

5-2024

Fostering Success: Enhancing Support to Empower Foster Youth

Serenela Lopez

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/caps_thes_all

This Capstone Project (Open Access) is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ CSUMB. It has been accepted for inclusion in Capstone Projects and Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ CSUMB. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csumb.edu.

Fostering Success: Enhancing Support to Empower Foster Youth

Serenela Lopez

Liberal Studies Department, California State University Monterey Bay

Abstract

For this Capstone Project, the researcher collaborated with a local organization that serves foster youth. Interviews were conducted with several employees to see what they thought could be done to improve the experiences of foster youth, an underserved population that often lacks the necessary support to succeed in school and society. Based on an analysis of the data and an examination of relevant research literature, three key themes emerged: increasing community awareness of the organizations services; enhancing foster parent and peer training; and promoting understanding of foster youth experiences. Each of these options could potentially help foster youth get the help they need to succeed. Following a thorough evaluation of the options, a recommended action was implemented to help foster youth access the help they need to succeed.

Fostering Success: Enhancing Support to Empower Foster youth

I was in foster care before I was adopted at a young age. I was lucky enough to be adopted and did not have to spend much time in foster care, but not everyone is that fortunate. This topic is near and dear to my heart because I was so fortunate. I want to help those that are in foster care and who struggle because of it. No child chooses to be in foster care, but they are burdened with so much. There are emotional, mental, and behavioral effects that happen to children in foster care.

I do not remember much from my experience but I remember snippets of experiences in one of my foster homes. In my mind it is me standing there watching everyone go by me and live their day to day life as I stand there. I was soon out of that home because the people taking care of me realized there was so much going on they were unable to fully give me the attention and care I needed. After that I was fostered by a great couple then later adopted by them and so blessed to be with a couple who had the time and energy to take care of me and who most importantly wanted to take care of me. I did not talk much when I was first adopted and clinged to my adoptive mom at the beginning. My adoptive parents hired people to come over to our house and teach me how to play, socialize, and just be a child. I did not play with other kids and really did not know how to. If they would not have hired people to help me get the help I needed I would not have been who I am today. I am able to socialize with others, know what empathy is, and know how to communicate efficiently because they helped me have those opportunities to learn. If I was not adoptive I would not be able to effectively communicate with others, be social, and still have the emotional issue that came with all of it.

Envision this, you grow up moving from house to house. Strangers upon strangers. Never feeling like you belong anywhere and no one telling you you mean something and have a purpose in this life. Not feeling like you can achieve much because you don't have much. Maybe even never feeling loved or having friends, someone to help you with homework, someone to cheer you on in extracurricular activities, or someone to come home to after a long day, good or bad. Never having someone stable in your life to help you navigate through all of those experiences. Or even after getting through all of this and being between 18-24 and not knowing how to step foot in society because you have not had experiences or knowledge to help you know how to navigate life as an adult or where to even start.

That's exactly what foster youths' lives are like. They don't have the same support, love, or opportunities as most. There are kids who truly experience that. Going from stranger to stranger house to house having different authority figures taking care of you and never really having a true home. This can have effects on youth. Not having someone to rely on can have an emotional effect on youth. Never having one permanent home can mentally hurt a child and they could potentially not feel safe and have trust issues. These can all leave to misbehaving, acting out, and getting into trouble with the law. When youth are not guided or have good influences they don't tend to make the best choices.

The effects of youth when not given a stable home can really affect them. With the interviews conducted there was a story that showed this and it showed it too well sadly. Gerald, one of my interviewees, shared an experience about his time in the foster system and his experiences transitioning out of foster care and fortunately being adopted.

Literature Synthesis

1853 is when foster care was first established. In an article called *History of Foster Care* it states, "Charles Loring Brace, a minister, founded a program called Children's Aid New York after noticing an influx of children living neglected and homeless in the streets of New York City. The program provided housing, food, fresh air programs, and schooling to support thousands of orphaned children".

Foster youth can ask to stay in the same high school even when moving to different group homes or to new foster family homes. On California of Education's website it states, "If you are behind on your credits, and you transferred schools after your 2nd year of high school, you may be eligible to graduate under Assembly Bill (AB) 167/216 by completing only the state graduation requirements (130 credits in specific classes) instead of your school district's requirements". There are ways that these youth are able to graduate but are they aware of this or even other resources that are out there to help them make sure they achieve.

Assembly Bill 12 is for foster youth who turn 18 and age out of the system. They are then able to re enter the system and get support until the age of 21. This makes it so the foster youth are able to transition out of foster care and into adult life more smoothly. They have the connection and are able to get money to help support them as they transition into adult life from either a foster home or group home.

