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Seeking Success: A Survey of Minnesota’s Education and Training Voucher’s Recipients

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The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master’s thesis nor a dissertation.
Abstract

Former foster youth are at risk for poor outcomes including higher rates of homelessness, being on public assistance, teen pregnancy and low educational attainment (Berzin, 2008). Minnesota’s Education and Training Vouchers (ETV) program is designed to assist foster youth in paying for college. The purpose of this study was to figure out what characteristics, connections and supports were common among foster youth who participated in the ETV program, what the impact and efficacy of the ETV program was in Minnesota and what the postsecondary educational experiences were of youth receiving (or having received) the ETV. This study used an online survey to collect data on the experiences of youth in the ETV program. It was discovered that participants who were involved in the ETV program had educational stability, relational permanency, access to financial resources to assist in paying for college and were highly motivated, supported and resilient. By focusing on what these foster youth have in common, it makes it possible to replicate these characteristics in order to assist other foster youth in achieving success.
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Success in Foster Youth

In 2012 there were 397,122 children in foster care in the United States. Over 20,000 of these children aged out of the foster care system (“The AFCARS Report”, 2013). ‘Aging Out’ is a term used to describe children who are in the foster care system upon the age of eighteen, twenty-one or have graduated high school. In Minnesota, children have the option to stay in foster care until the age of twenty-one (Craft, 2014). For many of these youth, foster care services were terminated before they were ready to take on the responsibilities of adulthood and live independently. Youth who age out of the foster care system are at a higher risk of being on public assistance, experiencing teen parenthood, being involved in the criminal justice system, and having low educational attainment (Berzin, 2008). Youth who have aged out of the system also have a higher risk of homelessness. Approximately 65% leave the system without a place to live and 51% are unemployed. Homeless shelters are filled with former foster youth. It is estimated that 0.3% of the population has spent time in foster care, yet 51% of homeless shelters are made up of former foster youth (Delgado, Fellmeth, Packard, Prosek & Weichel, 2007).

Low educational attainment is one of the biggest barriers youth face when transitioning to adulthood (Berzin, 2008). Employment rates and yearly earnings are greatly impacted by one’s level of education. Currently, youth who have exited foster care earn about half of what the general young adult population earns. Data reveals that postsecondary education increases earnings and employment opportunities dramatically (Okpych, & Courtney, 2014). Someone with a high school diploma earns approximately $179 more each week than someone without a high school diploma. Someone who has a bachelor’s degree earns approximately $457 more each week than someone with just a high school diploma. With this, it is critical for our nation’s foster
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youth to pursue a postsecondary education (“Earnings and unemployment rates by educational attainment”, 2014).

Fortunately, Minnesota’s Education and Training Vouchers (ETV) Program provides assistance to current and former foster youth who are pursuing a postsecondary education. This program was created through the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Act of 1999. The Educational and Training Vouchers Program was added in 2002. The Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) was created to assist current and former foster youth, as well as youth who were adopted on or after their 16th birthday. CFCIP offers assistance with education, employment, financial management, housing, emotional support and helps connect youth to caring adults (“John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program”, 2012).

Minnesota’s Education and Training Vouchers Program offers up to $5,000 per year to qualifying current and former foster youth to assist them with paying for postsecondary education. This can include college, university, trade, vocational or technical schools. These youth can use the funds to pay for tuition and fees, living expenses, transportation, books and any other costs relating to their postsecondary education. The ETV was designed to complement a student’s own efforts in securing financial support for postsecondary education.

Some research has been conducted on what factors impact foster youths’ decision to attend postsecondary education, such as perceived social support (Bryant, 2012). Little to no research has been conducted on what happens to foster youth after they start a postsecondary education program. The purpose of this study was to determine the efficacy of Minnesota’s Education and Training Vouchers Program and to discover what happens to youth after they start their postsecondary education program.
Glossary

**Aging Out**- a term used to describe “children within the state foster care system who are still in the system upon reaching the age of eighteen, twenty-one or have graduated from high school. These children have not found permanency with an adoptive family or reunification with their birth family before aging out” (Craft, 2014, p.1). The age in which children age out varies from state to state. In Minnesota, children have the option to remain in care until the age of twenty-one which is considered extended foster care (Craft, 2014).

**Attachment**- A bond between two people that lasts across time and space. It does not have to be reciprocal (Bowlby, 1969).

**Protective Factors**- “Supports and opportunities that buffer the effects of adversity and enable development to proceed” (Benard, 2004, p.8).

**Relational Permanency**- Sense of a permanent home and family.

**Resiliency**- “Strengths that people and systems demonstrate that enable them to rise above adversity” (VanBreda, 2001, p.1).

**Satellite Foster Care**- “foster family homes recruited, trained and licensed by a child placing agency” (State of Kansas Child Placing Agency, 2012, p.11).
Foster Care

In the state of Minnesota in 2013, 11,400 children were in out of home placement. Approximately 8,000 of these children were placed into foster homes and the rest of the children were placed in institutions (“Foster Care: Temporary out of Home Care for Children”, 2014). Children are placed into foster care when their birth parents can no longer care for them. Foster care is temporary and the ultimate goal is to reunite children with their birth families. When this is not in the child’s best interest, adoption is pursued. Adoption is when a family takes permanent custody of a child in need (“What is Foster Care?”, 2014).

