a rule where Amy was only allowed to go to school and nowhere else. However, this caused Amy to act out more, and the foster parents chose to evict her. Amy got her wish to live with her biological mom. The grass was not greener on the other side for Amy. Amy's caseworker reached out to see if Amy would consider going back to foster care and live with a foster family that implements more structure. Unfortunately, Amy was not willing to embrace the offer and by the end of the interview she was showing signs that she did not want a better life (Quest et al.).

Source: Virgin

All the children documented in the research were either frustrated with school, bored with their situation or had little to no idea of what they wanted for their future. The age range for the group varied from 15yr to 18yr, and each child was removed from their home for various reasons. The common thread for these children is a lack of emotional support, educational support, and proper guidance. So many children are lost, but children that are a product of the foster system that do not have the proper support suffer so much more. Foster children miss out on having a mother or father bond. The lack of connection causes trust and communication issues. The constant disruption bleeds into their day-to-day and educational journey. The government provides funding for programs throughout the United States but it is not enough. Systems and services need to be put in place to find the right educators and support, train them, giving them all the right resources to help put children like those describe in the right position to to see positive outcomes.

GAME CHANGER SYSTEMS

Can knowing the facts about foster children's success rate in school help create change? The answer to that is yes and no. First, some programs are in place but are limited and do not always have the right staff to succeed. Second, once the financial end is covered, there needs to be a plan to help achieve the goal. Knowing the real numbers can help the community, aids, teachers, and government officials impact this very large problem.

- Over 40% of school-aged children in foster care have educational difficulties. (S)

- Less than 3% graduate -Nationwide, only about half of the youth raised in foster care finish high school. And less than 3% graduate from a 4-year college. (S)

- High school dropout rates are 3x higher for foster youth than for other low-income children. (S)

Knowing the facts about the problem can help people (and those in power) focus on getting the resources needed to change the direction of the problem.

"After entering foster care at 16, Daniel Franklin moved between three different high schools in just one year. Before that, while living in an unstable situation with her father, she'd transferred a couple of times — in all, she'd matriculated in five high schools by the time she reached her senior year. Everything changed for Franklin when she found Learn4Life, an alternative to the traditional high school model that boasts one-on-one instruction and flexible schedules to accommodate students who may struggle academically due to outside circumstances and distractions in their lives. "In regular schools, there's a lot of people, it's really loud. Here it's one-on-one, it's a lot quieter," she said, noting that the setting was especially good for youth with anxiety or excess stress. "I used to ditch class a lot. Here I want to come to school" (TIANO). Almost 20 years ago, Learn4life was created to help children struggling in school. The Learn4Life model is built on a framework focusing on four key tenets: care, academic growth, mentorship, and resilience (TIANO). Learn4Life found that 6% of foster children graduate from high school, and only 3.5% of foster care children go on to higher learning, vocational, or an alternative program. Because of these findings, Learn4life saw an opportunity to intervene. They have worked hard to find specialized teachers and counselors that are children focused. This program has helped thousands of children find their true potential. It is important to see programs that work, and Learn4Life is a good starting point to help future foster children.

Studies have shown implementing support systems can help combat the foster care graduate success rate. The Orlando Sentinel spoke with Bill Frye, president of Florida Sheriffs Youth Ranches, a residential group care program with four campuses for boys and girls, to help answer this question and more. "We have found that many foster children who turn 18 have had so many disruptions that they need at least two or more years of stability before venturing on their own." A common issue is a term "aging out" (Murphy). Aging out a foster child terming 18 years and opting out of the foster care system. However, foster children can stay in foster care until age 21, thanks to Nancy C. Deterred passing the common sense and compassion independent living act in 2014. The act protects foster children who were not ready, emotionally and/or scholastically. "The percentage of foster youth who graduate from high school is between 30 percent and 50 percent — and a dismal 3 percent for college graduation" (Murphy). According to Frye, Florida's "child welfare system consists of 17 community-based care lead agencies that oversee foster care

in different regions of the state, each offering different support programs. The Florida Sheriff's Youth Ranches has established a scholarship house with support from Heartland for Children and the Polk Sheriff's Charities Foundation. The children in this program/home can work with life coaches, mentors, tutors, and independent life skills trainers and counselors. "Our goal is to significantly improve graduation rates for foster youth with a model that hopefully can be used in other parts of the state. Finally, creating more opportunities like the scholarship house for young adults will give youth a better chance at finding long-term success" (Murphy).

Foster children tend to be lost and frustrated due to issues that are sometimes out of control. The

current options for these children are living with family, living with a foster family, or living in a group home. "Youth in foster care are often at least a year behind their peers. According to a fact sheet published by Foster Care 2 Success, for example, the average reading level for 17- and 18-year-olds in foster care is 7th grade. Only half of foster youth graduate high school by the time they're 18" (RENICK). The missing component is that these children do not have much to look forward to besides a place to stay, food, and school. "SailFuture's two-year residential program is funded through contracts, individual donations, and foundations and operates on about $450,000 per year. Earlier this month, SailFuture was recognized by local community foundations with a handful of awards, including a Knight Foundation Communities Award" (RENICK). The children who want to participate in this program must apply, undergo an interview process, get accepted, and then choose to be a part of the SailFuture community. Once in the program, Participants complete a three-month sailing course, attend high school taught by SailFuture's staff, who have teaching certifications, and get jobs. The experience provided to foster youth in this program is life-changing.

Anthony is a 17-year-old who entered foster care when he was 15, "I didn't have anything going for me," Anthony says. "I was just being a bad kid, not doing what I'm supposed to be, skipping school. Until I came to the program, I was a lazy kid. Now I'm ambitious. I want to get up, work, go to school, get a college diploma, and just make something of myself" (RENICK). Anthony's case is very similar to most children subject to the foster care system. However, Anthony's took a turn for the better. Mike Long, CEO of Sailfuture, says, "It's the combination of an outdoor survival skill-building program with counseling, job training, and education that makes SailFuture both effective and unique... "It breaks the boys down completely and forces them to rebuild. When you get away from the environment, people, and scenarios you know and get put into a new environment with completely different people, you have no choice but to change". Sailfuture's motto is, "disrupts cycles of poverty, abuse, and incarceration through a continuum of social services, and innovative educational programs for teens." This program is highly effective, and other programs should incorporate their structure of success.

"If caregivers understand the effect of trauma over a child's lifespan, they are better able to meet the needs of children who have experienced complex trauma and violence" ("Trauma Assessment Center Helps Meet Children's Needs"). Western Michigan University opened the center to help foster children get the necessary services to process and move through traumatic experiences. The steps at this center help create an understanding for the child and the families and/or residential placements that work with placed children. The center provides the following services in their assessments:

- Brief medical exam

- Screening for fetal alcohol spectrum disorder

- Assessment of children's language, attention, visual processing, motor processing, executive function, and memory

- History from parents and caregivers about children's social and emotional functioning using the Child Behavior Checklist, Child Sexual Behavior Inventory, and Sensory Profile

- Psychosocial interviews with children to understand each child's perspective and worldview, including the perception of self.

- Use of trauma-specific tools to determine symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, and other conditions that may result from trauma

- Assessment of caregiver and child attachment using Theraplay tools

All the information gathered is used to move the child in a more positive direction than the arena that he or she came from. The bonus for these children is that this program is transdisciplinary (medicine, social work, occupational therapy, speech, and language). Therefore, this clinic is a one-stop shop. Once the information is gathered, it will be passed onto the respective child welfare office, the findings will assist in the child's placement, and it will open the lines of communication to help provide additional trauma-informed services for the child. This program and its services are in very high demand; thus, it has a minimum of a 10-month waiting period. This is a good thing because the clinic is holding to its mission, "to promote compassionate understanding and support for children and families who have experienced trauma" Center Helps Meet Children's Needs"). The flip side is early intervention opportunities can be lost, and building connections for the child's placements can become more challenging.

Foster care placement is a resource for children that have been removed from their families due to neglect and /or abuse. Foster care provides daily care for children whose biological families can no longer care for them. Foster parents offer a loving and nurturing environment that makes children feel safe and protected. What goes into being a foster parent? According to Fostering Hope Florida, the following items must be completed:

- Ability to provide care and supervision on a 24/7 basis

- Have financial stability

- Be a patient, understanding caregiver

- Ability to offer love and stable support

- Pass a background screening

- Complete a 30-hour training called MAPP (Model Approach to Parenting Partnerships)

- Have a home study approved by DCF

All of these points are straightforward, but the University of Florida conducted and recorded a study. This study looked into large numbers facing the foster care system. "In Florida, there are 22,917 children in foster care, and 6,355 licensed foster homes (licensed by the state "to provide care for children" and a "healthy and nurturing home environment)." The study looked into 438 adult Floridians who had never been foster parents or foster children. The sample group consisted of "57% women and 42% men with a mean age of 36.5 years (SD = 11.993). The sample was 79% White, 10% Black or African American, 6% Asian, 3% multiple races, 1% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 1% American Indian or Alaska Native. Respondents were mostly married (53%) or never married (36%), and a majority of respondents had at least one child (58.6%). Most respondents also reported being Christian (63%); however, 54.6% of all respondents also reported being a little religious or not religious. Respondents were primarily employed full-time (59%), had a bachelor's degree (40%), and made an annual income of $25,000 to $75,000 (54%)". Once the participants completed all of the requirements, they were asked to see how and where we're at mental and emotional: not enough time or too much responsibility (12.%), financial burdens (9%), concerns about personal age (5%), behavioral concerns (3%), concerns about their biological children (1.%), concerns about the foster care system and birth family (1%), and health reasons (1%). These are some very real numbers that open the eyes of people in United States.

Tools and procedures are essential to help foster children succeed more. However, this process should start when the child is brought into foster care. "Moving children around keeps them in limbo, increasing the chances of extending their time in care, as well as the likelihood of aging out to adulthood without the support of a lifelong family" ("Placement Stability Strategies –").

Some too many children end up in this situation. "Casey Family Programs is the nation's largest operating foundation focused on safely reducing the need for foster care in the United States. Our mission is to provide and improve — and ultimately prevent the need for — foster care" ("Placement Stability Strategies –"). The program has looked at a series of different cases and implements the following:

- Prioritizing Placement with kin – the goal of this program is to connect the child with family and other kin. The reasoning is that there is a better chance of permanency if a child is with people he/she knows.

- Tools for prompt and well-informed placement decisions and matching - tools like the Structured Decision Making (SDM) Model in Foster Care and Placement Support and Ever Child a Priority (ECAP) are being used to match children and foster families using a series of algorithms that combine preference and availability matching.

- Supports for children's behavioral health needs – being a foster child can have a long-term effects. This being the case, long-term systems need to be implemented to reduce the ongoing issues. A wraparound system works - "refers to helping people who have complex needs via a structured, creative, and individualized team planning process" (Zahedi).

- Resource parent programs that help children achieve placement stability are important to address behavior and trauma-related challenges. Keeping Foster and Kin Parents Supported and Training (KEEP) and Treatment Foster Care Oregon (TFCO) are programs that cope with challenging behaviors and increase stability. Additional, Attached and Biobehavioral Catch-Up (ABC) assists birth, foster, and adoptive parents and primary caregivers of young children who have experienced adversity by teaching caregivers how to nurture

children and provide safe, stable environments" (CEBC » Program › Attachment and Biobehavioral Catch Up).

- Caseworker retention – another primary key to foster care success is consistency. Children have a ton of mental and emotional weight on their shoulders, but their caseworkers have to be the advocate, the voice for the child to aid in a good transition. This being the case, these individuals need to be always prepared. Casework teaming is a model where staff shares responsibility in supporting children living in out-of-home care and meeting their families' needs. Teaming is generally used for complex cases with children at high risk of removal and offers resource families a larger network of trusting relationships bolstered by more frequent communication" (nytimes.com).

- Staff training – This is another component that ties into the overall growth of the foster child. Knowledge and understanding also play a tremendous factor. As caseworkers and staff become more familiar with different children, they gain confidence, thus helping to reduce the number of foster children's cases. This training is not limited to only the caseworkers and staff but also the families fostering the children. As foster parents, there must be a primary focus on creating a safe home and an environment of trust to promote growth. So, ongoing development is mandatory.

This program is putting children, connection, and reunification at the forefront. As one can see, this is not simple. All parties involved must be all in to optimize the outcomes for foster children. Look back at this research from the beginning. The goal is simple, improve the outcomes of foster children once they age out. In order to make this a reality, the general public of United

States needs to have a clear understanding of what foster care is. Foster care has been designed to help children from unhealthy situations transition into a new safe, nurturing arena. "Studies have found that just 3-4% of former foster youth obtain a four-year college degree. And between 2 and 6% receive a two-year degree" (Mariah). The numbers and reality are jaw-dropping, but many points need to be addressed, and the earlier, the better. How can this be accomplished?

- Currently, a child is removed from their home, given a minimal assessment with a background screening, and placed with a relative, foster home or group home. A system that uses an assessment center should be put in place. Within the center, the child would have the ability to get both physical and mental examinations. This information will aid the child's long-term success and placement (with the goal of reunification, if possible).

- Staff, caseworkers, residential staff, and foster families are overworked and unprepared to help the various challenged foster children. Level I, foster families, are given an annual license that requires 12 hours of training in the first two years and 8 hours each year after. Level II to Level V (Non-Child Specific Foster Home; Safe Foster Home for Victims of Human Trafficking; Therapeutic Foster Home; Medical Foster Home) are required to complete 30 to 40 hours of training each year. Training needs to be completed every six months with a focus on implementing systems that give families a clear understanding of the children they are working with, along with arming them with processes that can and will help to break down walls and grow bonds of trust and security. On the residential/group homes side, staffing needs to be increased. The staff must be trained both in class and within an immersive experience. Additionally, the staff within the homes should work in pairs to provide a more family-like experience and reduce the burden on each staff

member. More caseworkers are needed to check in on families, staff, and children.

- Most facilities do not provide education, therapeutic support, and limited access to outlets. Each of these systems is a major component in the growth of any child; therefore, they are of greater need to children that have been rattled by life-changing events. Programs must be placed in residential (group homes) to promote life skills, vocational training, and higher education. The systems should be an option for all children in and outside group homes. No child in foster care should be left believing that he/she can't do anything. All children need small wins to grow.

