

Foster Care Graduates' Experiences Obtaining Life Skills

by

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Abstract

Foster care is the 24-hour temporary care for children outside their homes (Department of Social Services, 2016). Children are often placed in foster care because they have “suffered abuse, neglect, abandonment, or the loss of a parent” (Keller, Cusick, & Courtney, 2007, p. 455). The expectation of foster care is that the removal of children from inadequate and/or substandard conditions will provide them with holistic wellness and a quality life as adults. The high propensity of foster care graduates to endure poverty, school withdrawal, substance abuse, generational foster care, incarceration, and early death suggests that there are deficits in this well intended social service. Life skills attainment is one of the necessary contributors to self-sufficiency. This study examined foster care graduates’ perceptions of the support they received in foster care to obtain life skills related to self-care, positive relationships and communication, money management, career planning, post-secondary education, housing stability, future planning, and performing daily tasks.

Acknowledgments

Langston Hughes was an African American poet who used his writings to illustrate the adversity felt by African Americans during the Harlem Renaissance era of the 1920s (Biography.com Editors, 2015). During his career, he wrote a poem entitled, “Mother to Son” (Bates, 2014). This poem depicted a conversation between a wise and experienced mother and her naïve son. The mother illustrates through her story that her life has had challenges, much like a staircase, but that each of these challenges must be surmounted. The mother’s intent is to teach her son that struggle is inevitable and that it must be overcome. I learned this poem as a young child perceiving that it would be beneficial over the course of my life. As an African American, single parent child, in Tuskegee, Alabama, in the early 1980s, I quickly learned the labels that society had placed upon my aptitude. I accepted these labels as a challenge to achieve the unexpected and to use my life’s work to help others to reach beyond their labels.

I would like to thank my “parents,” both grandparents and parents, for helping me to find my internal strength to achieve all of the small obstacles that culminated into my graduation from Auburn University. You challenged me to dream, without limits, and you supported me as I climbed my staircase. When I failed, your support was unrelenting and I would not have made it this far without your unconditional love. Each of you made sacrifices to help me on this journey; I hope that each of you are proud of who I have become and who I am still becoming.

The concept of creating a “village” to raise children is a long held sentiment in the African American community (Healey, 1998). This concept establishes that families of origin need to rely on the strengths of their community members to enrich the tutelage of children. For me, this village included extended family members and friends, former teachers, professors, advisors, ministers, carpool parents, afterschool directors, and on and on. You shared with me your stories about your staircase, the challenges and triumphs of your life’s journey. I listened, learned, and was stronger and wiser because of you. Even the smallest gestures had a large impact on my growth and therefore, I thank you for making the time to make me a better person.

The most vital contribution to this moment was my faith. I thank my parents and village for teaching me to rely on my faith when giving up seemed easier than enduring. Maybe it was a friendly conversation on an elevator, an unexpected job offer, a meal paid for by a stranger, or an optimistic person that was more disadvantaged than myself, each of them was a little whisper from God to be patient because my staircase has purpose. I appreciate God’s messengers.

In “Mother to Son,” Hughes does his reader the greatest favor by not creating a resolution to the mother’s journey to climb the staircase. The mother lets her son know that with all of her wisdom and strength, her life continues to be met with challenges. I expect that my journey through life will be same. I am writing this acknowledgement to humble me when I start to believe that this accomplishment was easy or that I am the only one responsible for my success. I am writing this in hopes that it will motivate me when I am weary and that it might motivate someone else who is stripping themselves of their labels.

It took eight years for me to complete this degree; there were a lot of peers and professors that helped me to climb my staircase along the way. I want to thank each one of you. To all of my CED advisors, current and previous dissertation committee members, and my outside reader,

thank you for believing in me and allowing me to grow. To my husband and son, the best is yet to come! I wanted you to be proud of me and I hope that you are. Thank you for all the sacrifices that you made to make this possible.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

It has been well established in literature that foster care graduates face high rates of incarceration, school drop-out, substance abuse, generational foster care, unemployment/underemployment, and early death (Kaplan, Skolnik, & Turnbull, 2009). Research has yet to pinpoint one or more specific reasons for these dismal outcomes (Kaplan *et al.*, 2009). Although literature has yet to determine specific reasons, it appears that a lack of life skills attainment is a potential factor in these outcomes. Life skills attainment can be beneficial in assisting these individuals in idealizing self-sufficiency and building skills related to educational attainment, financial stability, quality healthcare, and positive role modeling (Kaplan *et al.*, 2009). These life skills are beneficial to individuals whether or not they have ever been in need of a foster care placement. If foster care graduates are facing deficits in their ability to perform life skills, it is necessary to understand if the foster care system is providing enough support to its dependents for them to be competent in life skills. Greater understanding is needed to determine if the structure of the foster care system causes or significantly impacts deficits in developing life skills. This study examined the experience of life skills attainment from the perspective of foster care graduates. This information will be evaluated to recommend ways that those service provision deficits can be challenged.

Rationale

The child welfare system is a federal program, governed by each state and Washington, DC, to assist parents with the long or short-term care of their children due to death, imprisonment, neglect, or abuse (Department of Social Services, 2016). Admission to the child

welfare system can be voluntary, in which the parent seeks out their county or district's child welfare department (Department of Social Services, 2016). The child welfare department in Alabama is called the Department of Human Resources (DHR). Child welfare involvement can also be involuntary. This happens when a family court where the child resides declares that the child is in need of care and the State where the child lives becomes the guardian of that child (Department of Social Services, 2016). Whereas the circumstance of a parent or parents dying or being incarcerated is unmistakable and requires little investigation, the determination of neglect or abuse is assessed by a representative of DHR, typically a social worker (Kaplan *et al.*, 2009). A child welfare judge then determines whether the State needs to provide care to the child or children based on the assessment of the social worker and any corroborating or mitigating evidence (Kaplan *et al.*, 2009). The goal is that once a child is removed from their unstable environment and placed within the stability of State care, this child will receive all of the support necessary to become a self-sufficient member of society. However, there are apparent deficits in this objective that are exemplified in the rate of homelessness, incarceration, early death, and generational foster care experienced by emancipated youth (Kaplan *et al.*, 2009).

Previous studies have highlighted the deficits of the child welfare system including a lack of connection to biological family members, cultural isolation, a lack of youth involvement in their plan of care, and a lack of service provider accountability (Kaplan *et al.*, 2009). These findings have led to greater efforts to keep sibling groups together and to focus on family reunification (Kaplan *et al.*, 2009). When appropriate, foster care youth are more likely to be placed near their original community, with individuals of their ethnic background, and with individuals that speak their same language (Kaplan *et al.*, 2009). Foster care youth are expected to have an Individualized Service Plan (ISP), created by their social worker, which specifies the

individual and family related goals, objectives, and evaluations necessary to graduate from foster care. Foster care youth are expected to have input into their service planning to create a sense of ownership, to identify additional needs, and to be updated on their individual and family progress towards their goals (Kaplan *et al.*, 2009). The aforementioned role of social workers is aimed at reducing Social worker turnover and providing more quality assurance to foster care services (Kaplan *et al.*, 2009).

Significance of Study

Foster care youth are often burdened with a number of factors that may have an impact on their aptitude for life skills attainment, such as mental illness, low or borderline intellectual functioning, and environmental factors such as a history of school truancy, substance exposure, community violence, homelessness, and poverty (Keller *et al.*, 2007). Factors such as school truancy, substance exposure, community violence, homelessness, and poverty may relate to the traumatizing childhood experiences that caused child welfare services to identify the youth as abandoned, abused, or neglected. These youth may be burdened with trauma-related responses that should be extensively addressed in their ISP. Trauma-related responses impact the way that we perceive and respond to our environment; it can also impact our ability to adequately display our emotions, impulses, and coping strategies (Cohen, Mannarino & Deblinger, 2012).

Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that the more pervasive the childhood trauma, the more likely the foster care youth is to inappropriately respond to difficulties in transitioning to adult-related self-sufficiency without supports or intervention (Keller *et al.*, 2007). For example, the Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth found that many foster care graduates are “neither employed nor in school, have children that they are not able to parent, suffer from persistent mental illness or substance use disorders, find themselves without basic

necessities, become homeless, or end up involved with the criminal justice system” (Courtney, Dworsky, Brown, Cary, Love, & Vorhies, 2006, p. 211). The Multi-Site Evaluation of Foster Youth Programs studied the short-term impact of life skills attainment in foster youth (Valentine, Skemer, & Courtney, 2015). The Multi-Site Evaluation of Foster Youth evaluated four programs on their ability to strengthen life skills development (Valentine *et al.*, 2015). This study was a collaborative effort of the state child welfare agencies in Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, and the University of Wisconsin Survey Center to gather information about the life skills attainment of selected foster youth in the participating states (Valentine *et al.*, 2015). It was a longitudinal study that discovered that four-fifths of the participants had a high school diploma or GED, 11% of women and 5% of men have an Associate degree by age 26. These percentages are lower compared to the percentages of the general population. Only 15% of the participants without a degree were still enrolled and therefore, these individuals are less likely to match the statistics of the general population in the future (Courtney *et al.*, 2011). In terms of employment, fewer than half were employed. Of the employed individuals, half earned \$9,000 or less during the previous year (Courtney *et al.*, 2011). Research participants also reported periods of economic hardship, food insecurity, and the need for public assistance (Courtney *et al.*, 2011). The Massachusetts Adolescent Outreach Program noted an 18% increase in college enrollment in the two years devoted to this study, as well as a boost in financial earnings, housing stability, health, and safety (Valentine *et al.*, 2015). However, Valentine *et al.* (2015) notes little to no improvement in the ability of foster care graduates to meet their educational or community relationship goals. Little effort has been made to determine the long term life skills attainment of foster care youth as they face a multitude of traditional life transitions and the lifelong implications of the trauma they experienced.

This study examined the experience of obtaining life skills related to self-care, positive relationships and communication, money management, career planning, post-secondary education, housing stability, future planning, and performing daily tasks from the perspective of foster care graduates as well as recommend ways that those deficits can be challenged.

Purpose of Study

The United States Health and Human Services (2013) reported that 397,122 children were in foster care on September 30, 2012. There were 249,923 children that exited the foster care system by the conclusion of that same fiscal year (U.S. Health and Human Services, 2013). Of the children that exited care in the fiscal year of 2012, 129,854 had been in care for 12 months or longer and 25,021 were emancipated adults between the ages of 18 and 20 (U. S. Health and Human Services, 2013). It should be noted that their life skills attainment not only impacted 25,021 individuals, but also the family members, friends, and overall communities in which these individuals reside or return. By seeking greater understanding of the experiences of foster care graduates of obtaining life skills while in foster care, social workers and counselors may be better able to provide necessary services to encourage life skill development. The purpose of this study was to better understand life skills attainment from the perspective of foster care graduates and to recommend new strategies to address these perceived deficits.

Operational Definitions

Foster care encompasses a broad array of services based on the individual needs and care environment of the individual being served. This research study will be limited in scope to the following genres. The following definitions are generally accepted as a description of individuals who serve or are serviced by these child welfare communities.

Career planning skills: necessary to plan for a career and to have career longevity (Casey Life Skills, 2016).

Communication skills: getting along with others. It includes the skill areas of personal development, interpersonal communication, and relationships (Casey Life Skills, 2016).

Community-based expert: an individual who volunteers to provide mentoring in one or more life skills areas in which they are proficient due to their occupational responsibilities (Chafee Foster Care Independent Program, 2016).

Direct childcare worker: provides day-to-day training and exposure in a group home or hospital type setting where a large number of unrelated foster children reside and receive therapeutic services (Chafee Foster Care Independent Program, 2016).

Emancipation: a court order to relinquish state custody of a minor and to award them the same privileges and consequences as adults who never entered state care (Ala. Code § 26-13-1).

Foster care: a Family Court Judge determines that based on evaluation, the child's residing State should take on the basic needs of the individual child or a group of siblings until the biological family can meet established criteria, until the child can be adopted, or the child reaches the age and maturation for emancipation (About Parenting, 2015).

Foster care graduates: also referred to as foster care alumni; an individual who was a foster care child and no longer needs state care due to the feasibility of their home environment or has reached the age of majority (age 18 or 21, depending on the State), has adult expectations, adult responsibilities, and is capable of adhering to and understanding adult consequences (Franklin County Children Services, 2015).

Foster parent: provides day-to-day training and exposure in a single-family residence to one or more foster children (Chafee Foster Care Independent Program, 2016).

Home life skills: determining where to live and developing traits that promote healthy community relationships (Casey Life Skills, 2016)

Housing and money management skills: the ability to establish housing, transportation, community resources, beliefs about money, savings, income tax, banking, credit, budgeting, spending, consumer education, and financial earnings (Casey Life Skills, 2016)

Individualized Service Plan (ISP): the development of a partnership between a sibling group, their family, and necessary community resources to assess the strengths and needs within a family and the behavioral and environmental conditions needed to safely reunify families or to advocate for adoption (Department of Human Resources, 2014)

Life skills: techniques designed to increase an individual's capacity to live without guardianship; expertise in areas such as nutrition, menu planning, grocery shopping, meal preparation, dining decorum, kitchen cleanup & food storage, home management, home safety, beliefs about money, savings, banking & credit, budgeting/spending plan, consuming, leisure time, and resolving legal issues (Casey Life Skills, 2016).

Life skills trainers: individuals who are also considered to be the foster parent, direct childcare worker, or the community based experts of the particular life skill being studied (Chafee Foster Care Independent Program, 2016).

Social relationships skills: expertise in being able to relate to others. This domain includes personal development, cultural awareness, and relationships (Casey Life Skills, 2016).

Supports: individuals, organization, or businesses willing to provide mental, physical, emotional, financial, or spiritual assistance to foster care children and foster care graduates (Casey Life Skills, 2016).

Work and study skills: necessary for completion of educational programs and to pursue careers of interest. This domain includes work goals, employment, decision-making, and study skills (Casey Life Skills, 2016).

Work life skills: pertaining to acquiring, maintaining, growing in and changing jobs or careers (Casey Life Skills, 2016).

Research Question

The central question of this study was “What is the experience of life skills attainment while in foster care?” This study will examine the perceptions of foster care graduates regarding their attainment of life skills while in the child welfare system. Life skills include healthy relationship, work, study, long-term and day to day planning, money management, computer literacy, and being able to utilize community resources skills (Casey Life Skills, 2016).

Interviewing foster care graduates increases our understanding of how they have been impacted by their life skills training and what changes might be helpful for future foster care youth.

Research participants will be asked their experiences of obtaining life skills while in foster care.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Alabama law defines abuse as “harm or threatened harm to a child’s health or welfare which can occur through non-accidental physical or mental injury; sexual abuse or attempted sexual abuse; sexual exploitation or attempted sexual exploitation” (Alabama Department of Human Resources, 2016; S. Gilbert, personal communication, December 28, 2016). Alabama law defines neglect as “negligent treatment of a child, including the failure to provide adequate food, medical treatment, clothing, or shelter (Alabama Department of Human Resources, 2016; S. Gilbert, personal communication, December 28, 2016). Religious doctrine can be taken into consideration when determining if refusing medical treatment is neglectful (Alabama Department of Human Resources, 2016; S. Gilbert, personal communication, December 28, 2016). Foster care is designed to provide childhood victims of abuse or neglect a safe and productive environment to develop holistically until they can either return to their parent or be adopted. Holistic care of foster children involves the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual wellness of previously traumatized children through counseling, educational support, and community involvement (Katz, 2011). Enhancing the life skills attainment of foster children should have a beneficial impact on the descendants of future foster care graduates and the communities in which they reside. This study examined the experience of life skills attainment from the perspective of foster care graduates as well as recommend strategies that those deficits can be challenged.

Child Welfare System

Foster care is defined as safe temporary placement of children who cannot safely remain in their home (Department of Social Services, 2016). After removal from home, foster care is designed to find permanency for that child, or in other words, permanent support for the remainder of the child's life (Department of Social Services, 2016). Permanency options include reunification with a parent, adoption, placement with a relative or like-relative, a foster parent, or a therapeutic facility (Department of Social Services 2016). Community members that are like-relatives include close friends of the parent, an adult within the social or academic circle of the child, a teacher, pastor, coach, neighbor, and so on and so forth (Chapman, Wall, & Barth, 2004). These children enter into the foster care system when a parent reports an inability to provide supervision and basic needs for their child, a community member or relative reports the inability for a parent to care for a child, or all identified parents die without establishing a guardian for their child.

The inability to provide supervision and basic needs may be related to the inability of the parent to provide food, shelter, clothing, and utilities to their child; however, it could also mean a lack of supervision of a child while their parent works, the debilitating health of a parent, or the inability to avoid substance use (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016). A parent can call the child welfare services department in their county to report this inability and their interest in receiving future services to assist them in reunification with their child (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016). Community members can report the inability of a parent to care for their child by calling the child welfare services department in the same county (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016). Community members may become aware of a child in need of care if this child repeatedly comes to school with poor hygiene or grooming, child reports to a relative, friend, or court-mandated reporter that they are

in need of care, is repeatedly absent from school, or if the child appears to be left home alone or abandoned (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016).

