

ABSTRACT

SUPPORT NETWORKS AND THE EFFECTS THEY HAVE ON FOSTER YOUTH'S ACADEMIC SUCCESS

By

Sara Lynn Mendez

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between support networks and the effect they have on foster youth's academic success. The sample consisted of 47 cases as reported by 7 county social workers in the Los Angeles County, Department of Children and Family Services, Torrance office. The questionnaire was designed by the researcher and included a subscale from the School Success Profile (SSP) co-created by Dr. Gary L. Bowen.

Results from this study found that there was a statistically significant and positive relationship between the number of support networks foster youth have and their academic success. The youth that participated in activities outside of class also had a higher Grade Point Average (GPA) when compared to youth that did not participate in activities outside of class. The implications of the findings of this study are discussed as well as recommendations for future research, social work practice and policy.

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By Sara Lynn Mendez
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WE, THE UNDERSIGNED MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE,
HAVE APPROVED THIS THESIS

SUPPORT NETWORKS AND THE EFFECT THEY HAVE ON FOSTER YOUTH'S
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By

Sara Lynn Mendez

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Yolanda Green, Ph.D. (Chair)

Social Work

Catherine Goodman, Ph.D.

Social Work

Cheryl Lee, Ph.D.

Social Work

ACCEPTED AND APPROVED ON BEHALF OF THE UNIVERSITY

John Oliver, Ph.D.
Director, Department of Social Work

California State University, Long Beach

May 2008

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

There has been insufficient research regarding out-of-home care youth, their support networks and how these relationships impact their overall academic success. There are over 500,000 youth in the foster care system (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2005). The average age of out-of-home care youth in California in 2004 was 10.5 (National Data Analysis System [NDAS], 2004). Forty-six percent live in non-relative foster families, 23% live in foster homes with a relative (kin homes), 19% live in group homes, 5% in pre-adoptive homes and 7% live in other placements, including emergency shelters (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2005).

Previous research by Rosenfeld and Richman (2003), found that youth who lived in out-of-home care were less likely to report receiving the main types of social support as measured by the School Success Profile. Zins, Weisberg, Wang, and Walberg (2004) also found that children who did not receive support in school attitudes, behavior and performance were more likely to drop out of school, fail in school or have behavioral problems. Research on this topic will help social workers, teachers and guardians understand the specific needs of children in out-of-home care and allow for collaboration of support. Most importantly, it will help identify the networks needed to help a child become a successful adult.

Foster care is typically referred to as youth that live with foster families, while out-of-home care is referred to every type of home, including foster homes (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2005). For the purpose of this study these two terms will be used interchangeably, referring to all types of placements. The average stay in out-of-home care for a child in California in 2004 was 38.6 months, which is a little over 3 years. The median length of stay was 20.6 months, which is a little under 2 years (NDAS, 2004).

There are certain factors that only affect youth who live in out-of-home care. These factors include, moving from placement to placement, which may lead to a change in school (Rosenfeld & Richman, 2003). This causes disruptions in the youth's academic classes, support systems, as well as their ability to develop social skills. It also makes it harder for the youth to join programs that promote support networks because they may not be termed at-risk, which is a qualifier for many programs. Other factors include foster parents not always looking after the child's study habits to make sure assignments are completed (Rosenfeld & Richman). Lastly, their social workers have large caseloads; which makes it difficult for them to stay updated on the successes or challenges the youth might be facing academically (Rosenfeld & Richman).

All of these factors can have devastating effects on a foster child's academic success. Studies have shown that youth who leave care are at a higher risk of unemployment and homelessness than youth who were not placed in out-of-home care (Reilly, 2003). Youth that have emancipated or "age out" also have higher incidences of problems with the law (Reilly). Many of these problems can be avoided all together by

preparing the children in care with a solid education that will help them succeed later in life.

One way to minimize the negative effects of a constantly changing foster care system is to implement and strengthen support networks and collaboration between agencies (Bamba, 2005). These support networks will enable a child in foster care to be successful academically as well as later in life. The concept of social support has been conceptualized in multiple ways. There has not been a clear operational definition, due to the many facets of social support (Hupcey, 1998). These facets include, but are not limited to the type of support provided, recipients' perceptions, intentions or behaviors of the provider of support, reciprocity and support networks (Hupcey).

Although all definitions of social support are important, this study focused on the support networks involved in a foster child's life. It is important to focus on support networks because they impact the mental health of children in foster care (Perry, 2006). This interaction between foster youth and positive support networks will impact the level of psychological distress a child will feel when there is a placement disruption (Perry). This in turn affects the child's ability to perform well in school as well as behave appropriately.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate support networks and academic success among out-of-home care youth. Specifically, these questions were addressed: What are the support networks among out-of-home care youth? What types of support networks contribute to the academic success of out-of-home care youth? What are the academic success rates among out-of-home care youth? And lastly, what is the

relationship between support networks of out-of-home care youth and their academic success.

Definitions of Terms

Out-of-Home Care Youth: Any youth that no longer lives with their biological parents and lives with a relative or kin, traditional foster care, or residential care arrangements (Rosenfeld & Richman, 2003).

Support Network: A support network is a type of social support (Vaux, 1988). There are three main types of support systems: natural or informal, formal or organized and societal or professional support (Peebles-Wilkins, 2003). Support networks were measured by these types of systems.

Children's Social Worker (CSW): The CSW to whom a case or active referral is assigned (Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services [DCFS], 2007).

Academic Success: For the study's purpose, is measured by Grade point average, current grade level compared to appropriate grade level, test scores, and teacher's behavioral reports.

Multicultural Relevance

This topic is relevant due to the large number of minority youth in the child welfare system. There were a total of 92,344 youth in out-of-home care in the state of California as of September 30, 2004. Of that amount, 25,608 were Black; 38,135 were Hispanic and 1,212 were Asian. Seven hundred and sixty-two were American Indian/Native American, 369 were Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander and 22,559 were White. The amount of youth who were classified as more than one race was 3,222 and

477 were unable to be determined. There was no missing data (NDAS, 2004). More recent data from August 2007 (DCFS, 2007) states that there were a total of 32,466 ethnic minority children involved in the foster care system in Los Angeles County. This is 86% of the children in foster care in Los Angeles County.

One reason for the increase may be the lack of social support and support networks for these children. Social support and support networks are unique systems designed for individuals but there are current issues not being addressed that affect all minority groups. Two examples are that there are not as many minority social workers as clients and there are not enough positive minority role models of color (McKeller, 1997). A social worker of a different race or culture may not provide a living arrangement that can enhance a child's knowledge about their culture and identity (McKeller). As a result, other minority role models need to be increased and utilized, such as community members. By learning what types of support networks are most important to youth in foster care, treatment plans can be more accurate because they will reflect the cultural background of the child and will therefore help a foster child develop a positive sense of self and well-being.

Importance to Social Work

This study has implications for practice in terms of social work interventions. First, by providing a client with a strong support network a client will be more successful as an adult. Often times when a social worker helps formulate a support network for a youth, the network remains in place for a long period of time (Peebles-Wilkins, 2003). The client is then able to get the help they need on their own. Second, a client who is more successful and feels they have a support network typically has higher self-esteem

(Peebles-Wilkins). This will enable the child to continue to make good decisions when they have emancipated, which will in turn impact the amount of success for former foster youth.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Society believes that a good education will provide a child with the skills and knowledge needed to become a successful adult; however many foster youth are not receiving an adequate education (McMillen, Auslander, Elze, White, & Thompson, 2003). There are numerous factors that inhibit youth in care from receiving the education necessary to succeed. These factors include medical and mental health issues, a history of maltreatment and a lack of communication between the Child Welfare and Education Systems. Problems like lack of support networks and multiple placements only affect foster youth. Because of this, there is a stigma attached to being a youth in the foster care system. In this chapter these factors will be discussed in depth along with current legislation and interventions implemented to help youth in care receive a better education. Finally, a theoretical framework will be provided to the reader to allow a different perspective for viewing the information discussed.

Factors Affecting Foster Youth

Foster youth have to grow up coping with more than just puberty, peer pressure, forming an identity and learning to be independent. They also have the disadvantage of having to worry where their next placement will be. They may wonder if their new foster parents or group home staff are going to like them (McKeller, 1997) and how they will make new friends in their new school. Some may wonder where their siblings are placed

(McKeller). This section will discuss a few of the risk factors that affect foster children's well being.

Types of Placements

There are five different placements a youth may reside in once in the foster care system (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2007). They are foster families, kinship homes, group homes, specialized foster care and emergency shelters (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2007). The type of placement children reside in has recently become a topic of importance because it can affect children's outcomes as an adult. Children, who reside in group or residential homes are at a higher risk of not receiving a higher education and are also at a higher risk of exiting the system without a caring adult to rely on (McMillen et al., 2003).

Zetlin, Weinberg, and Shea (2006b) conducted a qualitative study involving four focus groups throughout California. Three focus groups consisted of professionals that work with foster youth and the fourth group, located in Southern California consisted of former foster youth. Six main themes emerged from the focus groups: placement instability, treatment/educational programs, record transfer/database, accountability/monitoring outcomes/advocacy, interagency collaboration/coordination and confidentiality (Zetlin et al., 2006b). The foster youth focus group discussed the hardships with living in a group home environment and succeeding in school. Reasons for these hardships included worrying about their belongings being stolen while asleep, being placed on medication while living in the group home and being placed in private special education schools (nonpublic schools or NPS's; Zetlin et al., 2006b). These schools are typically on the group home campus. The focus group explained that the

lessons were too easy, the teachers did not always have credentials, there was no physical education and no college preparatory information (Zetlin et al., 2006b). That is why there have been initiatives that require a child to be placed in the least restrictive school setting, which may impact their placement setting (Vesecky, Woodard, & Levine, 2005). The goal is to place more children in homes that resemble a more traditional family, as opposed to an institution.

As stated previously, 19% of foster youth in the United States live in group homes (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2005). This is the second highest kind of placement used in the United States. Therefore, special attention needs to be given to this population in order for them to succeed in school and as adults.