- Support systems are a necessity for children within the foster care system. Currently, foster children are given a small picture of what life looks like after 18. This is an unfortunate reality but is it fixable? Aging out is not the end - many children who turn 18 years old in the foster care system believe the end of the road has begun. With some intervention, children will know the steps to stay on the right track. Lucky for these children, their lives can be changed with knowledge and support.

- Lastly, networking systems need to grow. As of 2020 there are 214,421 licensed foster homes and even fewer residential group homes in the United States (Kelly, 2020). The issue that overwhelms the homes and facilities is communication. These environments need to step up, acknowledge what works and what does not, and find ways to make things better for children. The main goal is and always should be growth.

The problem with children aging out of foster care is a large issue and there is a lot that is needed to help tackle this issue. The primary focus is the children of the system that eventually turn into adults that will be expected to function independently and contribute to society in a meaningful

Source: Kong

way as well as support themselves. In order to best understand how to help them in the future, it is important that we look at and understand the challenges they have faced and the barriers that are in place. There are some resources available but there is no easy way to navigate these resources or access this information for professionals, let alone the children who are aging out of the system. This paper will introduce a four-part campaign that include social media, infographics, posters and a website to help narrow the knowledge gap about these aging-out foster youth. This campaign will help educate the children who are aging out of the system as well as the adults and professionals that are in positions to help them. These materials will be able to reach a broad audience in a way that is easy to navigate using smartphones and mobile devices. The posters will have a large footprint in areas such as therapy offices, schools, other not-for-profit youth outreach programs and other businesses that support foster children and provide services. The last component will focus on bringing people to the NEXTGENKID website which will serve as a hub for information about foster youth, specifically those on a path to aging out. It will open

the doors and provide resources for community involvement, internships, vocational training, and continued education options. This will make information easily accessible to those who need it and improve the likelihood of accessing the programs and resources. When the foster children are able to utilize these resources and attain housing, education, employment and other needs, they are able to be more productive members of society. Maslow's hierarchy of needs tells us that individuals can't move up the levels towards self actualization and attaining their fullest potential, can't focus on establishing and maintaining supportive relationships, and can't progress in academic and vocational careers unless their basic needs are met. With the correct knowledge, resources, and programs, strides can be made to help reduce the children negatively affected by the foster care system and increase the success rates of foster children who are aging out of the system.

Case Study and Visual Analysis - 1

Case Study:

1. Creator of the project:

Jim Casey Youth Opportunity Initiative created the infographic. This program aims to ensure all young people transitioning from foster care have the relationships, resources, and opportunities to ensure well-being and success.

2. Motivation of the project:

The reality of this infographic was to open up people's eyes to the rising issue of foster youth aging out.

3. Project Summary:

"The above factors can be critical in ensuring youth a pathway to becoming successful adults. The infographic states that after youth living in foster care turn 18, in many states, they 'age out' and are no longer part of the foster care system. Many of these youth live in precarious situations without support, resources, and guidance. Being cut off from their support network heightens the risk of experiencing loneliness, engaging in criminal activities, and even experiencing homelessness." (Aid, 2019)

4. Project challenges:

When diving into this particular infographic, the producer's only challenge was gathering all of the numbers and then turning them into a creative graphic that could be digested by anyone who reads it.

Source: Kong

5. Project outcome:

It would cost 26 million dollars to assist foster care children up to the age of 25

The added 26 million dollars would save $132 million on welfare and jail costs over 40 years.

6. Connected and relevant elements related to identified problem:

Join our society, which is part of the foster care system, suffers greatly due to a lack of intervention and understanding of a young child's psyche. The problem that I am looking into is aging out and what can be done to prevent it. Below are specific topics that are part of the infographic that will put things in perspective: Below are specific topics that are part of the infographic that will put things in perspective:

• Homelessness - https://www.homelesshub. ca/resource/youth-homelessness-canada-road-solutions - 43% of the 689-youth surveyed in this student were found to be from foster care.

• Substance abuse - https://homelesshub.ca/resource/history-foster-care-among-homeless-adults-mental-illness-vancouver-british-columbia - The study shows that there is a correlation between foster children and Substance abuse.

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7. Visual Analysis

● **Selection depiction -** This infographic focuses on the Aging out (18 years old) of Foster Care in America. The infographic dives directly into the numbers that make up the foster care system and the results of young adults that age out of foster care. For example, "on average for every young person who ages out, taxpayers and communities pay $300,000 in social costs over that person's lifetime."

● **Target audience -** This informational graphic is for everyone. Some so many people

do not understand the facts regarding foster care. It takes caring, trust, and community to help fix the problem. When we are provided information, we can assist in finding funding and reducing the number of negative outcomes for foster care children.

● **How do people consume the visual solution?** ILConnect.org is a program that is created to connect youth and professionals to independent living resources. This particular entry to the website was created by Vineeth Sekharan a research assistant foe

● **The wider embedded cultural context -** This document is a vital component of the ILConnect website. The graphic intended to bring awareness and reality to a large problem, failing youth in the foster care system. In reality, foster children do not have the support or guidance to succeed, and not having that in place keeps propitiating the issue. Additionally, these children are not just American-born; there are immigrants from other counties. Being from another country and speaking another language can set the child back, along with the trauma they have endured. The information provided in the document informed people that a large number of foster children past the United States with tons of taxpayer money. However, investment scales could be tipped if money was invested in children once they reached 18 years of age. By providing programs and assistance to up to 25, the money saved would be in the hundreds of millions.

Source: Kong

● **Interrelation between the image, the form, or object, and the accompanying text -** What could be done with 7.8 billion dollars? As of the production of this infographic, that amount of money is being spent to support foster children via public assistance (welfare), incarceration, and absorbed community costs. To put it plainly, for every 26,000 children that age out, it costs $300,000 to support them. However, if the same amount of money were to be placed into intervention programs, there would be more positive outcomes like foster children that transition to higher learning, business success, and a lower burden on the government.

● **Compositional Interpretation -** Supporting aging foster children is more expensive than creating prosperous intervention programs and putting resources in the right places. The infographic is set up as a problem solution. This document starts with a person, an aged-out youth, lost in the woods (aka life). It moves on to look at the costs associated with these lost youth. Additionally, the document explores the psyche of these children and steps to guide them in the right direction. The adventure is sealed with successful business people, graduates, and a reduction in the resource. To end the document, the producer moved back to the trees to symbolize growth and strength.

● **Content Analysis -** The document is very clear, and it's a message that lets us know the March problem and how it affects your United States financial standpoint. Additionally, it lets you know what solutions are available and what the positive results could be, such as fewer youth in jail, more youth graduating from college, and less strain on the taxpayers' wallets.

● **Semiotics -** This graphic has a great balance of visuals and written information. The elements do the expected and inform the viewer of the document's purpose. Every placed element is intentional, from the scale to the price tags and even the people.

● **Iconography -** Overall, this document has trees placed throughout. A tree is a symbol of growth and strength. This infographic promotes the same by providing solutions to grow positive outcomes for foster youth that are on track to age out.

● **Success or failure aesthetic choices for visual solution -** The color choices for this graphic were soft and calming. Orange emphasized impactful facts such as costs, the number of foster children, and the reality of the adolescent brain. Meanwhile, the green lettering and accents were used to focus on all positive outcomes such as education, jobs, independence, and cost reduction.

● **Aesthetic related/connected -** The ILConnect is all about creating connections between you and the community. The community component is important when it relates to my problem of opening doors for the next generation. This graphic has made it very simple for anyone to digest. The numbers do not lie, and aging out is a large financial burden. If we go back to helping these children, whether it's financially or by volunteering, it is a step in the right direction. By reading through this, we can see that just a little change can move foster children from a life of continued chaos to a brighter future.

Source: ("Foster Parent Recruitment Campaign May-July 2017")

1. Creator of the project:

RaiseAChild.org is a nationwide program focused on building a connection between foster children and potential foster parents. One of the primary driving forces of the program is to create events that help promote the foster system. At each event, meet-ups facilitate bonds and put children on track to be placed in environments for positive growth. Each year RaiseAChild.org creates a campaign to promote the overall program. In 2017 the campaign was called Reimagine Foster Parents to help people understand the diversity of parents willing to take on the responsibility of being a foster parent.

2. Motivation of the project:

"Our new campaign reflects our firm belief in acceptance, inclusion, and the value of all types of family formations" ("Reimagining Foster Families"). The image of a foster parent is not always the same. A variety of people, women, men, African-American, White, Asian, Indian, heterosexual, same-sex, etc., have a lot of love to give. The campaign's main focus was to create an inclusive environment so that foster children do not lose the opportunity for a caring and loving home.

3. Project Summary:

The Reimaging Foster Families campaign marked National Foster Care Awareness Month for RaiseAChild.org. Three hundred fifty street polls across Los Angeles and Long Beach had posters promoting the campaign. Additionally, the promotion rolled out to radio, television, print, and social media. To further push the message of the campaign John Cryer (actor and co-star of Two and A Half Men) and his wife Lisa Joyner (co-host of TLC's hit series Long Lost Family) did an interview where they reflection adoption and foster care. Lisa Joyner brought up the fact that friends and people are unsure of adoption and fostering because they are not sure what they are going to get. Her reply to that thinking was, "Well, you don't know what you are going to get with a biological child" ("Reimagining Foster

a child of foster care made it a no-brainer for her to adopt. "Raising children is an act of love. It takes desire, motivation, and patience, and every parent knows that there is always some uncertainty in attempting to develop a future for their children" ("Reimagining Foster Families").

4. Project challenges:

The campaign was limited to only 90 days, and changing the mindset of people takes time, especially when it comes to the challenge of foster children and adoption.

5. Project outcome:

"RaiseAChild has engaged more than 3,000 prospective foster and adoptive parents as the nationwide leader in the recruitment and support of LGBT and all prospective parents interested in building families through fostering and adoption" ("Reimagining Foster Families").

6. Connected and relevant elements related to identified problem:

One of the largest problems plaguing the foster system is the lack of families needed to care for children in the foster system. RaiseAChild focuses on bridging the gap between foster children and caring families. Providing a caring and loving environment for these children is a step in the right direction to creating positive change in the foster care system and children's lives.

7. Visual Analysis:

● **Selection depiction -** The Reimagining Foster Families Campaign focused on social and physical media to promote the message of families for foster care. The message was loud and clear, there are thousands of foster children in need in the United States, and anyone is eligible to help, provided they are willing to choose to care, love, and guide. They placed 300 images across Los Angeles and Long Beach to promote the campaign.

● **Target audience:**

- Poster Campaign: The information was geared toward everyone. The campaign was meant to inform and impact change. It was aimed to shine a different light on the misconception of foster families. Love does not have a

Image 1 Source: "Foster Parent Recruitment Campaign May-July 2017"

Families"). She doubled down by saying adoption/fostering is a choice, and having been a child of foster care made it a no-brainer for her to adopt. "Raising children is an act of love. It takes desire, motivation, and patience, and every parent knows that there is always some uncertainty in attempting to develop a future for their children" ("Reimagining Foster Families").

4. Project challenges:

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● **Target audience:**

- Poster Campaign: The information was geared toward everyone. The campaign was meant to inform and impact change. It was aimed to shine a different light on the mis-

Image 2 Source: "Foster Parent Recruitment Campaign May-July 2017"

conception of foster families. Love does not have a specific design. In the end, the goal is to provide a safe and loving home to those children that do not have the opportunity of a normal (biological) family.

- Video Campaign: A picture can say a thousand words, but a video can open the eyes. RaiseAChild partnered with celebrities exposed to foster care to help add perspective to their message.

● **How do people consume the visual solution?** RaiseAChild.org is the primary outlet to find more information about Reimagining Foster Family and their annual campaigns.

● **The wider embedded cultural context -** RaiseAChild is focused on bridging the gap between foster children and fostering parents. However, they have shined a light on the fact that a traditional husband and wife is not the only way for these children. They have let it be known that they are inclusive of everyone as long as the goal remains the child's well-being comes first. The signage for Reimaging Foster Family says it all, "let love define family".

● **Interrelation between the image, the form, or object, and the accompanying text:** The visual side of this campaign was very simple, showing what a family looks like:
- Image 1: John Cryer and his wife adopted a child mainly due to Cryer's previous experience as a foster child.
- Image 2: Cleo King and Camille adopted Titus because they were at a point in their lives where they wanted children. Unfortunately, both were in their forties and knew it would be difficult to have children physically. They found that adoption was their best course of action, and the decision has been life-changing for all of them.

● **Compositional Interpretation -** The posters helped promote the program's vision, but the campaign had a specific goal, letting people know that foster families can be anyone. The posters promote foster families regardless of sex, race, or gender and let people see that anyone can be a foster parent and change a life.

● **Content Analysis -** The document is very clear, and it's a message that lets us know foster children need help. Additionally, it lets us know that anyone can be a foster parent.

● **Semiotics -** This campaign used a simple approach of showcasing foster parents and their children. The parents were always placed to the side or behind the child, thus promoting the role of supporter(s). The campaign's overall message was to show diversity and inclusion in foster care families.

- **Iconography -** No iconography was used for the this campaign.

- **Success or failure aesthetic choices for visual solution -** The Reimaging Foster Families campaign was a strong program mainly due to the content. There is a tremendous lack of foster families when you put it next to the number of children in foster care. The campaign and previous ventures have helped connect over 3,000 foster children with families.

- **Aesthetic related/connected -** The look of the posters and social media campaign was warm and caring, which fit the mood of the content. Again, the campaign was designed to bring in more willing and loving foster families. Therefore, it was imperative to showcase real families that were dealing with families. The color palette features soft blues and grays mixed with the featured families. The design was spot on and helped promote the content beautifully.

Case Study and Visual Analysis - 3

Source: Fostering Champs

Case Study:

1. Creator of the project:

"CHAMPS is comprised of a broad-based network of partners who advocate for quality foster parenting in states and nationally. Specifically, CHAMPS calls for creating a new partnership between foster parents and the child welfare agencies responsible for foster care. This new, stronger partnership means that amazing families who step up to be foster parents will get the resources they need when they need them, and that hardworking case-workers will be better supported in their critical role "(CHAMPS).