Mandatory reporters are individuals required by law to report any reasonable suspicion that a child is in need of supervision and provision of their basic needs (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016). Mandatory reporters are social workers, school personnel, healthcare personnel, mental health professionals, childcare providers, medical examiners, coroners, and law enforcement personnel (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016). Social media has also assisted child welfare agencies in identifying children with inadequate supervision or safety concerns via pictures (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016). These pictures become evidence of a safety concern (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016).

The children of incarcerated parents are also placed in foster care if a biological relative or like-relative cannot be identified or approved by child welfare services as a suitable housing option for that child (Chapman *et al.*, 2004). Children may need out of home care due to their inability to control impulsive and dangerous behaviors, such as physical aggression, substance abuse, fire-setting, and sexual victimization (Chapman *et al.*, 2004). Children with impulsivity issues would need to demonstrate an ability to comply with societal norms before 18 years of age to be considered for a return to their parent (Chapman *et al.*, 2004).

Developing Life Skills

Foster care children, by definition, have been exposed to poor parenting techniques, inadequate housing, substance use, or other factors that the child welfare system determined would have a negative impact on their ability to have adequate guidance (Alabama Department of Human Resources, 2016; S. Gilbert, personal communication, December 28, 2016). Foster

care youth with inadequate guidance are likely to have developed an appreciation for the inadequate skills taught to them, directly or indirectly, by their parents (Casey Life Skills, 2016). Some examples of ineffective life skills attainment due to poor guidance include stealing food or money, pandering for income, malnourishment, and poor nutritional goals. It may be difficult for foster care children, as well as anyone else, to abandon skills that they believe are helpful. An additional resource for life skills development are Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) courses. FCS is the study of human development, personal and family finance, housing and interior design, food science, nutrition, wellness, textiles and apparel, and consumer issues (American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences, 2015). It can be attended by foster care children and children residing with biological and adoptive parents (American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences, 2015). FCS was previously known as Home Economics. It not only serves as an opportunity for life skills development, but also as a gateway to career technical education in careers, such as interior design, culinary arts, cosmetology, and fashion designing (American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences, 2015). It is taught in federally funded junior and high schools across America. FCS was previously known as Home Economics. It not only serves as an opportunity for life skills development, but also as a gateway to some employment options.

Some foster care programs have limitations to how much life skills exposure foster children receive on a daily basis (Alabama Department of Human Resources, 2016; S. Gilbert, personal communication, December 28, 2016). For instance, some foster care programs have a business office that monitors daily expenses and pays bills on behalf of the youth (Alabama Department of Human Resources, 2016; S. Gilbert, personal communication, December 28, 2016). Foster care youth in this type of environment may feel disconnected by having to

postpone wants until money can be earned to address their concerns. Additionally, they may have difficulty in determining the cost of their day-to-day life and imaging how to create a monthly budget to address their needs. These examples pertain more to foster care placements in large residential facilities (Casey Life Skills, 2016). In residential facilities, there are teams of individuals that assist the foster child in accessing health care, medication, food, domestic care, recreation, and so forth (Alabama Department of Human Resources, 2016; S. Gilbert, personal communication, December 28, 2016). It would be difficult to imagine a foster child in this environment having an in-depth understanding of the operations of each department, to the extent that they can execute these skills after care.

Foster care youth in single-family homes may have a more traditional upbringing and may have some exposure to what it takes to implement life skills (Alabama Department of Human Resources, 2016; S. Gilbert, personal communication, December 28, 2016). However, the care of foster care youth in single-family homes is still dictated by the ISP written by the social worker (Alabama Department of Human Resources, 2016; S. Gilbert, personal communication, December 28, 2016). The degree of life skills exposure experienced, in either setting, is based on the specific instructions found on the ISP (Alabama Department of Human Resources, 2016; S. Gilbert, personal communication, December 28, 2016). Therefore, foster care youth in single-family homes may not be encouraged to investigate how to address life skills if it is not written into their ISP goals. It is critical that researchers understand the role that this ambiguity plays in life skills attainment for foster care youth.

Life skills will be defined as techniques designed to increase an individual's capacity to live without guardianship (Barnow, Buck, O'Brien, Pecora, Ellis, & Steiner, 2013; Casey Life Skills, 2016; Courtney *et al.*, 2011). These techniques include healthy relationship, work, study,

long-term and day to day planning, money management, computer literacy, and being able to utilize community resources skills (Casey Life Skills, 2016). A commonly used life skills program, in the foster care system, is the Casey Life Skills program (Courtney *et al.*, 2011). The Casey Life Skills program utilizes a self-report questionnaire to determine life skills deficits according to the child (Casey Life Skills, 2016). The Casey Life Skills program also provides some instructional resources to assist the life skills trainer in teaching the life skills to the child (Casey Life Skills, 2016). However, the child may have an inadequate perception of their life skills strengths and needs. Furthermore, the child may be resistant to learning more information about life skills that they have already identified as their strengths. The concern regarding this approach are that self-report measures lack the validity of other evaluative measures and is subjected to bias. There is no clear rubric that dictates action steps to successfully achieve a skill or what to do when a skillset is insurmountable for a child, for instance a child with a disability. What advantages are attached to successful completion of this training course? What disadvantages are there to not successfully completing the program? Who verifies that the Casey Life Skills trainer is knowledgeable about the subject that they are instructing? The Casey Life Skills program does not have a mandated administrator training and has few instructional materials to support the training needs of foster children completing the program (Casey Life Skills, 2016). It also addressed only one half of the issue- learning how to open a bank account, wash clothes, or pay bills in a training seminar is still different from having tangible experience of performing these services as their peers who remained in their homes might experience.

The State of Alabama requires foster care children to participate in the Independent Living Program (ILP) which begins life skills training at age 14 (Alabama Department of Human Resources, 2016; S. Gilbert, personal communication, December 28, 2016). ILP continues until

the youth reaches emancipation and leaves the foster care system. ILP consists of one seminar per month on a single topic in which the nearest Department of Human Resources is able to book an expert. The State of Alabama requires the expert to perform the life skill in which they are lecturing as a regular portion of their job description (Alabama Department of Human Resources, 2016; S. Gilbert, personal communication, December 28, 2016). The expert is sought out by local social workers to volunteer their expertise with no specific guidelines from child welfare regarding the topic, content, scope, and the sequence in which the life skills are to be discussed. There may be several months before the same life skill is practiced with an expert again. Foster care children are paid \$10 to participate in the ILP, but the expert is an uncompensated volunteer. The ILP session often takes place in the Department of Human Resources office due the liability of having children practicing skills in real-life settings and company policies that discourage the use of work equipment for non-work related purposes. This arrangement limits the foster care children to lectures that do not require equipment. Therefore, foster care children may have limited training in areas such as cooking, ironing, making a bed, utilizing an ATM, and many others.

Emancipation

Emancipation is the end of the state-provided care, custody, and control of an individual (Ala. Code § 26-13-1). The age of emancipation is determined by each state; however, most states acknowledge emancipation at age 18 (Ala. Code § 26-13-1). Emancipation indicates that an individual is capable of obtaining and maintaining health benefits, housing, employment, post-secondary educational training, and family or like-family support without assistance from DHR (Ala. Code § 26-13-1). To become emancipated, a petition is filed in family court to determine the feasibility of emancipating the child (Ala. Code § 26-13-1). Evidence is submitted to the judge indicating the resources that the child is currently using or intends on using to obtain

and maintain healthcare, housing, employment, educational or occupational training, and social support (Ala. Code § 26-13-1). Upon approval from the family court judge, this individual will be issued a copy of their social security card, birth certificate, and any other materials justifying their citizenship (Ala. Code § 26-13-1). This individual will then be emancipated, or in other words, will be declared a graduate from the foster care system (Ala. Code § 26-13-1). Foster care graduates are entitled to the freedoms of any adult member of society (Ala. Code § 26-13-1). The relationship between life skills attainment and emancipation is that there are no mandates that specify that self-sufficiency has to be achieved before State custody ends. Clearly stated, a plan to create self-sufficiency is no more than an idea that self-sufficiency might be possible within ideal circumstances. It is worth pondering what emancipated adults are expected to do when their ideal plan fails and they are no longer entitled to the support systems available to them as a child.

Graduating from Foster Care before Adulthood

Foster care youth can be reunified with their biological family members or be adopted (Ala. Code § 26-13-1). Foster care youth that are reunified with a parent typically return to the care of their parent after the parent is able to demonstrate their ability to provide adequate supervision and safety to their child (Ala. Code § 26-13-1). The child must also demonstrate an ability to be governable while in their out-of-home placement (Ala. Code § 26-13-1). The stability of both parent and child are determined by their ability to comply with safety, medicinal, therapeutic, academic, and occupational service plan goals determine by the child welfare system (Ala. Code § 26-13-1). These children are considered to have graduated from the foster care system because they are thought to have the necessary support and materials to be nurtured without the supervision of the child welfare system (Ala. Code § 26-13-1). This title is

also given to children who leave foster care as a result of being adopted (Ala. Code § 26-13-1). For a foster child to be adopted, the adoptive family would have to prove their ability to emotionally and physically nurture the child (Ala. Code § 26-13-1). Once adoption occurs, the family assumes full responsibility of the adoptive child, including financial support (Ala. Code § 26-13-1). Foster graduates, who are still children, may continue to need medicinal, financial, or therapeutic support to maintain a healthy lifestyle, as well as their parent. Medicinal, financial, or therapeutic supports might include psychotropic medications, food stamps, welfare-to-work programs, and counseling. Child welfare services seeks to affirm the ability of the family to thrive even with multiple service providers (Ala. Code § 26-13-1). These individuals are still viewed as children and are not perceived any differently than children who never left the supervision of a parent (Ala. Code § 26-13-1). If there are safety concerns in the future, these children can re-enter the foster care system in the manner that was previously described to address the current safety concerns (Ala. Code § 26-13-1). Ideally, a child that leaves foster care before becoming an adult has the same opportunity to gain life skills as a child who remains in foster care until adulthood. However, a child that returns to family care or is adopted, may have more exposure to real life settings in which life skills can be taught. In contrast, a child that is not governed by a service plan may not be encouraged or motivated to refine their life skills attainment. It is worth pondering if leaving foster care prior to becoming an adult enhances or hampers the attainment of life skills.

Termination of Parental Rights

Termination of parental rights occurs when a parent displays a persistent inability or unwillingness to meet the health, therapeutic, or occupational goals given to them by the child welfare system (Chapman *et al.*, 2004). A parent has the ability to choose to terminate their

parental rights at any point in the foster care process by notifying child welfare services or the family court judge (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013). When a parent wishes to regain custody of their child, community-based programs are offered by the child welfare system to assist the parent in gaining the necessary skills to regain custody of their child before custody is terminated (Chapman *et al.*, 2004). These community-based programs include parenting classes, after school care enrollment, employment services, and substance abuse education (Chapman *et al.*, 2004). In the State of Alabama, child welfare workers file a court petition to terminate parental rights between the ninth and twelfth month in foster care (Alabama Department of Human Resources, 2016; S. Gilbert, personal communication, December 28, 2016). Permanency hearing occur once each quarter or monthly to explain why the biological family has been unsuccessful in regaining custody of the child (Alabama Department of Human Resources, 2016; S. Gilbert, personal communication, December 28, 2016). As a result of this examination, more intensive services may be offered to the parent and child, the child may be relocated to heighten the engagement between the parent and child, or a family lineage study might be conducted to investigate if there are extended relatives able to foster or adopt the child (Alabama Department of Human Resources, 2016; S. Gilbert, personal communication, December 28, 2016). These efforts are viewed as a last resort to maintaining family preservation (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013). These efforts will continue until the parent is able to satisfy the child welfare system and the family court system that they are motivated and capable of providing a nurturing environment for their child or until the child welfare and court systems can provide enough documentation to support their claim that the parent shows an inability to effectively parent (Alabama Department of Human Resources, 2016; S. Gilbert, personal communication, December 28, 2016). Regardless of the reason for termination of parental rights it is unlikely

that the parent will resume parental rights, in spite of their feasibility to parent in the future (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013). A parent with terminated rights to a child can still work towards retaining custody of another child in foster care (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013). Additionally, they may be successful in retaining a child born after termination of parental rights has occurred on another child (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013). This researcher will examine if having parental rights terminated influences the likelihood of a foster care child to engage in life skills attainment. In other words, does a child with terminated parental rights perceive a need to disregard family lessons that are in some way insufficient in hopes of meeting training standards regarding life skills attainment?

Foster Care Children who Transfer to Adult Care

Foster care children may remain in care beyond the age of consent if they are thought to be a danger to themselves or others. Children who transfer to adult services are not emancipated and are subjected to federal and state guidelines governing the care and retention of adults in need of supervision (Chapman *et al.*, 2004). Children with severe mental health concerns pertaining to erratic behavior and unprovoked aggression may be considered for a transfer to adult services (Chapman *et al.*, 2004). Children with severe intellectual challenges have poor decision-making skills and may need to transfer to adult services for day-to-day guidance (Chapman *et al.*, 2004). These individuals will remain in adult services until there are no more safety concerns regarding their ability to be self-guided (Chapman *et al.*, 2004). The decision to start and end adult services is determined by a family court judge based on the evidence that suggests that this child is not appropriate for emancipation (Chapman *et al.*, 2004; Graham, Schelliger, & Vaughn, 2015; Jones, 2014). Foster care children who transfer to adult care may have a significantly harder time learning life skills and independently demonstrating them.

Difficulty in completing life skills tasks may be related to their inability to leave adult care. These individuals may need more specialized services to attain adequate life skills.

Summary

Whereas it may be more beneficial to under-hire caseworkers to avoid large salary costs, it could be said that understaffing may result in increased expenses in the long run. Large caseloads could be correlated with the disconcerting turn-over rate; therefore, money that could have been spent hiring more staff was spent training new staff that may be dissatisfied with their work conditions and who may soon turn-over, as well. Another questionable practice is the emancipation of underemployed or unemployed and out-of-school youth who often have no permanent resources other than the impaired biological parents and disadvantaged communities that they were removed from based on their inadequacy. The focus of the child welfare system should be the welfare of the child. Policymakers have the never-ending task of balancing cost versus reward. If foster care graduates leave care needing public assistance to maintain their basic needs, then the child welfare system has demonstrated an ability to divert the financial responsibility of providing foster care, not lessened it. In an effort to improve foster care graduates' outcomes, it is suggested that several child welfare policies need to be revised, greater efforts should be made to bring awareness to the holistic care of foster care youth and foster care graduates, and foster children should not be emancipated until age 21.

CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This phenomenological study utilizes a qualitative research methodology to investigate life skills attainment in foster care children through the lived experiences of foster care graduates. This study allows the researcher and its subsequent readers to immerse themselves in the setting, cognitions, and the emotions linked to learning life skills in the foster care system (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Foster care children face a multitude of challenges and expectations while in foster care. Some of these challenges may include substance exposure, neglect, abuse, and intellectual deficits. This methodology allows the researcher to examine the experience of attempting to attain life skills in the midst of a multitude of other factors. This chapter identifies the inclusion and exclusion criteria for research participants, the data collection methods, and the method for data analysis.

Transcendental Phenomenology

This methodology was conceptualized by Clark Moustakas in 1994. Transcendental phenomenology is the process in which a researcher explores a research phenomenon through a fresh, open-minded perspective (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). Data analysis begins as soon as data is transcribed from the first interview (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). This phenomenology approach utilizes bracketing, transcendental-phenomenology reduction, and imaginative variation to synthesize the essence of the experience (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). To define the essence of this study, this researcher bracketed her own experiences with

foster care children and foster care alumni, identified significant statements given by research participants, and clustered these statements into units of meaning and themes (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). The qualitative codebook, which depicts the clustered statements and emerging themes found in this study, is listed in Appendix A. Bracketing occurs throughout the analytical process (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). This researcher's process of bracketing is further described in the section on "Role of the Researcher."

Transcendental-phenomenological reduction identifies the invariant qualities derived from the interview of each research participant (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). This happens after horizontalization has occurred or in other words, after each statement is valued equally. Invariant qualities refers to the non-repetitive or overlapping statements; this is the individual textual description of the experiences of the research participant (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). The composite textural description is the combination all of the individual textural descriptions into a universal textural description (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). After deriving the universal textural description, the researcher analyzed the various perspectives regarding the phenomena to evoke the structural qualities of the experiences had by the research participants (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). This began the imaginative variation step (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). The structural qualities are then clustered into themes to discover the universal themes (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). Universal themes are derived from the combination of all structural-textural descriptions (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). The combination of all structural-textual descriptions develops the synthesis of the essence of the experience (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004).