Foster youth when taken from what they know into unfamiliar situations are then taught differently. The things that could be different are cultures. If they grew up in one culture they could be exposed to another. They might not be able to share their cultural familiarity either

and have to “leave them behind” in a way if they aren’t accepted in their foster home. This can be hard on the foster youth especially when our cultures are part of who we are so whether that be the language or ways of life they might be taken away from that or not have an opportunity to practice it or end up losing that part of them along the way. In an article on fosterva.com it talks about the importance of culture and the effects of foster youths culture when being moved around and by simply being in the system.

No child chooses to be in foster care but they are burdened with so much. There are emotional, mental, and behavioral effects that happen to children in foster care. Foster kids don't have loving parents at home, someone reminding them to do their homework, someone offering to help them with their homework, or in some cases options to stay in the same high school for all 4 years. Foster kids go where they are placed that could be in a group home or different homes with different foster parents.

They didn't ask for this life and these struggles but nevertheless they have them. Key word is “kids/youth”, foster kids are still kids and need guidance. If no one is there to help of course they won't achieve they need guidance and to know they are able to achieve the goals they want to achieve.

Find resources for foster care kids in schools. Find out how we can help them. The odds are against them and not many people root for them to achieve because everyone else already has things going on in life. But there are ways we in society can give and help foster kids who don't have people cheering them on and have people helping them succeed.

Want foster youth to be able to succeed in school and in life. In school getting through moving to different high schools and still being able to achieve their goals. Want them to be able to transition out of high school in society and achieve the goals they have set for themselves. Many foster youth do not know how to transition out or where to even start when they are thrown into society out of high school as young adults. Many foster youth end up on the streets, in jail, or worse dead.

There are organizations that help foster kids. We have a good amount of organizations in Monterey County that help support foster youth. Putting an effort to support these organizations that are specifically there to help foster kids. There are different ways people in society can give support. Bring awareness to these organizations and donate to these organizations.

The EC offers a range of services. It provided a food pantry, free clothes, and drop in services. Drop in services let the youth come in and do homework. There is tutoring help, free wifi, computers and mentors able to help when the kids get out of school. The EC has our gente which is an LGBTQ organization that helps with support and counseling for kids who might want someone to talk to. It also has counseling help for foster parents who might want to help their foster child who are LGBTQ. California Youth Connection also is an organization the EC works with. California Youth Connection helps foster youth get involved with legislation and helps them have a say of bills that are passed that affect them.

Organizations like EC are helpful to foster youth in highschool and transitioning out of high school and out of foster care. When kids don't have support they aren't as prepared to be in society. Foster kids are having trouble staying in school and need support. Thanks to organizations in different areas they are able to get a little extra help. Bringing awareness that this is an issue is important. Talking about it and letting people know that foster kids need more support so they are able to have opportunities other kids in high school have. They need that equal opportunity and they are able to have it through organizations that are meant to help support them in their needs.

Method

Foster children often find themselves navigating through different living situations, such as group homes or various foster families. Without proper support and guidance, they may struggle to realize their full potential and achieve their personal goals. Fortunately, there are organizations in the community dedicated to providing resources and fostering a sense of belonging among these youth. By connecting foster children with peers who share similar experiences, these programs empower them to pursue their aspirations and offer essential support as they transition out of the foster care system. The research question focusing this project is: What do stakeholders from the EC¹ have to say about the experiences of foster youth and how to improve them? After interviewing people from the Epicenter, I will use what I have learned to do what I can to help bring awareness of the different effects that foster youth go through and need help with.

¹ Pseudonyms were used for all proper names.

Context

The EC helps provide resources to foster youth. They are in Monterey County serving Monterey County. The EC is a homie place. It looks like a house on the outside and has a welcome feel to it. They are right next to a high school, so that the high school students have easy access to resources. For others who might go to other high schools they might need transportation but they have easy access. The resources they provide are as follows; free food pantry, access to a kitchen, a place to do homework, and computers, access to wifi, social mixers they hold, LGBTQ support, and classes for foster youth and foster parents. It not only caters to high schoolers but also college age students and young adults in need of assistance even if they are not in college.

They only really serve people on the Monterey Peninsula just because that is where they are located. They have a full staff, including: foster services liaison, LGBTQ support person, front desk staff, and others who help out around to help with the resources they give.

Participants and Participant Selection

I will invite 3 people from the Epicenter to participate in this study. This group of prospective participants is being invited to participate because of their relevant experience or expertise.

Jen has a lot of experience with foster youth. Jen was a foster youth herself. She worked with independent living programs, was a state hearing advocate for foster youth, and

has helped out with guardian scholarships for universities. She was one of the founders and a past CSUMB student that has done a similar capstone project to mine.