2. Motivation of the project:

"CHAMPS is a national campaign to spur policy improvements nationally and in states to ensure children and youth in foster care experience the highest quality parenting. CHAMPS is led by a coalition of partners of researchers, advocates, pediatricians, faith-based leaders, foster parents, youth, service providers and others.

CHAMPS offers a policy playbook and related tools to help improve efforts to recruit, retain and support stable foster parenting" (CHAMPS).

3. Project summary:

CHAMPS is a program designed to improve the structure based on becoming a foster parent. They've developed a program to provide foster parents with the resources needed to provide an even more curing environment for foster children. Through their partners and their analysis, they can find help and make available programs to strengthen knowledge for foster parents and make them more compatible with children in the foster care system.

4. Project challenges:

The main issue facing CHAMPS is the number of children versus foster parents. However, because they have chosen to focus on tools to help foster parents, it is making it much easier for foster parents to be ready for the challenge of accepting these children.

5. Project outcome:

• Reform state policy in 20 to 25 states over five years to promote quality foster parenting.
• Promote federal policy changes that incentivize states to enhance supports to foster parents

• Strengthen public will by changing the narrative about foster parents to emphasize the vital role that foster parents play in a child's life.

6. Connected and relevant elements related to identified problem:

Being a foster parent is a very intense and special opportunity. Many people who choose to foster or adopt a child come into the process, with love being a focal point. However, children from the foster care system need a lot more tender loving care. Understanding that a lot of these children come from homes that are abusive or neglectful is a cornerstone to being able to work with these children. Because of their circumstances, these children can be rebellious or angry when they change environments. CHAMPS, however, has helped foster parents to gain a much deeper knowledge of what they may encounter when dealing with a foster child. Additionally, they can provide resources to help educate and processes/tools to make transitions much easier for both them and the child. At the heart of the program, it is important to note that it is about the child's future welfare. Therefore, it is important to ensure that foster parents are properly educated and understand that what they do is important and not easy.

Image 1 Source: Fostering Champs

7. Visual Analysis:

● **Selection depiction -** The number of foster children is not decreasing due to the rise in drug abuse, physical abuse, and neglect. The CHAMPS campaign focuses on bringing awareness and knowledge to foster families. Support tools

and recourses for willing families are an essential component to helping to create bonds between foster parents and foster children.

● **Target audience:**

 - Poster Campaign: The information was geared toward everyone. The campaign was meant to inform and impact change. It was aimed to shine a different light on the misconception of foster families. Love does not have a specific design. In the end, the goal is to provide a safe and loving home to those children that do not have the opportunity of a normal (biological) family.

 - Video Campaign: A picture can say a thousand words, but a video can open the eyes. RaiseAChild partnered with celebrities exposed to foster care to help add perspective to their message.

● **How do people consume the visual solution?** To find more information about The CHAMPS campaign all you have to do is go to fosteringchamps.org.

● **The wider embedded cultural context -** Foster children are unique because they are placed in an environment they either do not know, do not understand, or do not want to be involved in. This being the case, it is important to change people's minds and help them understand that anyone could be a foster parent as long as you have the right tools and mindset to help. CHAMPS has chosen to change the mindset of people and how they approach a very trying problem.

● **Interrelation between the image, the form, or object, and the accompanying text:**
The visual side of this campaign was very simple, showing what a family looks like:

- Image 1: In the image you will see that there is a couple that are having a good day with a child walking down a path. Again, the goal of chance is to create memories like this so that the child can see positivity.

Image 2 Source: Fostering Champs

- Image 2: The image is a depiction of two ladies helping a little girl get her coat on. This

image is very unique in the fact that it is about helping foster youth. And you can see just from the imagery that the child is happy and is bracing the assistance of the adults.

● **Compositional Interpretation -** Overall, looking at the website and this campaign's focus points, you will see that it is all inviting. It is bright and vibrant to reflect a child's mind and energy. And while looking through the site and its tools, you'll find that everything is straightforward to understand, thus making it much easier for a foster parent to find the resources that he or she may need.

● **Content Analysis -** The document is very clear, and it's a message that lets us know foster children need help. Additionally, it lets us know that there is help for foster parents.

● **Semiotics -**The CHAMPS campaign is centered around educating and properly equipping families with the tools to help foster children. The cartoon imagery featured throughout the website/campaign focuses on families and children. At the center, they were all happy. The feeling of happiness and caring also flows throughout the still images.

● **Iconography -** The campaign is firm on its visuals, specifically the cartoons and the family-oriented imagery. The beginning part of the website shows a cluster of adults and children all together, like a family. This image just made up of itself reflects the goal of the CHAMPS program. As you dive deeper throughout the web page, you will understand that everything is lively color because the approach is all about creating connection and understanding, thus creating a positive and growing environment for foster youth.

● **Success or failure aesthetic choices for visual solution -** Overall the design of this campaign is very strong and very informative. It captures the ideas and thoughts that are wrapped around the objective of the CHAMPS goal.

● **Aesthetic related/connected -** Again, the campaign is very vibrant and energetic, which should be the mentality of becoming a foster parent. The job of a foster parent is not simple, but being armed with the right tools makes it easier for people to digest and understand. The design of the campaign and website is very bold; even the simple imagery you will see below shows what the goal is, not worry, mixed with large visuals that drive home the point.

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Source: Pratama

Visual Process

- **Deliverables**

- **Campaign Research**

- **Marketing to Youth**

- **Mood Board Research**

- **Social Media**

- **Website**

CHAPTER 3

Source: Campbell

Deliverables

This thesis is meant to help those children that are on a road to aging out and do not see a positive future as they become an adult. The resources that are going to be available throughout these the deliverables are meant to aid foster children, caregivers, local businesses, and government officials. The rollout of this program will happen in a series of stages starting with stage one. Within the first stage a social media campaign will be built around a campaign called "DID YOU KNOW?". The social media post will feature a series of characters that have factual information about foster care children such as statistics and success rates. That part will be followed up by a distribution of posters that will go to schools, therapists, outreach programs, and department of Family Services. The goal of both parts is to fuel the Next Gen Kid website. This component is the most important part of this campaign. This website and app will serve as a place for foster children to gather information about life skills, resources, educational options, and vocational skills.

Campaign Research

Digital campaigns that connected with their audience:

On an average day, if you look around, you will see that most people look at their phones for some reason. However, in most cases, this is linked to some social applications. According to an article written in Smart Insights, "the average daily time spent using social media is 2h 31m (Chaffey). 62%-67% of teens access some form of social media on a daily basis (table 1). With these facts in mind, it is easy to see a good starting point for a campaign directly targeting challenged teen foster youth would be to create a buzz in these arenas.

The Fyre Festival

What was the goal? - Promote a new festival that is like Coachella but done on a remote island.

• The promotional video gave audiences a taste of what would they could experience at the festival - beautiful women, stunning water, unique adventures, and breathtaking performances.

- The orange tile - an offical start to the campaign for the festival.
- Social media influencers - Influencers promoted the festival by posting the orange tile on their social media platforms. Examples - Kendall Jenner, Bella Hadid, Hailey Baldwin, and Emily Ratajkowski.
- 90-95% of the festival sold out within 48 hours.
- Jerry Media was able to spawned an extremely effective social media strategy that created popularity and buzz for the festival (Melville).

Did the campaign work? - Even though the Fyre Festival was a complete disaster the marketing company was success in what was asked of them. Jerry Media created a visual campaign that drove customers to the website, purchase tickets, purchase items that didn't exist (the marketing company was not aware of false information coming from FYRE), and create a must have experience.

How does this relate to the plan? - The Fyre Festival campaign worked with a simple hook, an orange tile placed on Facebook, which opened the door to the idea of a grand festival (that never was). The developing social media campaign will use a similar method of delivery. According to Buffer.com, Facebook has 2.9 billion monthly users, while Instagram has 2 billion monthly users. Each platform will be used as the starting point and linked to the NextGen website.

Source: World Wrestling Entertainment, 2013

Wrestlemania 28 - The Rock Vs. John Cena

What was the goal? - Promote a new festival that is like Coachella but done on a remote island. The WWE (World Wrestling Entertainment) wanted to create the biggest match in wrestling history by pitting The Rock again John Cena.

• On April 13, 2011, John Cena challenged the Rock. However, the actual match would not take place until the following year at Wrestlemania 28.

- The Rock and John Cena were tag team partners at 2011's Survivor Series but after the match, the Rock slammed Cena into the mat. The events of the evening officially kicked off the road to Wrestlemania.
- Both The Rock and Cena used Twitter and other social platforms to help stir the pot for their epic confrontation.
- Each competitor was over charismatic and could gain the favor of the audience at any given time.

Did the campaign work? - The match between the two powerhouses was a complete success. The event helped sell out the arena and pushed pay-per-view sales to new highs for WWE (Staff).
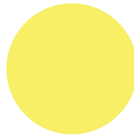
What is common about these campaigns?

- The target audience was given the chance to be part of an experience.
- Social media played a pivotal role in moving the opinions of the audience.
- Each campaign was clear and set the tone for what to expect. Jerry Media achieved this with breathtaking videos and visuals of models and musical artists. WWE used both The Rock and John Cena's audience appeal to charm the audience into the match of champions.

Marketing to Youth

It is very important to understand that marketing to a teen or young adult is very different than connecting to an adult. Key factors to consider:

▶ **92.6%** of people believe that color/design is the #1 influencing factor in their purchase decision (Lupien)?

▶ Within the first **90 seconds** of initial viewing, we make a subconscious judgement about a product or brand. If you think that's impressive, **90%** of that judgement is made based on color alone (Lupien)!

▶ While color impressions are responsible for **60%** of the acceptance or rejection of a product, it equates for **80%** of brand recognition (Lupien).

The information below will give a clear understanding of different colors and how they play a role in marketing:

Red represents energy and excitement. It's bold, youthful, and above all, captures your attention. It's the most intense of all colors, which is why you usually see it associated with call-to-actions online.
Known Brands: Coca-Cola, YouTube, Target

Orange is cheerful and confident, giving off an enthusiastic and successful vibe to all who lay eyes on it. It isn't as aggressive as red, but is still a great color to use when drawing the eye to something important.
Known Brands: Amazon, Harley Davidson, Nickelodeon

Yellow is a great accent color to sneak into your design to emphasize the summer season or add a drop of positivity to your message.
Known Brands: McDonalds

Green is used to instill peace, growth, and health when branding a company's image. The color can also evoke fertility and generosity, making it a great color for a variety of different causes.
Known Brands: Starbucks and Publix
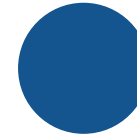
Blue is a classic color. It assumes a position of trust, dependability, and strength.
Known Brands: AT&T, Lowe's, Best Buy
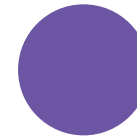
When viewing purple, one is instilled with a sense of power, wisdom, and spirituality.
Known Brands: Taco Bell
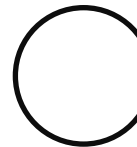
White is one of the most-used colors on websites. White gives off an innocent and clean vibe, which usually allows a company to be seen as good instead of cold or overwhelming.
Known Brands: Apple

Black's ominous darkness makes it both mysterious and sophisticated at the same time. It's a great color to utilize in logo creation.
Known Brands: Nike and Adidas

Each featured color in some way or another is linked to youths and teens. For example, Nike is one of the most well-known brands and according to Start.io 84.5% of consumers are between 18 and 44. One if not all of these colors will be used to create a campaign to positively impact foster youth futures (Carmely).

Mood Board Research

When looking into designs that appeal to teens and young adults, I reflected on brands that have been holding strong for years, such as Redbull, Michael Jordan, Beats, and YouTube. Each of these brands has a different purpose, Beats for music, Redbull for energy, etc. The common thread is that they know their target audiences, youth and young adults, and they continue to be strategically placed to win. You will notice that the color red is featured throughout. This color represents power and strength. Even though this was not the option I chose for the final design I felt it important to explore companies and brands that have winning strategy.

Red is a staple in the following brands and has connected with people for years.

Reflective words of the color red

STRENGTH	LOVE	AGGRESSION
ENERGY	EMOTION	EXCITEMENT

Imperial # ED2939	Salmon # FA8072	Scarlet # FF2400	Persian # CA3433
Raspberry # D21F3C	Indian Red # CD5C5C	Ferrari # FF2800	Fire Brick # B22222

Source: Velarde

Sources: ("RedBullEnergyDrink"; Jordan; Koffler; Laundry Service; Dugandzic; Haring)

The first step of my design process was researching celebrities who had dealt with the foster care. I was looking for relevant and notable people that would connect with the teen and young adult audience. Additionally, I created a list with takeaways for each celebrity.

I used the research to further my design process. The first round of celebrities that I chose was Tiffany Haddish, Eddie Murphy, Dr. Ruth Westheimer, and Barry Keoghan. Each person's journey was different and noted below.

While gathering useful information about celebrities, I found it necessary to generate some illustrations that could be used for additional marketing. The featured characters are designed to represent a youth who has aged out of the system, left with only two bags of clothing (see page for final renderings). The other depicts the same character but successful after receiving some intervention opportunities that changed her life after aging out.