Types of Abuse

The type of abuse suffered by a youth may affect their ability to function and their educational outcomes. There are four types of abuse: physical, emotional, sexual and neglect (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2007). Physical abuse may leave lasting scars physically and emotionally. Youth who suffer from physical abuse may demonstrate very extreme behaviors. These behaviors may include extreme withdrawal or submissive behavior, aggressive or hostile behavior to others or developmental delays (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman). Developmental delays may display themselves in the form of cognitive delays, which may lead to deficits in reading, writing and math, and poor educational achievement (Miller-Perrin & Perrin, 2007). In contrast, youth who have experienced sexual abuse may suffer from physical problems such as sexually transmitted diseases and psychological problems such as low self-esteem, anger and anxiety (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman). Children who have been abused sexually also have difficulties in school

by having poor concentration, low grade attainment and difficulties learning (Miller-Perrin & Perrin). They can also suffer from long-term affects such as posttraumatic stress disorder or difficulties in relationships, but the long-term affects are different for each individual (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman).

Children who have been emotionally abused may have low self-esteem, have thoughts of suicide, substance abuse disorders or violent behaviors (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2007). Emotional abuse may lead to academic problems and difficulty problem solving (Miller-Perrin & Perrin, 2007). While children who have been neglected, may suffer from failure to thrive, medical problems or cognitive delays (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman). Children who have been neglected also may repeat grades more often, have language problems and have deficits in overall intelligence (Miller-Perrin & Perrin). A child suffering from any of the discussed forms of abuse may have long-term difficulties that can affect their ability to do well in school.

Medical Issues

Abused children have more medical issues than children the same age who have not been abused (McKeller, 1997). These problems usually result from a lack of care while residing with their birth parents. Medical issues may include breathing problems, dental issues, skin problems (lice or scabies), bad vision or hearing (Evans, Scott, & Schulz, 2004). More chronic conditions may include anemia or asthma (Evans et al.).

Medical issues can affect children in school and in placement. Medical issues can affect the foster youth in school because they are absent more frequently or have doctor's appointments (McKeller, 1997). Medical issues can also affect foster children's placement because a foster parent may be ill-equipped to handle the medical needs that

many foster youth require (McKeller). Foster parents may not be able to get the time off of work to take the foster youth to necessary doctors appointments (McKeller). Medical records are often lost or inaccurate which makes it harder for foster youth to get appropriate treatment (McKeller). All of these factors affect a child's ability to perform well in school.

Mental Health Issues

Research discussing the amount of youth who enter care with mental health issues varies widely. According to Evans et al. (2004) as many as 22%-95% enter with emotional issues. This is a wide discrepancy. One reason may be that not every child receives a mental health assessment upon entering the system, but only receives one when negative behaviors are exhibited. At that point it would be nearly impossible to tell if the child had emotional/behavioral problems before entering the system or since entering the system.

There are many emotional/behavioral problems that foster children may have. These range from adjustment disorders to attention deficit disorders to post-traumatic stress disorders (Evans et al., 2004). Youth may also be diagnosed with disorders that include more externalizing behaviors (oppositional defiant disorder) or internalizing behaviors (depression). This may be because children are angry at being separated from their family and do not know how to deal with their feelings so they act out aggressively or shut down (McKeller, 1997). Regardless of when foster youth are diagnosed with mental health problems, youth in foster care have a lot to deal with and these issues can manifest themselves into negative behaviors that can affect them in a variety of settings, including school (McKeller).

Other Developmental Issues

The consequences of maltreatment on children influence their cognitive, behavioral and emotional growth as well as their medical and mental health issues (Bamba, 2005). Maltreatment can also influence how foster children develop attachment (Schor et al., 2001). Bamba also reviewed the literature on maltreatment of children in foster care and identified new attempts to meet this population's needs as well as developed recommendations for collaboration between the child welfare and educational system. Bamba found that cognitive delays from a lack of schooling prior to being placed in out of home care as well as how they fare while in foster care, can affect a child's ability to learn later on. Bamba expressed that only through collaboration between the two systems and effective governmental policies will foster children be able to succeed in school, even after maltreatment.

To attain the best child development it is important that children's needs are met over a long period of time (Schor et al., 2001). By meeting their needs the children will be able to form healthy long-lasting relationships, and have a higher self-esteem (Schor et al.). This positive growth will enable the children to build a support network that can help them be successful in adulthood.

Children feel attached to their biological family no matter the severity of maltreatment the children have suffered. Therefore, separation from the biological family can be traumatic for children, especially young children because they do not have an accurate sense of time (Schor et al., 2001). It is important that social workers and caregivers recognize the extent of the attachment the child has to the biological family and respect it. It is also important to recognize that a biological family may not be able to

meet all the child's needs for optimal development, and the child may still need alternative housing; but the biological family should still be involved in the child's life to support the child in building their identity, as long as safety permits (Schor et al.).

Multiple Placement Moves

As of the last day of the fiscal year in 2003 (September 30), the average number of placements a youth would reside in while in out-of-home care was 3.3 in California. The median number of placements was 2.0 (NDAS, 2004). Moving from place to place gives children the feeling that they have no control over their lives. This can lead to more behavioral and emotional issues in the home and in school. As the child gets older and becomes an adolescent they may begin to feel learned hopelessness. Learned hopelessness refers to the feeling that a person can not control anything that happens to them (Holmes, 2001). As an adolescent, independence becomes important (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2007). If the adolescent starts to feel they can not control anything around them, they start to look for things they can control, which can manifest into running away or other negative behaviors.

There are two main reasons that a child may be moved to another home. One is policy reasons and the other is behavioral (James, 2004). Policy reasons can include a mandate for a child to move to a least restrictive environment, a move to a sibling home or a foster home shutting down (James). Behavioral reasons, for example, may include a child acting out or running away (McKeller, 1997). Other reasons include a bad match between child and caregiver, unrealistic expectations the caregiver has for the child, and unexpected life events (James).

A literature review conducted by James (2004) revealed that most placement moves in foster care are due to behavioral reasons. Contrary to these findings James' study found that only one fifth were because of behavior, the rest were moved for policy reasons. James enlisted the help of trained research assistants in reviewing 580 cases of children in foster care. These children were chosen because they entered the child welfare system in San Diego County between May 1990 and October 1991. They were also enrolled in the National Institute of Mental Health, which was gathering data on children in foster care (James).

Although the research is divided, it is evident that changing placements affects children negatively by disrupting their community supports (Bamba, 2005). Moving can affect how children fare in school because they have to adjust to new schools and new expectations of the teachers and staff (Bamba). Moving can also result in a loss of friends and caregiver support.

Permanency

Permanency should be the goal for every child. Historically, this was not the goal of the child welfare system. In the 1990s many children were separated from their families and left in care for long periods of time, some until they aged out (Charles & Nelson, 2000). When these youth aged out they were left without a connection to anyone. The Adoptions and Safe Families Act (ASFA) was enacted with the goal of reducing the amount of time a youth spent in care and to move these children into permanent families (Charles & Nelson).

Permanency for foster children allows them the opportunity to learn the skills necessary to become successful adults (Charles & Nelson, 2000). Adolescence is a time

marked with the need for independence and the transition into adulthood. Some foster youth have difficulties during this transition because they are not emotionally ready to deal with independence and the formation of themselves (Charles & Nelson). The reason they may have difficulties is because they were forced to separate from their families at an early age, when they were not emotionally ready to become independent (Charles & Nelson). By not being allowed to move through the normal stages of development some developmental delays may occur (Charles & Nelson).

Exiting the foster care system and the difficulties presented with the formation of self and transition to adulthood can have devastating effects. Twenty to 25 thousand youth exit the system each year (Charles & Nelson, 2000). Without a permanent connection many youth end up homeless, in trouble with the law, unemployed, without health insurance, physically and emotionally abused on the streets, with health problems and low educational attainment (Charles & Nelson; Reilly, 2003). When presented with these hardships many youth return to the families they were once separated from seeking support and a connection (Charles & Nelson). Support networks are protective factors that can help reduce the effects of the risk factors mentioned above. A relationship with a caring adult that is consistent and is able to provide the support the youth needs while in the foster care system as well as when they have exited it, can minimize the negative effects of maltreatment and help a child succeed as an adult (Charles & Nelson).

Minority Status

Ethnicity. The reason so many minority children are in care may be unclear but what is clear is that it is true (Chibnall et al., 2003). Studies have shown that African Americans do not harm their children any more than any other ethnicity; yet, African

American children are more likely to be separated from their families and offered family reunification as opposed to family maintenance (Chibnall et al.). African American children are more likely to stay in care longer as well (Chibnall et al.; Daining & DePanfilis, 2007). Therefore, the problem may lie within the child protective system, rather than with the minority population. Historically minority children have been discriminated against through bias and racism (Mallon, 1997).

There are two terms that are used to describe minorities in the child welfare system, these are disproportionate and over-representation. These two terms are often used interchangeably but have different definitions. Disproportionate describes the fact that the number of minority children in the foster care system does not reflect those in the general United States population (NDAS, 2004). Over-representation is defined as the percent of children of color in the child welfare system being greater than the corresponding percent in the overall United States population (NDAS). To provide a picture of the situation minority foster children face, national numbers are compared to foster care statistics below.

In 2004 the total number of children in the United States was 73,377,998 and the number of children of color was 30,097,401 (NDAS, 2004). This means that 42% of the child population in the United States were children of color. In the same year the amount of children living in out-of-home care within the child welfare system equaled 509,662 and the number of minority children equaled 291,680 (NDAS). This means that 57% of the population in the child welfare system was children of color. While the reasons behind why disproportionality and over-representation exist within the child welfare

system are beyond the scope of this literature review, the impact of being a minority child in foster care and in the education system is discussed.

According to Custred (1997), children first begin to learn at home through informal education from family, and then move to formal education in the school system. Children who are separated from their families due to abuse and neglect early in life may be at a disadvantage when entering school because they may not have received adequate informal education while at home (Simms, Dubowitz, & Szilagy, 2000). Therefore the children may be behind other students that received this form of education. This makes foster youth a vulnerable population in the school system (Simms et al., 2000; Zetlin, Weinberg, & Kimm, 2004). Having these delays when younger may spread the gap even further between youth in the foster care system and those that are not when comparing academic success.

