

Tom W. Lushice

Approved:

Date: April 27, 2015

COUNSELING ADOLESCENCE:

AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE

COUNSELING ADOLESCENCE
AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE

A Seminar Paper

Presented to

The Graduate Faculty

University of Wisconsin-Platteville

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirement for the Degree

Masters of Science

in

Education

Adult Education

by

Tashanti Young

2014

Abstract

COUNSELING ADOLESCENCE

AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE

Tashanti Young

Under the Supervision of Tom Lo Guidice, PhD

Although, placing children in foster is supposed to be a temporary solution until the child can safely be reunified with their biological parents is not always the case. Many studies have shown that there is a significant amount of children who age-out of the foster care system. Adolescents who age-out of foster care are the youth who reach adulthood and have not yet been reunited with their parents, who have not been adopted or who may not have any other support.

Many adolescents are faced with many obstacles after being removed from their biological parents and their homes. These adolescents struggle with adapting to a new environment, schools, friends, family and new rules. Research shows that adolescence removed from the home can be a traumatic event which could result in the child developing emotional and behavioral problems.

Aging-out of foster is a challenging transition because there are limited resources and assistance to help make these young adults self-sufficient. In many states when a child turns eighteen they will no longer be a part of the child welfare system. These children then have to find ways to support themselves if they do not have any support. Due to the lack of independence preparation for these adolescents who age-out of foster care; they tend to be at a higher risk for being victims of society.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
APPROVAL PAGE	i
TITLE PAGE	ii
ABSTRACT.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Introduction	
Purpose of the Study	
Significance of Study	
Problem Statement	
Definitions of Terms	
Delimitations	
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	7
Reasons Adolescents are placed in Foster Care	
How Foster Care Placement Affects Adolescents	
Adolescents Aging Out of Foster Care	
III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	17
IV. REFERENCES	19

Chapter One: Introduction

INRODUCTION

Professionals in human services has witness a large number of children growing up and aging out of foster care. The goal is for foster care to be a temporary placement until adoption takes place or until biological parents are capable for reunification. If children have not been reunified with parents or adopted, the child will be placed in a long-term foster home until the child reaches the foster care age limit; which usually results in child aging out of the foster care system.

This topic is important because once these children become adolescents and age out of foster care at the age of eighteen, they are on their own because society states they are adults. The percentage of adolescents who age out of foster care has increased from 2000 to 2012 by 3%. (Children's Rights, 2014). In 2012 over 23, 000 children aged out of foster care without family or any other reliable adults to depend on. It has been proven that these adolescents are high risk for being jobless, homeless, incarcerated, having children at early ages, become ill, and are victims of sexual and physical abuse (Children's Rights, 2014).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to provide a review of literature related to how foster care may affect the children and how adolescent can successfully age out of foster care with the needed resources for them to become self-sufficient adults in society.

Significance of the Study

The study of Adolescence Transitioning out of Foster Care is important to the practice of Social Services. This work will make an impact on the use of programs and resources in the community to assist our adolescence with adapting to society on their own and should be of importance to others seeking information related to best practices.

Problem Statement

The problem to be addressed is “How to better assist adolescents when placed in foster care?”

Definition of Terms

Adolescence- The period of life when a child develops into an adult. (n.d.). Retrieved June 21, 2014, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/transition>

Affects- Feeling or emotion, especially as manifested by facial expressions and body languages. (n.d.). Retrieved March 12, 2015 from <http://thefreedictionary.com>

Foster home-A household in which an orphaned, neglected or delinquent child is placed for care (n.d.). Retrieved June 21, 2014, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/transition>

Transition- A change from state or condition to another (n.d.). Retrieved June 21, 2014, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/transition>

Delimitations of Research

The research collected for this project will focus on the struggles of adolescences face while in foster care and when exiting foster care system. The information on this this topic will be obtained from Ebscohost using the search engines Google, Google Scholars, UW systems and

Minds@UW. The key terms utilized for this search will be foster care, foster homes, transition, youth and adolescence.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Aging out of foster care has been a problem for many years because when children reach eighteen they no longer can benefit from the foster care program. When these youth age-out of the child welfare system they are faced with two transitions. One transition is from the care, protection, and supervision of the child welfare system to personal autonomy and responsibility. The second form of transitioning from childhood to adulthood (Vaughn, Shook & McMillen, 2008). Although these youth may be considered adults by age, they are not self-sufficient adults at that time. Not only have they have struggled from adapting to the foster care system but they now have to adapt to society without the support and resources that other eighteen year olds transitioning from childhood to adulthood may benefit from.