There are a variety of reasons for which children are placed in foster care including, abuse or neglect, inadequate housing, termination of parental rights, death of parents, illness, disability, abandonment, incarceration, substance abuse, temporary absence or an inability to cope and/or the child’s own behaviors. Of children who are placed in foster care in Minnesota, about 66% of them are placed in care due to some form of abuse or neglect. Twenty-one percent are placed in care because of their own behaviors, 11% for multiple different reasons and two percent because of disabilities (“Foster Care: Temporary out of Home Care for Children”, 2014).

Several different types of foster care homes are used in order to provide the children with the appropriate kinds of services. There is intensive treatment or therapeutic care, specialized care, respite care, emergency resource care, satellite or family care and supportive family living. Therapeutic care is offered to youth who have severe emotional and behavioral needs. Treatment is suggested for children who need more intensive behavioral management and mental health services. Specialized care is geared towards children who need behavioral management interventions. Respite care is a type of care that is short term and a way for the current foster
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home to have a break. This type of care can last up to seven days. Emergency resource care is also short term and is where children stay if they need to be immediately removed from their caregiver’s homes. The most common type of care is satellite or family care (“The Different Types of Foster Care”, 2014). Satellite foster homes are “foster family homes recruited, trained and licensed by a child placing agency” (State of Kansas Child Placing Agency, 2012). This type of care is used to offer a child a place to stay until a permanent home can be set up. Children leave satellite care to reintegrate with their families, live with a relative, start a new life with an adoptive family or can choose to live independently. Supportive family living is catered towards children with intellectual or developmental disabilities (“The Different Types of Foster Care”, 2014).

Half of the children in the foster care system in Minnesota are made up of youth who are 12 and older. Approximately 44% of the total foster care population is located in the Twin Cities seven county area. Children of color are overrepresented in the foster care system. In 2013, the foster youth population was 47% white, 20% black or African American, 17% Indian or Alaskan Native, 2% were Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 9% Hispanic and 13% identified as two or more races (“Foster Care: Temporary Out of Home Care for Children”, 2014).

Aging Out

Aging out of foster care can be a very difficult time for many youth. ‘Aging out’ or ‘opting out of care’ refers to the process in which youth have been part of the state foster care system and have either reached the age of 18 or 21, or they have finished high school. These youth have not found a permanent home through adoption, have not been reunited with their biological families and have not chosen to live independently through the foster care system. At the time of aging out, the state no longer provides funding to these individuals or their foster
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families. Many youth leave their foster families for a variety of reasons and are forced to survive on their own. Some foster families cannot afford to continue to raise the foster child because of the lack of funding and other times youth are ready to be done with the foster care system. Either way, these youth are not prepared to live independently as evidenced by the rates of homelessness, incarceration, lack of educational attainment, lack of employment and early parenting (Craft, 2014).

Funding for Foster Youth

When youth are in foster care, their foster families receive funding from the government in order to help support the child. In the state of Minnesota, there are basic foster care rates and Difficulty of Care (DOC) supplements. When a child enters foster care, a DOC assessment is conducted to determine what rate of funding the family will receive for caring for the child. The basic rates in Minnesota in 2009 ranged from $21.06 to $25.09 per day. Only 14% of youth in Minnesota receive the basic rate. There are six DOC levels and the rates for these levels range from $21.28 to $74.59 per day (Davooght & Blazey, 2013).

Generally, as a child increases in age, the amount per day increases as well. Foster families who are receiving the basic foster care rate, are receiving less money than it costs to raise a child of that particular age in Minnesota. In the state of Minnesota, on average, families are receiving approximately 91.16% of the estimated cost to raise a child of a particular age. Percentages across the country range from 42% to 145% (Davooght & Blazey, 2013).

The funding provided to foster parents, by the government, is meant to be used for food, clothing, shelter, daily supervision, school supplies, personal incidentals and reasonable travel to the child’s home for visitation. Families can apply for grants to receive additional funding to
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send foster youth to summer camps, pay for high school graduation, and buy class rings, books and more (Davooght & Blazey, 2013).

As of January 2015, the state of Minnesota will be implementing Northstar Care for Children that will change how benefits are provided to foster families, relative care and adoptive families. Currently, benefits decrease when children are put into relative care or are adopted. Northstar Care would provide the same level of funding in order to encourage more permanent living situations for children. With this, a new assessment will be used which is referred to as the Minnesota Assessment of Parenting for Children and Youth (MAPCY), instead of the DOC. The MAPCY focuses on how the caregivers meet the child’s needs. It assesses the extra care and attention provided to the child in order to meet their special needs. The same assessment tool will be used to evaluate foster homes, relative care and adoption homes (Northstar Care for Children, 2013).