David is the deputy supervisor at EC. David has an extensive background with working with foster youth. He has worked with them for about 10 years now.

Gerald used to be in foster care.. He is an adult now and was adopted after being in foster care for a few years. I know him from my church so I was able to chat with him about his experience.

Researcher

I was in foster care before I was adopted at a young age. I was lucky enough to be adopted and did not have to spend much time in foster care, but not everyone is that fortunate. This topic is near and dear to my heart because I was so fortunate. I want to help those that are in foster care and who struggle because of it. No child chooses to be in foster care but they are burdened with so much. There are emotional, mental, and behavioral effects that happen to children in foster care. I am carrying out this project because of my experience and I want to do what I can to do my part and help foster youth succeed and help bring awareness to show those what they can do to help. I would also like to bring awareness to the fact that foster youth need help transitioning out of foster care. Being able to do this capstone and work with EC has been great and I was able to connect because of my experience being in foster care for a little before I was adopted, but having felt some of the things these kids felt and the team at EC has seen foster youth feel. It just made sense hearing about the needs of these youth because I

understand that all those needs are valid and they help people truly succeed when given these resources.

Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions

What have been your experiences with foster youth?

What are you most concerned about when it comes to the experiences of foster kids?

What is currently being done to address the experiences of foster youth- by whom - and what are the strengths and weaknesses of these efforts?

What do you think should be done to improve the experiences of foster youth?

What do you think are the challenges to doing something about improving the experiences of foster kids?

Is there anything else that you would like to say about the experiences of foster youth or what can be done to help foster youth?

Procedure²

I found out from my professor about EC because one of the founders was a former CSUMB student. I was then able to look up their website and find an email to get into contact with the Deputy supervisor at EC. He then put me in contact with himself, the co-founder

² Interviewer one Jen. Former CSUMB student and co-founder of EC

(former CSUMB student), and their organization's foster youth liaison. I was able to have an interview with each of them at different times. I was also about to go tour EC and check out what they had to offer in person. When doing each interview we went through the questions I have provided above and I was able to get a true understanding of what actions need to be taken to help foster youth and what actions I could do that would benefit the foster kids in our area.

Data Analysis

Transcribed interviews were coded and analyzed for emergent themes. After looking over the different action options, interviews, and literature I was able to bring it all together. The emerging themes I found were my action options. When looking over the data I came to the conclusion that foster youth need help and they need to know about the help that they do have available at the moment.

Results

For my capstone project I worked with an organization EC. I interviewed a few employees at EC to see what they thought could be done to improve foster youths' experience. This is important because foster youth are not getting the support they need to succeed in school and in society. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature three themes emerged from my interviews and looking into foster youth resources. evidence-based decision making required evaluating each potential action option by the following criteria:

getting the word out to society by posting posters/brochures of EC, having more training for foster parents or peers, and bringing awareness to others about foster youth. Each of these show how we can help foster youth get the help they need to succeed. Based on the evaluation of each action option an action will be recommended and justified.

Table 1: *Evaluation of Action Options*

Actions:	Reason one:	Reason two:	Reason three:
Posters for EC and brochures	Not a lot of kids attend EC	They offer classes, computers, free food, and support for foster parents and I do not think many people know that because then more people would be taking advantage of these great resources they offer	Spreading awareness because everyone I interviewed talked about how more need to be aware of foster youth and foster youth aware of what is out there for them and what they can do to have a better life and succeed

More trainings for foster parents or peers	EC has LGBTQ trainings for kids and for parents	EC offers classes for parents but want more	Use to have more at the EC but it fell through so trying to have more classes and training with foster parents or community members
Bringing awareness to others about foster youth	Seems like they encounter that many don't know how to talk to, approach, or know about foster youth	Brochures for teachers on how to work with foster youth	Brochures on how to act and talk to foster youth terms to say so you do not trigger or offend them

Name for Emergent Theme/Action: Posters/Brochures for EC

From interviewing one of the co-founders of EC and Deputy Supervisor currently at EC, I became aware that not a lot of people know about the EC and what they offer. Others also aren't aware of the activities they have available. I also learned that foster youth weren't aware of the organization and that they could go mingle and meet other foster youth or former foster youth.

When passing out brochures and putting up posters about the activities happening at the EC is that maybe no one will look at it. It's up on bulletin boards but that doesn't mean anyone has to read it. Same with passing it our people can take it but maybe through it away once they leave my range of sight. With this action though it was easy to ask EC for brochures and posters and it was easy to find places to put the posters. Also easy to give to people because there are so many people on campus and I have friends who gave them to the different places they work that were with children.