There are numerous of children placed in foster care for many different reasons. Over 500,000 children in the United States currently live in foster care. Foster care placements have grown dramatically over the past 10 years (American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 2005). Foster care is acknowledged as a formal placement for children in need of temporary out of home placement. Foster care plays a significant role to child welfare because it guarantees that all children, no matter how old the child may be, have connections to a safe environment. Foster care is normally the last option for the child after ruling out other possible family members to temporarily care for the child. The ultimate goal is to maintain family reunification. Therefore, child welfare services offer a variety of support services based on the family's needs. These services help families develop needed skills such as parenting skills, appropriate discipline skills, counseling, financial assistance, stability and family interaction goal plans. Child welfare have no doubts that the best interest of the child it to live with their biological families, but at times biological families are unable to provide care, or a safe

environment for their children which is why the children were placed in foster care. The court system and child welfare partner together to determine and agree on the appropriate course of action needed for placing the child in foster care (Casey, 2000). If the child is not placed with other family members they may be placed in a group home setting (depending on the age) or the child may be placed with adoptive resources families. These are families who cooperate with child welfare on behalf of the child and biological parent's interaction but they are also interested in adopting the child if reunification is unsuccessful. The courts and child welfare take into consideration the physical, emotional, and long-term effect out of home placement may have on the child. That is why there has to be adequate safety concerns regarding the well-being of the child when removing the child from their home.

Over the past ten years there has been a decrease in the amount of foster parents available to care for the needed adolescents (American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 2005). Child Welfare is up against constant challenges with keeping sufficient amount of available foster homes for children who are in need of temporary care. Child welfare face many struggles when recruiting and licensing new foster homes (Rhodes, Cox, Orme & Coakley, 2006). Therefore, the agency works with "Children and Family Rights" and other adequate agencies to help increase the number of extended family members who may be eligible to provide care for the child, rather than placing the child in foster care (Boel-Studt & Landsman, 2011). In many cases children are placed with family members when removed from their biological home which is called Kinship Care. Kinship Care is when the family member has been approved by the courts and child welfare to temporarily take care of the child. Although, the child is placed with an approved family member many times that family member have to agree and abide by the court orders regarding the child/parent interaction. This may become

challenging at times which could result in the family member losing their rights to care for the child due to court orders not being followed.

Although, foster care is a great asset to child welfare it can also be a negative asset for the child because it could cause more harm to child if strict regulations are not met on behalf of the child. Removing a child from their biological family and placing them in foster care could result in the child developing behavior and or emotional problems. It is important that these children have the needed support from their counselors, teachers, case managers and most importantly the foster parent.

Reasons Why Children Are Placed in Foster Care

Social environments has played a big part for children being placed in foster care. Children are placed in foster care due to child welfare having some concerns regarding the safety of the child, due to physical abuse, sexual abuse, mental health issues, abandonment, family instability, crime charges, violence, homelessness, substance abuse, and possibly illnesses, court ordered, and domestic violence. Other factors that may result in the child/children being placed in foster care are due to parent being incarcerated, alcohol/substance abuse, parental problems and death (American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 2005). According to the article "The Future of Children" about twenty percent of children are taken out the home due to physical or sexual abuse. Majority of children were removed from the home due to neglect such as (lack of food, clothing, shelter, parent supervision, medical care or possibly child exposure) (Lewit, 1993).

How Foster Care Affects Children

Adolescents placed in foster care are temporarily not allowed to live with their parent(s) but are allowed to have court-ordered supervised visitation with their parent(s). The goal is to continue to encourage the parent-child bonding and interaction while the child is placed out the home, to give the Child Protective Services and the courts the chance to recognize parent-child relationships, and to observe the parent's progress. Parent-child visits are commonly short, and take place weekly in either a community or home setting, ranging from one to two hours a week, which are supervised by a caseworker. The adolescents may have confused feelings and may appear to be frustrated and upset as to what is happening and why they are unable to go home with their parent(s). Supervising weekly parenting visits are not always beneficial or the most favorable. Parent-child interaction provides the parent(s) with a steady connection with the adolescents, but may be more damaging for the child (Casey, 2000). When adolescents are detached from their home and placed in foster care, it can be a complicated and confusing process. Adolescents in foster care may also suffer from emotional problems and behavioral problems. Adolescents often go into foster care with trauma histories and can be susceptible to even further trauma once in the foster care system (Bruskas, 2008). The youth in foster care are vulnerable because many of them have already been exposed to traumatic experiences in their lives. For adolescents in foster care, they virtually are powerless and often do not have a say in their placements (Bruskas, 2008). Bruskas (2008) points out the importance of helping adolescents to have information about their future and helping them to take part in conversations about their future.