African American children are separated from their families more frequently than children of other ethnicities, causing further educational gaps between a minority ethnic group that is already struggling in school, and the majority population. African American children are not the only minority population to be affected. Hispanic youth are also affected because some children have to learn English once they have entered the school system. This may put them at risk of falling behind their peers as well. Other ethnicities are impacted as well but because of data that is poor in quality and because the population is spread out geographically there are not a lot of studies on other minority groups (Hill, 2006).

According to Children Now (2007), California County Data Book, African American, Latino/a and Native Americans are performing very low in English language

arts and math in Grades 2-11, compared to White youth the same age. In fact, Caucasian youth are proficient in math and English language arts at 2 times the rate of African Americans throughout Grades 2-11 (Children Now). Being of color in the education system is a potential risk factor to achieving academic success.

Poverty may also be a risk factor in achieving educational success. More minorities tend to be poor, especially Black and Hispanic (Allen-Meares, 1995). Children who live in neighborhoods where poverty is a factor may not have the same educational opportunities as other children and are more likely to fall behind in their education (Allen-Meares). Allen-Meares also found that multiple factors might influence school failure such as poverty, lack of support networks and a lack of overall opportunities.

Once in school, minorities may continue to be discriminated against. One study by Skiba, Michael, Nardo, and Peterson (2002) found that their research findings were consistent with other research in which Black students were over-represented in referrals made by teachers, suspensions and expulsions, compared to White students. They also found that socio-economic (SES) factors also played a role in disciplinary referrals and suspensions (Skiba et al.). This study consisted of 11,001 middle school students in 19 schools in an urban Midwest town (Skiba et al.).

Gay and Lesbian population. As stated above, minority children have been discriminated against historically. The gay and lesbian population faces these same challenges but some problems are unique to this population in foster care (Mallon, 1997). One of the differences is that diversity in terms of race and ethnicity is a topic that is discussed openly with the goal to gain some understanding (Mallon). One of the leading

researchers on this, topic Dr. Gerald P. Mallon, argues that gays and lesbians have not had the same opportunity as other groups because homosexuality makes people feel uncomfortable (Mallon). People have very strong opinions regarding homosexuality and unfortunately it may hinder child protective services from helping many Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual and Trans-gendered (GLBT) youth who are struggling with growing up in the foster care system. Some GLBT youth enter the system because of neglect or abuse but others enter because their family has rejected them when they told them about their sexuality (Mallon). Once in the system they may be subjected to other forms of abuse by peers, staff and county social workers, either knowingly or unknowingly. Many GLBT youth are attacked, either verbally or physically, by peers or staff when residing in out of home care if they “come out” as gay or lesbian (Mallon, Aledort, & Ferrera, 2002). Therefore, their basic need for safety is not being met.

The same treatment may also occur in the school system. Youth who are in the foster care system, may get harassed by their peers for being different. This harassment can be exacerbated by moving to a new school and being the “new kid” (Mallon et al., 2002). GLBT youth in the foster care system have to learn to handle this harassment as well as harassment about being gay or lesbian (Ragg, Patrick, & Ziefert, 2006). The feeling that school is not safe may lead a youth to drop-out or settle for getting their general equivalency diploma (GED) so they can get out of school faster (Mallon et al.).

Many GLBT youth have the support of their family and friends while living at home or in out-of-home care, but once they reveal their sexual identity many of those relationships become problematic because they are no longer accepted by friends and family (Ragg et al., 2006). This limits their support network and can influence their

ability to form their identity as well as their self-esteem in adolescence (Ragg et al.). Therefore two other forms of support are typically sought out, informal and formal. The informal support is called “gay fictive kinship” (Mallon et al., 2002). This informal system is composed of an adult who is either LGBT and acts as a support for the young child as they navigate their identity (Mallon et al.). It is the same idea as a godmother in other cultures. The formal system would be seeking professional help from a therapist (Ragg et al.). This system is typically sought out when the youth’s informal system have been exhausted. Policies and practices also need to be changed so that adequate services are offered to this population (Mallon & Woronoff, 2006). A good place to implement these services would be in the schools themselves to allow for a safe environment for all youth to learn and grow.

In all, the above risk factors influence foster children’s ability to perform well in school. Social workers need to look for protective factors to help the child succeed. One type of protective factor may be a support network for each child. In the next section factors that influence school performance and success will be discussed.

Academic Challenges Faced by Youth in Out-of-Home Care

A study conducted by Rosenfeld and Richman (2003) found that students who lived in out-of-home care were at risk of school failure, compared to other students, after reporting to be less likely to receive all main types of social support when the SSP (School Success Profile) was administered. Rosenfeld and Richman’s study consisted of 1,209 middle school students from diverse schools across the United States that were part of two large programs designed to measure social support and academic success. This provides evidence that all foster youth should be enrolled in programs at school to

promote academic success, but identifying and enrolling this population into school programs to enhance school performance can be difficult because it is often unknown to the school system that a child is a foster child, due to confidentiality. Therefore suggesting that foster youth should be labeled as at-risk as soon as they enter school so they can be provided with programs typically designed for youth that are at-risk, otherwise they may fall between the cracks and not be identified (McKeller, 1997). This population also tends to have more academic and behavioral trouble in school, more absences in school, lower standardized test scores in reading and math and lower grades overall. Behavioral problems include aggressiveness to others, attention-seeking, anxiety, or isolation from others (Zetlin et al., 2004). These factors lead to an increase in foster youth being held back in school and placement in special education (Zetlin et al., 2004). Below are factors that affect the academic success of foster youth.

Factors that Affect Academic Success

There are numerous factors that affect foster children's ability to succeed in school. One factor is because foster placement can be scary to some kids (Geroski & Knauss, 2000). It takes a lot of effort and work to learn the rules of each family (Geroski & Knauss). This can impact a child's school performance because they may be preoccupied trying to fit in with their new family instead of focusing on school. Children's school performance can also be affected if moving placements also means changing schools.

A qualitative study by Zetlin, Weinberg, and Shea (2006b) found that foster youth reported that moving schools, especially in the middle of the semester was problematic because many of the classes were already full and the children were unable to enroll in

the classes they needed. Foster youth who are behind in credits and especially those with emotional problems, were sent to continuation schools or community day schools where their educational and emotional needs were not met (Zetlin et al., 2006b). Foster youth also suffer because records are often lost when transferring schools (Evans et al., 2004).

Foster youth may also lose credits when their records are transferred or have to repeat grades because the information did not transfer (Bamba, 2005). Zetlin et al. (2006b) also found that many foster youth who transferred schools had difficulty joining after-school activities such as sports because their records were lost or their GPA was inaccurately reported. Because a child's GPA has to be at a certain level to participate in sports, foster youth who are constantly changing schools can miss out on these opportunities for social growth.

Many foster children have IEP (Individual Education Plans) due to emotional problems or special education needs. If children transfer schools sometimes the IEP does not transfer with them or there is a delay in accessing the requirements of the IEP. If a child transfers out of the school district even more problems may occur with the IEP such as having to completely write another IEP. In the mean time, the foster child is not receiving the necessary help they need to succeed in school.

Another factor is that many foster youth have behavioral problems, which influence their performance in school. Blome (1997) found that foster youth were more likely to be disciplined in school, including more suspensions. Seven years later, Zetlin et al., (2004) found that foster youth were more likely to have disciplinary referrals when compared to non-foster youth as well as aggression, attention-seeking, withdrawal and anxiety. Many foster youth do not trust authority because authority figures are the ones

who separated them from their families. They have a hard time paying attention in class, display delinquent behaviors and have a hard time socializing with others, causing them to be possible victims of bullying (McKeller, 1997).

A study by Altshuler (2003) may provide another reason for why foster youth have difficulty controlling their emotions. In this study, students from a nearby middle school, caseworkers, and educators in the Midwest, gathered in separate focus groups to discuss educational needs of foster youth, including barriers and solutions to the problem (Altshuler). Foster youth in the study reported that they felt like they did not have a place to express their feelings. They did not feel comfortable in their new foster homes, so they displayed their emotions at school through negative behaviors (Altshuler). However, displaying the negative behaviors only perpetuates the belief that foster youth have behavioral problems.

The same study by Altshuler (2003) also found that foster youth reported they had trouble in school because of the perception of others. The term “foster care” has negative connotations by people in the school system (Altshuler). Foster youth reported being treated differently than the non-foster youth in their school (Altshuler). They reported that some teachers were more lenient while others were harder (Altshuler). School personnel also stereotyped foster students and had lower expectations of them. They may believe that the child is in care because of their own problems, not the guardians and finally they may label the child as disruptive, which can severely impact the child (Bamba, 2005).

The lack of communication and collaboration between social workers and school personnel has a very combative history due to the lack of trust and systemic procedures

for sharing information between these two disciplines (Altshuler, 2003). In the same study by Altshuler, barriers to communication between these two professions were also discussed. These barriers included confidentiality constraints, a lack of overall communication, and both disciplines believing that the other discipline was not providing what was needed by that agency to better serve the child. This lack of collaboration leads to the foster child not receiving the best services because they are being serviced by two separate systems (Altshuler). No one agency has the ability or the resources to fix the educational problems with foster youth, but collaboration is necessary (Zetlin et al., 2006b).

Another factor that affects a foster child's ability to perform well in school is because educational issues are given low priority (Zetlin et al., 2006b). Courts and child welfare agencies are only made aware of a family in times of crisis, therefore the court and child welfare agency's job is to resolve the crisis. Once this crisis is resolved the child welfare worker has many responsibilities to ensure the child is safe including placement responsibilities, maintaining family contact and emotional and behavioral problems of the youth to worry about. The court may or may not revoke the educational rights of the parents when separating the parents and child. If the rights are not revoked then the foster parents and social worker needs to obtain permission from the parents before discussing any school issues (Zetlin et al., 2006b). This can slow progress for the child by impeding on quickly identifying special educational requirements or allowing a foster child to go on a field trip because the biological parent needs to sign.

Graduating from high school and going to post-secondary school or keeping a job is another factor that is affected by a foster child not performing well in school. One of

the issues is where the child resides and what kind of school the youth attends during high school. Most children who live in residential care also attend the nonpublic high school associated with the placement. Zetlin et al. (2006b) found that many nonpublic schools did not have fully accredited teachers, had children of many ages in one classroom and did not have a competitive academic schedule that included college preparatory classes. The schools also did not provide access to college counseling or other information so that the youth could continue their education. Therefore, living in residential care is a risk factor to not attending college.

