

Interview Report

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Introduction

As highlighted in the literature review, foster care is an intricate and complex system involving all demographics. From the foster youth themselves to the biological parents, foster parents, teachers, and social workers, this process affects the lives of many individuals. In order to better understand the different aspects of the foster care system and all those involved in it, I interviewed three individuals with experience around the foster care system, whether themselves or assisting foster youth through this complicated time in their lives.

Interviewees

The first two interviewees wished to be kept anonymous and will be referred to by their aliases, Ms. Potts and Ms. U. Ms. Potts is the biological mother of a particular foster youth (not a foster parent). Ms. U is an extremely experienced elementary school teacher and has worked with students of different ages, races, and socioeconomic backgrounds for over 41 years. She often crossed paths with students in the foster care system. The third interview was with Nancy Mogy, a student at Chapman University who was in the foster care system for five years. She is currently an activist for those currently in the system.

Interviewee Selection Process

I knew I wanted to interview people with three specific perspectives: a parent's, a teacher's, and a foster youth's. In doing so, I would attain well-rounded and insightful information about the system as a whole and the effects it has on students' emotional wellbeing and academic performance. Ms. Potts was an ideal subject as I have known her my whole life, and her experience with the foster care system is unlike most, as her biological daughter went

into the foster care system at age fifteen. She is a prime example of a biological parent that fought to get her child back, as she recognized home would be the best place for her child to be.

I also chose Ms. Potts because I thought it might be interesting to get the perspective of a biological parent who experienced the system rather than a foster parent. Throughout all my research, I found very little information regarding the perspectives of the biological parents in the foster care system.

For the second interview, I chose Ms. U because I also have a personal relationship with her. I have interviewed her previously, and know of her immense experience with different kinds of students. Therefore, I knew she would also be a knowledgeable subject based on her experience working with foster youth in an academic setting.

In my previous report, I found that many teachers felt the school system did not provide enough, if any, resources, to effectively prepare them to work with foster students both academically and emotionally. I believed Ms. U could provide her personal perspective on this topic and if the schools she has worked at prepared her properly.

The third interview was with my friend Nancy Mogy, who was in the foster care system for five years before being adopted by a new family. Nancy is extremely open about sharing her story because since leaving the system, she has been an advocate for foster youth. Nancy entered the system when she was twelve years old, an age where missing school and poor school performance has a massive impact on her academic future.

While working on my literature review, I found that there are few programs provided by schools to help foster youth with their academics and mental health during their time in the

system. Therefore, I wanted to hear Nancy's perspective on the support she had access to from her schools while in the system.

Interview Process

The interview process was relatively similar for each of my interviews. I conducted all of these interviews either over the phone or via zoom. I recorded each conversation on my phone and then uploaded the recording to Otter.ai to transcribe. Each interview ranged from around 15-20 minutes each. I developed a set of 13-20 questions for each interview, and while I did not use the same questions, I kept the same themes throughout. In order to obtain three varying perspectives on the same idea, I tailored the questions for each subject and focused on the topics of academics, emotional and behavioral issues, and the overall impact of the system. In addition, I asked a series of open and closed questions, such as “Describe your experience as an educator,” and, “How long did you stay in the foster care system?” According to Stewart and Cash, an open question is one that gives the interviewee freedom in their response and a closed question is one that narrows the focus and does not give much freedom for the interviewee to answer (Stewart & Cash, 2008, p. 51-52).

Interview Perspectives/Findings

After conducting and transcribing all three interviews, I was then able to compare the commonalities and differences of their answers, which created an interesting dichotomy between the perspectives. Doing this proved the importance of having various perspectives on the same subject matter.

Teacher Perspective

Ms. U offered an insight into the perspective of an elementary school teacher and provided an immense amount of information regarding her experience with foster youth in a classroom setting. She has experience with foster youth as a classroom teacher and as a liaison for schools. When it comes to foster care students and their academic performance, she said that it depends on their individual situations, placement, the stability of the home, and their own ability to cope, alongside their general academic abilities. Ms. U also said that the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) provides teachers in-service and workshops, both in-person and virtual, to help understand the needs of students in foster care. However, schools receive a limited amount of funding for programming for students.

Parent Perspective

Ms. Potts' interview is from the perspective of a biological parent whose child was in the foster care system. As a single mom with an only child, Ms. Potts had a very strong bond with her daughter, but after a period of drug abuse, her daughter was taken away and placed into the system. While a challenging and emotionally draining situation, they still managed to keep a close relationship, even after being separated. Ms. Potts worked tirelessly to get her daughter back, and after several months, Ms. Potts' daughter returned home.