Emotional Problems

Adolescents in foster care often struggle with blaming themselves and feeling responsible for being separated from their parent. Adolescents often have desires to return to their biological parents even after abuse has taken place. Adolescents often may feel unwanted, powerless and insecure when placed in foster care. The adolescents may also deal with mixed emotions about becoming attached to their foster family (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2005). Adolescents in foster care struggle with leaving behind their family, their community, their school, and their belongings. The majority of adolescents are able to cope with feeling angry, rejected, and disconnected from their parent(s). Some adolescents feel guilty, believing they caused the separation. Although, the majority of adolescents in foster care may be more accepting of their situation as long as the placement is secure, the foster family has the ability to care for the adolescents emotional needs; by the foster family working with the child to better adapt to the situation. Many adolescents in foster care have the advantage to seek counseling if needed. The longer the child is separated from their parent(s), the more damage it can cause to the child emotionally. Children who have been exposed to abuse or neglect often have a greater need for stability and safety (American Academy Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2005).

The adolescents in foster care often have experienced trauma due to abuse and neglect. Many of these adolescents develop posttraumatic stress disorders (Bruskas, 2008). Abuse that occurs in childhood is a risk factor for both post-traumatic stress disorders and for depression (Bruskas, 2008). The youths exposed to more instability experienced a significantly higher amount of mental health problems (Fowler, Toro & Miles, 2010). For this reason, it is vital that

youths at the brink of aging-out are connected to services and opportunities for their future (Fowler, et al., 2010).

Trauma can affect these adolescents' lives in a multitude of ways. It becomes critical that therapists employ therapies designed to specifically address the trauma, such as trauma-focused cognitive behavior therapy (Landsverk, Burns, Stambaugh & Reutz, 2009). Often times, when interventions are used with adolescents, they primarily are delivered from mental health agencies. Landsverk et al. (2009) suggests that mental health interventions that specifically target the adolescents' needs should be implemented by the social service agencies themselves.

Behavioral Problems

Adolescents being moved from one caregiver to another could cause the adolescents to react negatively (Casey, 2000). Studies have shown that, adolescents in foster care experience higher levels of behavior problems compared to adolescents who are living with their biological parents (Lewis, Dozier, Ackerman & Kozakowski, 2007). It has also been shown that foster care placement has an effect on the adolescents when they exit out of foster care. Being placed in foster care can be a disruption in the life of any adolescents. The adolescents has to adapt to being with a different family, school, peers and many times different cultures and believes.

When placed in foster care, adolescents' mental health, well-being, and ability to interact with others are affected. The adolescents tend to have unpredictable emotions that may affect their behavior in the foster home and school. These behavioral problems consist of the adolescents having problems with attachment disorder, which comes from disturbance in the child connection with their biological parent(s). Attachment disorder, which is also called reactive attachment disorder, causes the adolescents to become withdrawn from others. They will

appear sad the majority of the time and will rarely smile. The adolescents with reactive attachment disorder often do not make eye contact, and have lack of interest in any fun activities (Foster care in South Africa, 2011). After being placed with strangers, these adolescents may resist authority by refusing to follow directions; this often stems from feeling insecure and having no stability. Adolescents who are in foster care tend display behavioral aggression causing them to violently act out towards others (Foster care in South Africa, 2011). Adolescents often tend to have constant crying and clingy behavior. The adolescents may also become confused and upset from the separation after seeing biological parents and will suffer with excessive crying and other behaviors once they are back in their foster home. Adolescents may feel helpless when placed in foster care, which could result in the child stealing to make them feel in control of the situation (Foster care in South Africa, 2011).

Traumatic symptoms in adolescents often primarily emerge through the adolescent's behaviors (Stewart, Lescheid, Dunnen, Zalmanowitz & Baiden, 2012). Trauma, itself, can affect brain development, which often means the child will need to first address the trauma. Then, the child will need to learn new and adaptive ways to process information and effectively cope with emotions (Stewart et al., 2012).