The initial concept for a social media post. I integrated one of the character designs to see how well it would play into the overall campaign.
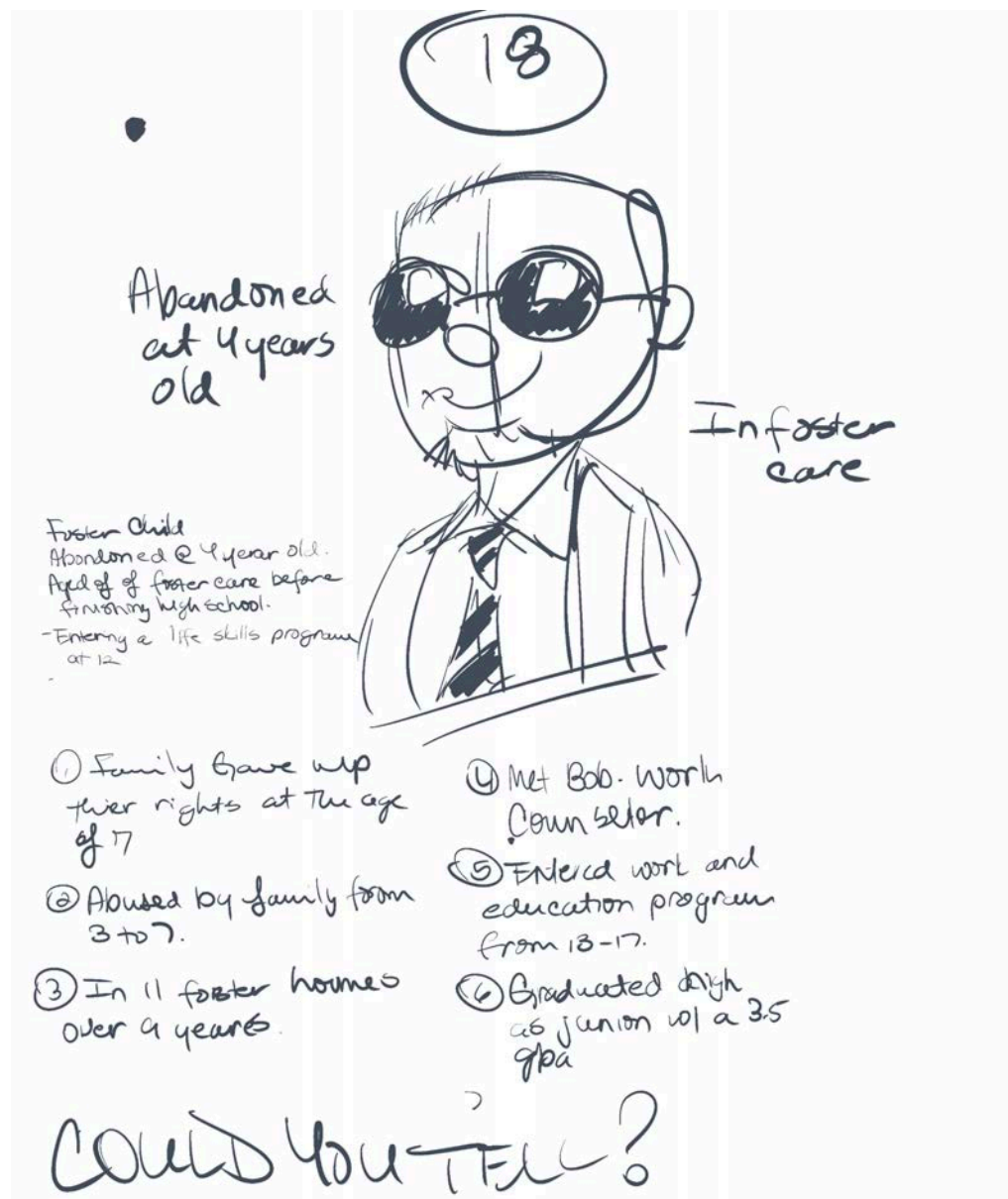
Tested three design layouts that featured a colored circle, a single character (just the head), and a sliced option.
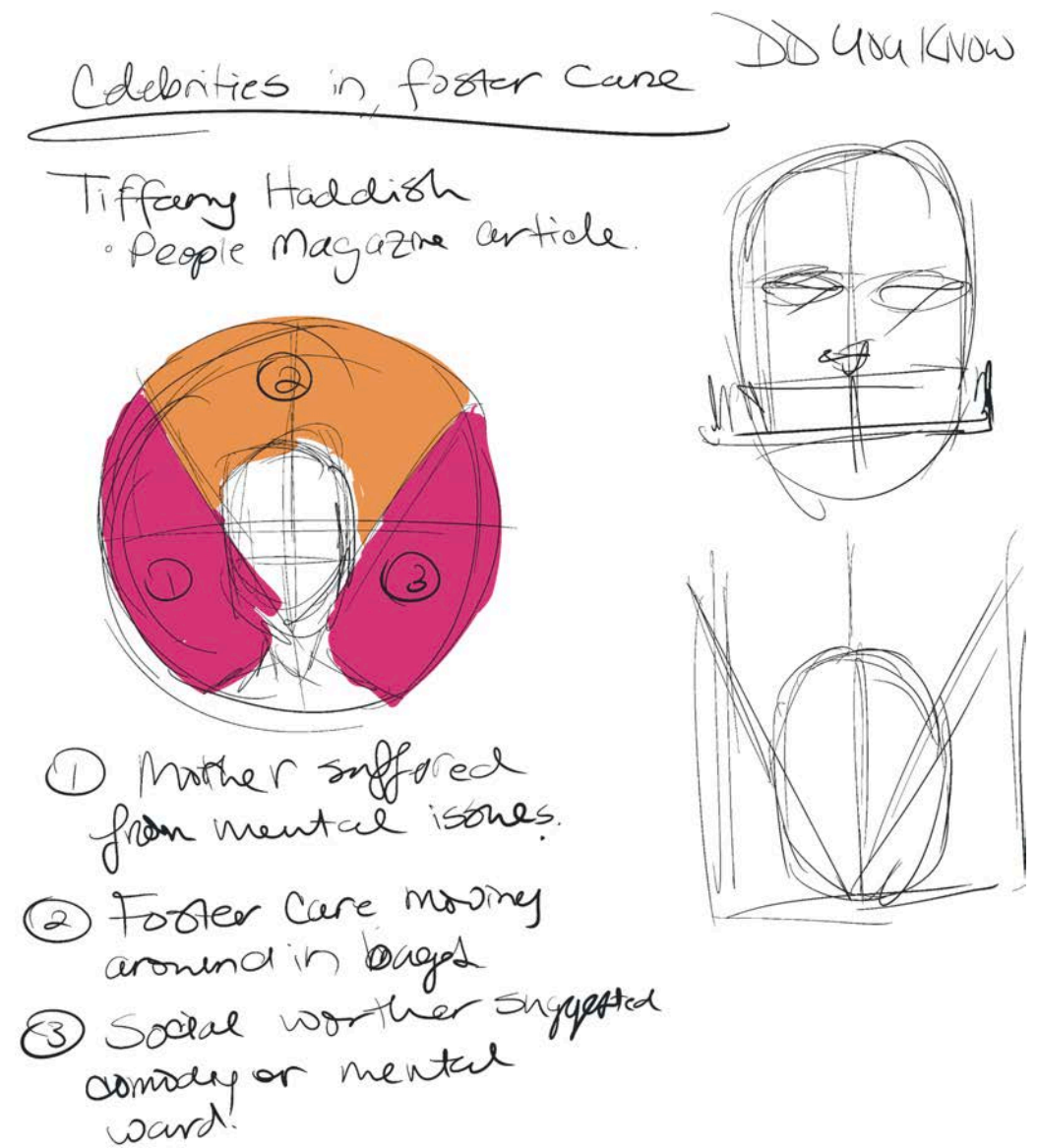
I used four celebrities, Marilyn Monroe, Tiffany Haddish, and Eddie Murphy. Two design concepts used digital black and white and the other vector illustration. Each design incorporated a limited color palette. The Marilyn Monroe was the desired design that I wanted for the first concept, while the Tiffany Haddish design worked best for the vector concept.

Marilyn Monroe

Cher

Tiffany Haddish

Eddie Murphy

Thinking about all the information gathered helped me name the campaign, "DID YOU KNOW?". The title was perfect, the statistics are available, but not everyone knows or understands how real the numbers are.

In this first mockup, I used a series of facts that Tiffany Haddish is known for and ended with the fact that she was in foster care. I tried incorporating some of the colors in the vector image to connect everything. The exclamation point was the bold purple Impact font for "Foster Child."

In this second mockup, I used one of the digital illustrations and mixed it with a bright purple and yellow color palette. The purple reflected the Marilyn Monroe image, and the yellow added the element of hope. I utilized the same hierarchy of facts to create a simple and clean layout. I completed the mockup by adding the design to an Instagram post. Unfortunately, after looking at the mockup, I found that it did not look good or feel suitable for the long-term plan of reaching foster youth.

Comic Strip

The concept of creating a comic strip originated from the children mentioned in Chapter 2 (pages 26-30), with the aim of engaging foster youth and inspiring them with a lighthearted approach. To commence the project, I reflected on my own childhood experience of browsing the Sunday newspaper. I found pleasure in observing the characters, and as I grew older, I began to connect with them on a deeper level, both visually and morally. Popular comic strips such as Peanuts and Garfield featured brief tales that imparted valuable lessons to their readers.

When coming up with a design for this comic book strip I wanted to keep some goals in mind:

Goal 1 – Create short and concise stories that could be produced monthly.

Goal 2 – Create characters that are unique and diverse so to connect to foster youth.

Goal 3 – The comic strip needs be designed so that it can be used in social media

The first designs of the comic strip included a character named Harrison, a gloomy foster child who had given up on his future, responding negatively to everything. The provided image represents a concept for one of the initial panels of the strip.

The initial visuals showcase Madison, a pivotal character who will feature as the first foster child in the comic strip. Madison's character will undergo a dynamic transformation, aging from 12 to adulthood. As she grows, the readers will witness her encountering various situations and experiences that shape her growth.
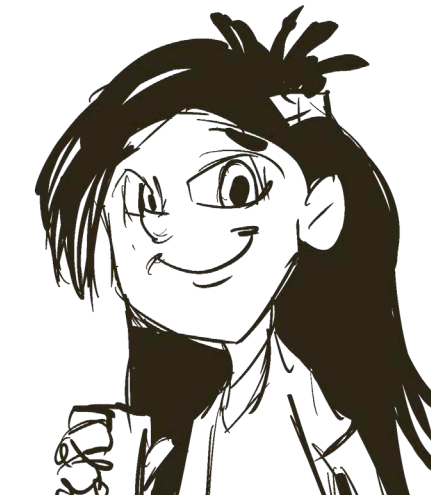
Intial Concept 1

Intial Concept 2

Intial Concept 3

COLOR SCHEME OPTIONS - Tone of the palette needs to be bold; colors cannot be rigid or bland. Overall, the colors should stand out. (The schemes are in order of most favored to least desired.)

Option 1 - Strong bold and playful colors. The colors represented reflect every part of the mission, inform and empower.

641749	2E1337	F3711E	029AA7	F9B717

Option 2 - Color palette does represent the feel and tone of the website's information but lacks a bit of pop.

575CD7	E29D62	2E3393	5AEAFF	F3CC4C

Option 3 - Good color options but lacks life, more of a business feel.

E8E8EA	252545	27DED8	359FD3	461F8D

Option 4 - First option for colors. The thought process behind this option was soft and did not hit the mark at all. Overall, the palette is bland and boring.

EDA0A8	BF85C4	F5A5A3	8965E5	E89DAB
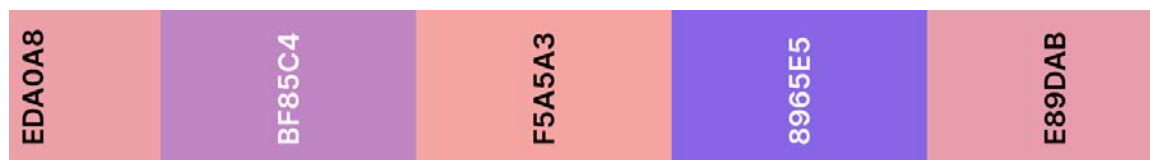
When considering the color palate for this portion of the campaign, I wanted to convey hope, opportunity, and success. The first step of development was looking for one or a few color palates that I thought would work for my design. Some the options that I considered and are seen on the previous page.

Source: Bissonnette

To help narrow down the options, I looked into people and artists that I found interesting and that appealed to large masses. In doing so, I could only think of one person, Peter Robinson, also known as Ten Hundred. Ten Hundred is a mural artist, graphic designer, musician, social media star, and business owner. His work is known for being vibrant, fun, and surreal. The energy of his work is enhanced by his color choices and strong use of contrast.

The Nintendo painting is unique in the design. It is loud while still maintainting the playfulness of the characters that are displayed.

Source: Hundred

The "Tiger" image sealed the decision for the color palette used throughout the campaign. The orange conveys strength and power, which work well with the tiger's fur. The blue-green captures the trusting nature of the child. The black background provides a strong contrast and causes the two figures to stand out.

Source: Hundred

FINAL COLOR PALETTE

Yellow Family
- Positivity

Blue & Green Family
- Growth, piece, and trust

Orange Family
- Confidence, enthusiastic, and succesful

Purple Family
- Power and Wisdow

Logo Options

In regards to the logo, my intention was to convey a feeling of progress and advancement. The term "Next Gen" is an abbreviation for the next generation, and aging-out foster youth are a crucial part of our future. The second logo's color scheme and arrow design are an ideal combination to embody my vision. However, during the project's development, I found out that NEXTGEN and all its variations were already taken. Therefore, I made a minor adjustment by adding the word "Kid" to the name, which better reflects the hub website's concept.