Role of the Researcher

The bracketing step began before the research study was conducted and was to suppress predispositions and prejudices (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). This method was conducted by the researcher and was her consideration of her biases and preconceived notations regarding the phenomena (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). This researcher developed these considerations into brackets (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). This researcher recalled her experiences as a counselor and case manager for foster care children and their families during eight of her nine years as a mental health counselor. This researcher has worked for six foster care agencies, with 10 programs that provided mental health services to either foster children, recent foster care graduates, or parents at risk of having their parental rights terminated. This counselor acknowledged greater success in mental health stability and life skill attainment in inpatient children with terminated parental rights and who began care before adolescence. This researcher acknowledges that these conditions have allowed her the least amount of oppositional influence regarding the service plan for the child. This researcher recalled foster care children and graduates who had little motivation to comply with program guidelines and service plans. This researcher recalled children and graduates that were traumatized while in foster care who preferred the support of their family members after they were traumatized in the child welfare system that was designed to protect them. This researcher recalled having to ask special permission from foster care agencies and social workers for clients to be exposed to life skills such as sex and puberty education, getting a library card, getting a savings account, college touring, and applying to post-secondary education. This researcher could not count the number of times that her colleagues discouraged her from exploring innovative or real-life experiences to motivate self-sufficiency. This researcher recalled the complexity of teaching life skills to a

client that had an Intelligence Quotient (IQ) of less than 70. Furthermore, this researcher has endured burn-out multiple times due to large caseloads and employment policies that burdened work-life balance. This is coupled with the experiences of high turnover within the foster care agencies and the child welfare system.

This researcher was inspired to research this issue after receiving a call from a former client that had been removed from her transitional program without long-term planning and in immediate need of assistance obtaining housing. In the process of finding housing for the client and developing a long-term plan for her, this researcher learned the depths of her own privilege. Even though this researcher served this population, the researcher still could not conceptualize the hardships that foster care graduates face as they exit care. Most noteworthy is the amount of stigma and discrimination faced by this population. This researcher found that the criteria to seek a number of public services was unyielding. Services that could assist her in avoiding homelessness would not assist her because she didn't have multiple forms of identification or a referring agency. In other words, this client needed assistance to meet the minimum qualifications to receive assistance. Even if such programs existed, this client needed housing within hours whereas most forms of identification take several days to be processed. Then, without an address, where would she retrieve these documents should she be able to afford them? This study sought to assist individuals like this client that have inadequacies in their ability to care for themselves after emancipation and to bring awareness to this issue.

Participants

This researcher received IRB approval to conduct this study (see Appendix B). This researcher distributed recruitment letters (see Appendix C) to the Department of Human Resources buildings in Jefferson, Montgomery, Mobile, and Tuscaloosa Counties. These

counties were selected because Jefferson, Montgomery, and Mobile counties have the largest populations in the State of Alabama. The Institutional Review Board approved for this researcher to utilize church announcements and news and radio segments in the same counties, but these methods were not pursued given the effectiveness of snowballing. Snowballing allowed research participants to refer their friends and relatives to participate in this study. Inclusion criteria included at least 12 months of consecutive relative or non-relative foster care in the State of Alabama, a willingness to participate in this research study, and currently being between 19 and 26 years of age. The inclusion criteria for this study specified a need for foster care graduates between 19 and 26 years of age because they are the most recent consumers of the policies and practices of the child welfare system. This narrow age group assisted this researcher in identifying and addressing the impact of life skills attainment while in the foster care given the most recent DHR standards.

Foster care youth were not used in this study due to legal constraints, the possibility of little experience or insight into the foster care system, and a possible lack of insight into what factors are necessary to make foster care most beneficial to adult success. Research participants may have remained in the foster care system until their 18th birthday and became emancipated or they may have left care as children to be raised by a biological or adoptive parent. Additionally, research participants would not have participated in ILP if they entered and exited the foster care system prior to their 14th birthday. Individuals in both sets of circumstances will give this researcher a more in depth perception of the impact of the life skills training provided to children within the child welfare system. For instance, if foster care graduates who entered and exited care before their 14th birthday have the same or greater struggles than foster care graduates who exited on their 18th birthday, it would suggest that more research is needed to understand how

children in the child welfare system are impacted in learning life skills prior to formal life skills training.

Potential research participants were contacted by this researcher from the telephone number listed on the flyer. This telephone call was used to assess their ability to meet the inclusion criteria of this study. Individuals who met the inclusion criteria were scheduled appointments in the town corresponding with the location of the flyer that they received. Some of the selected research participants were not current residents of the various counties where fliers were distributed. Although not required, each of the research participants resided in one or more of the four counties in which fliers were distributed while in foster care. Interviews were conducted in a private meeting room at the public library in the same city.

Interviews were digitally recorded to enhance the accuracy of transcripts and data analysis. All research participants were interviewed individually and expected a time commitment of 1 hour. Research participants were expected to have varied levels of educational attainment; the interview was semi-structured to accommodate for each participant's vocabulary needs. This researcher used a semi-structured interview to inquire about the experiences and perceptions of various foster care graduates until this research study reached saturation. In other words, no new information could be gathered regarding life skills attainment and the experiences of foster care children in acquiring life skills while in foster care (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The range of anticipated participants was between 3 and 10 individuals based on phenomenology guidelines; this study utilized 5 (Creswell, 2014). Research participants were notified prior to setting an appointment that they would be asked to schedule a follow-up interview within 2 weeks of the initial interview.

Research participants answered demographic questions about their experiences prior to, during, and after foster care to enrich this researcher's interpretation of the information gathered during the interview. Through this process, this researcher learned the sex, age, race, ethnicity, marital status, educational attainment, number and length of times in foster care, types of foster care placements, age at admission and termination, first residence after care, current need for public assistance, and current employment status. Demographic information was gathered for all 5 research participants in this study, 4 of them were female and 1 was male. Four research participants were 26 years of age and 1 participant was 25. Four of these participants were African American and 1 participant was African American and European. Two research participants were in heterosexual marriages and 3 participants had never been married. One research participant had a high school diploma, 1 participant did not complete high school, and 3 research participants did not complete their college education. Four participants did not return to foster care after being terminated from care. These participants spent between 18 months and 11 years in foster care. An additional participant returned to foster care once after being terminated. This participant spent 2 years in foster care and then another 6 years. Research participants in this study resided in various types of foster care settings, some individuals resided in a combination of these settings. These settings include single-family foster care homes with foster parents, residing with relatives, group homes, and residential facilities. These participants entered care between 3 and 15 years of age and exited care between 7 and 19 years of age. After foster care, 2 participants were adopted and resided with their adoptive parents, 1 participant returned to their biological parents, another resided with a biological relative for a brief period of time before residing by themselves, and an additional participant was immediately able to reside by themselves. Four out of the 5 participants reported a current need for public assistance to

meet their basic needs. Three of the research participants were employment full-time, 1 participant was unemployed due to a recent relocation and another participant was unemployed awaiting the start of her college education.

Participant Screening and Consent

There are few inclusion criteria for this study. The inclusion criteria states that the individual be between 19 and 26 years of age and reside in child welfare in the state of Alabama for at least 12 months. Purposeful sampling allowed the researcher to eliminate individuals that did not have enough experience with the research topic to adequately contribute to the discussion and interpretation (Creswell, 2014). This telephone conversation was utilized to introduce the researcher, state the purpose of the study, describe the research, and clarify the procedure, confidentiality, risks, and benefits. There was a possibility that research participants might experience some emotional discomfort given that they were likely to disclose personal information about their experiences prior to and during foster care. Research participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time and have their data destroyed. This researcher did not exclude any of the participants that volunteered for this study because each of them met the inclusion criteria. This researcher confirmed that each individual was interested in participating in the study, scheduled an interview date and time, and confirmed that they will be able to meet the researcher at a public library in their town. The day before each interview, this researcher called the research participant to remind them of the interview. The interview was conducted in a meeting room in the public library to optimize the privacy and the focus of the research participants and the researcher. Interviews were digitally recorded to assist in the accuracy of the transcripts and the data analysis.

A follow up letter was mailed to all foster care graduates who verbally agreed to participate in the study. The mailing thanked them for their willingness to participate and asked them to review and sign the informed consent form prior to our meeting. It also confirmed the time, date, and location of the interview. Completion of an informed consent form is a requirement of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Auburn University to determine that all research participants are aware of the risks and benefits of research participations (Creswell, 2014). The informed consent form specified who conducted the study, why the participants were chosen, purpose of the study, time commitment, expected benefits, potential risks and how they will be managed, voluntary nature of the study, confidentiality, how debriefing will be conducted, and contacts for this study (see Appendix C). A copy of the informed consent form was given to each participant for their records.

Data Collection

Each research participant met with the researcher for approximately 30 to 60 minutes depending on the depth of information given and the pacing in which the research participant can interpret each question. The researcher reviewed the purpose of the study, procedures, risks and benefits, and confidentiality as outlined in the initial letter. The informed consent form was reviewed. This researcher utilized the first few minutes of the study building rapport with each participant before asking demographic questions (see Appendix D) regarding their upbringing before foster care placement, the dynamics of their foster care placement, and their current socioeconomic standing. The interview questions (see Appendix E) explained what each category of life skills entails. These interview questions were reviewed for its content by the dissertation committee prior to executing the pilot study. A chart (see Appendix F) was utilized to verbally explain the life skills categories and the sub-descriptors of each of these categories.

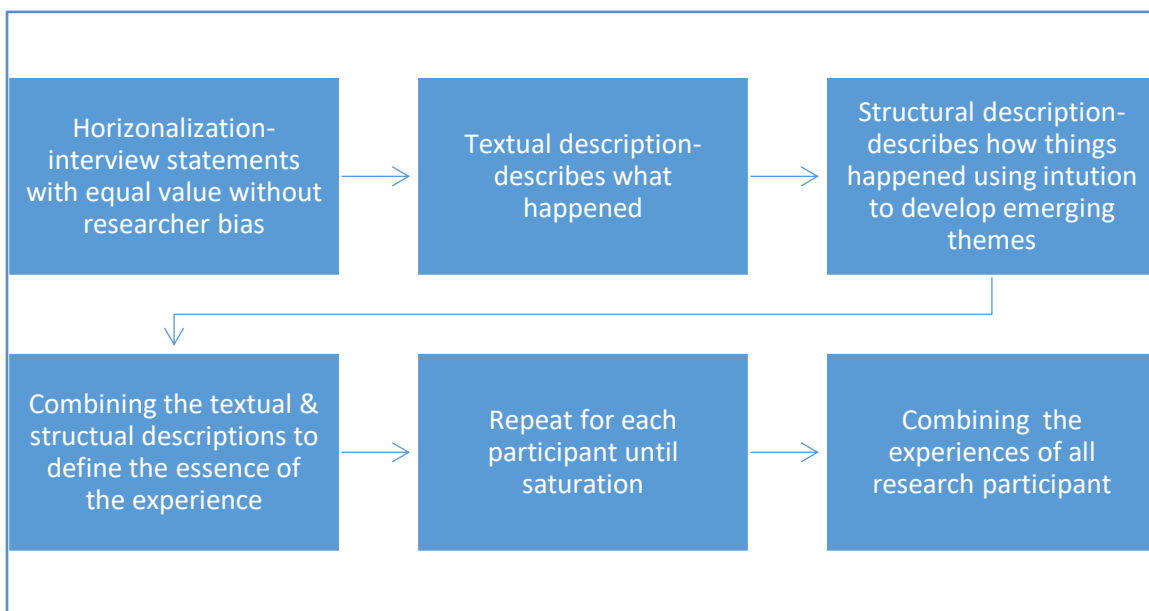
The researcher was the only person to view this chart in an effort to avoid research participant bias in their responses. Each of the six categories of life skills will have the same questions pertaining to the experiences and perceptions of that particular skill. The six categories of life skills are daily living, self-care, relationships and communication, housing and money management, work and study, and career and education planning skills.

All interviews were digitally audio recorded to preserve the language and the context of statements and vocal inflections. The researcher transcribed the interviews with the assistance of Verbatim Transcription Services. Participants were invited to schedule a second interview to review the transcription from the first interview and to address any discrepancies. The second interview is to ensure member checking, or in other words, to guarantee the accuracy of the transcription. Research participants were encouraged to call this researcher to address concerns, make corrections, or to ask questions. In total, 6 individuals completed both 30–60 minute interviews for this study. However, one individual was excused from this study due to this researcher's inability to resolve some discrepancies within each interview and across the two interviews combined. The researcher thanked the research participants for their participation during the second interview. All collected data was stored and managed in a locked filing cabinet in the home of the researcher. Audio recordings and their transcripts were saved on a secured password protected computer and backed up on a secure external hard drive.

Data Analysis

Hand scoring was utilized to analyze the phenomenological data. First, all statements relevant to the participants' experience were documented (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). In this process, known as horizontalization, each comment holds equal value (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). Second, all nonoverlapping and nonrepetitive statements were listed (Moerer-

Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). These statements were the invariant horizons of the experience (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). Third, the researcher grouped invariant horizons into themes (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). Fourth, the researcher used the invariant horizons and themes to construct an individual textural description of each participant’s experience, including verbatim examples (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). Fifth, the researcher constructed an individual structural description of each participant’s experience drawn from the individual textural description and imaginative variation (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). Sixth, the researcher constructed a textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of each participant’s experience, including the invariant constituents and themes (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). Finally, the researcher used the individual textural-structural descriptions to develop a composite description of the essences of the experience for all participants as a whole (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). See Figure 1 for a brief summary of these steps.



Derived from the Modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method

Figure 1. Transcendental Phenomenology Data Analysis

For example, this researcher reviewed Bonnie's transcript to learn more about her experiences in attaining life skills while in foster care. Each line of Bonnie's transcript was noted with a sequential number, called a ticker, as a quick reference to the timing in the interview in which she or the researcher quoted the statement being referenced. Bonnie began her interview by noting that she was in more than one foster home in ticker 8 of her transcript. In tickers 10, 11, 13, 15 and 16 Bonnie indicated that she felt as if she had "bounced around" from foster home to foster home because of her race. These statements seemed significant to this researcher and were marked with a check mark for further review. This researcher read the completion of this transcript and then reviewed this transcript for overlapping and repetitive statements. Ticker 8, which indicated that Bonnie had been in more than one foster home was removed because Ticker 10, which indicated that Bonnie felt as if she had been bounced around, was a much more vivid illustration of the prior statement. Tickers 11 and 13 were unmarked because tickers 15 and 16 indicated her perception that her biracial identity caused her relocations as an attempt to find the right ethnic group for her. This researcher continued this process of eliminating overlapping and repetitive statements throughout the remainder of this transcript. The next step was to find the relationship between the statements and to derive themes. This researcher needed to determine if Bonnie's statements in tickers 8 through 16 focused on racial identity or multiple placements. For clarity, this researcher reviewed the central question of this study. The central question was "What is the experience of life skills attainment while in foster care?" This researcher could not justify concluding that being biracial impacts life skills attainment while in foster care. Perhaps some biracial foster children felt as if their ethnic identity did not impact their life skills attainment or that it enhanced it. However, it is likely that most foster children who had multiple placements faced periods of transition in

which building rapport or terminating services took greater precedence than life skills development. This description, a lack of permanency, allows for a multitude of experiences, in addition to racial disparities. This phenomena was therefore labeled as a lack of permanency to allow the title of this theme to mirror the terminology that DHR uses to discuss the placement of foster children. This theme related to the experiences of 4 of the 5 participants in this study and was illustrated in a codebook that specifies quotes these participants made regarding their lack of permanency. The fifth participant noted that she had lived in multiple settings; however, she did not indicate that her lack of permanency impacted her ability to attain life skills. This researcher is certain that she did not make this statement because this researcher was unable to find a quote that suggested that she perceived permanency as a factor in her life skills attainment. Ultimately, this researcher developed 7 codebooks which correlated with the 7 emerging themes that were developed by the research participants in this study. Those 7 themes describe the essence of the research participants' experiences of attaining life skills while in foster care.

Credibility and Dependability

The qualitative research perspective utilizes the view of the participants to establish the credibility of the research findings. Credibility establishes that the analysis given by the researcher coincides with the findings of the research participants. This researcher used bracketing, memos, and member checking to give credibility to the research findings of this study. Bracketing began before the research study to divulge the personal experiences, biases, and preconceived notions about the current research topic or previous, but related research topics (Creswell, 2014). Memos reflected the lived experiences of the researcher as a foster care counselor who has had some challenges in teaching life skills to foster care youth and who has watched former clients peril due to their lack of life skills. Additionally, this memo reflected the

perceptions of this researcher as the researcher immerses in the lived experiences of the research participants. Furthermore, member checking was utilized to enhance the credibility of the research findings. Member checking is the most utilized credibility technique (Creswell, 2014). In member checking, each participant reads their interview transcript, prior to the analysis, for clarity and accuracy and to provide additional insight and information.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to better understand the lived experiences of foster graduates in attaining life skills while in foster care. This researcher assumed that a better understanding of life skills training would assist social workers in developing a life skills training approach that will provide the best opportunity for self-sufficiency. Interview questions were utilized to gather the perceptions of foster care graduates in attaining life skills while in foster care based on their lived experiences. Research participants were asked about their life skills development prior to foster care placement, efforts to improve these skills while in foster care, supports to make these improvements, ability to seek additional supports, and examples of their experiences. This chapter presents the key findings obtained from 5 open-ended, face-to-face interviews. Seven major findings emerged from this study:

1. Insufficient depth of life skills training.
2. Motivations for developing life skills.
3. Difficulty attaining support from direct childcare workers in developing life skills.
4. Need for community supports.
5. Unresolved biological family issues that hinder life skills development.
6. Difficulty attaining permanency while learning life skills.
7. Difficulty attaining support from DHR in developing life skills.