There are three other main factors that influence academic success in foster youth. They are: the age of entry into foster care, medical appointments and court dates. If a child started school and then was separated from their family, they are far more likely to have behavioral and academic problems in school due to inadequate supervision, lack of consistency attending school and abuse and neglect (McKeller, 1997). Many children in foster care are behind academically compared to other youth their age (Kessler, 2004). Many foster youth have more medical problems than other youth their age and may miss school due to illness or appointments (McKeller). According to Zetlin et al. (2004) foster youth have more absences overall than non-foster youth. Youth in foster care have court every six months, yearly or as deemed by the judge or social worker. Many youth want to go to these court dates because it often is a time to see their biological family. However, these dates are during school hours, causing them to miss even more school. Youth in foster care may also be involved in the Juvenile Justice System, often doubling the amount of court dates these youth have. These factors also influence a foster child's ability to succeed in school.

In all, numerous factors influence a foster child's ability to succeed in school. If society allows this population to struggle academically and socially while in school, this will lead to negative adult outcomes because a foster child will not have the educational tools to survive (Altshuler, 2003). Discussed next is legislation and interventions aimed to reduce the negative effects of some of these risk factors.

Educational Legislation and Interventions that Impact Foster Youth

Legislation

There has recently been a push to improve academic achievement of youth in California. Two recent pieces of legislation aim to do this for all students, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Joftus, 2007), and the State Law (SB2) 1999 (California Department of Education, 2007) that authorized for the High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) to be developed. Although this legislation is not directed at foster youth, they are affected (Zetlin et al., 2006b).

The No Child Left Behind Act aims to ensure schools are meeting appropriate standards of teaching. Schools are graded by tests given to their students each year. If the students do not pass, the school is sanctioned and must take corrective action (Zetlin et al., 2006b). If the students pass, then the school is provided with a financial bonus to use as they wish. The intentions of the Act are good but foster children often perform poorly in school, therefore, some schools that are concerned with passing the testing may not accept foster youth for fear these students will affect the school's scores (Zetlin et al., 2006b). If foster youth are already enrolled in the school, they may be moved during the testing period. Zetlin et al. (2006b) qualitative research also found that one of the focus group participants stated that, "schools are playing all kinds of games, for example,

moving kids out to continuation or alternative schools during testing and then bringing them back afterward” (Zetlin et al., 2006b, p. 170). The act does provide ways to improve passing rates of students, including special programs for at-risk students, however foster youth are not specifically designated as at-risk, so this vulnerable population is not included in those program (Joftus, 2007).

The California Exit Exam (CAHSEE) is an exam that students must take to determine if the student graduates from high school (California Department of Education, 2007). Again, this legislation is not directed at foster youth, but they are impacted. Foster youth who struggle to succeed in school still have to pass these exams. Although the CAHSEE has not been evaluated for its effects of foster youth; Zetlin et al. (2006b) found that some participants in their study feared that foster youth who have difficulties in school may drop-out prematurely to avoid another embarrassment of failure in the educational arena.

One piece of legislation directed solely at foster youth is Assembly Bill 490 (AB 490; Vesecky et al., 2005). AB 490 addresses school stability, immunizations, school transfers and record transfers, and protection of grades (Vesecky et al.). This legislation is provided to all counties throughout California to attempt to stream line the process of enrolling a foster child in school and promoting communication between social workers and school personnel.

Interventions

Interventions were also implemented to improve academic achievement for foster youth in California. As part of the Education Initiative Project in 1998 a position called an Educational Liaison (EL) was implemented in one of the largest urban child welfare

agency in America, Los Angeles County (Zetlin et al., 2004). The project was first implemented in one office of the child welfare system and has since grown (Zetlin, Weinberg & Shea, 2006a). The EL is assigned from the school district and is housed in an office in the child welfare system because they have knowledge of educational resources and programs that exist for foster youth (Zetlin et al, 2004). The law agency was involved in the collaboration in case the EL needed to consult with them on cases or if they had questions about the legal system. The EL also trained social workers about educational opportunities and provided assistance in case planning (Zetlin et al., 2006a).

The study conducted by Zetlin et al. (2006a) included an independent evaluator from the start of the project that evaluated the effectiveness of the Educational Liaison Model. Results showed that after collecting data from case files, social workers and school records, that the educational liaison model was in fact an effective intervention to help foster youth (Zetlin et al., 2006a). Further, results from a pre and post-test (at the beginning of the intervention and at 18 months) showed that there was more documentation in the social worker's files regarding the foster youth's educational attainment (Zetlin et al., 2006a). A second set of data was examined using the foster youth's school reports. Sixty youth were randomly selected from the 120 youth that were serviced by the educational liaison and compared in reading and math to 60 youth not serviced by the educational liaison, but from the same office. Results showed that the control group scored higher in math and reading at the baseline (pre-test) but upon post-test there were no significant differences in reading and math between the control group and experimental group.

Three other interventions that are unique to the child welfare services in California and Los Angeles are Foster Youth Services, educational passports, and Education Advocates/Surrogates (Zetlin et al., 2004). Foster Youth Services targets foster youth with the greatest need, those living in residential care (Zetlin et al., 2004). Services included counseling, tutoring and mentoring, tracking of school records and referrals to resources (Zetlin et al., 2004). Staff works to track school and health records (mainly immunization records) that are needed to enroll a child in school (Zetlin et al., 2004). Educational passports were designed to follow a child through placements and records were to be updated as needed. The passports provide health and educational information to the caregiver (Zetlin et al., 2004). The problem with the educational passports is that information is not being kept up to date. So as foster children move to new foster families their medical/psychological and educational information may become lost. Education Advocates/Surrogates are people who take the place of the absent parents and make educational decisions on behalf of the child (McMillen et al., 2003). Foster parents can be surrogates, but a surrogate can only be assigned if the child has an IEP (McMillen et al.). If the child does not have an IEP then there is no assigned adult advocate.

An intervention that has not been implemented is to include educational assessments with the medical and psychiatric evaluations recommended at thirty days of entrance into the system (Evans et al., 2004). Research by Evans et al. included 3,483 participants in Arkansas's child welfare system who entered between August 1995 and April 1999. All participants were of school age, had allegations that were substantiated and underwent a comprehensive medical and mental health evaluation within 30 to 60

days of entering the foster care system. A pediatrician, psychologist and speech-language pathologist were involved in the evaluations (Evans et al.). Results from the study showed that participants had low-average to average IQ scores when controlled for age and grade completion in school (Evans et al.). Results also indicated that participants had deficits in basic skills such as reading, writing and arithmetic (Evans et al.). Educational status also gave insight into other aspects of a foster child's life, such as how the child may adjust back home and in placement settings, the amount of times they may be moved to other placements and the amount of possible further maltreatment (Evans et al.). Results from this study provided support for the notion that educational assessments should be added to the medical and mental health evaluations of foster youth upon entering into the system to help identify needs of this population.

Other solutions to educational problems were identified in a qualitative study conducted by Altshuler (2003). Focus groups including social workers, school staff and foster youth gave suggestions on how to reduce the barriers between the systems and how to make school more successful for foster youth (Altshuler). Suggestions included social workers sending letters to all of the youth's schools on their caseload introducing themselves to the staff, being assertive and an advocate for the youth. It is important for foster parents to become involved in the foster youth's educational process as soon as possible, and foster youth should be treated the same as other students. Other suggestions included trainings for social workers and school staff to learn what the other profession does, as well as a "one week swap," to have hands on experience regarding what each profession does (Altshuler). The last two suggestions included making a teacher at the school a mentor for the child so there is always someone at the school to advocate for the

foster child and keeping the child in the same school so they do not have as many placement and school disruptions. In the following section social support and psychosocial theory will be discussed to provide a framework to implement change in the education of foster youth.

Social Support and Psychosocial Theory

People want to feel like they belong and strive for connections with others. This is evident from children who have been abused by their parents yet still long to be with them (Cauce, Reid, Landesman, & Gonzales, 1990). Relationships between adults and children should be protective because children are not able to take care of themselves. When the relationship between children and parents becomes a risk factor, social workers need to step in and build a protective support network around these children so they can grow into healthy adults.

In this next section the history of social support theory and support networks will briefly be discussed as well as the different support networks that are identified as most important to youth and can affect their well being. Lastly, two of Erik Erikson's stages from his psychosocial development theory will also be examined in relation to the effects on school and identity of youth in foster care.

History of Social Support

There is no single definition for social support. It is a multidimensional concept that should be divided into separate components (Sarason, Sarason, & Pierce, 1990). This multidimensional concept becomes a problem when conducting scientific research due to the difficulties in defining the actual concept being studied (Vaux, 1988).

Historically, a sociologist named Durkheim reviewed cases of people who had committed suicide and found a link between a weak support system and suicide (Vaux).

Other disciplines also researched the modern day term “social support.” In sociology, after Durkheim, the term social support evolved from examining social relationships to examining social relationships and their effects on someone’s health (Sarason et al., 1990). In community psychology it was believed that if institutions provided social support to people with inadequate resources and to people who were coping ineffectively then their situations would improve (Sarason et al.). Child development also has its own view, which was influenced by Bowlby, the man who is known for his research on attachment (Sarason et al.). This discipline believed that social support was a personality variable that was influenced by relationships in early childhood. If a child were provided with positive relationships when younger, the child would be able to develop a strong social support network that would last a lifetime (Sarason et al.). This paralleled Bowlby who believed it was important for a child to have support over a long period of time (Sarason et al.).

There are three men who are credited with evolutionizing social support. They are Cassel (1976), Cobb (1976) and to a lesser degree Caplan (Sarason et al., 1990; Vaux, 1988). Cassel was a physician who viewed social support as a buffer for stress and disease. He believed that it was important to strengthen the supports a person had, rather than decrease the amount of life stressors (Sarason et al.). Cobb focused on clinical medicine and also believed in social supports as a buffer for stress as well as disease (Sarason et al.). He also tried to redefine the construct. He defined social support as “information leading to one or more of the three following outcomes” (Sarason et al.,

1990, p. 10.). The outcomes included: “1. Feeling of being cared for; 2. Belief one is loved, esteemed and valued, and 3. Sense of belonging to a reciprocal network” (Sarason et al., 1990, p. 10).