OPTION 1

OPTION 2
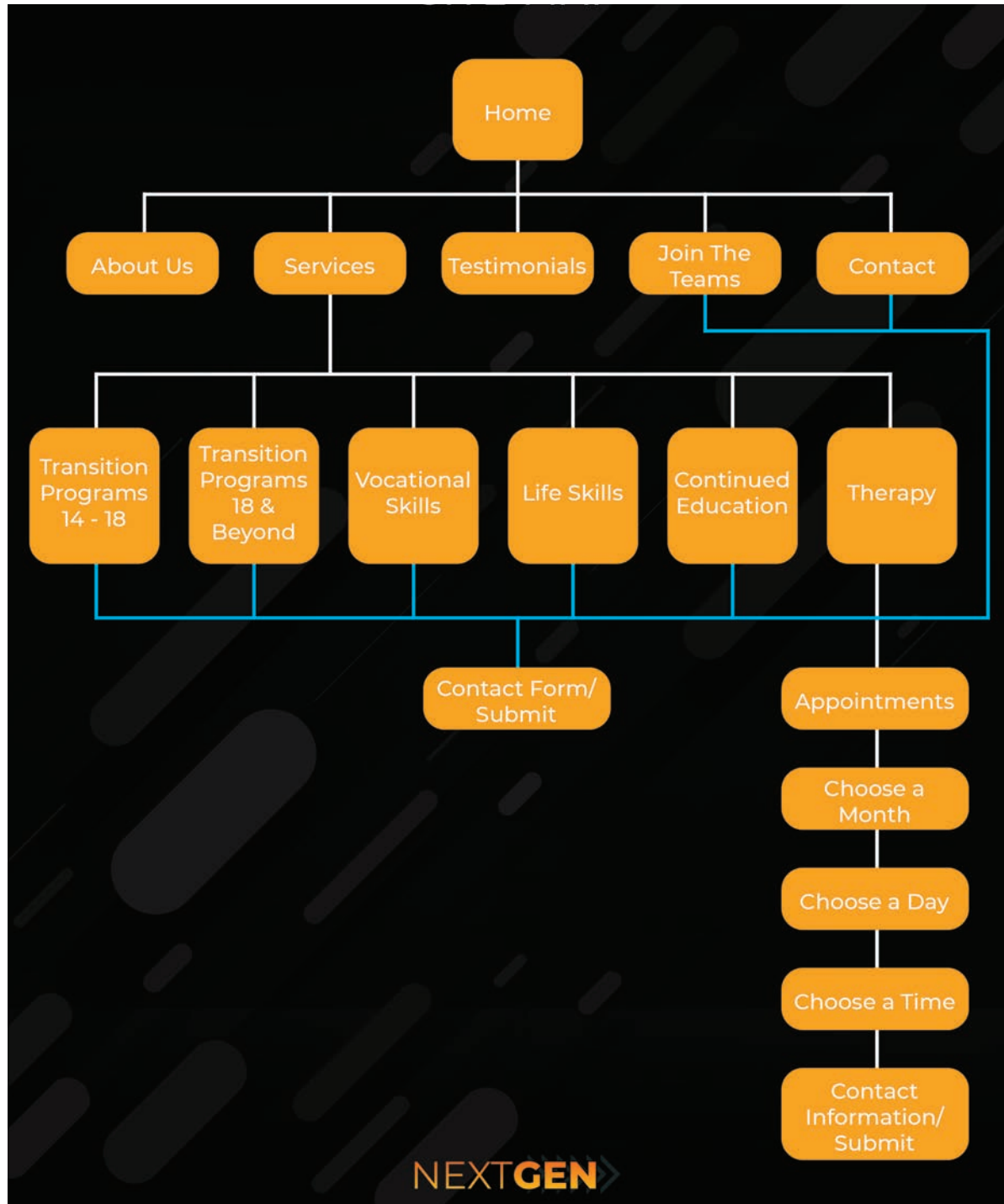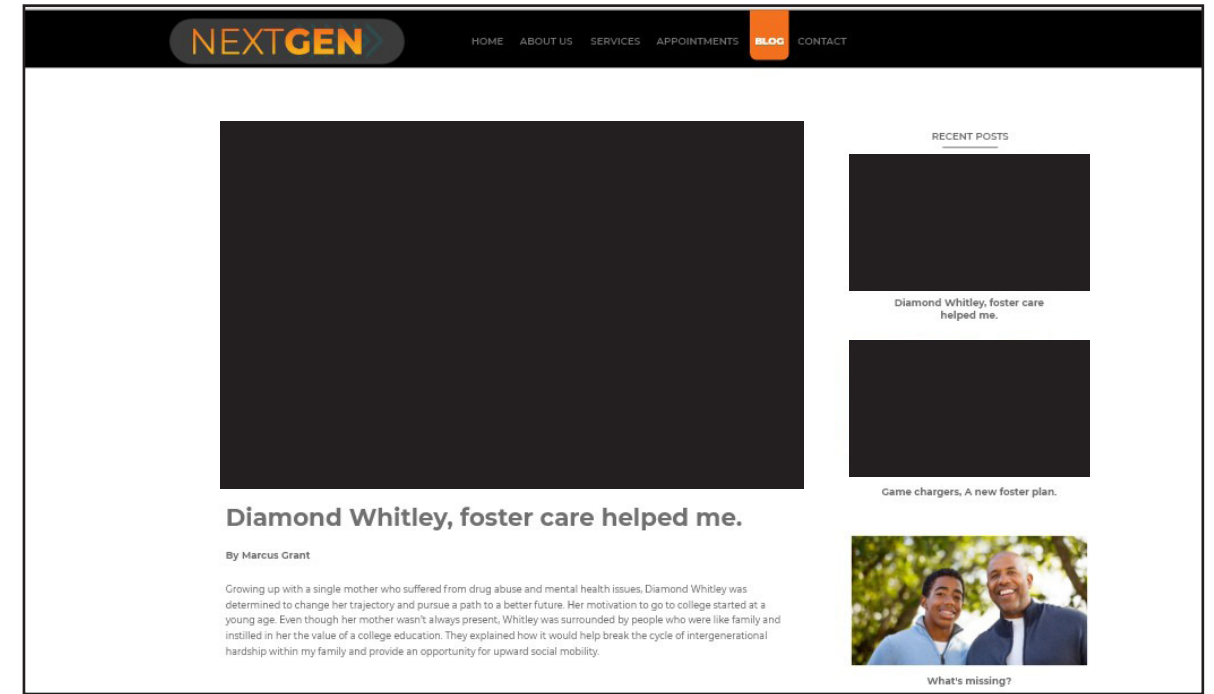

OPTION 3

OPTION 4

(Intial design for website)

- **Transition Programs (ages 14-18 & ages 18-26)** - Children in foster care require structure to help with rebuilding what has been broken (emotionally, physically, and or psychologically).

- **Vocational Skills** - Not all children are made for college, but they still need an opportunity to flourish. Vocational training will open doors to construction, graphic design, culinary and more.

- **Life Skills** - Basic skills such as cooking, cleaning, banking, and money management are a necessity.

- **Continuing Education** - Some foster children want a better life, and they see it through a college education. Foster children will acquire guidance and support to discover their potential.

- **Counseling Services** - Foster children will find an outlet in the NextGen counseling staff. The children will be appointed a counselor that is screened and specializes in their needs.
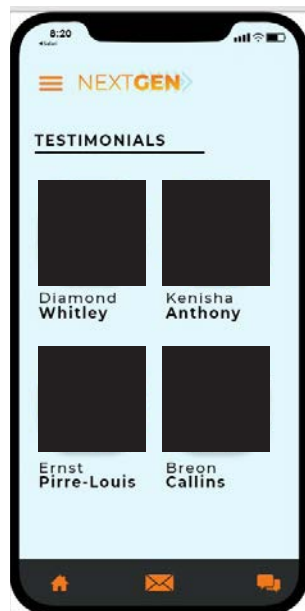
Mobile Prototype Link Version 1

Created in Adobe XD

NEXTGENKID.ORG

Social Media Campaign

- The black and white digital illustration are not the best option for this campaign.
- Over the course of creating the rough drafts I found that the designs appeared to be forced and did not flow together as I had intended

Poster Series

- The second series of cartoon characters worked better with the overall design.
- I created several characters that proved to word with the general poster mock and versions of the posters that were placed in context.

Website

- Once the site map was established the general design of the site began to grow.
- The intial creation of the site was generated in AdobeXD as a mobile version for smartphones.
- The final version of the website will be constructed in Wordpress and will remain active.

Final Solution

Source: Llyod

CHAPTER 4

- Part 1: Infographics

- Part 2: Social Media

- Part 3: Posters

- Part 4: Comic Strip
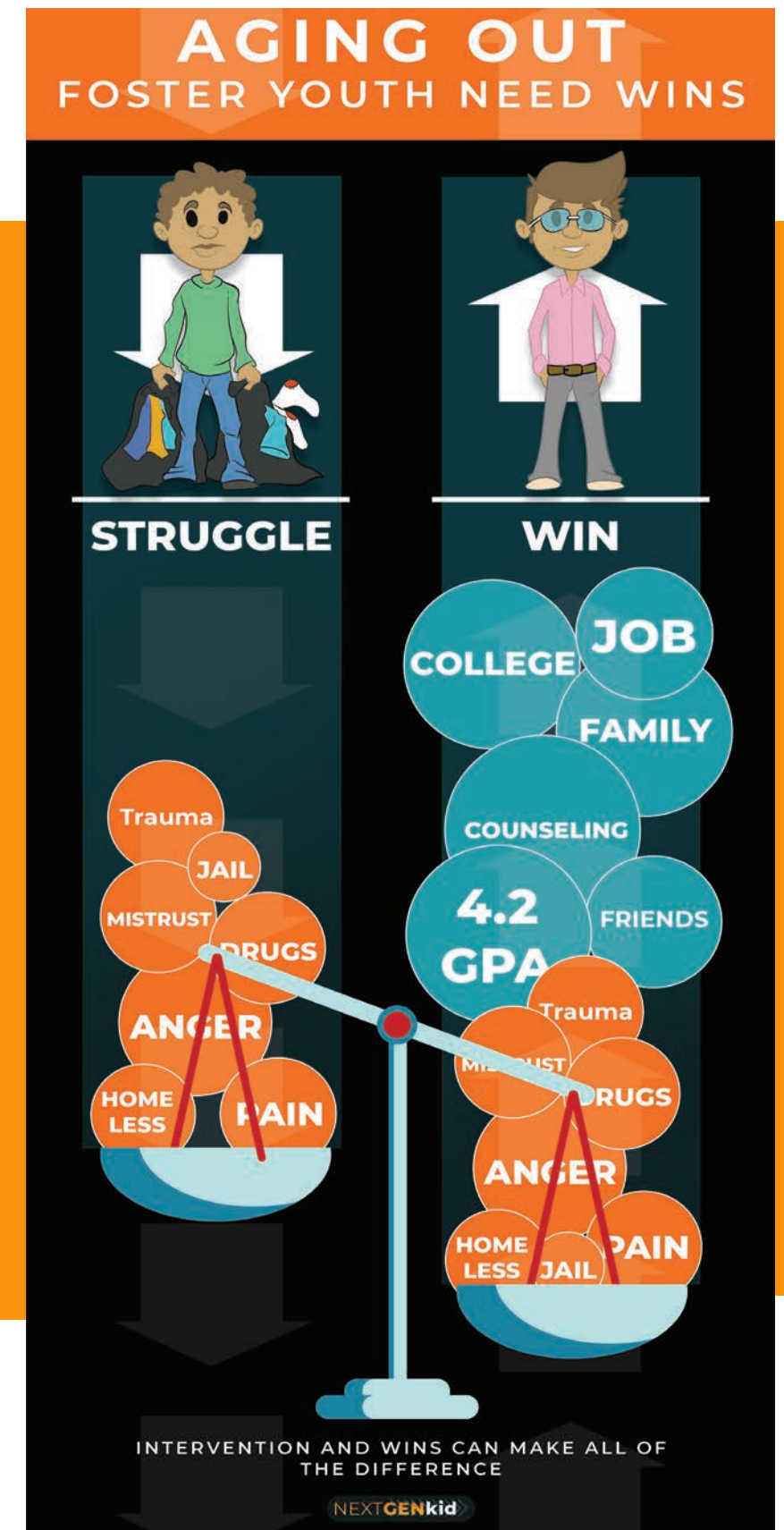
- Part 5: Website

- Reflection

Part 1: Infographics

Part one of the campaign will be used to educate the viewer. The first graphic features a boy's journey, similar to pages 28-31. Bobby is an individual that has dealt with the foster system all of his life. However, he had a successful future thanks to some intervention, support, and wins.
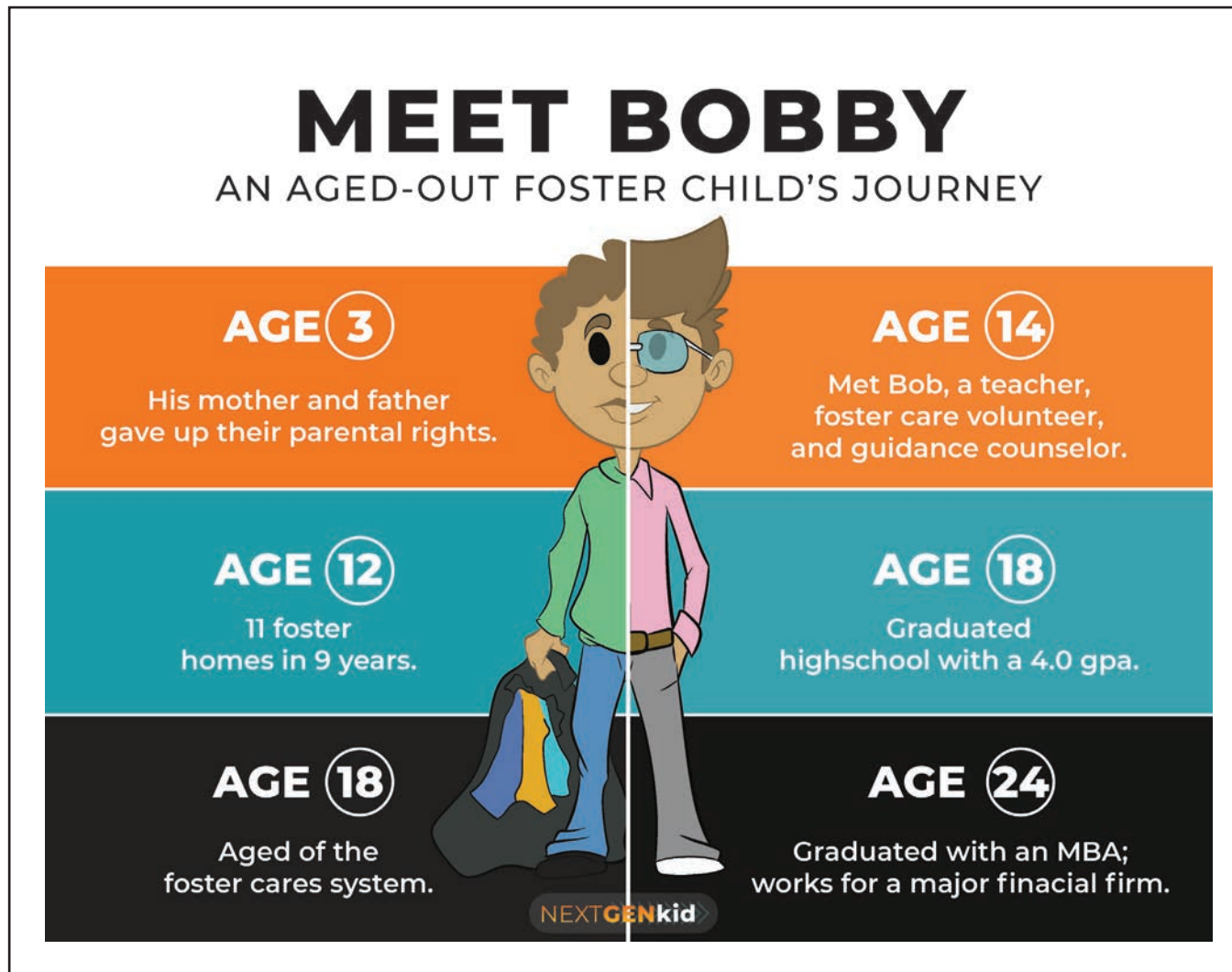
Graphic two looks into the struggle versus the win of a foster child. The child on the right is weighed down with pain, hurt, trauma, and more frustration that closes the doors to help and support. The figure on the left came with the same issues but was given more positivity, such as counseling, family, friends, and good grades.