Resources for Foster Youth Aging Out

There are some programs throughout the United States that do assist foster youth in meeting their basic needs as well as developing job skills. In 1999, the Foster Care Independence Act allowed foster youth to receive health care through Medicaid until the age of 21 (Gardner, s2008). The Affordable Care Act (ACA) was passed in 2012. It allows youth who have emancipated from foster care to access Medicaid until the age of 26. Because non-foster youth are allowed to stay on their parents plan until the age of 26, the government thought it would be important to allow foster youth to do the same, despite their lack of family support (Child focus Inc., 2013).

Through the Chafee Foster Care Independence program, foster youth can access independent living services. In 1999, this program expanded and provided double the funding to
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states to assist with independent living programs. The states were allowed to disperse their funding to the programs of their choice. The Family Unification Program (FUP) is another federal resource that foster youth can access. This program offers housing assistance and transitional assistance for youth who have exited foster care after the age of 16. Youth ages 18 to 21 can access these services. Housing vouchers are given, but are time-limited. YouthBuild is a national organization that provides high-risk youth with the opportunity to build job skills by learning housing construction. These youth build or reconstruct affordable housing for people who have very low income or are homeless (Gardner, 2008).

Outcomes of Foster Youth

Of 23 to 24 year olds who have aged out of the foster care system, only a quarter reported feeling very prepared to be self-sufficient after leaving care. Research suggests that the majority of youth who are leaving care are not acquiring the life skills or interpersonal connections in order to be successful after aging out (Courtney, Dworsky, Lee & Raap, 2010).

Criminal involvement. In California, approximately 1/3 of foster youth had involvement in the criminal justice system. In June of 2008, 14% of inmates in California prisons had spent time in foster care at some point in their lives. Of the 14%, 70% left foster care between the ages of 13 and 19. About 21% had aged out of the foster care system. The majority of these individuals were sent to prison more than 5 years after leaving care (California Senate Office of Research, 2011).

Youth who have been in foster care are disproportionately represented in the juvenile justice system and the criminal justice system. This could be because the child welfare system, educational system, mental health system and juvenile justice system are not in coordination with each other and are not taking preventative measures. Preventing involvement in the juvenile
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justice system and criminal justice system requires a few simple factors including: a safe and supportive environment for youth to spend their time, positive role models or mentors that believe that they are capable of a bright future, and community engagement and participation. Promoting job skills and employment opportunities is another way to help prevent involvement in these systems. Finally, a positive attachment to a supportive adult reduces the chances of a child being involved in the juvenile justice or criminal justice system (Krinsky, 2010). Krinsky (2010) recommends that youth at risk have educational stability, support, prompt assessment for educational and mental health needs and individualized mental health services.

**Substance use.** Alcohol and marijuana use among foster youth is lower or the same compared to non-foster youth of their same age; however rates of Substance Use Disorders (SUD) among foster youth are significantly higher than the general population (Narendorf & McMillen, 2010). “Lifetime substance use of opiates, amphetamines, crack/cocaine, and hallucinogens were substantially higher” in foster youth than in the non-foster youth population (Braciszewski & Stout, 2012). Foster youth also experiment with drugs, alcohol and more dangerous substances at an earlier age than their non-foster youth counterparts. Research suggests that exiting foster care can instigate a substance use problem (Braciszewski & Stout, 2012).

**Mental health.** Mental health issues are highly prevalent in the foster care population. The rate of mental illness is disproportionately high in comparison to non-foster youth. Approximately 54.4% of foster youth in 2005 had mental health problems including depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), panic disorder, drug dependency and social phobia. Over half to three fourths of the population had severe behavioral or social competency issues that require mental health services. Approximately 30% of foster youth had been diagnosed with
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PTSD which makes it the most common mental health diagnosis among the foster care population. The rate of PTSD among this population was twice as high as United States war veterans at this time (Pecora, Kessler, O'Brien, White, Williams, Hiripi, & Herrick, 2006; Orlando, 2014).

**Support.** Foster youth reported their perceived level of support (both emotionally and physically) as low compared to youth who had never spent time in foster care. Few people encouraged them to attend a postsecondary education program. Foster youth did report receiving most of their support from the school and foster care staff in pursuing a postsecondary education (Bryant, 2012). For non-foster youth, they received their greatest support from their biological families. Foster youth reported that school staff and foster care staff were key in finding sources of funding for education, selecting a major and choosing courses. With non-foster youth, their biological families assist them with these things as well as school staff (Bryant, 2012). For former foster youth between the ages of 23 and 24, about one quarter reported having enough people in their social network to turn to for help. Of this same population, 81% reported contact with their biological family at least one a week (Courtney et al., 2010).

The most significant predictors of perceived social support include a foster youths’ social support from their foster family, the encouragement they receive from their biological family, mentors and most significantly, school staff. Placement status is also a significant predictor of perceived social support (Bryant, 2012). Previous research suggests that foster youth can accomplish so much with some social support. It also suggests that it is necessary to strengthen the quality and consistency of relationships with family, friends, school and foster youth staff in order to increase success among this population (Bryant, 2012).
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Research suggests that foster youth lack permanency and opportunities for positive youth development, which make it difficult to become self-sufficient. Supportive relationships help youth acquire independent living skills as well as learn ways to maintain their own emotional health. Through engaging in relationships, foster youth can gain a sense of competence, usefulness, belonging and empowerment. Foster youth not only need a supportive environment, but they also need opportunities for leadership and developing life skills (Scannapieco, Connell-Carrick, & Painter, 2007). The connections that youth build while in foster care, can help foster these qualities and skills for youth so that they can become successful after leaving care.