Caplan focused on preventative psychiatry and community mental health (Vaux, 1988). He agreed with Cassel but used the term support systems, which included everyone from the family to people in the community (Vaux). The continuum of social support as a construct and how it splintered into many different sub-constructs including support networks is further discussed.

Social Networks/Support Networks

As researchers began to break down the construct of social support into separate parts social network analysis was used. Social network analysis looked at “the system of relationships with other individuals” (Vaux, 1988, p. 12). This included everyone that interacted with a person in any way. People used their support networks as needed for many different things such as belonging, attachment and esteem (Heller, Price, & Hogg, 1990). As it was further refined the term support network was defined as “those people in the network that provided support” (Vaux, 1988, p. 13). Therefore, support networks became a subset of social networks. A support network is something that an individual can turn to on a regular basis to achieve what they need to achieve (Vaux). It can affect a person’s well being and act as a buffer during life transitions and times of stress. Not all researchers agreed that social network and support network should be separated as two different constructs, but it is important to do so because not everyone in a social network may provide support. It is important to measure people in the smaller support network that provides help as needed. The goal of support networks is to provide long-term

relationships (Peebles-Wilkins, 2003). This can help foster children succeed in life if implemented correctly.

To have a strong support network the individual must be able to seek out support when needed, otherwise they may feel alone (Vaux, 1988). This may be difficult for foster children who typically come from environments where support was unavailable and they do not know how to ask for help. But there are possible solutions for social workers that interact with foster children. First, while formulating the intervention or case plan the social worker should determine what kind of support is needed for the child (Peebles-Wilkins, 2003). Because a child's first support network is small and includes immediate family, their only support is stripped from them when they are separated from the family. Therefore, it is crucial that a social worker help build a support network with the child because as a child grows, so should their support network. It will include peers, friends and eventually co-workers and associates (Cauce et al., 1990). They should also take culture and community into consideration. This is important because the literature reviewed earlier discussed the large amount of minorities in the system. Lastly, a social worker needs to be able to find people who are able to fulfill all aspects of social support and support networks (Peebles-Wilkins). This may mean that a child's support network must consist of many different people to provide for the child's various needs or it may consist of only one person. Some studies found that having one adult that can provide all of the types of support was better than having numerous adults that were not able to fulfill all the needs (Cauce et al.).

In current study, the definition of support networks comes from researcher Peebles-Wilkins (2003). She used an ecological viewpoint that defined "three types of

support systems: (1) natural or informal, (2) formal or organized and (3) societal or professional supports” (Peebles-Wilkins, p. 67). Natural or informal support network includes people such as family and friends (Peebles-Wilkins). Formal or organized support networks include providing “face-to-face support” (Peebles-Wilkins, p. 67). These include client task groups, after school groups and community-based groups. Finally, societal or professional support includes teams that advocate for the child or provide a service to the child (Peebles-Wilkins). If a social worker can create more formal or societal supports for children, these systems will most likely have a long-term effect on children and their well-being (Peebles-Wilkins).

Types of Support

The family is the most important support system. It provides many different types of support including emotional, financial, and cultural support (Sarason et al., 1990). Foster children are separated from their families at a variety of ages and are not always able to keep that bond, due to abuse or neglect. Parental involvement is also important in helping a child succeed in school (Bamba, 2005). For those children it is important to have caring foster parents that can handle anger and are able to be emotionally involved to provide a stable environment for these youth (McKeller, 1997). Many children do not live in foster homes but rather in group home settings. These settings usually involve more youth in a cottage, resulting in a higher youth to staff ratio. In this instance a child may have a harder time feeling supported. For children living in foster care, placements are not always permanent. Multiple moves affect a child’s family support system because the child may not live somewhere long enough to get adjusted and feel supported.

Friends and peers are also important to a child's support system. As children enter adolescence, peer groups become the main focus of social interaction (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2007). Peers surround children living in group home settings all the time. This makes it easier to seek advice from peers rather than an adult. Peer influences can be positive or negative and ties with peers are important in school as well as out of school (Hirsch, Engel-Levy, DuBois, & Hardesty, 1990). Peers in school can help with interactions with teachers and school work while peers outside of school can help with family problems and can help a child learn different identities (Hirsch et al., 1990). When these friends become non-school friends an individual's support network increases to a variety of settings. Foster youth may not be in a school long enough to develop these non-school friends which negatively impacts their support network. A child who has difficulty making friends, or in the classroom academically, and does not feel supported may have lower self-esteem as well as lower educational goals and surround themselves with people that also have low self-esteem and lower education goals and who are not as engaged in school (Kiuru, Aunola, Vuori & Nurmi, 2007). This can lead to them being influenced by a negative crowd.

A person's community provides resources for an individual as well as a sense of belonging. Foster children have difficulty building a sense of community due to multiple placement moves. Each time a child moves they have to relearn many new things, such as where the grocery store is, what the family rules are going to be like, and what their new school is going to be like (McKeller, 1997).

Teachers are also seen as a source of support for information. Younger children perceive teachers as more of a support than preadolescents, who see their teachers in a

contradictory way (Sarason et al., 1990). When a child does not perceive social support in at least one of these settings it becomes harder for the child to make and maintain friendships, deal with emotional issues, succeed in school and get connected to other sources of help (McKeller, 1997).

Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory

Erikson's psychosocial theory of development is a stage theory, which describes the different tasks that must be completed during each time period. During each stage there is a crisis that must be resolved. If it is not resolved then the individual will have difficulty resolving crises in later stages (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2007). There are two stages that are crucial to understanding the effects of academic success and foster youth. These two stages are stages 4 and 5, industry versus isolation and identity versus role confusion (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman).

The key tasks during industry versus isolation are to be successful in school activities as well as socially (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2007). During this stage a child, ages 6-12; should be focused mainly on school and learning how to master academic skills. The child also begins to compare themselves to other children in terms of their progress of academic skills and social behavior (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman). If the child does not master the academic and social skills then they may feel inferior to their peers. As discussed above there are many factors that influence a foster child's academic success. Many of these factors deter a child from being able to focus solely on school. Therefore, a foster child may not master academic and social skills, which can impact their ability to perform successfully at other stages.

Stage 5, identity versus role confusion occurs during adolescents. The focus of this stage is to form an identity. An adolescent does this by reviewing past roles and then combining those roles into one identity (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2007). If an adolescent is unable to understand and combine their roles they may feel role confusion (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman). A foster child, who may have not succeeded in resolving the crisis from the previous stage, would have difficulty resolving the crises from this stage as well. Many foster children do not have the opportunity to live their roles because they were separated from their families. They may not have a traditional sibling relationship with their brothers and sisters and may not have a traditional child-parent relationship either. This inability to understand their roles and form an identity can be devastating to many adolescents and can affect their ability to resolve crises in other stages.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Design

This study examined support networks and the effects they have on academic success for youth in foster care. An exploratory, cross-sectional design was used to investigate this relationship, because it gave the researcher insight into which support systems were most important for foster youth and will lead to more specific research.

Sample

This study used convenience sampling. The subjects were Children's Social Workers' (CSW) from a family maintenance and reunification unit in the Los Angeles County, Department of Children and Family Services, Torrance office. All 7 of the CSWs agreed to participate in the study and were informed that it was voluntary. They were given questionnaires to complete, on a minimum of 5 to 7 of their current cases, regarding the youth's support networks and their academic status. Criteria for reviewed cases were: 1) School-aged children, 2) Living in out of home placement and, 3) Current enrollment in school. As a result, 47 cases were included in the sample.

Instrument

The instrument used in this study was researcher designed and included a subscale from the School Success Profile (Bowen & Richman, 2005). Since there have been no

known studies conducted with the proposed population, the questions were developed by the researcher. The instrument therefore had no reliability or validity.

The questionnaire consisted of seven demographic questions and 26 questions that addressed support networks and academic success of foster children (see Appendix A). The questionnaire was divided into four sections: 1) demographics (which was then separated for confidentiality), 2) support networks, 3) academic questions, and 4) additional academic questions. Examples of demographic questions are: “What is the current age of foster child” and “What is the total amount of time in care?”

Support networks were measured by questions such as: “Does the child see a therapist on a regular basis?” and “Does the child attend a place of worship?”

A question measuring academic success is: “What is the child’s current GPA?” GPA data was coded so that missing and unknown GPA’s (previously coded 8 and 9 respectively) were excluded from analysis to give an accurate mean. If a child was too young for a GPA (for example in primary school or kindergarten) then the data was considered missing and therefore excluded. Another academic success question was: “Has the child passed the High School exit exam?” Responses to this question were recoded to accommodate answers provided by the respondents and a new category was added to reflect an answer of partial completion of the CAHSEE.

Behavioral reports from teachers in response to an open ended question were classified into three themes: needs improvement, performing well, and specific educational needs. An example of a comment coded, as “needs improvement” was “child does not attend most of his classes, however he does enjoy participating in his JROTC class. He does well in school only when he is willing to participate.” An example of a

comment coded as “performing well” was “child is responsible and show eagerness for learning. Finally, an example of a comment coded as “specific educational needs” was “child needs an IEP. Child needs to attend school to get the IEP. Child refuses to go to school.”

The researcher was given permission by Dr. Gary L. Bowen, the co-creator of the School Success Profile, to use and adapt the “school” subscale to the current population under study, foster care youth. The original scale measures academic issues that youth face such as learning climate, school satisfaction, teacher support and school safety, school engagement, trouble avoidance and grades (Bowen, Rose, & Bowen, 2005). The subscale consists of 16 questions designed to investigate the child’s current level of functioning at school. Validity for the “school” subscale is broken down by the above categories of issues that youth face. The validity for each section is the following: Learning climate (.81), School Satisfaction (.72), Teacher Support (.89), School Safety (.88), School engagement (.80), Trouble Avoidance (.82) and Grades (.82; Bowen et al., 2005). The School Success Profile has been administered to 805 students and 26 schools (Bowen et al., 2005). Therefore, it has high reliability. Due to the length of the SSP and the probability of CSWs not having access to the information, 4 questions were eliminated from the subscale and others were revised for the study’s population.