The two graphics are focused on establishing the problem and showing where positive influence can make a dramatic difference. The end goal will be to connect those that need help with the NextGen.com website. need help with the NextGen.com website.


MEET BOBBY
AN AGED-OUT FOSTER CHILD'S JOURNEY

AGE 3
His mother and father gave up their parental rights.

AGE 12
11 foster homes in 9 years.

AGE 18
Aged of the foster cares system.

AGE 14
Met Bob, a teacher, foster care volunteer, and guidance counselor.

AGE 18
Graduated highschool with a 4.0 gpa.

AGE 24
Graduated with an MBA; works for a major finacial firm.

NEXTGENkid

AGING OUT
FOSTER YOUTH NEED WINS

STRUGGLE

WIN

Trauma
JAIL
MISTRUST
DRUGS
ANGER
HOME LESS
PAIN

JOB
COLLEGE
FAMILY
COUNSELING
4.2 GPA
FRIENDS
Trauma
MISTRUST
DRUGS
ANGER
HOME LESS
JAIL
PAIN

INTERVENTION AND WINS CAN MAKE ALL OF THE DIFFERENCE

NEXTGENkid

Social media posting will directly connect to the NextGen website while providing insight into celebrities in the foster care system. The social media blasts will be distributed through Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

Facebook
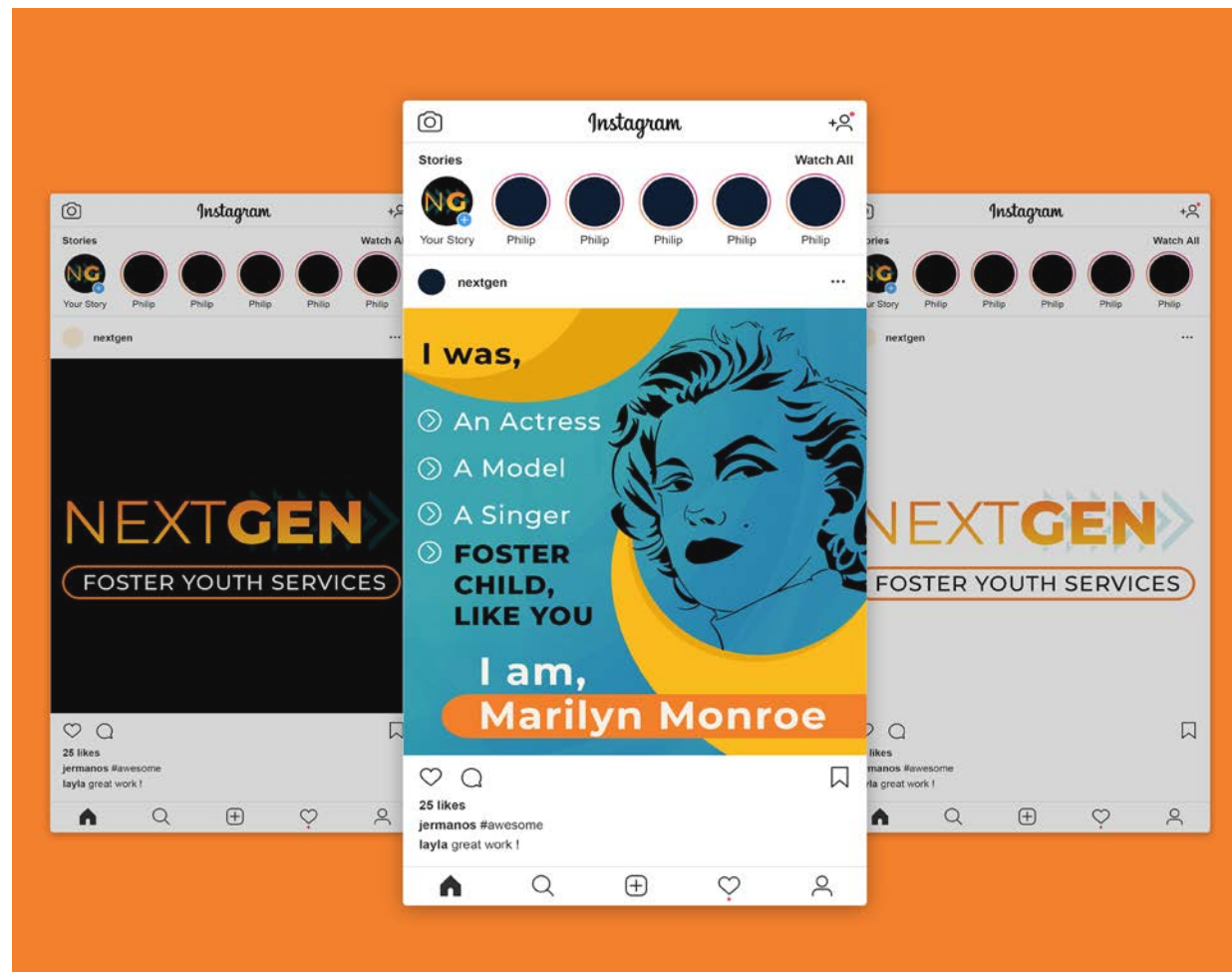## 2.9 Billion Monthly Average Users
(Lua, "Top Social Media Sites to Consider for Your Brand in 2023")
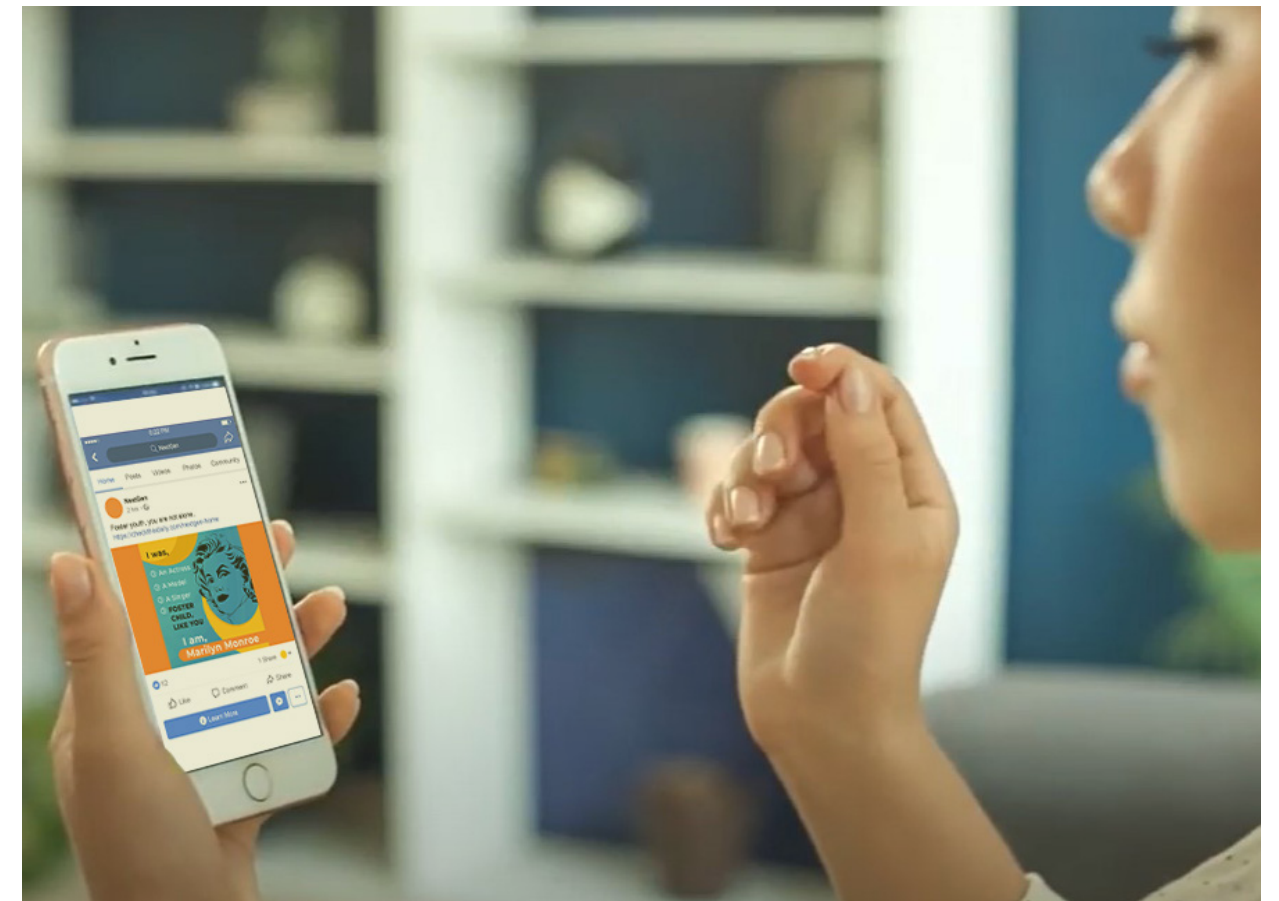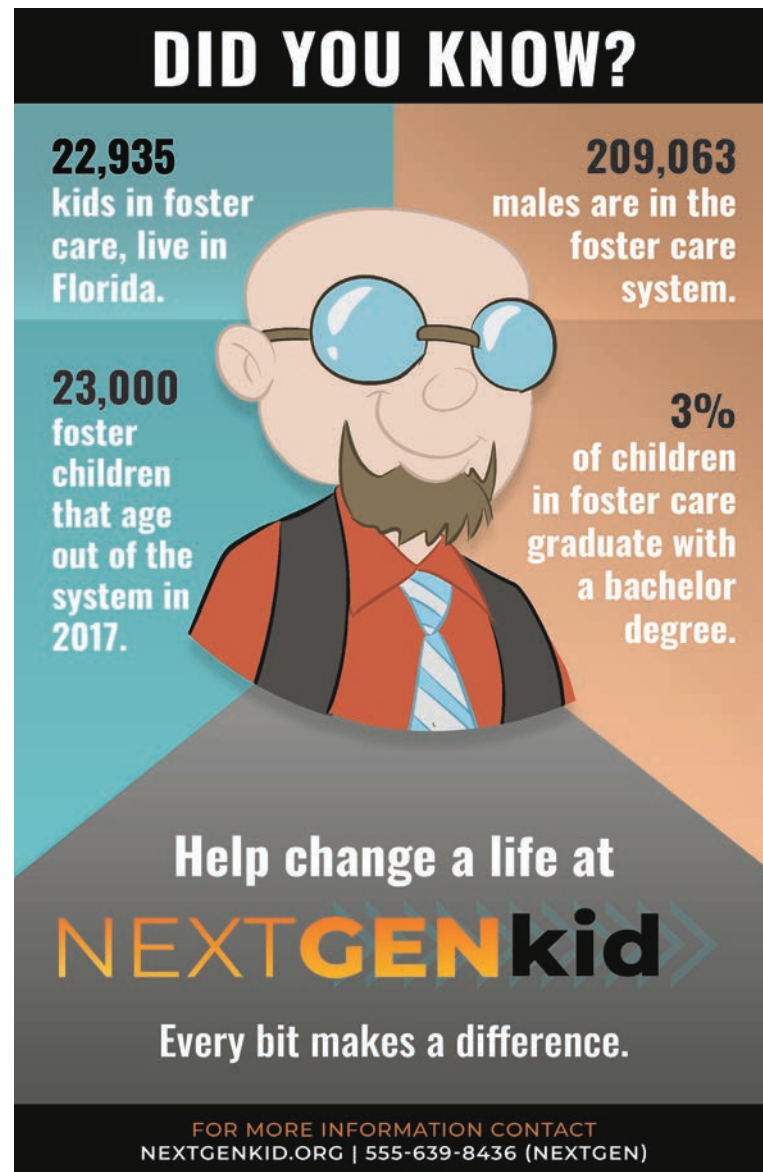
Instagram
2 Billion Monthly Average Users
(Lua, "Top Social Media Sites to Consider for Your Brand in 2023")

Twitter
436 Million Monthly Average Users
(Lua, "Top Social Media Sites to Consider for Your Brand in 2023")

Part 3: Posters

Each poster was designed to open audiences up to the facts surrounding aging-out foster youth. The characters were designed to be inviting and fun (additionally, each character incorporates the color palette chosen for the campaign). The posters will be used to reinforce the facts of the growing problem. These posters are intended to be used in schools, therapy offices, after-school programs, alternative learning centers, and other programs where teens and youth can use a supportive hand. The end goal will be to connect those that need help with the NextGen.com website.

DID YOU KNOW?