**Educational attainment.** Former foster youth are less likely to earn their high school diploma, go to college and secure employment. According to the Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth (2010), 23 to 24 year olds who aged out of the foster care system were three times more likely not to have a high school diploma, half as likely not to complete any college and 1/5th as likely to have a college degree compared to their non-foster youth counterparts. Approximately 1/3 of this population had completed at least one year of college, yet only 6% had a two or four year degree. A quarter of this population had not received a high school diploma or a GED (Courtney et al., 2010).

**Employment.** Employment is another area in which former foster youth struggle after aging out of the foster care system. The Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth (2010) revealed that less than half of 23 to 24 year olds were employed. About a quarter of the youth had no income from employment in the last year. Most of the youth who were employed, were not making a livable wage. The median earnings of those who were working was $8,000. About 92% of non-foster youth at this age are employed and median earnings are $18,300 (Courtney et al., 2010).
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Former foster youth struggle to earn the same income as the general population, even with the same level of education. It was found that youth who had spent time in foster care earned approximately half as much as their peers. Former foster youth on average earned $14,148 and non-foster youth earned $28,105 excluding the zero income earners. When the zero income earners are added, foster youth earned $9,969 and non-foster youth earned $22,169 (Okpych & Courtney, 2014).

There are many possible explanations for this gap in economic earnings. Educational instability, mental health challenges, early parenthood and housing instability are all possible explanations. Research suggests that foster youth are more likely to attend underperforming secondary and postsecondary schools which could also provide a lack of opportunities for students (Okpych & Courtney, 2014).

Relational Permanency

Relational permanency is a sense of a permanent home and family. It is key in order for a child to grow up to be a healthy and successful adult in society. For permanency to be achieved, a child needs an adult who is committed to their long-term success and willing to go to their school meetings, check on their grades, go to their sporting events, and be present in their lives. Youth need a network of support in order to achieve a sense of permanency which could include family, friends and other supportive adults (Williams-Mbengue, 2008).

While a child is in foster care, it can be difficult for them to feel a sense of permanency as they frequently change foster homes. About 73% of children who have been in care for longer than four years, have had at least three different foster home placements. These frequent moves can cause a loss of relationships with their support network. The loss of these relationships can cause emotional and behavioral issues in children (Williams-Mbengue, 2008).
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In a study conducted by Lenz-Rashid (2009), she found that the majority of foster youth interviewed felt lonely while in foster care. They reported feeling isolated from their siblings and having a lack of emotional attachment to others. Research suggested the importance of emotional, supportive and permanent connections for foster youth (Lenz-Rashid, 2009).

**Barriers to permanency.** There are many barriers to permanency for foster youth, especially emotional permanency. Social workers are trained in finding permanent housing for foster youth, but not on finding emotional permanency. Another barrier is the little research that has been done on permanency interventions. There is little to no evidence on which interventions are effective; therefore, interventions are being used that might not even be beneficial to foster youth. Working with an adolescent on finding permanent emotional connections can pose a challenge as in this stage of development; adolescents are not always willing to admit they would like to connect with others. Along with these obstacles to finding permanent emotional connections, staff turnover among social workers decreases the trust youth have with their social worker, and limits the emotional connectedness that is possible. High caseloads and burnout rates contribute to this turnover among staff working in child welfare (Lenz-Rashid, 2009).

Attachment can be a barrier to relational permanency. The evolutionary theory of attachment suggests that children are born seeking attachments with others as these attachments help the infant survive. Children require not only food, but care and responsiveness from adults. The attachment figure in a child’s life provides them with the security to explore the world. If a child does not form an attachment or it is disrupted, the child suffers consequences in the future such as aggression or reduced intelligence. The attachment children form early on provides the prototype for relationships that the child will create in the future. The critical period for the initial attachment is when children are between the ages of zero and five. Because many foster
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Youth have disrupted attachments early on due to neglect or abuse, they may not know how to form trusting relationships with adults (McLeod, 2009).

Resilience

Resiliency is not a personality trait, but an ability to overcome obstacles. Resiliency lies in each individual and can be brought about through protective factors. Protective factors can be provided by a child’s family, school and community. The family can foster resiliency by believing in the child’s ability to be successful, providing individualized attention, helping the school and the community see the child’s strengths, and encouraging their strengths, interests and goals. The school can foster resiliency by providing individualized help, believing in the child’s ability to be successful and helping their family see the child’s strengths and talents. The community can help foster resiliency by providing connections to resources including access to employment, education, housing, etc. (Benard, 2004).