Adolescents Aging-Out of Foster Care

For most adolescents their eighteenth birthday is when they start their transition into adulthood. During this milestone these adolescences will be faced with change, growth and a new found independence (Kirnsky, 2010). Krinsky states "very year close to 25, 000 vulnerable youth- the abused and neglected age out of foster care and become face to face with the cold, hard, realities of adulthood alone". The average age in America for financial independence is

twenty-six years old, child welfare, courts and policies expects a eighteen year old adolescence aging out of foster care to attain financial and emotional independence once they turn eighteen (Kirnsky, 2010). These adolescences are unprepared to take on the role of independent living. Majority of these adolescences have drivers' license, very few have cash, and not too many of them have the basic skills to be independent or how to even began independence. These adolescences need help in gaining skills that would help benefit their self-sufficient skills. They also need a safe place to live while in the process of learning these skills. Society's failure with make support mechanisms available for these adolescences causes adverse consequences for our society and adolescences (Kirnsky, 2010).

Adolescents aging out of foster care are at a high risk for risky behaviors later in adulthood. Substance abuse and/or sexual behaviors are the possible risky behaviors of these adolescents aging out of foster care due to vulnerability (Stott, 2011). These vulnerable adolescents are placed in society after being exposed to neglect, abuse and or abandonment. Many were also exposed to poverty, parental substance abuse, violence in their homes and communities and incarceration of a parent; which has resulted in these adolescents being vulnerable and engaging in high risk behaviors (Stott, 2011).

Workers who recognize the need for adolescents aging out of foster care's need for autonomy, while also recognizing their needs as a youth, are much more likely to find helpful ways to help the adolescent to thrive. Adolescents aging out of foster care seek to be independent; however, they have certain needs they still need met by others. Often, youth want to be able to make their own decisions and want to be involved in planning their own care. (Scannapieco et al., 2007).

Using collaboration with adolescents can help them gain a sense of autonomy, which also demonstrates that the adolescent has supportive people who will provide assistance if they should encounter difficulty. This collaboration helps adolescents feel comfortable to make difficult decisions by knowing they will be supported if they have struggles (Scannapieco et al., 2007).

The majority of these adolescents have not gained consistent, stable living or healthy nurturing adult relationships but are expected to enter society as self-sufficient adults. It has been proven that about half of the adolescents aging out of foster care without a high school diploma, employment, financial stability or living arrangements are the ones who suffer in society. The majority of these adolescents enter society unemployed and homeless which often results in them becoming susceptible to risky behaviors. One-third to one-half of these adolescents have been arrested or incarcerated. It has been reported that 25% use substance abuse and 15% have substance abuse and dependency disorders between 40% - 60% are currently parents or have become a parents. However, the gathered information regarding the general population shows little evidence-based knowledge as to why these risky behaviors are increases amongst the adolescents in foster care (Stott, 2011). Although these adolescents have been removed from their unstable high risk environment and placed in foster care (a safe non-risk environment) and provided the services, resources and case management needs these adolescents tend to still engage in risky behaviors and environments similar to what they were removed from.

It becomes important for social worker to focus on what the foster families are doing well and helping these adolescents to utilize their strengths in order to be happy and successful (Schofield et al., 2012). When the foster families feel as if they are accomplishing their goals as

parents and professionals, they often value both roles and are able to seamlessly move between roles.

Scannapieco (2007) suggests that for adolescents in foster care, it becomes important to distinguish between living interdependently and independently. By distinguishing from the two, the adolescent can learn to establish connections to others, which often can help to ground traumatized youths (Scannapieco, 2007).

Chapter Three: Conclusion

CONCLUSION

Adolescents who have been taken away from their biological family and placed in foster care due to the safety concerns of child welfare. The department of child welfare main goal is to first provide safety of the child and to provide the family with the needed resources and services to gain reunification. Unfortunately, the adolescents aging out of foster care were not able to gain reunification back with their biological parents. It has been proven that when children experience a traumatic event in their life (like being removed from their home) they act out due to the environment change. These adolescents develop emotional and behavioral problems; which is their way of showing being scared and discomfort.