The following is a discussion of the findings with details that support and explain each finding. The statements given by research participants during their interviews was condensed

into themes that emerged as responses to the research questions. To enhance the credibility of the research findings, quotes from the research participants have been used to further illustrate the lived experiences of attaining life skills while in foster care. Pseudonyms have been utilized to uphold the confidentiality of each participant.

Insufficient Depth of Life Skills Training

The first emerging theme illustrates that foster children face disparities in the depth of their life skills training. Each research participant was able to enhance some life skills while in foster care, but each one of them also had some deficits. Multiple research participants noted that they were not exposed to or had very limited exposure to the life skills addressed in this study. These participants noted that they utilized trial and error and crash courses to make improvements in various life skills. These responses were more common when discussing factors related to work, housing, money management, and career and education planning skills. Bonnie stated, "...the work thing, you know, we were basically on our own..." Danielle noted that she began adulthood with a negative credit report due to some family expenses that were charged to her as a child. She reported that she had limited support in addressing this concern and continued to have difficulty in this area. She stated, "My credit is messed up. I don't know how to fix that yet. I'm probably going to file bankruptcy." Fiona reported, "I got my first phone and my first bank account when I was in the 8th grade, but I didn't save enough like I was supposed to. I didn't manage it right." Julia spoke to this issue the most. She noted she was limited in her ability to perform home cleanliness, food and nutrition, budgeting, banking, and transportation related skills. This research participant also noted that her sex education training was limited to conversations regarding what to refrain from. Julia made the following statements during her interview:

“...They had people to clean our rooms for us. We were not allowed to cook our own meals... some people were like coming of age and, of course, like they had those talks with us but the talks pretty much went ‘don’t do this’... I don’t feel like they fully explained why we should or should not do something... They [gave] us pretty much crash courses in things... I can’t honestly say that there was any improvement as far as money because pretty much what I wanted for Christmas, they got for me. Of course, they would put money, you know, in our accounts and you know we could spend it until it was gone and, eventually, we would get more... I never learned how to drive until after foster care...I felt like a lot of that was trial and error.”

There were other phenomena that were noted as a lack of support in attaining life skills training, but are less directly correlated with the efforts of life skills training due to the possibility of additional factors such as perceived age-appropriate behavior, residuals of previous trauma or pre-placement care, and a lack of preparedness for life skills development. Bonnie noted that between 17 and 20 years of age, she began partying and was unable to complete her post-secondary education plans. She noted, “You somehow get side-tracked and go in a whole new direction... this was like any other person at that age, they change their minds...” Julia reported some difficulty with relationship and communication skills which derived from her difficulties trusting others. It is not unlikely that the factors that lead to this participant being removed from her biological family had a contributing impact on her ability to feel trusting of others. This research participant stated, “My husband and I, when we were dating, it was really hard because he came from a well put-together home, mother, father, and everything... I had trust issues but he was always willing to trust...” Danielle reported, “I feel like it should have been better opportunities as far as [school]... I knew I wanted to go to school and all that but I

never really stuck with anything and I had no idea of what I wanted to – you know really go to school for.”

Motivations for Developing Life Skills

The second emerging theme demonstrated the influence of each research participants’ motivation to be self-sufficient. Research participants described experiences that both contributed and hindered their ability to learn life skills. Additionally, some participants described their perceptions of how motivation impacts foster care graduates’ ability to be self-sufficient. This theme was categorized into three sub-themes which seek to give some perspective regarding the basis for the research participant’s motivation to acquire life skills. These categories are their experiences and resistance, life skills training while in foster care, and perceptions regarding normalcy.

Client Motivation Due to Experiences and Resistance

Bonnie stated that she initially had some difficulty in school and she repeated a grade to assist her in strengthening her academic skills. From this experience, she received additional support to assist her in her academic development. She reported that she was motivated by her adoptive mother, foster care siblings, and teacher to take advance placement classes in high school. Bonnie was accepted into college right after high school. Bonnie reported that she focused more on her social life than her education and ultimately withdrew from school. She described her behavior as her desire to disregard the directives of her support system. She stated, “...I wanted to do my own thing because I felt like, well, they want me to do this that and the other, but what about what I want...” She discussed knowing other foster children that had similar life skills training in foster care that were not motivated to attain life skills while in foster care. Regarding these experiences, this research participant stated,

I know some people that I've grown up with in foster care that they still turned out to be – how can I say this – nobodies or [in] jail or you know even though they were taught well, they still chose a different route based off previous family members that they were with before foster care. It's just something that you can't help. Some things that you're already adapted to.

Danielle reported that observing the lived experiences of both her direct care staff and the other foster care children gave her an opportunity to learn the importance of attaining life skills. This motivation was increased by her own experiences in foster care. This included being abruptly terminated from her last foster care placement without having assistance with long-term planning. She reported, "I felt like it was more so me just being tired of not having my stuff together... After being in there and going through the stuff that I went through and when I left and stuff, I was just like... enough is enough... it's time to get myself together." It is possible that Danielle's struggles to find transportation to and from school, assistance with academics, and her rapport with direct care workers had an impact on how she was characterized in her last foster care placement.

Fiona discussed how her biological mother's choices impacted her desire to acquire life skills. She reported that she observed her mother's behaviors which she hoped not to repeat. This research participant has been on a quest to avoid indicators that she perceived would lead to the pitfalls that her mother experienced. Fiona perceived that her mother gave her power away by allowing substance abuse to take control of her life. She decided that her life's motivation would be maintaining her power. This research participant stated, "I never wanted to be like my real mother. So I always strived never to do drugs, never to drink, never to, you know, do those

things because when you do those things you're giving your power up to something – an inanimate object.”

Alex reported some initial resistance to attaining life skills. This research participant reported initially thinking “who wants to get along with somebody that is telling them what to do all the time.” He reported that he had been taking care of himself since he was 15 years old and had a difficult time listening to directives. As a former drug dealer and gang member, this research participant reported that he was initially focused on enhancing his criminal skills while in foster care. He stated, “I was in like the GED classes. You know I dropped out. I was a smart kid but you know – money, cars, and all the other types of BS that go with it – You know it probably had me blind.” He reported that he suspected that many of the children that resided in foster care with him had similar perspectives regarding court-mandated foster care placement. He stated, “Whenever a person or child goes into certain situations in different environments like foster care or getting sentenced going to jail or what have you, I mean some do better themselves but 95%, if we're saying, they're just learning how to be better criminals or better at whatever they were doing before they went in... I really wasn't trying to better myself. I was trying to be a better crook...”

Alex reported two things that motivated him: fear and responsibility. This research participant realized the severity of continuing to engage in criminal activity. In regards to his criminal associations, this research participant stated,

You got to learn quick, whether it's your money or somebody else's money, you know not to mess it up. So it's some sort of fear factor right there. Also, that makes you like, you know, if I mess this person's money up, they're going to be like real upset and somebody might be burying me [or causing me bodily harm].”

Alex learned some life skills to enhance his ability to perform criminal activity; these skills pertain to money, time management skills and communication skills. Alex was motivated to learn other life skills, such as those related to career planning, to avoid the temptation of criminal behavior. Additionally, this research participant reported a sense of responsibility to his biological parents and to his children to attain life skills that would assist him in being able to provide for them. This research participant reported,

That's why I made up in my mind to go ahead and change, you know. My parents love me, I've got children who love me, I have a lot of younger people that's under me that look up to me so... – I feel like I can't let them down and it's been instances where you know I have to really make decisions for these people so they won't fall by the wayside and be in the same predicament I have been in.

Client Motivation through Life Skills Training

Danielle reported that she received life skills training that really emphasized daily living skills, self-care skills, and relationship and communication skills. She reported that these skills have assisted her in obtaining her own car and house. Additionally, she has been able to maintain a bank account and employment. She reports having had consistent employment opportunities since emancipation from foster care. She stated, "I'm doing good – car, house, bank account... and a job..." Regarding her ability to work or to gain study skills before foster care, this research participant reported, "I wasn't capable at all; that's why I was there."

Julia reported that she felt as if foster care exposed her to multiple life skills. She reported that she had more life skills training near termination of care than throughout the duration of care. This participant reported that this added emphasis on life skills development near termination had been helpful, but that the limited time period had left some questions

regarding how to implement these skills in reality. This participant reported that she utilized the trial and error approach in housing and money management skills, in addition to career and education planning skills. With regards to career and education planning skills, this research participant stated “That was [n]ever really harped upon – It was something that actually when I got out of foster care that I learned to like, I won’t say excel, but do okay for myself in.”

Alex entered into foster care to make improvements in his behavior, so that he could return to the care of his biological parents. Therefore, his foster care placement was heavily focused on changing his perspectives regarding his life skills development. Should this research participant not cooperate with the expectations of his service plan, this research participant was at risk of being placed in a juvenile detention center. This research participant reported that he hoped to avoid turning his foster care placement into a juvenile detention center placement. This participant made the following statement regarding his need to comply with life skills training while in foster care: “I mean you really didn’t have to ask where I was. They just give it to you. It’s either you do it or they ship you.”

Client Motivation and Their Perceptions of Normalcy

Two research participants discussed their perceptions of normalcy, or in other words, their perception of what is normal. Fiona reported her diligence to maintaining self-control. She stated, “And I’ all about self-control. I don’t want an object or something to control me inside, just rather not do it.” Alex reported that it takes effort to be successful. He questioned whether it is possible to provide enough life skills training to inspire an individual to attain life skills. He stated,

I mean if they teach you life skills like that – I mean – I mean, yes, I can see where it does make some type of improvement but the individual, they – he or she, they got to

want that for themselves. I mean it's just not like you know you teach this and they're going to receive it. It doesn't work like that. The individual themselves has got to want these skills and want to better themselves."

He went on to question his own motivation to complete his GED as an example of this concern.

He reported,

[I] started like studying and taking classes and you know trying to better myself really, but like I said before, you got to want it, you know. People can force anything on you but you actually got to want it for yourself. You know you can ask for help all day but you know if you don't help yourself, who else is going to help you, so... it's really a self-thing. You have to have that drive inside you to go ahead and do the right thing and you know get things done like that as far as education goes."

He reported that he has not completed his GED requirements yet, but he still desires to do so in the future.

Bonnie, Danielle, and Julia reported an additional factor regarding their motivation. These individuals reported that they were aware, as foster care children, of life skills that they could not perform; however, they did not ask for additional assistance with these skills. These research participants reported that they were likely to have received assistance with these skills had they asked for assistance. Each of these participants reported that they were not certain as to why they had not pursued further knowledge of these various skills. One factor may have been their perceptions of their ability to perform these various skills. An example of this deficit in readiness was pinpointed by Danielle. This research participant noted that she had some difficulty remaining in college because she was not ready to focus on her education. She reported, "I dropped out after I got my check."

Difficulty Attaining Support from Direct Childcare Workers in Developing Life Skills

Bonnie noted that her foster mother, who later adopted her, was instrumental in the development of her motor skills. Bonnie noted that her motor skills development hampered her academic preparedness to promote to the 2nd grade. She reported that her adoptive mother chose to have her to repeat first grade to enhance her academic readiness. This research participant reported that she felt comfortable asking her questions and felt supported when she requested support. She noted that she was able to “pick things up quickly.” Bonnie reported difficulty thriving in her previous foster homes where she perceived that her African American ethnicity was a source of embarrassment for her European foster families. Bonnie reported that she lacked support in gaining communication skills because she was to remain hidden from her neighbors and community members because she was biracial. She perceived that she made little academic or social growth until she was placed with her final foster mother who was patient, supportive, and accepting of her. Fiona had a similar experience; she noted that her last foster mother, who also became her adoptive mother, was a good listener. She reported that she feels confident confiding in either of her adoptive parents and that they are very supportive of her learning and refining her life skills.

Julia felt as if she “didn’t get the full experience” of conducting life skills because her direct childcare workers were required to perform various tasks for her. She noted that various housekeeping tasks, such as making up your bed, cleaning your room, doing laundry, and meal preparation were performed for her and that she had little exposure to financial planning. Julia also reported that her inability to attempt these tasks led to her feelings of inadequacy, which hampered her willingness to ask her direct childcare workers for support in refining her life skills. She also noted that she was aware of a number of life skills, but that she had to learn how

to perform them after becoming an adult through trial and error. Some examples, include ironing, cooking, and banking.

Danielle reported that she sensed her direct childcare workers felt disconnected from the consequences of her not learning life skills. This research participant utilized foster care services in multiple States and perceived that a number of direct childcare workers in the State of Alabama were more focused on earning an income than providing services. An additional concern that she noted was how her direct childcare workers reacted to certain stigmatizing factors regarding clients. For example, she noted that one or more staff members displayed discriminatory behavior to children who had a sexually transmitted disease and may have, at least passively, influenced how other children responded to these children. These observations did not increase this research participant's willingness to confide in these direct childcare workers or to trust their judgement. Alex had a similar experience and reported that his direct childcare workers were very regimented. He felt comfortable asking questions when he needed to, but he also noted that he perceived that some of the direct childcare workers were more motivated by their paychecks than providing life skills training.

Need for Community Supports

Bonnie reported that she learned a number of life skills from older foster children. She discussed the difficulty of having these foster care children explain to her their life experiences that led to their placement in foster care and their experiences thereafter. Bonnie stated that the experiences of her older foster siblings increased her understanding of her need to learn life skills during childhood. She noted that these stories were so horrific that she did not believe that she could ever be a foster mother. Bonnie could perceive the advantage to a current foster child, if a former foster child were to mentor, foster parent, or adopt them. However, listening to the

experiences of other foster care children had previously triggered her memories of abuse and neglect. This research participant maintains communication with more than one of the foster children that lived with her and her adoptive mother. She refers to them as her siblings. This research participant reported that she did not receive counseling while in foster care or after being adopted. She reported that counseling may have helped her to cope with her family discord and issues related to her adoption.

Danielle discussed her enrollment in a four-year college. She reported that she had support to start her matriculation, but a lack of support after enrolling that could have been beneficial towards her completion of this degree. With wavering interest in completing her degree, Danielle was unexpectedly terminated from her last foster care placement. She discussed not having enough awareness of her community to find subsequent supports. She also discussed the difficulty of accessing these services once they became known to her. She faced issues regarding available bed space, proper documentation of her reason for homelessness, scrutiny for her lapses in foster care placement, and a lack of required identification.

Alex reported that he began to sell drugs, not realizing how difficult it would be to rebuild his image after being known as a gang member and a drug dealer. He reported that he received support in developing skills that would allow him to abandon his criminal persona while in foster care. He also reported that he lacked this assistance upon his discharge. He reported, “You know you really don’t have people to push you in the right direction and you know all your friends start coming around and you may get sidetracked.”

Fiona reported that she relied on her therapist, psychiatrist, religious practices, and her adoptive parents to cope with previous trauma and to attain life skills. She reported that a lack of community support could be a precursor to destructive habits, such as substance abuse and

negative peer influences. She also discussed the importance of DHR to provide post-secondary funding, housing, and income beyond age 18. This research participant associated these supports with an increased likelihood of completing post-secondary education, obtaining a career, and having financial stability.

Whereas Fiona reported the added benefits of community supports, such as her mental health professionals and religious practices, Julia reported that she utilized her employment to enhance work-related skills and her school teachers to enhance her study skills. She reported that she was able to have lived experiences with work and study skills. This allowed her an opportunity to experiment with new ways of addressing challenge, and to refine her competency regarding these life skills.

Unresolved Biological Family Issues that Hinder Life Skills Development

Bonnie reported that she did not understand why she needed to be removed from her biological family as a child, but that she had developed the opinion that she benefited from this decision. This research participant reported that she recently reconnected with her mother and that she approached parenting differently than her mother. Additionally, this research participant questioned whether or not her mother would have been able to support her in developing certain life skills, such as those related to work and study skills and career and education planning. She stated, “I reunited with my real mother a couple of years ago... She’s trying to communicate with [me], she wants to build a relationship... There [are] some things you can’t get over even though you were too young to remember. It’s just the thought that I can’t believe you... I probably would end up needing some type of help eventually on the schoolwork and different things like that.”