Key Characteristics of Resilience. A study was conducted with academically successful foster youth who had at least junior standing at a four year postsecondary institution. Through studying successful foster youth, the researcher was able to find out what characteristics these youth had in common. Resilience was evident among this population. The participants in this study received few mental health services, special education services and had little to no involvement in the criminal justice system. This suggests these youth had few risk factors with mental illness or educational disabilities (Hass & Graydon, 2008). Another key characteristic was that this population sought out social support across multiple settings. They recognized the key role that others played in their own successes and despite their difficult circumstances, felt grateful for the support of others. These youth were able to identify supportive people to help them identify their own strengths. Research suggests that these youth were skilled in recruiting
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the support they needed in order to be successful. Thirdly, this population of foster youth was
highly involved in their communities, schools and with their families. They became agents in
their own lives and felt their lives had purpose. Through involvement in their communities,
school and families, these youth likely gained problem solving skills and decision-making skills
that helped them get where they are today. Finally, they had goals for their future and felt that
they were capable of achieving their goals. Surprisingly, this population of successful foster
youth had little confidence in their own abilities to cope (Hass & Graydon, 2008).

Importance of Education

Level of educational attainment plays a significant role in obtaining financial security.
Data reveals the general population’s employment rates and earnings vary dramatically by level
of education. Not all gaps between levels of education are equal. The biggest gaps lie between
some high school and a high school diploma, and some college and a two or four year degree. It
was discovered that there is no gap between those who have no high school diploma and those
who have a GED (Okpych & Courtney, 2014).

Success in Postsecondary Education

Research demonstrates that first generation college students have lower grade point
averages (GPA) than students who have at least one parent with a four year degree. An
intervention focused on the value of difference was used with a group of continuing generation
and first generation college students. The continuing generation and first generation students in
the intervention group received a workshop focused on how difference matters, and encouraged
these youth to access the proper tools and resources in order to be successful in college. The
control group did not receive any intervention. Both intervention groups saw an increase in their
end of year grade point averages compared to the control group (Stevens, Hamedani, & Destin,
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2013). The interventions groups also saw improvement in their overall mental health and engagement levels. They experienced less stress and anxiety and were more engaged in academic and social activities compared to the control group. The average GPA for first generation college students was 3.16 and 3.46 for continuing generation college students. The intervention group increased their average GPA’s to 3.4 for first generation students and 3.51 for continuing generation students. Research suggests that accessing resources at school helped increase their GPA’s and improved their overall involvement on campus. This led to better mental health compared to the control group (Stevens et al., 2013).

One of the biggest challenges with former foster youth is college retention. There is little to no research done on foster youth support programs in postsecondary institutions; however, there is an assumption that support programs help and therefore there has been a growth in such programs. University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) has programs specifically tailored towards youth who have spent time in foster care. They offer youth year-round living arrangements in the dorms, campus jobs, academic and therapeutic counseling, tutoring, health insurance, health care, bedding, towels, cleaning products, toiletries, and occasionally other perks such as free snacks or free paper. School breaks can be a very difficult time for former foster youth who have nowhere to go over the holidays and in the summers. They may not have the means to afford simple things such as bedding, towels, paper, snacks and cleaning products. Foster youth frequently do not have health insurance or access to health care. Non-foster youth currently can stay on their parent’s health care plan until 26, but foster youth do not have that luxury. There is an assumption that by offering these services to former foster youth, they will be able to remain in school and finish their degree (Winerip, 2013).

John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Act
The John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 was established in response to the need for additional assistance for youth aging out of foster care (youth ages 18-21). The goal of the program was to help youth achieve self-sufficiency. The Act is meant to provide assistance with education, emotional support, connections to supportive adults, housing and offer help managing finances (“John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program”, 2012). In the state of Minnesota in 2012, $1,650,999 was allotted to be used for the Chaffee Foster Care Independence Program (“State Pages-Minnesota”, 2013).

**Education and Training Vouchers Program**

The Educational and Training Vouchers Program was added to the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act in 2002 in order to assist foster youth and former foster youth in paying for postsecondary education and the expenses associated with it. The law authorizes $60 million to be used for the Education and Training Vouchers Program. Up to $5,000 can be awarded to an applicant each year. Funds are awarded on a first-come, first-served basis. Eligibility for youth differs for each state (“John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program”, 2012).

In the state of Minnesota, Educational and Training Vouchers funds can be used for school “tuition, fees, books, housing, transportation and other school-related costs and living expenses. Funds are to complement the student’s own efforts to secure financial assistance to attend postsecondary school” (“Adolescent Services”, 2014). Youth who qualify to apply for an Educational and Training Voucher in Minnesota need to be under the age of 21 at the time of the application deadline, and have been accepted into a postsecondary institution of higher education. They also need to have been in foster care on or after their 16th birthday and continue to be in foster care until age 18, be in foster care on/after age 16 when they were adopted or a
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relative or kin accept a transfer of custody, or be under state guardianship on their 18th birthday ("Adolescent Services", 2014).