When asked about her daughter's academic performance while in the system, Ms. Potts remembers her daughter struggling academically because of, "a change of like a rapid environment and not being able to live with me and not being able to see me and just her whole, you know, daily lifestyle was just uprooted and just, you know, shook up." Fortunately, after reuniting, their lives went back to normal in both their relationship and her daughter's academic performance.

Youth Perspective

Nancy offered insight into the struggles and process of growing up in the foster care system. Nancy was in the system for five years, with a story different from most. At a young age, Nancy knew that living with her biological mother was endangering her and that she deserved a better life. Therefore, Nancy wanted to terminate her mom's parental rights so that she could be adopted into a new family. When it came to Nancy's performance in school, she said that when she was in the system and before when she was living with her biological mom, her academics slipped because she never turned in homework or studied for tests because external factors in her life would take priority. Nancy expressed it was difficult being in the system for five years because it not only affected her academics but her attendance records too. Nancy also talked about how being in the system took a great emotional toll on her. She also felt that her schools did not provide her with any support while going through this difficult time.

Common Themes

Overall, within the three interviews, the common findings were the strain of the relationship between foster youth and biological parent, healthy relationships with social workers among all parties, academic struggles and emotional trauma with all students, behavioral changes in foster youth during their time in the system, poor attendance records among foster youth, and schools providing little to no resources to assist both teachers and foster youth. From both Ms. Potts' and Nancy's interview, it can be concluded that being in the system and the separation of biological parent and child can put a strain on the relationship, whether that strain is for the best or not. Likewise, it can be concluded that being in the system puts more strain on the student's academic performance the older they are. Ms. U, the elementary school teacher, did not

recognize a significant difference in her foster students' academics, which is partly due to the age of the foster youth. Whereas Ms. Potts' daughter, who was 15 when she entered the system, and Nancy, who was 12, both recognized their academic performance slipping, and the future impact it had on their education.

Furthermore, a consistent factor found in all the interviews was that most foster youths' behaviors change when entering the system, with the most common behavior trait becoming more withdrawn. Lastly, a commonality found between both Ms. U's and Nancy's interview was that from both the teacher and student perspective, there was little to no support to those who are in the foster care system or to those who have to teach those in the foster care system.

Emergent Questions and Suggestions

After conducting, analyzing, and comparing these three interviews, there are still emergent questions. For example, one interesting fact that Ms. U brought to my attention is that "due to confidentiality, teachers may not be aware of their students who are in the foster care system unless the guardian reveals this information to the teacher. The administration does know who these students are." I found this very interesting as if teachers do not know which of their students are in the foster care system, how are they supposed to adequately help them if they fall behind or miss class? Another question brought up was how to make this system better for all individuals involved? It appears that the foster care system failed all of my interviewees in one way or another. For the parents and children, the system is an endless waiting game that could be sped up if the system updated its processes. In her interview, Nancy said, 'There are certain things that can be determined faster. Have a better rubric for when a parent should have their parental rights terminated, especially if a child is of age and able to advocate for herself and to

kind of let the child be taken more seriously.” The problem with the system is that it has not been updated to keep up with modern situations and that social workers are overloaded and overworked. They simply just do not have enough time to keep up with all their cases, therefore prolongs the process further.

Conclusion

Through careful analysis, it is clear that these subjects for this interview report further prove the data found in my literature review. These interviews gave an insight into the different perspectives of those apart of this complex system. While each interviewee proves different aspects and themes, each is consistent with one another. Furthermore, these interviews also proved the issues I found lacking in my literature review and were able to further elaborate on how prevalent those lacking issues truly are. Through these interviews, it is clear to see that school support programs and the foster system as a whole need to be altered in order to prevent further damage to foster youth and their families.

References

Stewart, C. J., & Cash, W. B. (2018). *Interviewing: Principles and practices* (pp. 51-55). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Education.

Appendix*NVivo Codebook**Nodes\Academic Performance*

Name	Description	Files	References
Ms. Potts Interview		1	1
Ms. Potts Interview #2		1	1
Ms. U Interview		1	1
Nancy Mogy Interview		1	1

Nodes\Attendance Records or School Transfers

Name	Description	Files	References
Ms. U Interview		1	1
Nancy Mogy Interview		1	1

Nodes\Emotional or Behavioral Toll

Name	Description	Files	References
Ms. Potts Interview		1	1
Ms. Potts Interview #2		1	1
Ms. U Interview		1	1
Ms. U Interview #2		1	1
Nancy Mogy Interview		1	1
Nancy Mogy Interview #2		1	1

Nodes\Relationship with Social Workers

Name	Description	Files	References
Ms. Potts Interview		1	1
Ms. U Interview		1	1
Nancy Mogy Interview		1	1

Nodes\\Supports from Schools

Name	Description	Files	References
Ms. U Interview		1	1
Ms. U Interview #2		1	1
Nancy Mogy Interview		1	1