Bonnie reported needing assistance with age-appropriate execution of self-care, home cleanliness, cultural competency, and personal development skills upon entering foster care. She also noted that a number of the foster children that she grew up with struggled to refine their life skills during care because of their perceptions of normalcy. She discussed having to support foster care siblings in perceiving daily living skills and self-care skills as tasks that are normal. Bonnie reported that she and the residing foster children were able to engage new foster children to conform to the expectations of this foster home by defining and emphasizing the importance of working together as a team, or family, and making new foster children feel included in this family.

Alex reported that he was no longer living with his parents at the time that he entered foster care. He reported that he was 15, living with a woman, viewing himself as an adult, working, paying bills, and selling drugs. Alex reported that his largest regret was making life decisions that led him to foster care. He reported that he had sufficient support to avoid gang activity and criminality in his parent's care. Alex also reported that he maintained his parents' support and that he now relies on his parents' support to make positive milestone decisions. He reported that he was once motivated to make poor choices by television and musical glorifications of criminality. He credits his desire to change to his ability to perceive the trajectory of the life that he was living and an ability to rely on the advice of his parents. He reported an ability to receive temporary housing and income from his parents as he applied for jobs.

Danielle reported a lack of biological family support. Danielle reported that she ran away from her biological grandmother's home in another State in search of more emotional support. This action led Danielle to Alabama and into foster care as a youth who was unable to identify a

biological relative willing to take custody of her. This research participant lacked an interest to return to her grandmother and was not invited to return to her grandmother's house. Her mother was no more prepared to care for her than she was when this research participant first entered foster care as a very young child.

Difficulty Attaining Permanency While Learning Life Skills

Bonnie report that she continued to struggle with some life skills, such as relationship and communication skills, after entering foster care. This research participant reported that she was initially placed with European families who appeared to be uncomfortable with her biracial heritage. She reported that she was often hidden from community members and community activities. Bonnie reported that she felt more accepted after she was placed with an African American family and that she was later adopted by her first African American foster mother and resided with this foster mother until she graduated from high school. She stated, "We understood each other, and I learned a lot." Bonnie reported that she went from having to repeat the first grade to excelling in advanced placement courses in high school. She credits her adoptive mother's nurturance as the main fuel for this change in her academic aptitude. If Bonnie continued to struggle with placement instability or racial discrimination, she may have continued to struggle with life skill development.

Fiona reported a lack of permanency that is likely to have occurred due to her need for various levels of care during her childhood. She reported, "I was in Children's Hospital, then I was in the Intervention Center, then I was in Brewer-Porch, then I was in Safety Net, then I was in Lee County Youth Development Center, then moved [out of state] with my adoptive parents." Whereas she did report some frustration in having placement instability, she seemed to value the therapeutic interventions and structure of these various agencies. Fiona was able to gain skills at

each of these residential facilities. Fiona was adopted at 16 years old and reported a sense of belonging that was different than her foster care experiences. She reported that this sense of belonging motivated her to stop acting out, so that her adoptive family can be proud of her.

Both Julia and Alex discussed their hesitation to ask questions and to receive support from their direct childcare workers. They reported that this hesitation is based on their perceptions of their previous direct childcare worker's availability to be a long-term support in assisting them with life skills. These individuals discussed how this distrust led to a lack of communication with their community supports regarding desired life skills trainings. Julia responded that it is "hard (when you have people in and out of your life) to build a relationship when you're no longer in the system because you never know who's going to leave you." Alex reported that he not only had concerns regarding the longevity of the support of others, he also has difficulty trusting the intentions of others due to his experiences while in foster care. He stated, "It has been hard for me to trust some people. You never know what another person's agenda is." He also stated, "I get what I get and I try to make it last or stretch it as long as possible because you know you never know when the next whatever will come."

Difficulty Attaining Support from DHR in Developing Life Skills

Bonnie and Danielle discussed their negative experiences with DHR as it pertained to their relationships with social workers. Bonnie responded, "I didn't like Social Workers. I felt they took me away from my original home. I felt like, you know, they were the enemy. So, I knew that [being a] Social Worker was never going to be my thing." She reported that it wasn't until she was adult that she began to understand that social workers are designed to help children, yet she reported that she would never consider becoming a social worker. Danielle noted that Social Workers were people that "came in" and that "we were supposed to talk to them." She

reported her discomfort in talking to social workers because of their limited involvement with her case. She reported that she felt more comfortable discussing her needs with her direct childcare workers. This lack of assertion may have limited her access to resources that could have heightened her life skills attainment.

Summary

This chapter condensed the various experiences of multiple foster care graduates into seven themes that were noted across the perspectives of these varying individuals. The seven themes indicate that the depth of life skills training, motivation to attain life skills, ability to attain support from direct care workers, need for community supports, the ability to cope with biological family issues, and attainment of permanency and support from DHR are the main influences in foster care children's ability to attain life skills training while in foster care. Some of these experiences were positive and enhanced life skills attainment; however, some of these experiences were reported to have had the opposite effect. Some of these emerging themes had multiple facets, in which the same theme had both desired and undesired effects. An example of a multi-faceted emerging theme was that regarding the depth of life skills training. Whereas some participants noted that they lacked a consistent support system to learn life skills, there were other life skills that the same individuals reported being able to find consistent support in refining. An additional facet of this theme would be the depth of the child's deficiency in certain life skills, upon entering foster care, that may have made acquiring certain life skills more challenging. For example, Bonnie discussed issues regarding her grooming and her education. Whereas she believes that she has made some significant improvements in these skills since early childhood, it is not unreasonable to consider that there are lingering consequences to her day-to-day experiences that derive from her experiences of having had difficulties in these two areas.

Table 1 combines the emerging themes of this study with the pseudonym of the research participant who made statements which lead to the emerging theme. The table is a visual representation of how many participants acknowledged each of the emerging themes. However, this visualization does not imply that individuals who did not make certain statements had positive experiences regarding those experiences. For example, 3 of the 5 research participants did not report any difficulty attaining support from DHR to learn life skills. However, these participants may not have attempted to receive support from DHR.

Table 1
Participants' List of Emerging Themes

	Bonnie	Julia	Danielle	Fiona
Insufficient Depth of Life Skills	X	X	X	X
Client Motivation Due to Experiences & Resistance	X		X	X
Client Motivation Through Life Skills Training		X	X	
Client Motivation & Their Perceptions of Normalcy		X	X	X
Difficulty Attaining Support from Direct Childcare Workers in Developing Life Skills	X	X	X	X
Need for Community Support	X	X	X	X
Unresolved Biological Family Issues that Hinder Life Skills Development	X		X	
Difficulty Attaining Permanency While Learning Life Skills	X	X		X
Difficulty Attaining Support from DHR	X		X	

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to better understand the lived experiences of foster care graduates in obtaining life skills while in foster care. This study sought to better understand if foster care children were able to attain life skills while in foster care. The transcendental phenomenology methodology was utilized to collect qualitative data by conducting face-to-face interviews. There were five research participants that completed the requirements of this research study. These research participants spent more than 12 consecutive months in foster care in the State of Alabama. The research statements that derived from the research participant's interviews were coded and analyzed by this researcher in pursuit of answering the research question, "What is the experience of life skills attainment while in foster care?"

This research question was largely satisfied by the findings presented in Chapter 4. The dominant finding in this study acknowledged that the depth of life skills training has a major influence on the experience of obtaining life skills while in foster care. This finding was multi-faceted in the sense that it encompasses the foster care graduate's perceptions of the amount of support their direct childcare workers offered them, their lists of other supports in obtaining life skills, and their lag in obtaining adequate life skills training after having a period of misguidance during childhood. Casey Life Skills (2016), Alabama Department of Human Resources (2016), and foster care expert Sarah Gilbert (personal communication, December 28, 2016) indicate that foster children may be limited in the amount of exposure they receive of life skills due to the

type of residence they reside in, ambiguity of life skills training in the ISP, and the lack of consistency in how direct childcare workers and social workers measure life skills attainment.

The motivation of foster care graduates to attain life skills while in foster care was noted in a large number of the interview statements. This finding focused on the intrinsic motivation of the foster child to learn life skills while in foster care to avoid the hindrances that research suggests plague foster care graduates, such as poverty, school withdrawal, substance abuse, generational foster care, incarceration, homelessness, incarceration, and early death (Kaplan *et al.*, 2009). This intrinsic motivation was noted to occur as a result of the lived experiences of the individuals who experienced adversity and aspired for a sense of control regarding their destiny or as a result of mentoring or peer relationships in which the foster child learned the benefits of self-sufficiency through the trials and triumphs of others.

There was a considerable amount of conversation across the five research interviews about the engagement between foster care children and their direct childcare workers. More than one research participant discussed their perception that direct childcare workers were neither concerned about the outcomes of the children that they serve nor the quality of the care that they administered. Travis, Lee, Faulker, Gerstenblatt, and Boston (2014) noted that encouraging work conditions promotes an environment of trust and respect, that creating a social identity around work encourages an emotional investment in a childcare worker's work, and that childcare workers will continue to work in stressful environments beyond burnout if they find their work fulfilling and full of learning opportunities.

This researcher has experienced more than one direct childcare worker, in more than one company, that reported that they felt ignored in the planning and assessment of their client's needs and that they had become pliable in their approach to client care as a reaction to their lack

of inclusion in case planning. In other words, the direct childcare worker's attitudes discussed in more than one participant interview may be the result of their perceptions that earning a paycheck was the extent of their value within their employment. This perception would be consistent with the fact that direct childcare is an entry-level position which has a limited earning potential. Therefore, it would seem unlikely that individuals would remain as direct childcare workers solely focused on making money. Research participants who reported the best experiences of engagement with their direct childcare workers were later adopted by their direct childcare workers. Future research should seek to better understand if these relationships were enhanced by the diligence of these direct childcare workers or if envisioning a foster child as your child increases the amount of investment that the foster parent places in nurturing the child, among other possible factors.

The next most significant factor impacting life skills attainment is a lack of community supports. Spencer, Collins, Ward and Smashnaya (2010) noted that foster care children struggle to maintain healthy relationships with community supports, and that this is particularly disappointing as foster care children prepare for emancipation and face a lifetime of future challenges and triumphs. There is little evidence to support that mentorship will be successful in combating the dismal statistics regarding the outcomes of foster care graduates; however, research suggests that foster care graduates have better outcomes with at least one individual providing community support (Spencer *et al.*, 2010). This study also noted that mentorships are most successful when the community supports have prior helping experience, on-going training, supervision, scheduled appointments, a set duration to the relationship, and preplanned activities with the foster child (Spencer *et al.*, 2010).

This researcher has had her own experiences, as a Counselor attempting to coordinate community supports for foster care children. For this researcher, the greatest hindrance has been the public opinion of DHR. This perception includes the amount of time that exists between requesting to provide a service to a foster child and when it can be approved, or digesting a long list of exclusions. These exclusions limit a large number of supports that may have some powerful life lessons that they could share with foster care children or the types of activities that foster children can participate in. This researcher counseled children that were not allowed to ride bicycles or horses due to the risk of injuries. This researcher recalled inconsistencies within her career in which mentors were denied mentorship because DHR had previous disagreements with a community support's employer, because too many new mentorships would begin around the same time, the child and adult had a previous clinical relationship, and because the client's mental health diagnosis is likely to dissolve the relationship at a later date. Individuals who have had poor experiences in mentoring have likely shared these experiences with others in their circle of friends. This perpetuates the inability of foster care children to obtain life skills if they are limited in their exposure to experts on these various skills.

When considering unresolved biological family issues, let us consider the story of a six year old girl that was repeatedly sexually and emotionally abused by multiple male biological family members. After entering foster care, she continued to have difficulty building upon her life skills due to her trauma responses of life threatening and sexualized impulsivity and emotion dysregulation. Although she had periods when she was funny, social, pleasant, and delightful, she also had periods when she might run away, expose herself, be self-injurious, or publicly self-pleasure. These trauma responses were more apparent and increased in frequency as she grew older and experienced puberty. Her behavior made it difficult for her to reside in a single-family

home, attend school, build friendships and communication skills, and participate in community activities. Since we know that foster children enter into care because they have been abused and/or neglected under the supervision of one or both parents, it is reasonable to question the impact of unresolved family issues on the life skills attainment of foster children (Alabama Department of Human Resources, 2016).

Let us also consider a scenario in which a foster child has been removed from their home due to substance abuse issues. Perhaps the same child has a grandparent that has 15 years of sobriety from illegal substances. This individual is not likely to be considered as a placement option for this child at this point or any other point. It would be at the discretion of the social worker whether or not this grandparent would be allowed to have supervised or unsupervised visitation or no contact at all. Should this child be adopted after spending a year in foster care, this grandmother, nor any other biological family member, is not entitled to a continued relationship with the child. This is true even if the child wishes to continue the relationship. It is at the discretion of the adoptive parent to determine whether or not the relationship will continue. For adoptive parents there may be some concern that adoptees might not fully accept the new parents if they continue their relationship with their biological families or that the biological family might reject their parenting style and make parenting more difficult. However, there is no guarantee that all children who are eligible for adoption will be adopted. For those who are not adopted, they have neither a biological family nor an adopted family. These foster children continue to have a lack of permanency, in spite of the laws regarding permanency. It is not uncommon for a child in either situation to display emotional and/or behavioral issues due to their desire to continue their relationship with their biological family members (Chapman *et al.*,

2004). This acting out behavior and its consequences are likely to also impact the speed and scope in which this child will be able to learn life skills.

A lack of permanency was the next most prominent finding. This refers to the need to have a permanent sense of home and an unending support. If the child in the previous scenario is not adopted, the child may be allowed to continue the relationship with their grandparent throughout the remainder of their childhood. However, even this researcher has had the difficulty of giving an age-appropriate explanation for why biological family members will visit but cannot take a child home with them. This outcome was coupled with the reality that the grandparent in this scenario did not raise the parent in this scenario, yet both individuals suffered from substance abuse issues. Was this a result of the parent's exposure to the grandparent before foster care placement? Are there some biological or community factors that influence this outcome? Is DHR culpable in this outcome due to the way that it handles biological families? Could the grandparent have been beneficial in providing information to DHR or the child's counselor if they were allowed to have a more active role in the child's life? It is important to consider that upon termination or emancipation from foster care, there are no more legal barriers to the relationship of the child, parent, and grandparent. Perhaps the outcome of generational foster care lies in this dynamic. Perhaps this disparaging outcome can even be lessened or eliminated if DHR addressed the need for foster care graduates to learn how to be related to their relatives regardless of the condition of their family members. As adults, foster care graduates no longer have a social worker to provide support and guidance while they navigate family relationships and mentorships. Four of the five participants in this study reunified with at least one biological relative after foster care. This can be correlated with their reports of a lack of depth to their life skills training and their continued need for life skills training as adults. Who

will provide them this support? Who gives them a sense of belonging as adults? This researcher has observed that some individuals turned to their biological family members. Better effort is necessary to teach both biological family members and foster care children to overcome issues of abuse and neglect that would hinder a continued relationship as adults. As a counselor, this researcher has not always had DHR's permission to explain to a foster child that community members desired to mentor or adopt them. It is unknown what impact this information may have had to a foster child's self-esteem or behavior while in foster care and their ability to identify these community supports as adults.

The last finding is in some ways the most troubling finding. Individuals that should have benefited from DHR involvement had negative perceptions of foster care as children and continue to struggle with their perceptions of DHR, even as adults. One challenge to the way that foster children perceive DHR is the way that many foster care children learn about social workers and DHR. Social workers are designed to advocate for the safety of children and to coordinate a broad array of services for at-risk children, up to the possibility of removal from the home. However, it is possible for a child to miss the disparities in their housing if they have never been exposed to more feasible parental guidance. Just think, we educate children that police officers, firefighters, and paramedics remove people from harm to keep them safe. However, it is not uncommon for a child's first experience with a social worker to be the dissection of their family and the subsequent limited communication with their relatives. This can be confusing to a child and fuel their negative perceptions of the amount of care and concern social workers and DHR embody for the children that they represent.

It is disheartening that research participants in this study reported their own distrust and lack of loyalty to this profession. Ideally, it would benefit the quality of foster care services for

foster care graduates to then aspire to be social workers, child welfare advocates, politicians, and direct childcare workers. Foster care graduates are the only individuals who can attest to the needs of this population. This researcher assumes that these foster care graduates continue to have negative impressions of their relationship with direct childcare workers, DHR, and social workers, in addition to their own memories related to being removed from their biological families. It should also be noted that some children are subsequently abused or neglected by foster parents, community members, or other foster children while in foster care. This is likely to have an impact on the perceptions of foster care children that were either victimized or aware of the victimization of another foster child. Furthermore, it is still concerning that the research participants felt powerless to evolve the perception of this career. It is this researcher's opinion that the best way to improve the public perception of foster care is for foster care graduates to advocate for the rights of foster care children.