Two examples of questions from the subscale that were revised for this study are: “How many grades have you repeated in school” to “How many grades has your client repeated in school?” and “Do you currently take part in any school activities that are not part of class work, such as sports or school clubs” to “Does your client currently take part in any school activities that are not part of class work, such as sports or school clubs?”

To determine the number of support networks each foster youth had a new variable was created adding each individual support network variable to form the total number of networks for each foster youth

Data Gathering/Collection

The researcher obtained permission from the CSULB Institutional Review Board (IRB) and Supervising County Social Worker (SCSW) to sample CSWs. The researcher presented the opportunity to participate in the study to CSWs during a unit meeting, discussed the study proposal and obtained consent from the CSWs. The researcher then asked each CSW to randomly select five to seven cases that fit the criteria of the study. The researcher clarified in the informed consent letter that participation in the study should only occur during the CSWs lunch break as not to disrupt the workday (see Appendix B). The CSWs were also given a \$5.00 Starbucks gift card as an incentive, once they completed the questionnaires. Finally, the researcher provided two boxes on the human service aid's (HSA's) desk at the Torrance office, one for the demographic section of the questionnaire and one for the completed questionnaires. The boxes were placed on the HSA's desk to ensure confidentiality and because the researcher did not have her own desk at the office.

Data Analysis

Data from the questionnaires were statistically analyzed using SPSS version 15. Univariate analysis was conducted on demographic and support network's data to obtain frequencies and percentages. Univariate analysis was also used to obtain the mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum scores for GPA. Multiple *t*-tests were run on each social support network variable to determine those supports that influenced GPA.

Lastly, correlational analysis was used to determine the relationship between support networks and academic success.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of the study was to investigate support networks and academic success among out-of-home care youth. Four questions were addressed: 1) What are the support networks among out-of-home care youth?, 2) What types of support networks contribute to the academic success of out-of-home care youth?, 3) What are the academic success rates among out-of-home care youth?, and 4) What is the relationship between support networks of out-of-home care youth and their academic success? This chapter describes demographics, support networks, and academic success (GPA, performance at grade level) results. Only results that are statistically significant will be reported.

Demographic Characteristics

Of the 47 foster youth reported by the county social workers in this study, Table 1 illustrates that 55.3% ($n = 26$) were male and 44.7% ($n = 21$) were female. Table 2 illustrates that 10.6% ($n = 5$) were between the ages of 5 and 7; 23.4% ($n = 11$) were between the ages of 8 and 10, and 17% ($n = 8$) were between the ages of 11 and 13. The largest group was between the ages of 14 and 16 (40.4%). The sample consisted of few youth older than 17 years, 6.4% ($n = 3$) were between the ages of 17 and 18 and 2.1% ($n = 1$) were between the ages of 19-21.

TABLE 1. Gender ($N = 47$)

Demographics	<i>f</i>	%
Gender		
Male	26	55.3
Female	21	44.7

TABLE 2. Age ($N = 47$)

Demographics	<i>f</i>	%
Age		
5-7	5	10.6
8-10	11	23.4
11-13	8	17.0
14-16	19	40.4
17-18	3	6.4
19-21	1	2.1

Regarding ethnicity, the largest group, 44.7% ($n = 21$) were Latino/a, followed by 38.3% ($n = 18$) African American, 10.6% ($n = 5$) were bi-racial and 6.4% ($n = 3$) were Caucasian (see Table 3).

TABLE 3. Ethnicity ($N = 47$)

Demographics	<i>f</i>	%
Ethnicity		
African American	18	38.3
Caucasian	3	6.4
Latino/a	21	44.7
Bi-racial	5	10.6

The largest amount of time in care was less than 1 year at 38.3% ($n = 18$), followed by 1 year at 25.5% ($n = 12$). The results for 2 years in care and 4 or more years in care were the same, 17% ($n = 8$). Only 2.1% ($n = 3$) of foster youth were in care for 3 years (see Table 4).

TABLE 4. Amount of Time in Care ($N = 47$)

Demographics	<i>f</i>	%
Amount of Time in Care		
Less than 1 year	18	38.3
1 year	12	25.5
2 years	8	17.0
3 years	1	2.1
4 or more years	8	17.0

Table 5 describes the number of homes the foster youth has lived in since residing in out-of-home care. More than half had lived in one home 51.1% ($n = 24$), followed by two homes at 21.3% ($n = 10$). Foster youth that lived in four or more homes were 14.9% ($n = 7$). The fewest homes lived in was three homes, 12.8% ($n = 6$).

TABLE 5. Number of Homes Foster Youth has Lived ($N = 47$)

Demographics	<i>f</i>	%
<hr/>		
# of Homes		
1 home	24	51.1
2 homes	10	21.3
3 homes	6	12.8
4 or more homes	7	14.9

A majority of the foster youth lived in one placement, 76.6% ($n = 36$), followed by two placements, 14.9% ($n = 7$). Only 2.1% ($n = 1$) resided in three or four placements while in out-of-home care, 4.3% ($n = 2$) lived in five or more placements (Table 6).

TABLE 6. Foster Youth in Multiple Placements ($N = 47$)

Demographics	<i>f</i>	%
Multiple Placements		
1 placement	36	76.6
2 placements	7	14.9
3 placements	1	2.1
5 placements	1	2.1
Missing	2	4.3

The majority of youth currently reside in foster homes 40.4% ($n = 19$). Kinship home and the other category reported the same amount of foster youth at 25.5% ($n = 12$). Foster youth that lived in group homes were 6.4% ($n = 3$) and 2.1% ($n = 1$) of youth lived in a specialized group home (see Table 7).

TABLE 7. Where the Child Currently Lives ($N = 47$)

Demographics	<i>f</i>	%
Current Residence		
Foster Home	19	40.4
Group Home	3	6.4
Kinship Homes	12	25.5
Specialized Group Home	1	2.1
Other	12	25.5

Question 6 of the demographics section asked the social worker to record all the placements the foster child had ever resided in, including the current placement. Table 8 illustrates the findings. The largest amount lived in a foster home at 34% ($n = 16$) followed by 21.3% ($n = 10$) in kinship care. Seventeen percent ($n = 8$) were living in placements categorized as “other,” while 6.4% ($n = 3$) were living in a foster home and kinship care while in out-of-home care. The 8 other foster youth were reported to have lived in a group home, 4.3% ($n = 2$), in a foster home and group home, 4.3% ($n = 2$), a foster home and other home at 4.3% ($n = 2$), a foster home, group home and emergency shelter at 2.1% ($n = 1$), a foster home, group home, specialized group home, emergency shelter and other at 2.1% ($n = 1$) and 2 were missing data.

Support Networks

To answer the question regarding the support networks of out-of-home care youth, frequencies were run. Results are displayed on Table 9. A majority (69.6%) of foster youth did not participate in activities outside of school, or participate in after school activities (85.1%), or attend a place of worship (61.7%). While, 55.3% reported seeing a therapist on a regular basis.

Relationships with biological parents, siblings, extended family, friends and Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) were also explored. The majority (59.6%) reported contact with their biological mother, on the other hand (66.0%) reported no contact with their biological father. A majority did report having contact with their biological siblings (66%) and extended family (68.1%). When asked if the foster child had friends or a CASA, a majority responded that the foster child did have friends (78.7%), while 84.8% responded that the foster child did not have a CASA.

TABLE 8. Type of Placement ($N = 47$)

Demographics	<i>f</i>	%
Placement Types		
Foster Home	16	34.0
Group Home	2	4.3
Kinship Home	10	21.3
Foster Home and Group Home	2	4.3
Foster Home and Other	2	4.3
Foster Home, Group Home and ER Shelter	1	2.1
Foster Home, Group Home, Specialized Group Home, ER Shelter and Other	1	2.1
Other	8	17.0
Missing	2	4.3

TABLE 9. Support Networks by Category ($N = 47$)

Support Networks	f	%
Participation in Activities Outside of School		
Yes	13.0	28.3
No	3.3	69.6
Unknown	1	2.1
Missing	1	2.1
Attend a Place of Worship		
Yes	16	34.0
No	29	61.7
Unknown	2	4.3
Sees a therapist Regularly		
Yes	26	55.3
No	21	44.7
Involved in After School Activities		
Yes	5	10.6
No	40	85.1
Unknown	1	2.1
Missing	1	2.1

TABLE 9. Continued

Support Networks	<i>f</i>	%
Contact with Biological Mother		
Yes	16	34.0
No	31	66.0
Contact with Biological Father		
Yes	16	34.0
No	31	66.0
Contact with Siblings		
Yes	31	66.0
No	16	34.0
Contact with Extended Family		
Yes	32	68.1
No	15	31.9
Child has Friends		
Yes	37	78.7
No	3	6.4
Unknown	7	14.9

TABLE 9. Continued

Support Networks	<i>f</i>	%
Child has a CASA		
Yes	1	2.1
No	39	84.8
Unknown	6	13.0
Missing	1	2.1

Academic Success

GPA, test scores, current grade level compared to appropriate grade level, and teacher's behavioral reports, measured academic success rates. For GPA, the mean was 2.24 and the standard deviation was .77. The minimum GPA was 1.00 and the maximum was 4.0. In regards to the CAHSEE, 68.1% ($n = 32$) responded that the test was not applicable to their client, while 19.1% ($n = 9$) replied that their client had not passed the CAHSEE. There was one foster youth (2.1%) who passed half of the test and there was a total of five (10.6%) missing data. None of the foster youth had passed the CAHSEE at the time of this study. Out of the 47 cases, 19% ($n = 9$) contained behavioral reports from the teacher. The comments were categorized into three themes: needs improvement ($n = 3$), performing well ($n = 4$), and specific educational needs ($n = 2$).

Table 10 displays the responses to if the foster child is performing at grade level. Of the 47 foster youth, 42.6% ($n = 20$) were performing at grade level while 34.0% ($n =$

16) were not. There were 10.6% ($n = 5$) missing responses and 12.8% ($n = 6$) of social workers did not know if the foster child was performing at grade level.