Adolescences aging-out of foster care face many struggles as a child and as adult due to their unstable situation or environment. These adolescents should be offered more tools to help them become self-sufficient adults after aging-out of foster care due to them not having the stable or healthy support system as others children who are eighteen years of age. It is a factor that aging out of foster care adolescents end up in the criminal system due to lack of stability. No matter what your background may consist of all children need a fair chance at life. It's sad to witness the children who are placed in foster care struggle more in society due to the lack of support. There should be more programs and resources available to those adolescents to help them become more self-sufficient. The department of human services know when and if a child is going to be reunified with their parents, they know if the child is going to be adopted or if the child is going to age out of foster care. There should be a program that will help adolescents

who will be aging out of foster care. The program should take place when the child is seventeen years of age. The program should consist of tools, education, services and assistance for those adolescents. The program should educate these adolescents on what expect in society. The program should not end when the adolescents reach eighteen, they should be able to continue services by gaining assistance with seeking employment, continued education, safe and stable living arrangements. There should be continuous services for those adolescents who are most vulnerable due to aging-out of foster care.

References

- Affects (2015). In *The Free Dictionary* online. Retrieved on March 12, 2015 from <http://www.thefreedictionary.com>
- Adolescence (2014). In *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* online. Retrieved from <http://www.merriam-webster.com>
- American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry (2005). Facts for families: foster care. Retrieved from <http://www.aacap.org>
- Boel-Studt, S. & Landsman, J. (2011). Fostering families' and children's rights to family
- Bruskas, D. (2008). Children in foster care: A vulnerable population at risk. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing, 70-77*.Connections. *Child Welfare*. Pp.19-40. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov>
- Casey, E. (2000). *Official Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics*. Development Issue for Young Children in Foster Care. Pp1145-1150. Retrieved <http://www.pediatrics.aappublications.org>
- Facts about aging out. (n.d). *Children's Rights RSS*. Retrieved June 21, 2014, Retrieved from <http://www.childrensrights.org/issues-resources/foster-care/facts-about-aging-out/>
- Foster care in South Africa (2011). *Common Behavioral Problems of Children Placed in Foster Care*. Retrieved from <http://christianfostercare.wordpress.com>
- Fowler, P., Toro, P., & Miles, B. (2010). Emerging adulthood and leaving foster care: Settings associated with mental health. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 335-348*.
- Krinsky, M. (n.d.). A not so happy birthday: The foster youth transition from adolescence into adulthood. *Family Court Review, 250-254*.
- Landsverk, J. A., Burns, B. J., Stambaugh, L. F., and Rolls Reutz, J. A. (2009). *Psychosocial interventions for children and adolescents in foster care: Review of Research Literature*.
- Lewis, E. Dozier, M. Ackerman, J. & Kozakowski-Sepulveda, S. (2007). The effect of placement instability on adopted children's inhibitory control abilities and oppositional

- behavior. *Developmental Psychology* pp. 1415-1427. Retrieved from <http://www.psych.udel.edu>
- Lewit, E. M. (1993). Children in foster care. *The future of children*. Vol.3, No. 3 pp192-200Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1602551>
- Rhodes, K.Cox, E. Orme, J. & Coakley, T. (2006). Fostering Parents' Reasons for Fostering and Foster Family Utilization. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* Vol. 33 pp 105-126. Retrieved from <http://www.mendeley.com>
- Scannapieco, M., Connell-Carrick, K., & Painter, K. (2007). In Their Own Words: Challenges Facing Youth Aging Out Of Foster Care. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 423-435.
- Schofield, G., Beek, M., Ward, E., & Biggart, L. (2012). Professional foster carer and committed parent: Role conflict and role enrichment at the interface between work and family in long-term foster care. *Child & Family Social Work*, 46-56. Retrieved from
- Stewart, S., Leschied, A., Dunnen, W., Zalmanowitz, S., & Baiden, P. (2012). Treating Mental Health Disorders for Children in Child Welfare Care: Evaluating the Outcome Literature. *Child & Youth Care Forum*, 131-154.
- Stott, T. (2011). Placement Instability and Risky Behaviors of Youth. *Child Adolescent Social Work* (2012) 29:61–83.
- Transition (2014) Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary. Retrieved from <http://www.merriam-webster.com>
- Vaughn, M., Shook, J., & McMillen, J. (2008). Aging Out Of Foster Care And Legal Involvement: Toward A Typology Of Risk. *Social Service Review*, 419-446.