Implications for Counselors and/or Counselor Educators

Foster care counselors should be involved in social justice advocacy. Social justice advocacy is a three tier process which evaluates the client, system, and social/political factors that impact the holistic wellness of marginalized groups, in this case, foster care children (Lewis, Arnold, House & Toporek, 2003). Client advocacy suggests that counselors recommend interventions and resources for foster care children, identify and address possible barriers to their success, and establish a comprehensive plan of action (Lewis *et al.*, 2003). Systems advocacy seeks to better understand how environmental factors affect foster care children (Lewis *et al.*, 2003). Counselors, foster children, Social Workers, and DHR should work together to develop guidelines and various approaches to address environmental factors that hinder wellness. Counselors must work with these stakeholders to encourage political and social reforms to

address these environmental factors (Lewis *et al.*, 2003). Social/Political advocacy identifies issues and processes that can be impacted by political and social reform (Lewis *et al.*, 2003). Counselors should involve themselves in research, legislative lobbying, and policy creation to communicate systemic issues that hinder client wellness. This researcher combined her experiences as a researcher and counselor to pinpoint various interventions that assist foster care children in achieving social justice.

Case planning is a collaborative effort between social workers and counselors (Alabama Department of Human Resources, 2016). Social workers are responsible for identifying the service needs of foster children (Alabama Department of Human Resources, 2016). However, it is the role of a counselor to address and evaluate growth in individuals (Hodge, Danish & Martin, 2012). Counselors who serve foster care clients are also involved in the emancipation process and can challenge the emancipation of foster care children or the proposed aftercare plan (Alabama Department of Human Resources, 2016). Since counselors lead the charge in changing behavior and evaluating growth, counselors will also need to lead the charge in creating or revising a treatment approach to address life skills attainment. Additionally, counselors will need to lead the charge in standardizing this life skills attainment approach for all foster care children. This would provide DHR and counselors with empirical evidence to support the emancipation of foster children.

Counselors are also at the forefront of redefining the goals, needs, and access to counseling (Hodge, Danish & Martin, 2012). Counselors are vital in changing the focus of foster care planning from an emphasis on managing behavior and developing a plan for termination to an effort to increase self-sufficiency through life skills attainment. An effort to increase life skills attainment would include an effort to manage behavior and to plan for discharge, but it also

emphasizes to direct childcare workers, social workers, counselors, foster children, and all other involved entities that foster care's goal is to produce adults that can contribute to the communities in which they reside. When foster care focuses on behavior modification, foster children lose components of critical thinking and problem solving skills, in addition to emotion regulation (Hodge *et al.*, 2012). Foster care agencies that employ counselors may require counselors to over-intervene in scenarios that would not have been addressed in single-family household settings due to the extra effort that addressing these issues would require. This leaves some foster care children dependent on "super heroes" to address issues that might be better addressed with self-reflection and others with festering issues that may remain unaddressed. A common concern is the ability to transport and serve foster care children who live in single-family household settings. Most of these children attend school and have foster parents who are employed. This presents a concern if children have to be checked out of school and foster parents have to take off work to address mental health concerns. Counselors have to advocate for managed care's acceptance of counseling via technology to fill this gap.

Counselors need to routinely ask if individuals that seek care as adults are foster care graduates. This is vital information that would be useful in community development of community supports. Counselors should advocate in their communities for support in addressing the needs of foster care graduates in the communities that they serve. Awareness of your foster care graduate population also changes how counselors approach counseling these individuals. Counselors who are aware of the dismal statistics surrounding foster care graduates can ask the right questions in the introductory phase of counseling to effectively address presenting problems and to avoid client initiated termination of services. Plus, counselors can suggest approaches,

interventions, and services that are conducive to individuals who may not have supports in their community.

Counselor educators must also advocate for this population. This study discussed foster care graduates who were members of DHR care; however, counselor educators need to teach students that foster care occurs with documentation and without (Department of Social Services, 2016). Individuals who were temporarily raised by other family members or family friends require the same investigative approach to determine if presenting problems are exacerbated by issues pertaining to their need for foster care. Discovering these concerns may require making a genogram or a timeline of life events, among other strategies. Counselor educators cannot overlook the value of encouraging students to pursue practicums and internships in foster care settings. Counseling students should explore the challenges of case planning when there are gaps in the client's previous history, ambiguous post-traumatic stress triggers, and learned hopeless and helplessness. Students need to understand the link between taking psychotropic medications as children and becoming recreational drug abusers as adults. Students will also need to understand that the quest for love, acceptance, and family play a major role in the depths of their peer relationships, pregnancy rates, promiscuity, prostitution, and domestic violence, among other forms of poor decision making (Chapman *et al.*, 2004). Counseling students must be aware that foster care children and graduates face labeling and discrimination in community settings that should serve as supports, such as schools (Chapman *et al.*, 2004). Foster care children may be ostracized for being "emotional," having poor social attachments, or seeming overly aggressive (Chapman *et al.*, 2004). They may be teased by their peers or criticized by teachers for frequent absences or a high number of school transfers (Chapman *et al.*, 2004). Additionally, counselor educators should teach students about their need to further the

understanding of the clients that they serve through research, policy and guideline revisions, and legislative lobbying.

Limitations

This research study was successful in pinpointing seven emerging themes that describe the experiences of the five individuals who completed this research study. Since the majority of these participants were the result of snowballing, it can be assumed that this enhanced the homogeneity of the perspectives of these research participants. This study did not solicit the perspectives of currently incarcerated foster care graduates or adults that could not emancipate and continue to need adult care. One research participant who is currently homeless dropped out of this study before completing the first interview. The perspective of homeless foster care graduates would benefit future research studies regarding this topic. Additionally, to best define the experiences of foster care graduates in obtaining life skills while in foster care, research will need to study the perspectives of social workers, counselors, and direct childcare workers of foster care graduates to better understand their perspectives of attaining life skills while in foster care.

Recommendations for Future Research

It is imperative that every possible effort is made to assist the foster care system in raising self-sufficient individuals. Individuals who graduate from foster care and are incarcerated, homeless, utilizing public assistance, or continuing a cycle of generational foster care continue to be a burden on the communities in which they reside. To address the limitations of this study, researchers should examine social workers' perceptions of the deficits of the child welfare system, what foster care graduates perceive as missing components of the child welfare system, and the impact of allowing foster care children to make long-term financial investments before

emancipation or termination from foster care. Greater understanding is also needed to understand community perceptions of DHR and social workers. This study should be replicated with research participants of different races, ethnicities, genders, and ages.

Researchers should also study the impact of the ILP program and future statewide affiliation with Foster Care Alumni organization or similar organizations. An alternative to ILP might be Family and Consumer Sciences. It is taught in junior high and high schools across the United States (American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences, 2015). Future research should examine the effectiveness of highly qualified Family and Consumer Science programs on life skills attainment. These programs would include a curriculum, skilled instructors, related activities, and assessments. With better understanding of these factors, it is possible to better understand the lived experiences and the needs of foster care graduates. Then, those negative outcomes can be challenged with new approaches that are presumed to have the greatest impact on the self-sufficiency of foster care graduates.

Summary

This research study was designed to better understand the experiences of foster care graduates in attaining life skills while in foster care. Foster care graduates have a tendency to experience poverty, school withdrawal, substance abuse, generational foster care, incarceration, and early death (Kaplan *et al.*, 2009). It is important to understand the role that life skills attainment plays in these outcomes since life skills attainment pertains to education attainment, financial stability, quality healthcare, and positive role modeling skills (Kaplan *et al.*, 2009). During the fiscal year of 2012, there were 25, 021 individuals that emancipated from foster care in the United States. This study seeks to better understand if these individuals have adequate exposure to life skills training to persevere the milestones and challenges that accompany

adulthood. Additionally, this study seeks to make recommendations regarding ways that these research findings can be used to enhance life skills attainment for current foster children.

The research findings suggests that there are some problems with the depth of life skills training, motivation to attain life skills, ability to attain support from direct care workers, need for community supports, the ability to cope with biological family issues, and attainment of permanency and support from DHR based on the foster care experiences of five graduates of Alabama's foster care system. Of major concern regarding the findings of this study is this researcher's casual observation, as a foster care counselor, that some foster care service providers believe that funding is at the foundation of all of the findings of this study. It is worth pondering whether Alabama or any other state would be able to generate a state fund large enough to resolve the issues that were noted by the research participants in this study. Perhaps the answer is not as much a question of how to remediate foster care, but how to prevent families from needing foster care. The question still remains who will make the necessary changes, what will change, and how will these changes be made.

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APPENDIX A
QUALITATIVE CODEBOOK

Depth of Life Skills Training – Supports

BONNIE 125 & 126	Older foster sisters there. Well, there are my adoptive sisters and, of course, my mom.
BONNIE 203	in high school (housing & money management skills)
BONNIE 245– 248	Is that kind of like learning responsibility and learning that you have to contribute to your daily existence? BONNIE: Yes.
BONNIE 360	ended up in advanced classes in high school
JULIA 56–61	when we took a bath, we would have to lather up and then we will have to call the house parent in and they have to see we were lathered up and then we would rinse off to make sure we were doing it properly and to make sure we brushed our teeth properly. Of course, when I got my time of the month, you know, I was taught to use the things that I needed to maintain. So I felt like that was pretty good.
JULIA 98–100	seeing that you have people that – pretty much, I have different opinions and different ideas. There were fights among us you know and pretty much on that aspect, we were taught that violence is wrong.
JULIA 105–107	we were taught you know to respect each other and you know, of course, with the fights that violence is wrong and I guess that’s you know roundabout what we were taught.
JULIA 159	I was allowed to have a job so you know I knew how to work.
DANIELLE 27 & 28	the nutrition in the living skills or whatever, that worked fine but it was also like as far as far as like school
DANIELLE 132	Yeah. We had classes and stuff. (to learn relationship and communication skills)
DANIELLE 136	Really everybody, even the girls. (supports)
DANIELLE 138	Because they teach you know how to deal with people in everyday life.
DANIELLE 144	It’s like where everybody got different experience and stuff.
DANIELLE 168 & 169	I want to say it was really the home as far as that
ALEX 128–129	you deal with so many personalities and different attitudes so you have to be adaptable to any situation
FIONA 14–19	my mom taught us to bathe every day, to get our hair braided, to brush our teeth, to wash our face, to iron our clothes and then when we come home to school, to wash them. She just taught us to look neat, to wash our shoes with a toothbrush and make sure our jackets are clean and our clothes are neat, crease in our pants, shirt, you know, neatly tucked in with a belt on
FIONA 43	...Cooking.
FIONA 98	we do groups all the time
FIONA 100–101	know your medication and anger management, self-worth, self-esteem, respect, responsibility
FIONA 103	Character counts. (an example of a type of group)
FIONA 192–193	in a few weeks I’m going to be going to college for massage therapy.

Depth of Life Skills Training – Success

BONNIE 106 - 108	I learned how to give myself a bath the proper way as a kid at that age and there's really nothing but really taking a bath. I mean lotion, you know. Making sure your skin is hydrated. Before that didn't exist.
BONNIE 282	I learned how to wash clothes, iron before I was 10
JULIA 50 - 52	I knew how to go to the restroom alone and, of course, brush my teeth and take a bath and things like that.
DANIELLE 148 & 149	I'm not so outspoken anymore. I did learn how to, you know, work on my anger and all of that since then. So...
DANIELLE 175 & 176	My credit is messed up. I don't know how to fix that yet. I'm probably going to file bankruptcy
ALEX 52- 54	I would sit and watch first, others, know what I'm saying. So I know what to do and what not to do because I don't like to make mistakes
ALEX 132 - 135	Just by being in different situations, some good, some bad. I mean you have to know how to handle people without you know hurting their feelings or you know how to be a good listener sometimes. It's not about talking all the time. You also have to know how to listen
ALEX 219 - 220	I learned that you know if you are to get a job, I mean, you are going to have to do stuff that you don't want to do.
ALEX 221 - 225	you have to literally, you know, be there for a certain length of time and do something that you don't want to do but you have to – you know, you have to do this because this is your job, you know. I mean it's either that or you'll be on the side of the street and I can't put it in any plainer than that.
ALEX 230 - 231	it kind of trained you to set you up for like, okay, I got to get up every morning.
ALEX 233 - 235	So by the time you leave and you do get a job or whatever, you know you are already kind of set in what, you know, you're supposed to be doing.
ALEX 237 - 240	I thought I could just sell drugs forever, yeah, they did teach me that you know there is going to have to be some type of work – work ethnic going on in order to survive outside of that type of situation.
FIONA 14 - 19	my mom taught us to bathe every day, to get our hair braided, to brush our teeth, to wash our face, to iron our clothes and then when we come home to school, to wash them. She just taught us to look neat, to wash our shoes with a toothbrush and make sure our jackets are clean and our clothes are neat, crease in our pants, shirt, you know, neatly tucked in with a belt on
FIONA 43	...Cooking.

Depth of Life Skills – Lack of Support

BONNIE 225 & 226	You know like I said the work thing, you know, we basically were on our own.
BONNIE 315 & 316	when you become 17, 18, 19 or you know in your 20's – you somehow get side tracked and go in a whole new direction.
BONNIE 321 & 322	I mean it's like I started out good. I did start out going to college but then there's like – but I ended up eventually doing my thing. The party world
BONNIE 379	I was going to go to school to be something but ended up not doing it.
Bonnie 381–383	So, I went in a different direction so this was like any other person at that age, they change their minds. So no, no other interests other than what I'm doing now which is the medical field.
JULIA 13–18	One issue that I had is the – well, we were not allowed to clean our own rooms. They had people to clean our rooms for us. We were not allowed to cook our own meals. They had people to do that for us. I don't know. It's just a lot of things that I felt like they could have taught me when I got out in the real world that I would be well-versed in and they didn't. They failed miserably.
JULIA 27–29	Well, I don't know. As I was mentioning, I can cook my own food. I can manage my own household. There are a lot of things that just life been teaching when I was no longer in the system. When you're thrown out there, it's rough at first but that's the time you either sink or swim.
JULIA 33–36	Well, I'm not going to say it was all bad but I feel as if because I came into the system with problems, they pretty much did everything for me as if I was a fragile being or you know not a regular kid or anything. So pretty much everything was done for me.
JULIA 40–41	Let's just say cooking per se. I'm pretty sure they probably did not want me around a knife or fork
JULIA 45–47	I felt like discharge, it was a little bit better but because it was such a short period of time, I felt like they could have been maybe teaching me these things longer than they did.
JULIA 70–73	some people were like coming of age and, of course, like they had those talks with us but the talk is pretty much went don't do this, don't do this, don't do this. I don't feel like they fully explained why we should or should not do some things.
JULIA 75–76	As far as sex and – I mean they never really – that's something that I felt like they could have done better teaching us.
JULIA 83–86	they say that they want people, well, us in the system, to go into the world and learn how to, you know, cope in the world. So they give us pretty much crash courses in things and you know sometimes they're pretty helpful.
JULIA 117–122	My husband and I, when we were dating, it was really hard because he came from a well put together home, mother, father, and everything and I felt as if we could not relate to each other because of how I grew up, I had trust issues but he was always willing to trust and – but you know by the grace of God, we made it
JULIA 125	I didn't have a banking account. I didn't have any money.