22,935 kids in foster care, live in Florida.
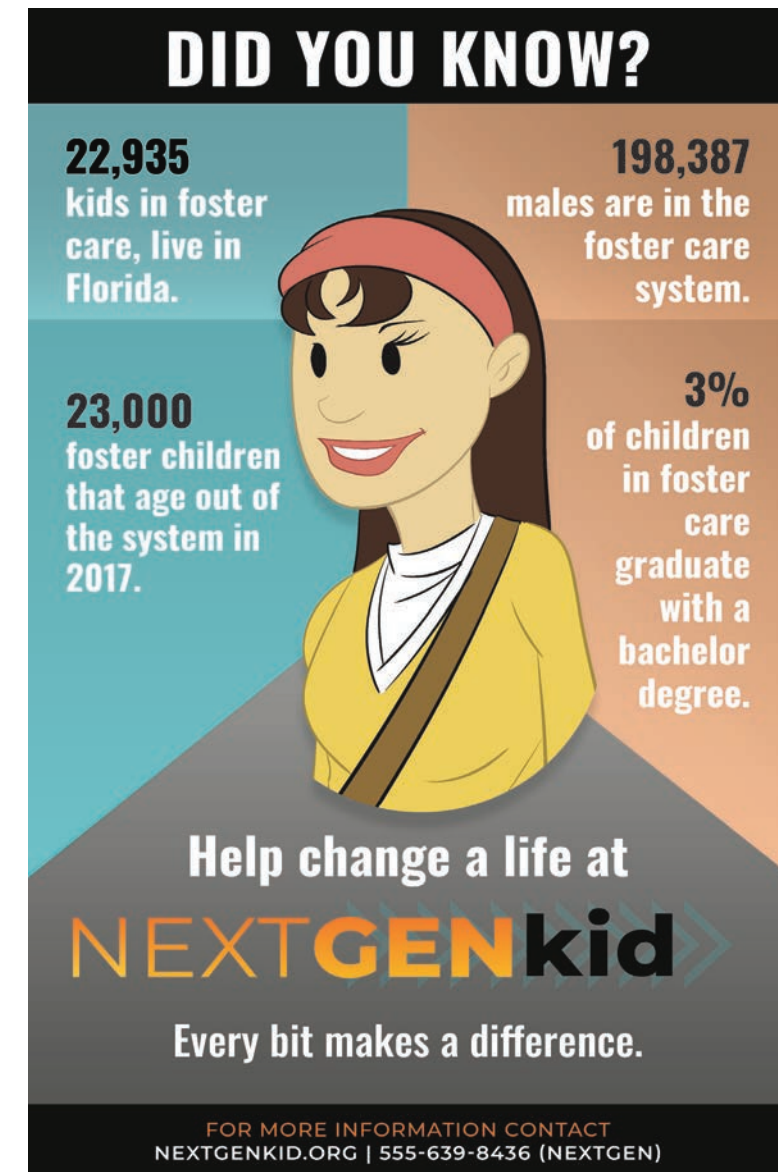
209,063 males are in the foster care system.

23,000 foster children that age out of the system in 2017.

3% of children in foster care graduate with a bachelor degree.

Help change a life at NEXTGENkid

Every bit makes a difference.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT
NEXTGENKID.ORG | 555-639-8436 (NEXTGEN)

DID YOU KNOW?

22,935 kids in foster care, live in Florida.

198,387 males are in the foster care system.

23,000 foster children that age out of the system in 2017.

3% of children in foster care graduate with a bachelor degree.

Help change a life at NEXTGENkid

Every bit makes a difference.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT
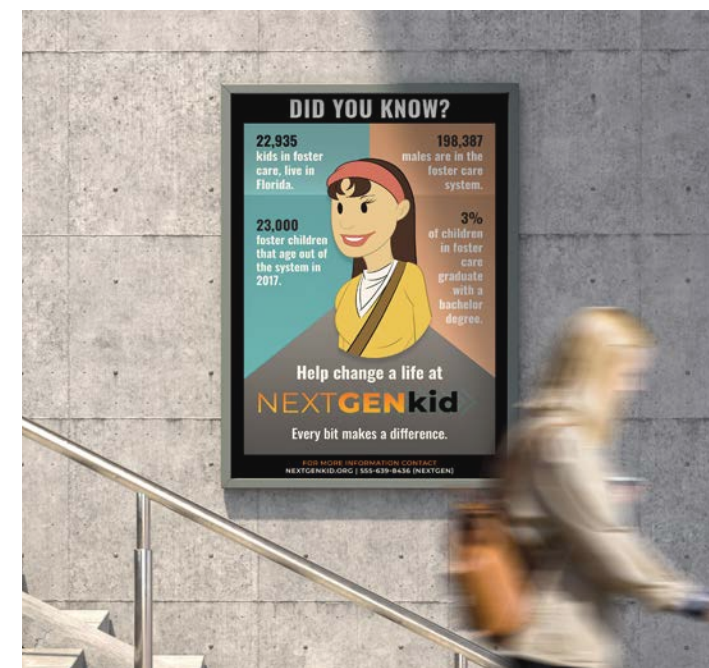NEXTGENKID.ORG | 555-639-8436 (NEXTGEN)

Part 4: Comic Strip

Fostering The Future will be a monthly inspirational comic strip created for foster youth and produced in a digital and physical formats. The comic strip will provide a series of benefits. Firstly, the comic strip will be an effective way to engage young people and capture their attention. By presenting inspirational stories and characters in a visually appealing format, the comic strip will provide a positive and uplifting message to foster youth who may be facing challenging circumstances.

Additionally, the comic strip will provide motivation and encouragement, helping foster youth believe in themselves and their potential. It will showcase examples of successful individuals who have overcome adversity and achieved their goals, providing inspiration and hope to those who may be struggling.

Moreover, the comic strip will serve as a platform for highlighting important issues and raising awareness about the experiences and needs of foster youth. It will help promote understanding and empathy among the general public while also providing foster youth with visibility and representation.

Overall, this monthly inspiration comic strip, produced by NEXTGENKID.ORG, will be a powerful tool for fostering positive attitudes and promoting resilience among young people who may be facing difficult circumstances.

An Inspirational Story

Once upon a time, there was a young girl named Madison who entered the foster care system at the age of 12. She was shuffled from one foster home to another, never quite finding a place where she felt truly loved and accepted. As she got older, she began to feel the weight of the system's limitations and began to fear the day she would age out of foster care.

Madison was a fighter, and she refused to let her circumstances define her. Despite the obstacles she faced, she worked hard in school, got good grades, and dreamed of a better life. She knew that aging out of foster care would be difficult, but she refused to let that fear hold her back.

As her 18th birthday approached, Madison began to panic. She didn't have a stable place to live, no job, and no support system. But instead of giving up, she turned to the community for help. She reached out to a local organization that helped aging out foster youth, and they connected her with a mentor, Julie, who would become a guiding light in her life.

Together, Madison and Julie worked to build a plan for her future. They talked about her dreams and goals and worked on practical steps to make them a reality. Madison found a job and started saving money, and with her mentor's help, she found a small apartment to call her own.

Over time, Madison began to thrive. She enrolled in community college, earned a degree, and landed a job in her chosen field. She formed close friendships and even started dating someone who loved and supported her unconditionally.

Madison's story is a powerful reminder that even in the face of adversity, anything is possible. Though the foster care system failed her, she refused to let it define her future. With hard work, determination, and the support of those around her, she built a life that was truly her own. To all those aging out foster youth out there, know that you too can overcome your circumstances and build a bright future for yourself. You are worthy, you are loved, and you are capable of achieving greatness.

Part 5: Website

NextGenKid.org **is the goal for all campaign points (infographics, social media, and posters). The website is a one-stop hub of information for all things foster children, focusing solely on helping children transition into adulthood.**

MISSION: Bring inspiration to each foster youth.

VISION: Unique programs and systems created to empower foster youth through connection, support, and hope.
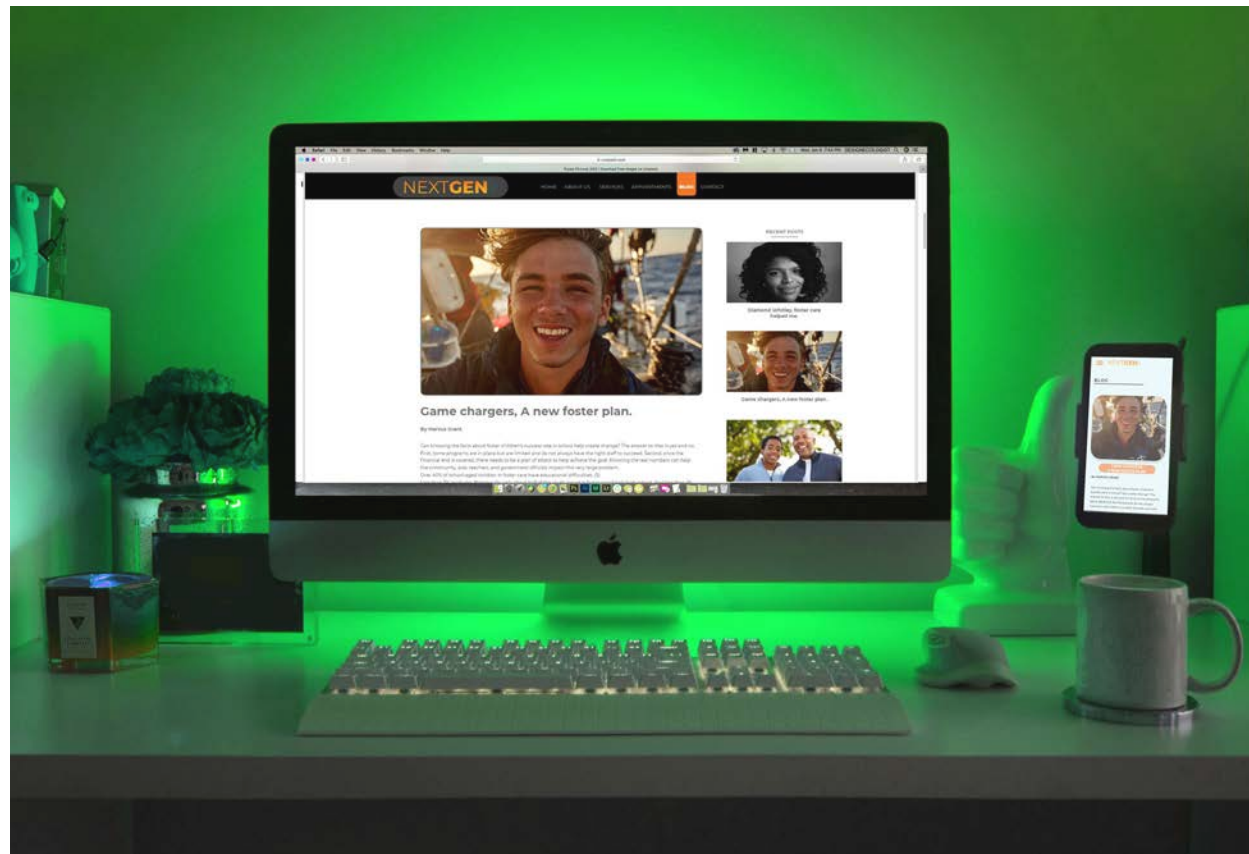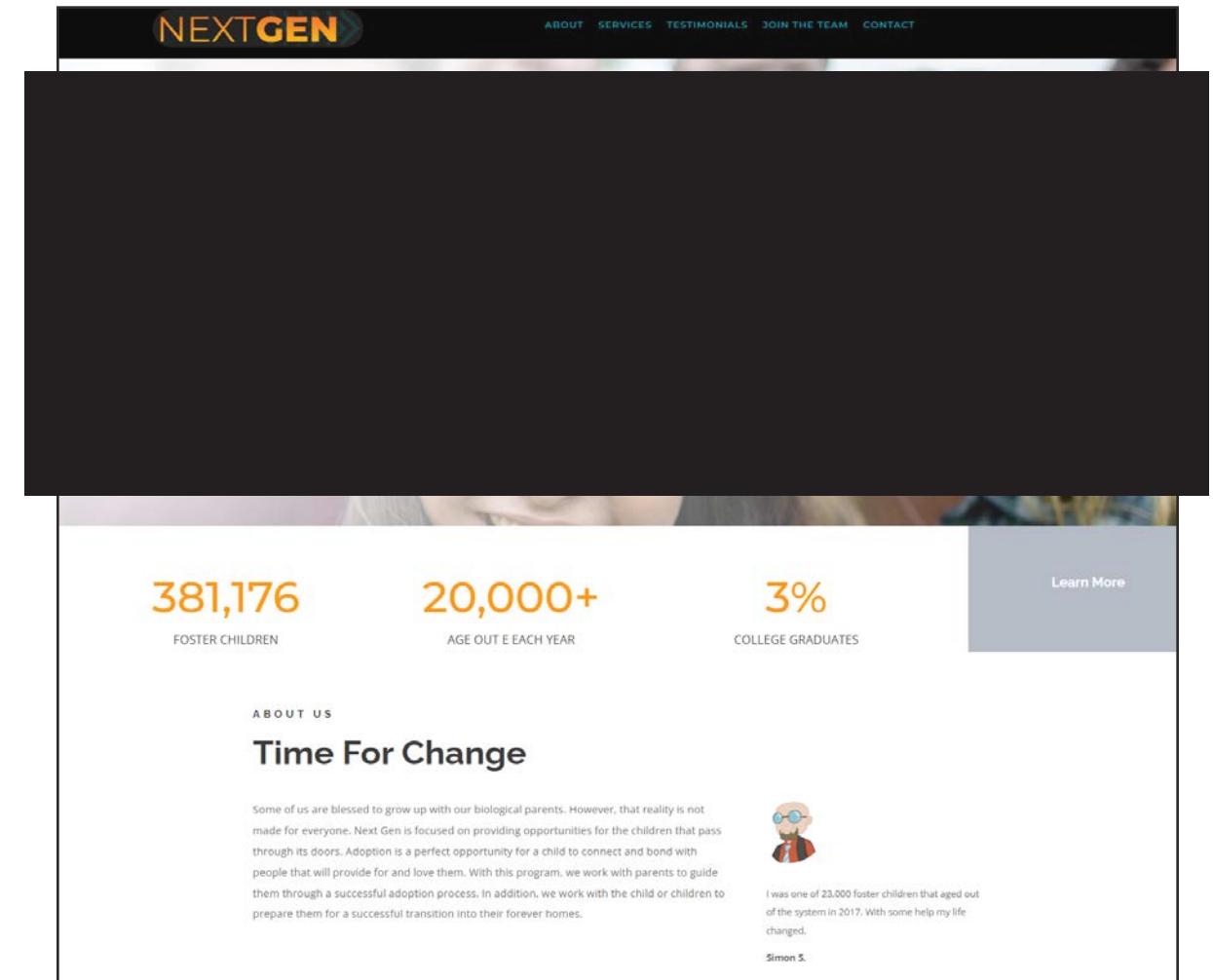
NextGenKid.org is a fully functional Wordpress-based website that is an online resource hub that provides information and support to foster youth and young adults who are aging out of the foster care system. This website includes a range of resources and services, such as educational and career guidance, housing assistance, financial literacy and management, mental health support, and legal assistance.