The ETV is making an impact on youth in foster care and former foster youth in the state of Minnesota and across the country. The ETV Program not only provides students with financial aid, but also provides a strong support system and academic support when needed. Some former recipients expressed gratitude for the support they received from their ETV coordinator. One girl stated that, “she stayed on top of me and pushed me when I needed it” ("Eight States Have Partnered with FC2S to Help Current and Former Foster Youth Pay for College and Provide the Support they Need to be Successful”, 2013). Other youth also advised that the Education and Training Vouchers staff assisted them with setting goals and provided a lot of helpful advice throughout their program. The staff also assisted youth in accessing campus and community resources and taught them how to balance family life and school. The program strives to educate youth, social workers, educators and other concerned adults about the struggles foster youth face in accessing higher education ("Eight States Have Partnered with FC2S to Help Current and Former Foster Youth Pay for College and Provide the Support They Need to be Successful”, 2013).

There is little research on the Education and Training Vouchers Program in Minnesota. A survey was conducted in 2011, but due to the government shutdown, the response rate was low. Hill and Peyton (2011) surveyed 33 current and former foster youth recipients between the ages of 18 and 25. They found that over 60% of the ETV recipients lived with their foster families when they applied for the ETV program and 21% lived with relatives. These recipients reported that they received a lot of support from the ETV program, their significant others, social workers and from their foster families for their postsecondary education. Only 36% reported receiving
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additional training, supports or services from the county prior to leaving care to help with the transition out of care. With this, 64% of these youth reported not receiving any supports, services or training to help with their transition out of foster care. It was reported that 100% of the youth who were not currently in school, had finished their postsecondary program (Hill & Peyton, 2011).
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Conceptual Framework

Resilience Theory

This study was strongly influenced by resilience theory. Resilience is the ability to cope with internal and external stresses (Yost, 2005). Resilience theory recognizes the “strengths that people and systems demonstrate that enable them to rise above adversity” (VanBreda, 2001). Resilience is often seen as a quality that some people have and others do not. In resilience theory, resilience is seen as something that lies within each individual and system. It recognizes resiliency is not a personality trait and that it is part of normal human development. Resilience is seen as something that is very ordinary but needs protective factors in order to be brought about (Benard, 2004).

Fostering resiliency in children is very important. Resilience theory recognizes social competence, problem solving, autonomy and a sense of purpose can help foster resiliency. These core elements go across culture, religion, gender, geography and time (Benard, 2004). Protective factors are also crucial in fostering resiliency. Protective factors are “supports and opportunities that buffer the effects of adversity and enable development to proceed” (Benard, 2004, p. 8). Protective factors can be implemented in the family system, school system as well as in the community. There are many common actions across systems that people can do to foster resiliency. Teachers, parents, social workers, psychologists, and nurses can check in often with the child, be warm and affectionate, get to know the hopes and dreams of the child, believe that the child can be successful, help others see the student’s strengths and advocate for the child. Offering individualized help and connecting youth to community resources such as education and employment is also critical (Benard, 2004).
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The Education and Training Vouchers program seeks to foster resiliency in foster youth by giving them the opportunity to attend postsecondary education. This program allows youth to take charge of their learning and also provides support to students throughout their education. Research suggests that youth who have an active role in decision-making in their lives can go from being a victim of circumstance to thriving, despite how they grew up (Hass & Grayden, 2008). The ETV also supports youth in setting goals and achieving their goals. It helps them recognize they have value and have a purpose in their lives. These characteristics are seen in some of the most resilient populations (Hass & Grayden, 2008).

In this study, this researcher will be looking at what helps youth become successful and attend postsecondary education. This researcher will also be looking at what characteristics and supports are common among foster youth who are involved in the ETV program and those who have earned their postsecondary degrees.

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory also directly applies to this research study. Attachment is a bond between two people that lasts across time and space. It is possible for one person to attach to someone else who does not feel the same way. It does not have to be reciprocal. John Bowlby (1958) is responsible for creating attachment theory. According to Bowlby (1969), children will seek closeness with an attachment figure when they are feeling scared or upset (McLeod, 2009). When adults feel attached to children, they respond sensitively to the child’s needs. Attachment theory explains how the parent-child relationship effects development. The attachments children have when they are younger provide the framework in which the child will develop relationships in the future. Disruption in attachment can negatively impact a child’s development including their intelligence and aggression towards others (McLeod, 2009).
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Attachment theory strongly influenced this study as it plays a crucial role in how foster youth attach to other caring adults. Because many of these children have experienced abuse and neglect in their early childhood years, they may have difficulty trusting adults or other people. Adults and caregivers early on did not provide a safe environment for the child; therefore, the children did not receive the message that adults can keep them safe.

In order for foster youth to grow into successful adults, research suggests that relationships are an important element (Lenz-Rashid, 2009). If children have trouble forming relationships because of disruption in early attachments, it can be more challenging to provide supports for these children in schools, foster homes and in social circles.
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Methods

The purpose of this study was to conduct a survey to gather information on the experiences of youth who have received or are currently receiving Minnesota’s Education and Training Voucher (ETV). There were three objectives to this research project. These objectives include: to assess what characteristics, connections and supports were common among youth who have participated in the ETV program, what the impact and efficacy of the ETV program was in Minnesota and what the postsecondary educational experiences were of youth receiving (or having received) the ETV.