JULIA 127–130	I can't honestly say that there was any improvement as far as money because pretty much what I wanted for Christmas, they got for me. Of course, they would put money, you know, in our accounts and you know we could spend it until it was gone and, eventually, we would get more
JULIA 131–133	I never learned how to drive until after foster care so I felt like that that was something that they should have taught us to unleash us from the world but we never learned how to drive
JULIA 134–136	I felt like a lot of that was trial and error. I have a banking account but it was something I learned from trial and error.
JULIA 139–143	they gave them crash courses when you're getting ready to get out of there but they allowed – we were allowed to have jobs but I was young and dumb. I did crazy spending just because I had it. I felt like if I was taught, you know, better, on how to manage then and things could have, you know, maybe been better.
DANIELLE 28–31	I feel like it should have been better opportunities as far as there, you know, the home, getting a job, and saving money and you know watching what you eat and all that. I felt like that was fine that they taught us that.
DANIELLE 113 & 114	I know a few people who felt like – you know felt bad from having stuff because once the other girls found out, they just kind of, you know, treating them wrong
DANIELLE 175 & 176	My credit is messed up. I don't know how to fix that yet. I'm probably going to file bankruptcy
DANIELLE 237–239	as far as school, it's like – I knew I wanted to go to school and all that but I never really stuck with anything and I had no idea of what I wanted to – you know really go to school for.
FIONA 133–136	while I was in the 8 th grade, I got a job, painting. And they paid me \$9 an hour and that's when I got my first phone and my first bank account when I was in the 8 th grade, but I didn't save enough like I was supposed to.
FIONA 138	...I didn't manage it right. (her money)

Depth of Life Skills Training – Previous Deficits

BONNIE 110–113	Now, I didn't do my hair but I didn't never realized how long my hair was until somebody did something to it versus before it was matted to my head so I was going to school and different places looking like who did it and what for.
BONNIE 115–120	But like back home, you know, I don't think I probably knew you know how to use a tissue, when to use tissue, you know, different stuff like that when going to the bathroom. You know how most younger kids get – use the bathroom, get up, and go. I think, you know, maybe you know something like that versus in the foster home, you know, they do – well, what are you doing, you know. This is what you do, this, that.
BONNIE 161	Because I was barely sent to school...
BONNIE 163	..before
BONNIE 305–307	You know it's like they're going by what we saw or what we heard or seen previously from someone else versus what our new ways are to be.
ALEX 157– 159	I didn't have a problem ever like just managing money. I mean I spent a lot and I made a lot of bad decisions with spending.
ALEX 281	I started having children when I was like super young

Client Motivation – Experiences

BONNIE 156 & 157	You know it took me longer to pick up on different things.
BONNIE 356 & 357	I was actually pinpointed as I expected the most from you.
BONNIE 363–365	I just didn't want to. I just, you know, I wanted to do my own thing because I felt like, well, they want me to do this that and the other but what about what I want, you know [resistance to provided experiences]
BONNIE 390–395	I know some people that I've grown up with in foster care that they still turned out to be – how can I say this – nobodies or jail or you know even though they were taught well, they still chose a different route based off previous family members that they were with before foster care. It's just something that you can't help. Some things that you're already adapted to.
JULIA 179–181	nothing that was ever really harped upon- It was something that actually when I got out of foster care that I learned to like I won't say excel but do okay for myself in. [career and education planning]
DANIELLE 169 & 170	I felt like it was more so me just being tired of not having my stuff together.
DANIELLE 209 & 211	But I mean like I said like after being in there and going through the stuff that I went through and when I left and stuff, I was just like, you know. Actually, enough is enough
DANIELLE 213	It's time to give myself together
DANIELLE 221 & 222	people struggling and stuff. I know I ain't want to struggle. You know, go without.
ALEX 80–81	I mean who wants to get along with somebody that is telling them what to do all the time [resistance to provided experiences]
ALEX 89–91	I feel like I've been taking care of myself since I was 15 really, you know. I mean I didn't need no help in that department.
ALEX 112	I never had a lot of problems communicating.
ALEX 135–136	that was probably one of my biggest problems, not listening.
ALEX 170–174	Whenever a person or child goes into certain situations in different environments like foster care or getting sentenced going to jail or what have you. I mean some do better themselves but 95%, if we're saying, they're just learning how to be better criminals or better at whatever they were doing before they went in
ALEX 177–178	I really wasn't trying to better myself. I was trying to be a better crook really.
ALEX 206–210	you got to learn quick whether it's your money or somebody else's money, you know not to mess it up. So it's some sort of fear factor right there. Also that makes you like, you know, if I mess this person's money up, they're going to be like real upset and somebody might be burying me or whatever.

ALEX 261– 263	I was in like the GED classes. You know I dropped out. I was a smart kid but you know- money, cars, and all the other time of BS that go with it- You know it probably had me blind.
ALEX 284– 289	That’s why I made up in my mind to go ahead and change, you know. My parents love me, I’ve got children who love me, I have a lot of younger people that’s under me that look up to me so... – I feel like I can’t let them down and it’s been instances where you know I have to really make decisions for these people so they won’t fall by the wayside and be in the same predicament I have been in
FIONA 221– 224	I never wanted to be like my real mother. So I always strived never to do drug, never to drink, never to, you know, do those things because when you do those things you’re giving your power up to something – an inanimate object.

Client Motivation – Life Perceptions

ALEX 28–33	I mean if they teach you life skills like that – I mean – I mean, yes, I can see where it does make some type of improvement but the individual, they – he or she, they got to want that for themselves. I mean it’s just not like you know you teach this and they going to receive it. It doesn’t work like that. The individual themselves has got to want these skills and want to better themselves.
ALEX 97–98	if you want to succeed, you’re going to have to put forth some type of effort.
ALEX 266–272	started like studying and taking classes and you know trying to better myself really but like I said before, you got to want it, you know. People can force anything on you but you actually got to want it for yourself. You know you can ask for help all day but you know if you don’t help yourself, who else is going to help you, so... it’s really a self-thing. You have to have that drive inside you to go ahead and do the right thing and you know get things done like that as far as education goes
ALEX 338–340	it’s been hard. It’s been a struggle, but I mean I’ve been trying to like stay afloat and not go back in that same direction.
FIONA 228–229	And I'm all about self-control. I don’t want an object or something to control me inside, just rather not do it.

Client Motivation – Training

JULIA 173– 174	Well, other than when I got out I felt like if some work was something I knew how to do because I did it...
JULIA 176	...to make money for my household.
DANIELLE 173	now, I mean I'm doing good – car, house, bank account (... and job, see JW 195)
DANIELLE 195	you have a job
DANIELLE 207	I wasn't capable at all that's why I was there (work and study skills)
ALEX 253– 254	I mean you really didn't have to ask where I was. They just give it to you. It's either you do it or they ship you out.

Client Motivation – Other

Ticker	Statement
BONNIE 154 & 155	So if it's something that I want to know about then I did ask questions but I had no knowledge
BONNIE 156 & 157	You know it took me longer to pick up on different things.
BONNIE 356 & 357	I was actually pinpointed as I expected the most from you.
BONNIE 363–365	I just didn't want to. I just, you know, I wanted to do my own thing because I felt like, well, they want me to do this that and the other but what about what I want, you know
BONNIE 390–395	I know some people that I've grown up with in foster care that they still turned out to be – how can I say this – nobodies or jail or you know even though they were taught well, they still chose a different route based off previous family members that they were with before foster care. It's just something that you can't help. Some things that you're already adapted to.
JULIA 110 & 111	Well, I can't say that I did. If I did, I don't remember at the time but I can't really say that I did ask for help on that. I just took things as it came.
JULIA 173–174	Well, other than when I got out I felt like if some work was something I knew how to do because I did it...
JULIA 176	...to make money for my household.
JULIA 179–181	nothing that was ever really harped upon- It was something that actually when I got out of foster care that I learned to like I won't say excel but do okay for myself in. (career and education planning)
DANIELLE 169 & 170	I felt like it was more so me just being tired of not having my stuff together.
DANIELLE 173	now, I mean I'm doing good – car, house, bank account (... and job, see DANIELLE 195)
DANIELLE 195	you have a job
DANIELLE 207	I wasn't capable at all that's why I was there (work and study skills)
DANIELLE 209 & 211	But I mean like I said like after being in there and going through the stuff that I went through and when I left and stuff, I was just like, you know. Actually, enough is enough
DANIELLE 213	It's time to give myself together
DANIELLE 221 & 222	people struggling and stuff. I know I ain't want to struggle. You know, go without.
DANIELLE 270 & 272	R: You're able to get the help you needed but you were not successful in starting your education. DANIELLE: No, because I wasn't really ready

DANIELLE 274	I dropped out after I got my check.
ALEX 28–33	I mean if they teach you life skills like that – I mean – I mean, yes, I can see where it does make some type of improvement but the individual, they – he or she, they got to want that for themselves. I mean it’s just not like you know you teach this and they going to receive it. It doesn’t work like that. The individual themselves has got to want these skills and want to better themselves.
ALEX 80–81	I mean who wants to get along with somebody that is telling them what to do all the time
ALEX 89–91	I feel like I’ve been taking care of myself since I was 15 really, you know. I mean I didn’t need no help in that department.
ALEX 97–98	if you want to succeed, you’re going to have to put forth some type of effort.
ALEX 112	I never had a lot of problems communicating.
ALEX 135– 136	that was probably one of my biggest problems, not listening.
ALEX 170– 174	Whenever a person or child goes into certain situations in different environments like foster care or getting sentenced going to jail or what have you. I mean some do better themselves but 95%, if we’re saying, they’re just learning how to be better criminals or better at whatever they were doing before they went in
ALEX 177– 178	I really wasn’t trying to better myself. I was trying to be a better crook really.
ALEX 206– 210	you got to learn quick whether it’s your money or somebody else’s money, you know not to mess it up. So it’s some sort of fear factor right there. Also that makes you like, you know, if I mess this person’s money up, they’re going to be like real upset and somebody might be burying me or whatever.
ALEX 253– 254	I mean you really didn’t have to ask where I was. They just give it to you. It’s either you do it or they ship you.
ALEX 261– 263	I was in like the GED classes. You know I dropped out. I was a smart kid but you know- money, cars, and all the other time of BS that go with it- You know it probably had me blind.
ALEX 266– 272	started like studying and taking classes and you know trying to better myself really but like I said before, you got to want it, you know. People can force anything on you but you actually got to want it for yourself. You know you can ask for help all day but you know if you don’t help yourself, who else is going to help you, so... it’s really a self-thing. You have to have that drive inside you to go ahead and do the right thing and you know get things done like that as far as education goes
ALEX 284– 289	That’s why I made up in my mind to go ahead and change, you know. My parents love me, I’ve got children who love me, I have a lot of younger people that’s under me that look up to me so... – I feel like I can’t let them down and it’s been instances where you know I have to really make decisions for these people so they won’t fall by the wayside and be in the same predicament I have been in

ALEX 338– 340	it's been hard. It's been a struggle, but I mean I've been trying to like stay afloat and not go back in that same direction.
FIONA 221– 224	I never wanted to be like my real mother. So I always strived never to do drug, never to drink, never to, you know, do those things because when you do those things you're giving your power up to something – an inanimate object.
FIONA 228– 229	And I'm all about self-control. I don't want an object or something to control me inside, just rather not do it.
DH 154 & 155	So if it's something that I want to know about then I did ask questions but I had no knowledge
LW 110 & 111	Well, I can't say that I did. If I did, I don't remember at the time but I can't really say that I did ask for help on that. I just took things as it came.
JW 270 & 272	R: You're able to get the help you needed but you were not successful in starting your education. JW: No, because I wasn't really ready
JW 274	I dropped out after I got my check.

Engagement with Direct Care Worker

Ticker	Statement
BONNIE 63 - 67	I want to say yes because of the fact that my foster mother that ended up adopting me, she realized that my motor skills, my learning ability, reading this, that and the other as far as education and different things like that, things that she noticed I was doing around the house, she felt like I needed to repeat a grade again because she felt like it would have been best.
BONNIE 86	If I needed help, I will probably ask questions, yeah.
BONNIE 137 & 139	I pretty much picked up pretty quickly. It was just from that age, let's say between you know 6 and 7, being with the family that you know I'm with today, you know, it didn't take me long to pick up on anything.
BONNIE 165	So I was totally lost when it came to anything in the education and social because I was always, you know, put away. You see what I'm saying?
BONNIE 168	Because of the color of my skin.
BONNIE 171	Patience. Patience from my mom. She was a lot frustrated because she couldn't understand how anyone can let me get so far behind like that on anything.
BONNIE 175 & 176	So it was a lot of patience and that would have been my biggest supporter, my mom.
JULIA 38 & 39	Well, I would ask but I don't feel that I got the full, I guess, experience of what I asked
JULIA 168 - 170	Well, because I felt like that's something you just did, you know, I felt like some stuff like if something is not going just terrible, I don't feel like I need to ask about anything if it's not just going bad for me.
JULIA 196 - 198	I did but, like I said, I felt like I was given limited information on things and when you feel like somebody is not telling you the whole story, it kind of makes you not want to ask.
DANIELLE 13 & 14	I feel like – while, at Alabama, they should have had more workers that were actually doing their job because of us versus the money.
DANIELLE 16 & 17	Because I feel like a lot of them didn't care although there were some that did but a lot of them really didn't care.
DANIELLE 38	The people from the home (supports).
DANIELLE 44 & 45	the ones that I got close to, they - I talked to them about a little bit of everything but, yeah.
DANIELLE 108 & 112	they need to like explain more to the children and the teenager or whatever that's there like about STDs and stuff because there were some people there that had – you know, kind of had STDs and people were treating them wrong because of that and that's like you can't catch STD just from you know walking past somebody
DANIELLE 230	I mean, because the person that was there at that time didn't care.
DANIELLE 256 & 257	I ended up going to one of the schools that one of the direct care workers went to

ALEX 47-49	R: So tell me do you feel like you were able to ask for assistance in learning daily life skills? ALEX: Yes, if I really needed it.
ALEX 77	I mean they tell you when to do whatever
ALEX 81-83	it was good but once they begin most of them are bad. They are just there for a check. I mean it ain't like they care for real.
FIONA 32	My adoptive parents. (supports in learning skills)
FIONA 114	I talk to my mom every day.
FIONA 123	A good listener. (relationship with mother)
FIONA 148	...my adoptive parents. (her supports)

Lack of Permanency

Ticker	Statement
BONNIE 10	I didn't like being bounced around trying to be fitted in...
BONNIE 15 & 16	I am mixed race so they were trying me to place me based off of my background of color.
BONNIE 21	With white families...
BONNIE 29 &30	I was placed in my first black foster home and that's where I remained until I graduated high school.
BONNIE 32	I think it was a good thing because I adapted well.
BONNIE 34	It didn't take long for me to, at the time, make friends and siblings.
BONNIE 36	We understood each other and I learned a lot..
BONNIE 38 &39	...versus the first few years of my life versus I guess you could say culture wise.
JULIA 114- 116	It's kind of hard when you have people in and out of your life to build a relationship when you're no longer in the system because you never know who's going to leave you
ALEX 114- 115	it's been hard for me to trust some people. You never know what another person's agenda is
ALEX 186- 188	just I get what I get and I try to make it last or stretch it as long as possible because you know you never know when the next whatever will come from.
FIONA 85-88	I was in Children's Hospital, then I was in the Intervention Center, then I was in Brewer-Porch, then I was in Safety Net, then I was in Lee County Youth Development Center then I moved to New Mexico with my adoptive parents.

Need for Community Support

Ticker	Statement
BONNIE 290 & 291	When people ask me today how many sisters do you have and I'm like well I've got a lot of sisters.
BONNIE 301	I still communicate with him to this day. Him and his sister to this day.
BONNIE 333–335	It's kind of like an emotional and it's kind of stressful to see each individual because it was emotional for us to hear each child or each of my siblings' story
JULIA 160–161	I was in school so the teachers pretty much taught us a lot on that front.
DANIELLE 53	, when I left I kind of got put out so...
DANIELLE 57	and I didn't have no idea of where I was going to go but, yeah.
DANIELLE 128 & 129	I mean I felt like I would have made good if I had more support from, you know, family or someone
DANIELLE 227 & 228	work, yeah, but, for me, not really the study skills. I was in school going there, yeah. I didn't really had no support.
DANIELLE 232 & 233	if I tried to stay late at school, you know, to do a little studying and stuff it was always the problem of why I wasn't there at the house.
DANIELLE 243 & 244	some of the house parents were still in school and, you know, going through their little- That's kind of motivation.
DANIELLE 259–261	it was a support while I was there because they really liked took me up and introduced me to people and you know made me feel comfortable and showed me around the school and everything.
DANIELLE 263	Yeah, it was a support, but no I didn't get that far, still.
DANIELLE 259–261	they really liked took me up and introduced me to people and you know made me feel comfortable and showed me around the school and everything.
DANIELLE 263	it was a support, but no I didn't get that far, still.
DANIELLE 267 & 269	R: Were you able to get the help you needed? DANIELLE: Yes.
DANIELLE 275 & 276	With more support would you been able to stay in school? DANIELLE: Maybe, yeah.
ALEX 41	a couple of other folks but you know that's snitching and I don't snitch
ALEX 203–204	I always kept like on your job but I was like maybe like selling stuff or whatever – drugs or what have you.
ALEX 218	the legal side of it I really didn't know anything like that
ALEX 331–334	once you step foot outside of that foster care, I mean you really don't have nobody looking over your shoulder you know anymore. I mean you're sort of lost a little bit.
ALEX 336–337	You know you really don't have people to push you in the right direction and you know all your friends start coming around and you may get sidetracked
FIONA 56	I had to see a therapist and a psychiatrist.

FIONA 63	...God (supports)
FIONA 195	From my adoptive parents, God, and my church and that's pretty much it.
FIONA 207-213	I don't think that just because they turned 18 that they should just be thrown out of the system and no college fund, no money fund, no place to stay. Most of the time, people get off on drugs and get to hanging with the wrong crowd because they have nowhere to go and I would just encourage them to find somewhere for them to go like a halfway house or another house that they can go to pursue whatever it is they want to pursue. If they want to go to school, I feel like DHR should pay for it.