This website aims to provide a one-stop-shop for foster youth transitioning to independent living, with the aim of helping them navigate the challenges of adulthood and achieve long-term stability and success. These websites will also offer a community forum where foster youth, caregivers, case workers, counselors, and foster families can find the resources needed to create positive outcomes for these foster children.

Overall, this foster care aging-out foster care website will be a valuable resource for foster youth and young adults who currently, may, and have aged out of the foster care system, as it can provide them with the tools and resources needed to overcome the unique challenges they face and achieve their goals.

Transition Services Ages 14-18

Adolescent youth need help, especially because at this point in their life they will be exposed to so much and they need people to help them navigate the rough road ahead. We offer the following options:

- Mentoring
- Life Skills
- Community Service
- Networking

Become A Volunteer

Transition Services Ages 18+
When a child turns 18 the rules of life change,

College Prep and Guidance
Foster children are challenged daily to learn the

Vocational Skills
Not everyone is made to take on college but

NEXTGENkid · ABOUT · SERVICES · TESTIMONIALS · JOIN THE TEAM · CONTACT

| 3% | 20,000 | 400,000+ |
| AGE OUT OF FOSTER CARE | AGE OUT OF FOSTER CARE | IN THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM |

Nextgen.com has been created to focus on foster youth, specifically those on the path to aging out or are currently 18 to 26.

Children that have been placed in foster care are not always ready for the challenges that lay ahead. The reason for this is due to constant routine disruption, lack of guidance, lack of strong support system, and trauma. Our goals are simple:

1 discover and understand the needs of the foster youth

2 place to use in the program or programs that are suited to their needs or desires

3 give foster youth all the needed support, guidance, life skills, and or future growth options.

4 maintain connections and watch foster youth thrive. Don't give up.

Services

Overall, this foster care aging-out foster care website will be a valuable resource for foster youth and young adults who currently, may, and have aged out of the foster care system, as it can provide them with the tools and resources needed to overcome the unique challenges they face and achieve their goals.

Transition Services Ages 18+

When a child turns 18 the rules of life change, everything that he or she does they are held responsible for. This being the reality, foster children are provided a series a people that will help them along the way to minimize struggles and frustrations.

- Mentoring
- Life Skills
- Community Service
- Networking
- Job Opportunity

Learn More

College Prep and Guidance

Foster children are challenged daily to learn the skills to pass the tests to achieve the grades their college of choice is looking for. As each year passes, it becomes more challenging to gain college access. If a child has the vision and desire but can't seem to get to the next step well, we are here to help.

- GED Guidance and Prep
- SAT and ACT Guidance and Prep
- College Application assistance
- Understanding grants and scholarships
- College prep (before and during)

Learn More

Vocational Skills

Not everyone is made to take on college but other opportunities are available. Specialized curriculums have been developed in the following areas

- Welding
- Culinary
- Graphic Design

Learn More

Testimonials

NEXTGENkid   ABOUT   SERVICES   TESTIMONIALS   JOIN THE TEAM   CONTACT

Diamond Whitley

Growing up with a single mother who suffered from drug abuse and mental health issues, Diamond Whitley was determined to change her trajectory and pursue a path to a better future. Her motivation to go to college started at a young age. Even though her mother wasn't always present, Whitley was surrounded by people who were like family and instilled in her the value of a college education. They explained how it would help break the cycle of

Kenisha Anthony

At a young age, I had to deal with the harsh reality that my parents would no longer surround me, as drugs tore us apart. Through every trial and tribulation, I had to realize that I would ultimately have to save myself and strive towards independence. I was driven by the fact that, no matter how much I cried, something better was going to come so long as I kept pushing forward. Thirteen years of being relocated, constantly meeting different people and tragic experiences has ultimately formed a solid foundation for me.

Today, I stand here an ambitious and determined young woman who has recently earned a bachelor's degree in Social Work from Florida State University. I have been admitted to Florida International University and will begin my graduate studies this fall. It is my plan to

Ernst Pierre-Louis

I'm a graduate of The Florida State University and plan on attending Howard University School of Law in the fall. I'm the founder of the "Unconquered Scholars Program" at Florida State, which helps youth in foster or relative care transition into the University setting. I write music in my free time and one day would like to start a nonprofit that merges music and education as a form of self-therapy for at-risk youth (while defending their intellectual property in court!)

Breon Callins

I was placed in foster care at the age of nine and shuffled in between foster and relative care for about 4-5 years. I have four brothers, but in all that time in foster care I only got to see them once. When we were placed in HANDY (an after-care support system for foster care youth) I got my life back. The relationship with my family is still broken, but I've graduated from high school and completed 2 years of college. I have a beautiful daughter that I love dearly.

Core Values

CONNECTION - Building bonds is essential for any person. The most upfront and straightforward way of doing this is by testimonials. Foster youth must know that their journey is unique and not set in stone. They can choose their destiny.

SUPPORT - Teachers, therapists, community leaders, and caregivers are all components that can aid in helping foster children get to a better place. Getting involved and being part of the solution is a strong part of helping these children.

PROGRESS AND HOPE - Programs focused on curving the realities of foster youth that have lost focus. The programs have been developed to assist in education, life skills, therapy and more. Additionally, the services will be available to the foster children through age 26. It is important to know that foster youth struggle due to trauma and other issues.

Reflection

Social Media Campaign

- Infographics - each graphic brings attention to different outcomes (positive and negative) for aging-out foster youth.

Poster Series

- Fun characters, clear facts, and clean design have allowed me to create a poster series that makes sense in practical application.

Website

- The website is the centerpiece of all the research. Within the website, anyone can find resources and programs (14 - 18+) geared specifically for those that need direction and hope.
- The goal, reduce the number of children that age in foster care and equip them with the power to create a positive future for themselves.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

Conclusion

Source: Avery

Ultimately, it is crucial to ensure foster children's long-term physical, mental, and emotional health is the primary focus. 18-year-old foster children may legally be adults but mentally and emotionally the trauma they have experienced in their home lives prior to going to foster care often impacts their development and they may not be at the same level as other adults. Even those who have not been through trauma or the foster care system can struggle in young adulthood in finding their way and foster children often lack many of the healthy supports that their peers may have access to. According to an article in Growing Leaders, "Most neuroscientists today agree that the pre-frontal cortex is not fully developed until about 25 years old. The common term for these functions of the pre-frontal cortex is executive function. This is the ability to differentiate conflicting thoughts, determine right and wrong and the future consequences of conduct, and the ability to suppress urges that lead to inappropriate outcomes"(Harris). The foster system has

been designed so children can opt-in and out of foster care services until they turn 21 years old (in some states, the age limit is up to 26 years of age). The major problem that plagues these children is they do not receive the support services such as life skills, education and guidance, and therapeutic support. All of the components are essential to any adult's development, but even more so to a child in the foster system.


Source: Clark

This paper was created to help youth on the path of aging out and who lack the abilities to navigate life as an adult. The gathered research centers around creating a social media campaign targeted at youth and young adults, a poster series to be distributed to agencies and schools, all of which will fuel a website called NextGenKid, a hub website to find all resources to help this population. All the components are just the tip of the iceberg to combat the huge issue of children aging out of the system. At this point, the expectations for future research are simple:

- Create awareness about aging out foster youth. According to a Pew Research Study in 2021, 85% ("Mobile Fact Sheet") of the United States population uses a smartphone. Social media posts will target everyone who has access to a smart phone. The poster series will be distributed to schools, caseworkers, mental health agencies, divergent programs, non-profits (kids and teens), out-of-school suspension programs, and other professional businesses that may interact with this population.

- Connect foster youth with programs that will allow them to grow and see a positive outcome in their future.

Gain the support of business owners, community leaders, and government leaders to help acquire the funding needed to create vocational skills training, educational development, and internship programs.
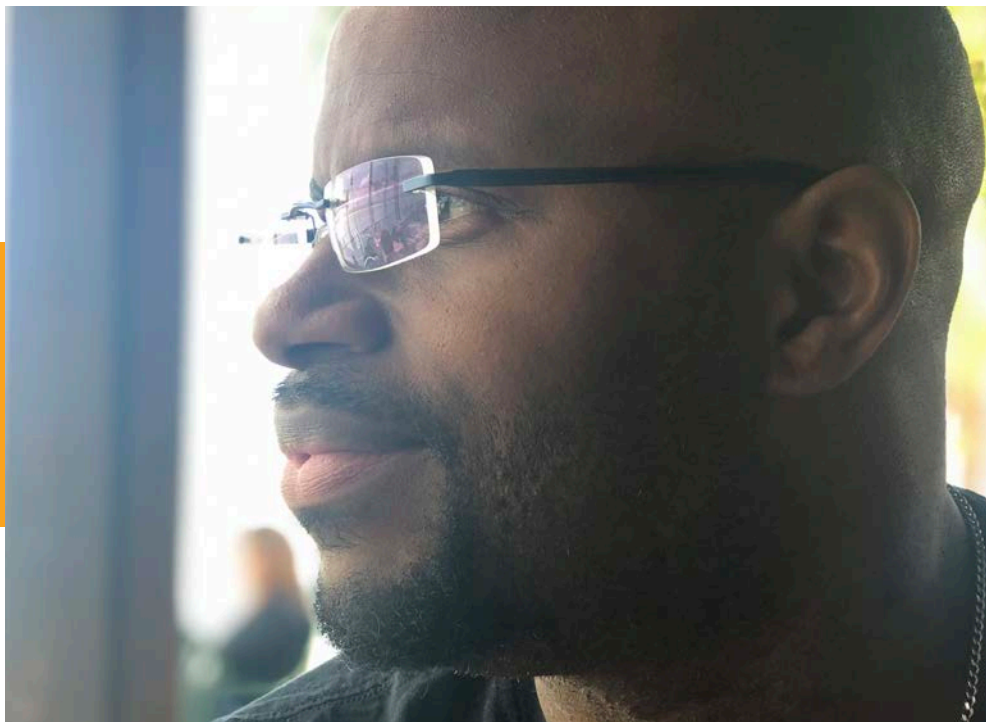
On a personal level, there is more that I would like to see happen. I have been working with children in the foster care system for the past 5 years and with children in general on and off throughout my adult years. These are some of the things that I would like to target and develop professionally over the next few years:

- Dig deeper into the issue by creating a series of questionnaires that will gather information from the foster children, caregivers, social workers, teachers, etc about their perspectives on the needs of the youth. The gathered facts will assist in targeting the needs of these children from a national level down to a local level and help drive programs to meet those needs.

- Petition for a series of grants to build alternative learning and vocational skills through community programs targeted towards helping this population. Foster youth need alternatives to college as many of them are not emotionally or educationally ready to take on continuing their education or simply do not want to. Vocational programs offer a way for these young adults to support themselves and possibly find a career they enjoy. Funding is needed to make any program work and grow. The resources garnered through grants will allow those tasked with operating these programs to focus on helping these children in need.

- Refine the NextGenKid website and have it used to simplify the process of finding resources and tools to help these challenged youth.

Throughout this paper, the ultimate goal always goes back to helping youth on the verge or path to aging out of the foster care system to be able to access and utilize programs and supports to help them function in the adult world.

One inspiration for this type of work comes from people like Diamond Whitley. She was a foster child alumni who benefited from her drive to do better than her situation and she utilized a tuition

waiver given to her in Florida. Whitley's vision pushed her to navigate through foster care as a child, graduate high school with a 4.2 GPA and complete a college degree in psychology. "Whitley is now part of the Postsecondary Education Services and Support (PESS) state program. It provides her with financial and other support services while she focuses on school and works toward becoming independent" (Stinnett, "From Foster Care Youth to Community Advocate"). However, inspiration also comes from the foster care children currently in the foster care system, living in group homes, and preparing to age out of the current system. I have personally encountered children who are turning 18 and are confused, scared, and have no idea what is next for them as far as where they will live, what supports they will have, how they will finish their education, or where they may work. I am a director for a program called the Graphic Design Impact Center where I am able to use my skills as an artist/graphic designer as well as an educator to help train children who want to learn and have an opportunity to make money. We do community projects for other agencies which also allows for the group home to network with other programs and resources for the children. But when the children leave the group home, they are limited on options. There are not many vocational programs such as mine that foster children have access to and children are often bounced around to different placements in the foster care system. I hope that my social media campaign and website will allow these children to access resources and services wherever they go and, perhaps, eventually expand programs like mine so that they can be accessed all over and more students have an opportunity to learn a vocation and have an opportunity to make money to help support themselves.

In order to facilitate growth, it is essential to have people who are not only driven by love and passion, but also possess the necessary training and education. A key step towards achieving this goal is to raise awareness within the community about foster children and ways in which they can be supported. By building understanding and support within the community, efforts can be made to petition for increased government funding to improve current systems, create new jobs, and provide training to caseworkers, caregivers, foster families, and anyone caring for a foster child. The community needs to understand the challenges that these children face as well as possible solutions. They need to understand how vocational programs, community supports and resources can change a child's life and set them up for future success including having stable employment.

Source: (Stinnett, "From Foster Care Youth to Community Advocate")

The ultimate objective of this mission should be to achieve positive outcomes for these children. Given the imperfections within the foster system, it is important to work together under one umbrella, with successful programs shared and replicated throughout the United States. Networking should be considered a necessity rather than an option, as our country and the challenges faced by children are constantly evolving. It is imperative that we strive to make a difference in the lives of these vulnerable children. The hope is that a social media campaign and NextGenKid website will allow everyone to be able to access very important information to raise awareness and provide support and resources for children and professional within the foster care system.

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