Questions in this survey focused on addressing ETV recipients’ experiences before and after entering their postsecondary education program. The questions in the survey asked about the ETV recipient’s support systems while in high school and in postsecondary school. For example, the researcher asked about the level of support the youth received from social workers, teachers, biological parents, significant others, friends and extended family prior to entering and after entering their postsecondary program. The survey also addressed what happened once the ETV recipients started their postsecondary program. For example, the survey asked if the ETV recipient had ever experienced homelessness while attending postsecondary school, if they finished the program and who their support systems were while attending school.

This research model was based on a study conducted by Hill and Peyton (2011). They conducted an evaluation of Minnesota’s ETV program. This researcher used the same research questions and the same model in order to provide more insight into Minnesota’s ETV program and what experiences were common among youth who are receiving or have received the ETV. Hill and Peyton (2011) used a research model that was based off of Brinkerhoff (2002). Brinkerhoff (2002) focused on finding successful individuals and determining which
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characteristics and experiences were common among them. He found that by focusing on these elements, he could replicate those characteristics and experiences to help others. For this research project, it was assumed that those who have received an ETV have already had some success compared to other foster youth who have not attended a postsecondary education program. This study helped determine what experiences, characteristics and supports were common amongst this population so it can be replicated. This research also examined elements of the ETV program that participants felt were more successful.

Research Design

A survey methodology was used for this research study. A survey was sent out to all past and present ETV recipients who have a valid e-mail on file at the Department of Human Services (DHS) in Minnesota. Both qualitative and quantitative questions were asked on the survey. The individual voices offered thorough and rich data about the overall ETV experience.

Sample

A population sample was used as the survey was sent to 158 current and former foster youth who have received and are receiving an ETV, and had a valid e-mail on file at the Department of Human Services (DHS). DHS sent out e-mails to the ETV population. A population sample was chosen for this study in order to collect rich data on the experiences of ETV recipients as a whole. All youth surveyed were over the age of 18. All participants were either currently or formerly residents of Minnesota.

In total, 39 participants completed the online survey. Of the 39 participants, 28 (72%) were female and 11 (28%) were male. The average age of participants was 20.59 as the youngest participant was 18 and the oldest was 23 years of age. Of the total participants, 24 (62%) identified as Caucasian, 13 (33%) as African American/African/Black/Caribbean, five (5%) as
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Hispanic/Latino, four (10%) as Asian/Pacific Islander, four (10%) as Native American and one (3%) as other. Participants were asked to select all race/ethnicities that apply to them. All participants responded to this question on the survey. The races reported align with the overall races of the entire ETV population. With this, the data collected from this group was likely representative of the population sampled.

Data Collection

Quantitative and qualitative data was collected through an online survey using the University of St. Thomas’s Qualtrics tool. Sixty survey questions were created through collaboration with the ETV staff, an examination of the literature review and the conceptual framework. Survey question categories included demographics, housing, finances, emotional support and the Educational and Training Vouchers program. Not all questions were asked to all participants as some questions were only asked based on a particular answer to a previous question. The questions that branched off of other questions were designed to gain more information about a particular response. Survey questions can be found in Appendix A.

Survey data was collected using an online survey tool (Qualtrics). A link to the survey was sent to the ETV program staff and they sent out the link to all current and former Minnesota ETV recipients who had a valid e-mail address on file. The survey was sent to 158 recipients of the ETV. With 45 people starting the survey, the response rate was approximately 28.4%. With only 35 completing the survey, the response rate changed to 22.15%. There was approximately a 22.2% drop out rate. Data was collected in January and February of 2015. The e-mail sent out by the ETV staff included an introduction to the research project, informed consent materials and a link to the survey. Thus the identity of the participant was not revealed to the researcher. All participants were required to complete the informed consent process prior to accessing the
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If participants chose not to complete the informed consent process, they were not given access to the survey. A reminder e-mail was sent to the participants the first and second week after the initial e-mail. The survey was closed after 26 days.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

To ensure the safety and protection of all participants, an International Review Board (IRB) reviewed and approved the research study prior to e-mails being sent out to possible participants. Participation in the survey was voluntary. Those who participated in the survey were offered the opportunity to have their names entered in a drawing for ten $10 Target gift cards. The participants were asked to e-mail the ETV program coordinator once they completed the survey to let her know they had done so. The ETV program coordinator did not have access to their individual survey answers. The participants who were entered in the drawing were not revealed to the researcher. According to the IRB, this was not considered to be a vulnerable population.

The e-mail sent out to participants gave a brief introduction to the survey and contact information for the ETV program coordinator. Once the survey link was opened, participants started the informed consent process. They were offered a description of the study and its purpose, how their privacy would be protected and answers kept confidential, and the risks and benefits of participating in the study. Also listed in the informed consent process was the contact information for this researcher, the research chair, the IRB and the ETV program coordinator. If the participant agreed to participate in the study, they were brought to the survey questions. If the participant did not agree to the informed consent process, they were brought to the end of the survey and no further questions were asked. Participants were not required to answer any of the survey questions and could discontinue the survey at any time.
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To protect the anonymity and confidentiality of each participant, individual names were not requested on the survey and survey answers were not connected to each individual’s e-mail address. Participation in the gift card drawing was optional; therefore, participants could choose not to send an e-mail to the ETV program coordinator to be entered in the drawing. Results of the survey were kept on a password protected computer and were only accessible by the researcher. Other data was kept on an online program that required a username and password to gain access. Data from the survey will be kept until June 1, 2015 and then will be destroyed.