TABLE 10. Percentage of Foster Youth Performing at Grade Level ($N = 47$)

Demographics	f	%
Performing at Grade Level		
Yes	20	42.6
No	16	34.0
Unknown	6	12.8
Missing	5	10.6

Types of Support Networks Contributing to Academic Success

Multiple t -tests were conducted using each support network variable to assess the influence of support networks on the GPA of foster youth. Only two t -tests had statistically significant results. One yielded a statistically significant finding at the .05 level ($t = -2.733, p = .010$), suggesting that there is a difference in GPA between foster youth who participate in activities outside of school and those foster youth who do not. Specifically, those youth in activities outside of school (mean = 2.67, $SD = .821$) reported higher GPAs than those students not participating in activities outside of school (mean = 1.99, $SD = .624$; see Table 11).

TABLE 11. Participation in Activities Outside of School

Variable	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Participation in activities outside of school			-2.733	.010**
Yes	12	2.67		
No	23	1.99		

** $p < .05$

Another related question indicates similar findings. Question 13 from the questionnaire, “Does your client currently take part in any school activities that are not part of class work, such as sports or school clubs?” indicated statistically significant findings at the .05 level, ($t = -2.631, p = .013$), suggesting that there is a difference in GPA between foster youth who do take part in school activities that are not part of class work and those that do not (see Table 12). Specifically, those foster youth that take part in school activities not part of class work (mean = 3.15, $SD = .838$) reported a higher GPA than those that do not participate in school activities outside of class work (mean = 2.11, $SD = .726$).

TABLE 12. After School Activities

Variable	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Youth takes part in after school activities, not part of class			-2.631	.013**
Yes	4	3.15		
No	30	2.11		

** $p < .05$

Relationship between Support Networks and Foster Youth's GPA

Table 13 illustrates the results of the Pearson's *r* correlation. The results show that there was a statistically significant and positive relationship between the number of support networks a foster child has and their GPA ($r = .405, p = .013$). This association is a moderate to high association. Specifically, the more support networks the foster child has, the higher the foster child's GPA will be.

TABLE 13. Correlation between Support Networks and GPA

Category	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Number of Support Networks vs. GPA	.405	.013**

** $p < .05$

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This study consisted of 47 current cases of foster youth as reported by seven county social workers, from the Los Angeles County, Department of Children and Family Services, Torrance office. The social workers were asked to report on the following topics; demographics, support networks and academic success of each foster youth. Criteria for the study included: 1) School-aged children, 2) Living in out of home care and, 3) Current enrollment in school.

The purpose was to explore the support networks of foster youth and their academic success rates. Four questions were addressed: 1) What are the support networks among out-of-home care youth?, 2) What types of support networks contribute to the academic success of out-of-home care youth?, 3) What are the academic success rates among out-of-home care youth?, and 4) What is the relationship between support networks of out-of-home care youth and their academic success?

Summary of Findings

Demographics

The present study found that the two ethnicities most represented in the study were Latino/a (44.7%) and African American (38.3%). This is consistent with state statistics from the NDAS on the foster care population. The majority of foster youth

sampled in this study (38.6%) had only been in care for less than one year. In contrast, state data illustrated that the average amount of time in foster care is a little over three years (NDAS, 2004). However, data from this study accounted for the foster youths current situation, meaning that these youth are still in care, and therefore there is still a possibility that the youth remain in care longer. When compared to state statistics in relation to the type of homes foster youth reside in, findings were congruent with state data. In the current study the majority, (40.4%) of foster youth lived in foster homes, while 25.5% lived in kinship homes. Although there was a discrepancy with this study's data in that many social workers that marked "other" under place the child currently lives, wrote in lives with some form of family. Therefore, taking this into account, the study's data may be more consistent with state data then previously noted. State findings are that more children live in kinship homes than other homes (NDAS). Therefore, while most national and state statistics presented the average over a period of time, this study focused on the percentages at the current point in time, making it difficult to compare to other statistics.

Support Networks Among Out-of-Home Care Youth

Researchers on support networks agree that an individual needs support to feel like they belong (Heller et al., 1990; Vaux, 1988). According to Peebles-Wilkins' (2003) view of support networks there are three types of support that an individual must have to feel a sense of attachment and high self-esteem. They are natural or informal supports, formal or organized supports and societal or professional supports (Peebles-Wilkins). However, this study found that foster youth are not provided with all of these types of support. While a majority of foster youth had some kind of contact with an informal

support; mother (59.6%), siblings (66%), extended family (68.1%), or friends (78.7%), a large majority had no support from formal supports such as participation in outside activities (69.6%), attending a place of worship (61.7%), or being involved in after school activities (85.1%). In terms of professional support, the results differed, 55.3% had regular contact with a therapist, however 84.8% did not have a CASA. On the other hand, this study found a relationship between the number of people in the foster youth's support network and their grades. Meaning that the more people in the foster youth's support network, the higher the GPA. This is important for social work because it may be important to involve as many people as possible in the foster youth's life to ensure they are receiving informal, formal and professional support. Peebles-Wilkins also found that if a more formal or professional support network can be designed for children in out-of-home care there would be an improved long-term type of effect on children. Therefore, foster youth, a vulnerable population, need the protective factor of a complete support network, including formal support.

Types of Support Networks that Contribute to Academic Success

The present study found that participation in activities outside of school and participation in after school activities contribute to academic success in foster children. These results demonstrate the need for foster youth to be involved in activities after school and in their community. These findings are in contrast to research findings that have found that family, friends, teachers, and community all contribute to academic success (Bamba, 2005; Hirsh et al., 1990; McKeller, 1997; Sarason et al., 1990). One reason may be the turbulent and conflictual relationship between the family and the child. Most often, a child enters the foster care system because a family member or someone

close to the family has abused him/her (McKeller). Once the child is out of the home it may be difficult to build trust and a healthy relationship between the child and the parent who was supposed to protect them. As a result, families may not contribute to a foster youth's academic success. Another reason the current study's results may differ from previous research is there is not a lot of research that focuses solely on foster youth and their support networks and how they influence academic success, most research focuses on children in general.

Academic Success Rates

Research states that foster youth perform more poorly than their peers (Zetlin et al., 2004). The present study found that the average GPA was 2.24. This averages out to a "C" average. The minimum GPA reported was 1.00 and the maximum was 4.00. The average GPA found in this study was much higher than previous research and demonstrates that in this study the foster youth are performing on average in school.

There were 68.1% ($n = 32$) of youth that the CAHSEE was not applicable to. One reason for this may be because the child is too young to take the test. There were 19.1% ($n = 9$) that had not passed the test and 2.1% ($n = 1$) that had passed half of the test.

According to the responses in this study, no one had passed the CAHSEE completely. There were 10.6% ($n = 5$) responses that were missing. This is concerning because there were 3 foster youth that were in the 17 to 18 category, which is the time that most students graduate high school. Without passing the test the foster youth can not graduate.

The current study found that 19% ($n = 9$) questionnaires contained behavioral reports from the foster youths teachers. This is only a small amount of reports. One reason for the small amount may be because the social worker had not received the

information from the school, either because they had not asked or because the school had not returned the requested information. Another reason may be that in high school a student has multiple teachers and the paperwork the social workers fax over does not specify that behavioral reports from teachers are required. Of the nine behavioral reports three themes emerged. The themes were: needs improvement, performing well, and specific educational needs. These themes showed a pattern consistent with the results of the GPA. Many youth were performing well ($n = 4$), which was nearly half of the behavioral reports. However the other five reported that the foster youth were having difficulty in school either because they needed an IEP or because they did not attend all of their classes or because they act out in class. These results are consistent with other studies that show that foster youth have difficulties in school with regards to behavior (Miller-Perrin & Perrin, 2007; Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2007).

Relationship between support networks and academic success

The present study found that there was a statistically significant, moderate association between the number of support networks a foster child has and their academic success ($r = .405, p = .013$). Specifically, the more support networks the foster child has the higher their GPA. This is consistent with Peebles-Wilkins (2003) who argues that support networks can have a positive effect on the academic success of youth and can positively affect their well being. Support networks can act as a buffer during stressful times and are to be a system that an individual can turn to on a regular basis (Vaux, 1988). If the support network is providing the individual with all different kinds of support such as informal, formal and professional then the individual will perceive support (Peebles-Wilkins).

Limitations

This study contains limitations related to the instrument that was used, sample size, geographic location and process of data collection. The sample size was small ($N = 47$) and only one unit was surveyed. Therefore, it was not representative of the foster care population in other parts of the County. This study also focused solely on foster youth within Los Angeles County, which means that the results do not generalize well to other parts of the Country. The instrument that was utilized in this study was developed by the researcher, with the exception of the subscale (Bowen & Richman, 2005), therefore, the reliability and validity of the questionnaire is unknown. Lastly, the data was gathered from a secondary source, the county social workers. By not asking the foster youth directly about their support networks and academic success the data may not be as accurate.

Implications for Further Research

This study laid the groundwork to investigate further about the types of support networks that influence a foster youth's academic success. The research focused on support networks and the influence they had on a foster youth's academic success, however, the information gained was through a secondary source, the county social workers. In the future, a research design that allowed for either quantitative surveying of the foster youth population directly or a qualitative study would greatly enhance the overall findings. Utilizing a larger sample size would also be an effective way of enhancing the study's generalizability. Also, using an instrument with identified reliability and validity would assist in validating the study's findings. Lastly, research on the relationship between foster youth participating in activities outside of school and

taking part in activities after school and academic success may lead to change at the practice and policy level.

Implications for Social Work Practice

Social workers have the ability to affect what happens in the lives of foster youth because they have day-to-day direct access. County social workers are also more aware of the circumstances in which the youth entered out-of-home care. Based on the finding that youth who participate in activities outside of school as well as after school, it is recommended that social workers work to bridge the gap between the school system and foster care system. Social workers can communicate to school personnel the needs of each foster child and can insist in enrolling them in after school activities to promote academic success and strong support networks. Altshuler's qualitative study (2003) contained several suggestions to enhance the communication between school social workers and county social workers. Suggestions included a "one week work swap" so each profession can experience what the other does, and social workers sending letters to each school that a client attends to introduce themselves in an effort to bridge the gap (Altshuler).