Rapport with Biological Family

Ticker	Statement
BONNIE 56 & 57	being around my biological family
BONNIE 58 & 60	I probably would end up needing some type of help eventually on the schoolwork and different things like that.
BONNIE 76–81	Yeah, there were my foster sisters that, you know, came I guess you could say listening to their stories and the things that they did at their families' houses versus what my foster mother, the one who adopted me, taught us how to do. There were things like you needed to do chores, you need to do homework. These are the things that we do as a family. So there was change there.
BONNIE 89–91	We had to wash dishes, we had to do laundry, we had to keep our bedroom clean. All of that versus the life I had before, I probably would not have knew these things.
BONNIE 101	No. I was like 5, 6, 7 years old. I'm not –
BONNIE 199 & 200	I didn't know how to budget and bank and all at 5,6,7 years old
BONNIE 396 & 397	I reunited with my real mother a couple of years ago
BONNIE 399–400	you know she's trying to communicate with you, she wants to build a relationship with you
BONNIE 400–402	there's some things you can't get over even though you were too young to remember. It's just the thought that I can't believe you
DANIELLE 126 & 127	as far as my living arrangement and having support from my family, I really didn't have it so that's actually what made me come there but as far as – I don't know.
ALEX 153–156	I was 15. I was living with this chick or whatever and I was basically, you know, doing what the average grown up would do, you know. I was paying bills. I had a job. I was doing illegal stuff on the side.
ALEX 159–160	I was young and you know I didn't invest my money where it probably should have went, like saving
ALEX 243	... my father (biggest support)
ALEX 245–246	I had a good support system before all that happened
FIONA 23–25	you meaning your biological mom or your foster mom? FIONA:Both. (taught life skills)
FIONA 53	...Getting molested. (self-care experiences before care)

Lack of Rapport with DHR

Ticker	Statement
BONNIE 338–341	I didn't like social workers. I felt like they took me away from my original home. I felt like you know they were the enemy. So I knew social workers were never going to be my thing.
BONNIE 343	But then I later realized they were there to help you.
DANIELLE 97 & 98	Oh, okay, yeah. I mean we had like social workers that people they came in that we were supposed to talk to.
DANIELLE 99 & 100	R: ...But you felt more comfortable with your direct care providers? DANIELLE: Yeah.

APPENDIX B

AUBURN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) PROTOCOL LETTER

**AUBURN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD for RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS
RESEARCH REVIEW BOARD or EXPEDITED PROTOCOL FORM FULL**

For information or help contact THE OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE (ORC), 115 Ramsay Hall, Auburn University
Phone: 334-844-5966 **e-mail:** IRBAdmin@auburn.edu **Web Address:** <http://www.auburn.edu/research/vpr/ohs/index.htm>

Revised 2.1.2014 **Submit completed form to IRBsubmit@auburn.edu or 115 Ramsay Hall, Auburn University 36849.**

Form must be populated using Adobe Acrobat/ Pro 9 or greater standalone program (do not fill out in browser). Handwritten forms will not be accepted.

1. **PROPOSED START DATE of STUDY:** August 16, 2016

PROPOSED REVIEW CATEGORY FULL BOARD EXPEDITED
 (Check one):

SUBMISSION STATUS (Check one): NEW REVISIONS (to address IRB Review Comments)

2. **PROJECT TITLE,** Foster Care Graduates' Experiences Obtaining Life Skills

3. APPLICANT INFORMATION April J. Upshaw PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR P.O. Box 70162, Tuscaloosa, AL 35407 <hr/> MAILING ADDRESS	Doctoral Student TITLE	SERC <hr/> DEPT	aju0001@auburn.edu <hr/> AU E-MAIL
		(334) 799-4451 <hr/> PHONE	N/A <hr/> ALTERNATE MAIL

4. **FUNDING SUPPORT** N/A Internal External _____ Pending Received
 Agency _____

For federal funding list agency and grant number (if available). N/A _____

5a. list any contractors, sub-contractors, other entities associated with this project:

N/A

b. List any other IRBs associated with this project (including Reviewed, Deferred, Determination etc.):

PROTOCOL PACKET CHECKLIST

All protocols must include the following items:

- Research Protocol Review Form** (All signatures included and all sections completed)
(Examples of appended documents are found on the OHSR website: <http://www.auburn.edu/research/vpr/ohs/sample.htm>)
- CITI Training Certificates for all Key Personnel
- Consent Form or Information Letter** and any Releases (audio/video or photo) that the participant will sign.
- Appendix A**, "Reference Lists"
- Appendix B** if e-mails, flyers, advertisements, generalized announcements or scripts, etc. are used to recruit participants.
- Appendix C** if data collection sheet, surveys, tests, other recording instruments, interview scripts, etc. will be used for data collection. Be sure to attach them in the order in which they are listed in # 13c
- Appendix D** if you will be using a debriefing form or include emergency plans/procedures and medical referral lists (A referral list may be attached to the consent document).
- Appendix E** if research is being conducted at sites other than Auburn University or in cooperation with other entities. **A permission letter** from the site / program director must be included indicating their cooperation or involvement in the project. **NOTE** If the proposed research is a multi-site project, involving investigators or participants at other academic institutions, hospitals or private research organizations, a letter of IRB approval from each entity is required prior to initiating the project.
- Appendix F** - Written evidence of acceptance by the host country if research is conducted outside the United States.

FOR ORC OFFICE USE ONLY

DATE RECEIVED IN ORC: _____ by _____ PROTOCOL # _____
 DATE OF IRB REVIEW: _____ by _____ APPROVAL DATE _____
 DATE OF IRB APPROVAL: - - - - - b _____ INTERVAL _____
 COMMENTS: _____

The Auburn University Institutional Review Board has approved this Document for use from
09/07/2016 to 09/06/2017
 Protocol # 16-314 EP 1609

7. PROJECT ASSURANCES Foster Care Graduates' Experiences Obtaining Life Skills

3. I certify that all information provided in this application is complete and correct.
4. I understand that, as Principal Investigator, I have ultimate responsibility for the conduct of this study, the ethical performance of this project, the protection of the rights and welfare of human subjects, and strict adherence to any stipulations imposed by the Auburn University IRB.
5. I certify that all individuals involved with the conduct of this project are qualified to carry out their specified roles and responsibilities and are in compliance with Auburn University policies regarding the collection and analysis of the research data.
6. I agree to comply with all Auburn policies and procedures, as well as with all applicable federal, state, and local laws regarding the protection of human subjects, including, but not limited to the following:
 - i Conducting the project by qualified personnel according to the approved protocol
 - ii Implementing no changes in the approved protocol or consent form without prior approval from the Office of Research Compliance
 - iii Obtaining the legally effective informed consent from each participant or their legally

- responsible representative prior to their participation in this project using only the currently approved, stamped consent form
- i Promptly reporting significant adverse events and / or effects to the Office of Research Compliance in writing within 5 working days of the occurrence.
- 7. If I will be unavailable to direct this research personally, I will arrange for a co-investigator to assume direct responsibility in my absence. This person has been named as co-investigator in this application, or I will advise ORC, by letter, in advance of such arrangements.
- 6. I agree to conduct this study only during the period approved by the Auburn University IRB.
- 7. I will prepare and submit a renewal request and supply all supporting documents to the Office of Research Compliance before the approval period has expired if it is necessary to continue the research project beyond the time period approved by the Auburn University IRB.
- 8. I will prepare and submit a final report upon completion of this research project.

My signature indicates that I have read, understand and agree to conduct this research project in accordance with the assurances listed above.

April J. Upshaw

Printed name of Principal Investigator

1. I have read the protocol submitted for this project for content, clarity, and methodology.
 2. By my signature as faculty advisor/sponsor on this research application, I certify that the student or guest investigator is knowledgeable about the regulations and policies governing research with human subjects and has sufficient training and experience to conduct this particular study in accord with the approved protocol.
 3. I agree to meet with the investigator on a regular basis to monitor study progress. Should problems arise during the course of the study, I agree to be available, personally, to supervise the investigator in solving them.
 4. I assure that the investigator will promptly report significant incidents and/or adverse events and/or effects to the ORC in writing within 5 working days of the occurrence.
- S. If I will be unavailable, I will arrange for an alternate faculty sponsor to assume responsibility during my absence, and I will advise the ORC by letter of such arrangements. If the investigator is unable to fulfill requirements for submission of renewals, modifications or the final report. I will assume that responsibility.

Melanie M. Larussi 8/2/16

3

Printed name of Faculty Advisor/ Sponsor Faculty Advisor's Signature Date

By my signature as department head, I certify that I will cooperate with the administration in the application and enforcement of all Auburn University policies and procedures, as well as all applicable federal, state, and local laws regarding the protection and ethical treatment of human participants by researchers in my department.

Everett Davis (Dave" Martin, Jr. 08/02/2016

Department Head' s Signature Date

APPENDIX C
RECRUITMENT LETTER

RECRUITMENT SCRIPT (verbal, in person)

(This should be a brief version of the consent document.)

My name is April J. Upshaw, a graduate student from the Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, and Counseling (SERC) at Auburn University. I would like to invite you to participate in my research study to bring awareness to the problems and needs of foster care children to improve their independence as adults. You may participate if you were in foster care in the State of Alabama for at least 12 consecutive months during your lifetime and are currently between 19 and 26 years of age. Please do not participate if you did not spend 12 consecutive months in foster care, if you are older than 26 years of age, or if you are younger than 19 years of age.

As a participant, you will be asked to participate in a face-to-face interview in a private meeting room at the public library of your town. You should expect a 1 hour time commitment and an additional hour to review your comments from a transcript.

There is some risk of emotional discomfort from participating in this study. However, there are no costs and no need for identifiable information (other than a telephone number). The benefit of participation is an increase in the understanding of the experience of attaining life skills while in foster care.

If you would like to participate in this research study, call April J. Upshaw at (205) 393- 7401.

Do you have any questions now? If you have questions later, please contact me at (205) 393-7401 or you may contact my advisor, Dr. Melanie Larussi, at (334) 844-2880

APPENDIX D
INFORMED CONSENT

(NOTE: DO NOT SIGN THIS DOCUMENT UNLESS AN IRB APPROVAL STAMP WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN APPLIED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

INFORMED CONSENT
for a Research Study entitled
"Foster Care Graduates' Experiences Obtaining Life Skills"

You are invited to participate in a research study to *better understand the experiences of foster care children in learning life skills*. The study is being conducted by April J. Upshaw, Researcher, under the direction of Dr. Melanie Iarussi, Faculty Advisor in the Auburn

University Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, and Counseling (SERC). You were selected as a possible participant because you were in foster care for at least 12 consecutive months, you are willing to share your experiences of obtaining life skills in an audio-recorded interview, and are age 18 to 26.

What will be involved if you participate? If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to complete a face-to-face, audio recorded interview. Your total time commitment will be approximately 1 hour for the interview and an additional hour for a review of the first meeting.

Are there any risks or discomforts? The risks associated with participating in this study is possible emotional discomfort when describing your experiences. To minimize this risk, I will provide you with a list of counseling resources, analyze research data anonymously, and secure any related data in a locking file cabinet and a password protected computer. Your identity will be known to the researcher for the purposes of communicating with you. Your identifying information will not be linked to your interview and data analysis will be conducted with anonymous data.

Are there any benefits to yourself or others? If you participate in this study, you can expect to bring awareness to the experiences of attaining life skills while in foster care. I cannot promise you that you will receive any or all of the benefits described.

Will you receive compensation for participating? To thank you for your time, you will be offered a thank you letter.

Participant's initials _____

**The Auburn University Institutional
Review Board has approved this
document for use from**

09/07/2016 to 09/06/2017

If you change your mind about participating, you can withdraw at any time during the study. Your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to withdraw, your data can be withdrawn as long as it is identifiable. Your decision about whether or not to participate or to stop participating will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University, the Department of SERC or April J. Upshaw.

Your privacy will be protected. Any information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. Information obtained through your participation may be used to fulfill an educational requirements, published in a professional journal, and presented at a professional meeting. No information will be presented that could identify you. Audio recordings will be destroyed after they are transcribed.

If you have questions about this study, please ask them now or contact April J. Upshaw at (205) 393-7401 or Dr. Melanie Iarussi at (334) 844-2880. A copy of this document will be given to you to keep.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Research Compliance or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334)-844-5966 or e-mail at IRBadmin@aubum.edu or IRBChair@aubum.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES YOUR WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE.

Participant's signature

Date

Investigator obtaining consent

Date

Printed Name

Printed Name

**The Auburn University Institutional
Review Board has approved this
Document for use from**

09/07/2016 to 09/06/2017

APPENDIX E

RESEARCHER DEVELOPED DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Researcher Developed Demographic Questionnaire

1. Gender
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Other: _____

2. Age _____

3. Race
 - a. Asian
 - b. Black/ African American
 - c. European, Non-Hispanic
 - d. Hispanic, Non-European
 - e. Middle Eastern
 - f. Multi-Racial: _____
 - g. Other: _____

4. Ethnicity (such as Dominican, Cuban, Swedish, or French) _____

5. Marital Status
 - a. Never married
 - b. Married
 - i. Same Sex
 - ii. Heterosexual
 - c. Separated
 - d. Divorced
 - e. Widowed

6. Preferred form of communication
 - a. Email: _____
 - b. Cell: _____
 - c. Mail: _____
 - d. Other: _____

7. Highest level of education completed:
 - a. Junior high school
 - b. Some high school
 - c. High school diploma
 - d. Some college
 - e. Associate degree
 - f. Bachelor's degree
 - g. Other: _____

8. How many times were you in DHR custody? _____

9. How long were you in DHR custody? _____

10. While in foster care, who were you placed with:

- a. a relative
- b. a person like family
- c. Foster parent
- d. Group home
- e. Other: _____

11. How old were you when you entered foster care?

12. How old were you when you left foster care?

13. Where did you live after foster care?

- a. Biological Parent
- b. Adoptive Parent
- c. Emancipated / Adult
 - i. Relative
 - ii. Self
 - iii. Homeless
 - iv. Facility/Program: _____

14. Are you able to meet your basic needs without public assistance, such as Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) assistance, the Women, Infant and Children (WIC) program, and/or a housing authority?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I don't qualify for assistance, but it is needed

15. Are you employed:

- a. Full-time
- b. Part-time
- c. Unemployed
- d. Part-time student
- e. Full-time student
- f. Other: _____

APPENDIX F
RESEARCHER DEVELOPED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Researcher Developed Interview Questions

1. Do you have comments about the quality of your care while in DHR custody?

1. Describe your experience in learning daily life skills while in foster care?
 - How capable were you of executing these tasks before foster care placement?
 - How did you make improvements in these skills while in foster care?
 - What supports did you have while in foster care to improve these skills?
 - Why did or didn't you ask for assistance with these skills while in foster care or at discharge?
 - Please give examples of ways that you were impacted by your ability to demonstrate these skills after you left foster care?
 -
2. Describe your experience in learning self-care skills while in foster care?
 - How capable were you of executing these tasks before foster care placement?
 - How did you make improvements in these skills while in foster care?
 - What supports did you have while in foster care to improve these skills?
 - Why did or didn't you ask for assistance with these skills while in foster care or at discharge?
 - Please give examples of ways that you were impacted by your ability to demonstrate these skills after you left foster care?
3. Describe your experience in learning relationship and communication skills while in foster care?
 - How capable were you of executing these tasks before foster care placement?
 - How did you make improvements in these skills while in foster care?
 - What supports did you have while in foster care to improve these skills?
 - Why did or didn't you ask for assistance with these skills while in foster care or at discharge?
 - Please give examples of ways that you were impacted by your ability to demonstrate these skills after you left foster care?
4. Describe your experience in learning about housing and money management skills while in foster care?
 - How capable were you of executing these tasks before foster care placement?
 - How did you make improvements in these skills while in foster care?
 - What supports did you have while in foster care to improve these skills?
 - Why did or didn't you ask for assistance with these skills while in foster care or at discharge?
 - Please give examples of ways that you were impacted by your ability to demonstrate these skills after you left foster care?

5. Describe your experience in learning work and study skills while in foster care?
 - How capable were you of executing these tasks before foster care placement?
 - How did you make improvements in these skills while in foster care?
 - What supports did you have while in foster care to improve these skills?
 - Why did or didn't you ask for assistance with these skills while in foster care or at discharge?
 - Please give examples of ways that you were impacted by your ability to demonstrate these skills after you left foster care?

6. Describe your experience in learning career and education planning skills while in foster care?
 - How capable were you of executing these tasks before foster care placement?
 - How did you make improvements in these skills while in foster care?
 - What supports did you have while in foster care to improve these skills?
 - Why did or didn't you ask for assistance with these skills while in foster care or at discharge?
 - Please give examples of ways that you were impacted by your ability to demonstrate these skills after you left foster care?

Appendix G
CHART OF LIFE SKILLS

Chart of Life Skills

Daily Living Skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food and Nutrition • Home Cleanliness • Home Safety • Home Repairs • Computer & Internet Basics • Daily Living Permanency

Self-Care Skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Care • Personal Benefits • Personal Hygiene • Personal Safety • Sexuality

Relationship & Communication Skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Development • Developing Relationships • Communication with Others • Cultural Competency • Domestic Violence • Legal Permanency

Housing & Money Management
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budgeting & Spending Plan • Banking & Credit • Housing • Transportation

Work & Study Skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study Skills • Employment • Time Management • Personal Development • Income Tax • Legal

Career & Education Planning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education Planning • Career Planning

Derived from the Casey Life Skills and the key components of each life skill