Name for Emergent Theme/Action: Training for Foster Parents

When interviewing I learned that the EC used to have training and used to work with another organization in Monterey County that helped with training. They offered training to foster parents, teachers, and peers. These training would help them learn what times of words and language to use with foster youth, what might trigger them and how to help them.

When pondering this action I realized this would be hard in the aspect of time. Don't have much time left in the Monterey area and there are a lot of moving parts to try and get training. Need to obtain funding, teachers for the training, and find people interested to take the course. The easier part is that this would be a good thing to implement and bring back to the EC. Would benefit all that take the course.

Name for Emergent Theme/Action: Bringing awareness to others about Foster Youth

After my interviews I realized that others didn't know about foster youth and were unaware there was an issue. The only ones who were aware of it were the people who specifically work with foster youth. Getting people educated on the topic of foster youth and letting them know what they can do to help and how they do their part. Others can donate, mentor, or volunteer to help foster youth organizations.

Along the lines of awareness about foster youth it is also bringing awareness to foster youth about what is available to them. That can then lead to foster youth being able to do more and get more when they are aware of what is available to them.

An issue that could come across when doing this action is not seeing any results. If people are not interested to learn or care to know about foster youth there won't be any response to reaching out and bringing awareness.

Recommendation.

Bringing awareness to others about foster youth can then make people want to go to trainings and want to read posters and do their part however that may be to help and support foster youth however they can. Passing out brochures can help make the needs of foster youth more aware of the community and then that can help organizations like EC be able to bring back more training and create more as needed. I recommend the action of brochures and posters because by doing this the other two possibly could come out of it. Let others know about the EC brings awareness and it might make it so the EC gets more support and could bring back training.

Concessions.

With bringing awareness to others it should be accepted openly because this is such an important topic universally. Training is also such an important thing universally so that would be accepted openly as well. Both of these have lasting and important effects if they are sought out and really worked on.

Limitations.

I could be wrong that maybe there are more people aware of foster youth and their situation but if I am they are aware and might not know what they can do to help or know how they can show their support. Many might think it takes a lot of help and takes sacrifice but people in the community can just be allies and show their support and help bring support for maybe bills or trainings or whatever else needs to be done in this specific community to get foster youth all the support they need to succeed in and when getting out of foster care.

Potential negative outcomes.

People not caring. Others have enough going on they are not able to or do not think they have time to help others. Some might not see the issues that I'm addressing as an issue and so won't take time to look into it or be receptive. Some might think that this is something that is not that big of a deal and might think that foster youth have all the support they need and doing more of them will not help. The people taking the brochures and looking at the posters just looking at them or even throwing them away because they do not care and do not spend time reading the brochure or poster.

Conclusion.

Even after I graduate I want to see what I can do to bring awareness of the need to continue to help foster youth. Get them the resources they need whether that be places to feel safe, help transitioning out of foster care, and or places they can get emotional support.

Even if others seem to not care about the EC by showing them or explaining why they might want to care about the EC and the services provided it can change a mindset. When someone learns why something is passionate to you and that it can benefit others they seem to want to listen and do what they can to help.

Action Documentation and Critical Reflection

I was able to give out brochures and posters to others on campus and to friends to take to their workplaces. These friends work with children and some of them are foster youth, so that the word gets out. I got asked questions about the brochures and was able to chat with others about what I was doing and why they should read the brochure and let others know about it. When doing this on campus I was able to let college students know that these services also pertain to them if they are a current foster youth or a past foster youth.

References

Children, V. F., & Children, A. V. F. (2020, May 26). *History of foster care*. Voices for Children |

CASA Program.

<https://www.speakupnow.org/history-of-foster-care/#:~:text=1853%20%E2%80%93%20foundations%20of%20modern%2Dday%20foster%20care%20are%20established>

Foster Youth Education Rights. Foster Youth Education Rights - Foster Youth Services (CA Dept of

Education). (n.d.). <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/pf/fy/fyedrights.asp>

Foster Youth in California schools. *Foster Youth in California Schools - Student Group Information*

(CA Dept of Education). (n.d.).

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sg/fosteryouth.asp#:~:text=The%20four%2Dyear%20adjusted%20cohort%20dropout%20rate%20is%20calculated%20as,percent%20of%20foster%20youth%20students>

The importance of cultural competence in Foster Care. Foster VA - Become a Foster Parent.

(n.d.).

<https://www.fosterva.org/blog/the-importance-of-cultural-competence-in-foster-care#:~:text=Children%20exposed%20to%20a%20particular,outsider%20in%20their%20foster%20family>