Another study by Martin and Jackson (2002) involved qualitative interviews of 38 "high-achieving" foster youth. Their study found similar suggestions for interventions in social work practice. Suggestions included, providing each foster youth with a educational materials needed to be successful such as books, a desk and a quiet place to study as well as consistency in school attendance (Martin & Jackson). Other suggestions included teaching teachers and students about foster care and what it means in order to dispel the negative stereotypes about children in foster care (Martin & Jackson). One

participant even suggested making some sort of literature to distribute to other students to help them understand what foster care is.

These suggestions can be implemented by involving the school social worker that many schools now employ. The school social worker can work with the county social workers to ensure that foster youth are receiving the correct services as well as educate school staff about the needs of youth in care.

Implications for Social Work Policy

Interventions and suggestions for a change in social work practice can further be enhanced by a change in policy. It is a social worker's job to advocate for the individuals who are not heard at the legislative level. Foster youth, who are one of the most educationally vulnerable populations and do not vote, need this advocacy. Creating a policy that only allows placement moves to occur during school breaks (unless deemed a safety risk) would allow for foster youth to attend school more consistently. A policy also aimed at developing programs that mentor and support foster youth in their educational needs by providing encouragement, tutoring and assistance in obtaining an higher education will also help foster youth excel as adults. Further, implementing educational testing, along with the medical and mental evaluations within 30 days of entering the system will allow social workers to ensure the educational needs of foster youth are met. Lastly, county social workers have high caseloads. This undermines the social worker's ability to focus on what is important, the success of foster youth, which starts with a solid education. Therefore, policy needs to be created to reduce case sizes as well as to create a county job position that's sole purpose is to keep track of foster youth's educational needs. Enough positions should be funded that allows for each unit,

in each office, to have one of these social workers. The responsibilities of this assigned social worker would be to provide referrals for tutoring, after-school activities, and encouragement. This will allow for the other social workers as well as the foster youth to feel supported in their educational endeavors.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE

Support Networks and the Effect they have on Foster Youth's Academic Success



Please take a moment to complete the following questionnaire. All answers are confidential. Thank you for your time.

PART 1
Demographics

Please answer the following questions to tell us a more about your client. Place an "X" by the most appropriate answer. **Do not write the child's name or your name on the questionnaire.**

Current Age of foster child:

- 5-7
- 8-10
- 11-13
- 14-16
- 17-18

Gender:

- Male
- Female
- Other: please specify _____

Ethnicity the child most identifies with:

- African American
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Caucasian
- Latino/a
- Native American
- Bi-racial
- Other; please specify _____

Total amount of time in care:

- Less than one year
- 1 year
- 2 years
- 3 years
- 4 or more years
- Unknown

How many different families or homes has the child been in since entering foster care?

- 1 home
- 2 homes
- 3 homes
- 4 or more homes
- Unknown

What types of foster care placements has the child resided? Please mark all that apply.

- Foster home
- Group home
- Specialized Group home (ex: D-rate, F-rate)
- Kinship care
- Emergency shelter or setting
- Other: please specify _____

Where does the child currently reside?

- Foster home
- Group home
- Kinship home
- Specialized Group home (ex: D-rate, F-rate)
- Emergency shelter or setting
- Other: please specify _____

At this time please place this demographics section in the box marked “demographics.”
When you are completely done you will place the questionnaire in the box marked
“questionnaires.”

Thank you

QUESTIONNAIRE
PART II
Support Networks

Please answer the following questions regarding the child's social support network. Please put an "X" next to the most appropriate response.

1. Does the child participate in any clubs, organizations or teams outside of school?
 Yes: If so, how many _____
 No
 Unknown

2. Does the child attend a place of worship?
 Yes: If so, how often _____
 No
 Unknown

3. Does the child see a therapist on a regular basis?
 Yes: If so, how often _____
 No
 Unknown

4. Is the child involved in any after-school activities?
 Yes: If so, how many _____
 No
 Unknown

5. Does the child have contact with their:
Biological Mother:
 Yes: If yes, please circle how often: **never, sometimes, frequently**
 No

Biological Father:
 Yes If yes, please circle how often: **never, sometimes, frequently**
 No

Biological Siblings: If yes, please circle how often: **never, sometimes, frequently**
 Yes
 No

Biological Extended Family:
 Yes If yes, please circle how often: **never, sometimes, frequently**
 No

6. To your knowledge does the child have friends?
 Yes: If yes, how many (approx.) _____
 No
 Unknown

7. Does the child have a CASA?

- Yes: If yes, how often do they see each other? _____
 No
 Unknown

Part III
Academic Questions

This portion has been adapted from the subscale “school” of the School Success profile.
Please answer the following questions regarding your client’s academic standing/history.
Please fill in the blank with the appropriate answer.

8. What kind of grades did your client make on their most recent report card?

- Mostly A’s and B’s
- Mostly B’s and C’s
- Mostly C’s
- Mostly C’s and D’s
- Mostly D’s and F’s
- Unknown

9. How many D’s and F’s did your client make on their last report card?

- None
- One
- Two
- Three or more
- Unknown

10. How many grades has your client repeated in school?

- No grades
- 1 grade
- 2 grades
- 3 or more grades
- Unknown

11. Compared to other students in your client classes, how would you describe their grades?

- Much better than most
- Better than most
- About the same as most
- Worse than most
- Much worse than most
- Unknown

12. During the past 30 days, how often did any of the following things happen to your client?

	Never	Once Or Twice	More Than Twice	Unknown
a. Cut at least one class.	_____	_____	_____	_____
b. Had to see the principal because of problems with attendance or behavior.	_____	_____	_____	_____
c. Guardians received a warning about attendance or behavior.	_____	_____	_____	_____
d. Guardians received a warning about grades or homework.	_____	_____	_____	_____
e. Got into an argument with one of their teachers.	_____	_____	_____	_____
f. Got in a physical fight with another student.	_____	_____	_____	_____
g. Was suspended.	_____	_____	_____	_____

13. Does your client currently take part in any school activities that are not part of class work, such as sports or school clubs?

- Yes
- No
- Unknown

14. During the past 30 days, about how many hours, on average, did your client spend studying or doing homework each school night (Sunday-Thursday)?

- None
- Less than one hour
- About 1 hour
- About 2 hours
- About 3 hours
- About 4 hours
- More than 4 hours
- Unknown

15. How well does each of the following statements describe your client?

	NOT	A LITTLE	A LOT	UNKNOWN
	LIKE MY	LIKE MY	LIKE MY	
	CLIENT	CLIENT	CLIENT	

- | | | | | |
|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| a. He/She finds school fun and exciting | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| b. He/She looks forward to learning new things at school | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| c. He/She looks forward to going to school. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |

16. How well does each of the following statements describe your client?

	NOT LIKE	A LITTLE	A LOT	UNKNOWN
	MY CLIENT	LIKE MY	LIKE MY	
		CLIENT	CLIENT	

- | | | | | |
|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| a. He/She enjoys going to their current school. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| b. He/She gets along well with other students at their current school. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| c. He/She gets along well with the teachers at their current school. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| d. He/She is getting a good education at their current school. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |

17. How often is your client afraid that someone will hurt or bother them at school?

- Never
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always
- Unknown

18. How helpful is school in preparing your client for what they want to do after High School?

- Client doesn't know what they want to do after high school
- Not helpful at all
- Somewhat helpful
- Very helpful
- Unknown
- Not Applicable

19. Does your client want to go to college in the year after they graduate from high school?
- Yes, definitely
 - Maybe
 - Client does not think they will graduate from High School
 - No
 - Unknown if client wants to go to college
 - Not Applicable

PART IV
Additional Academic Questions

Please answer the following questions regarding the child's academic status. Please put an "X" next to the most appropriate response.

20. What is the child's current GPA?

21. What is the child's current grade level?

22. Is the child performing at grade level?

_____ Yes
_____ No
_____ Unknown

23. Has the child ever been expelled?

_____ Yes: How many times _____
_____ No
_____ Unknown

24. How many days has the child missed in the last whole semester?

_____ Semester
_____ Unknown

25. Has the child passed the High School exit Exam? (Only applies to High School students)

_____ Yes: During which grade _____
_____ No
_____ Not Applicable

26. Please write any additional comments from the school that describe the child's behavior on an on going basis:

Created by Sara Lynn Mendez

Part III: Academic questions were adapted from:

Bowen, G. L., Rose, R. A., & Bowen, N. K. (2005). *The School Success Profile*. Chapel Hill, NC: Jordan Institute for Families, School of Social Work, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I am Sara Mendez, a Master's of Social Work student at California State University, Long Beach. I am collecting data for my thesis project on support networks and the effect they have on foster youth's academic success. I am inviting you to participate in this study. You were selected as a potential participant because you are currently a County Social Worker for the Department of Children and Family Services in the Torrance Office. You will be asked to select a minimum of 5-7 cases that fit the following criteria: 1. Child must be of school age 2. Not living in the home of the biological parent and 3. Currently enrolled in school. You will then be asked to complete a demographics section and questionnaire about each client. Each demographics section and questionnaire should take a total of 10-15 minutes to complete. Upon completion you will place the demographics section in the box marked "demographics," the questionnaire in the box marked "questionnaire," and this signed Informed Consent Form in the box marked "consent forms." Although there are no direct benefits to your participation in this study, you will receive a Starbucks gift card worth one drink if you decide to take part in this project.

If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. Participation or non-participation will not affect your standing at the Department of Children and Family Services. Any information obtained will be kept confidential.

The risks to you are minimal. The questions relate entirely to your clients and will remain anonymous. If at anytime you feel uncomfortable you do not have to answer the question or you may withdraw from the study all together.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study or you would like a summary of the results, please feel free to contact me at my e-mail address XXXXXXXX@XXXXX.XXX or my thesis advisor Dr Yolanda Green, Ph.D. at 562-985-8312. If you have any questions regarding your rights and a participant, contact the Office of University Research, CSU Long Beach, 1250 Bellflower Blvd., Long Beach, CA 90840; Telephone: (562) 985-5314 or email to research@csulb.edu.

Thank you for your consideration in participation in this study. If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign your name and date below.

Printed Name

Signature

Date

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REFERENCES

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