Data Analysis

Data from this study was analyzed using analysis tools provided by the Qualtrics tool including descriptive statistics to analyze quantitative answers. Data collected from open-ended survey questions were analyzed using content analysis techniques (Padgett, 1998). The data collected by the open-ended questions was analyzed for themes. The themes identified were compared with previous research data that was identified in the literature review to develop theories about foster youth and postsecondary education.

Strengths and Limitations

All research studies have strengths and limitations. Because the survey was sent out via e-mail, it limited the amount of people who may have received the survey. Some e-mails may have been invalid preventing recipients from receiving the survey. Also, the people who responded may have been the most successful or the least successful students, which could have skewed the data that was collected.

The response rate for this survey was low and is a limitation in this study. The original response rate was 28.14% but after some participants dropped out of the survey, the response rate dropped to 22.15%. Because the majority of recipients did not respond to the survey, the
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data collected may not be representative of the population. Non-response error is possible as not all participants who were sampled, provided data. There is a possibility that data gathered may be different than what the population as a whole would have provided (Visser, Krosnick & Lavrakas, 2000).

There is strength in this study as this researcher attempted to survey the entire population of ETV recipients in Minnesota over the last four years. This allows for an overall picture of what the experiences of these youth were in the program. Rich data was collected through open-ended survey questions as well as quantitative data. The questions were analyzed by multiple professionals in order to ensure they were not leading the respondents towards a particular answer (Padgett, 2008). Another strength in this study is that a draft of the survey being used had been used in a previous research study. This enhances the reliability of this research study.

Findings

A variety of demographic questions were asked in the online survey. Of the 45 participants who began the survey, 28 (65%) reported being out of foster care and 15 (35%) reported currently being in extended foster care. Two participants chose not to answer this question. The mean age youth reported leaving foster care was 18.68 with a standard deviation of 1.95. The mode was 21 and the median age was 18 for when youth left foster care.

Of the participants who reported being in extended foster care, 10 (71%) were currently living independently in a dorm or apartment and 4 (29%) were still living with their foster families.

Education

Participants were asked how many different high schools they attended prior to high school graduation or receiving their GED diploma. Twenty (49%) participants reported only
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attending one high school, 12 (29%) reported attending two, three (7%) reported three high schools, three (7%) reported four high schools, one (2%) reported five high schools and two (5%) reported six or more high schools. The median number of high schools attended was two. The mode number of high schools attended was one and the mean was two high schools.

Another survey question asked what setting participants attended high school. Twelve (30%) reported attending high school in an urban setting, 13 (33%) in a suburban setting and 15 (38%) in a rural setting.

Participants attended postsecondary education at a variety of institutions. Two (5%) participants reported attending a vocational training program, 22 (54%) reported attending a community or technical college, 18 (44%) reported attending a state college or university and 5 (12%) reported attending a private college or university. It should be noted that participants were asked to check all answers that applied to them. With this, some participants selected more than one option.

This researcher was not only interested in the current level of education that participants had received, but how their educational goals changed over time. Table 1 below displays what the past and current educational goals were of the ETV recipients who responded to the survey.

| Table 1 |
| Educational Goals When Starting College and Now |
| When You Started College | Now |
| N | % | N | % |
| Vocational Licensure | 4 | 11 | 3 | 9 |
| 2 Year Degree | 6 | 17 | 7 | 21 |
| 4 Year Degree | 20 | 57 | 10 | 29 |
| Graduate Degree (Doctor, Lawyer, | 5 | 14 | 14 | 41 |
College attendance was of interest to this researcher. Recipients were asked what has impacted their college attendance. Table 2 below displays this information. Participants were asked to check all reasons that applied to them; therefore, some participants selected more than one reason.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Which of the Following Areas Impacted Your College Attendance?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Check All that Apply)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health or Medical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemical Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pregnancy or Parenting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended Foster Care Ended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A survey question asked if participants were still attending college. Ten (28%) of participants reported that they were no longer attending college and of those ten, seven (70%) finished their college program. Participants were asked how long it took them to finish their college program. Three (43%) reported taking five or more years to finish their program; one student reported taking four years, one reported taking three, one reported taking two and one reported taking one year to finish his/her college program.

The participants who completed their college program were asked what degree they received. One (14%) student reported receiving a vocational licensure, two (29%) reported
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receiving a two year degree, and four (57%) reported receiving a four year degree. These same participants were asked if they have a job in their field of study. Four participants (44%) reported they have a job in their field of study and five (56%) reported that they did not have a job in their field of study.

Housing

Living situations of participants were of interest to the researcher. Participants were asked to select all living situations that applied to them while attending college. Participants who selected “other” were asked to explain the living situation. Three participants selected “other” for where they lived prior to starting college. The participants advised that two lived with adopted families, and another was living in a supervised independent living setting. The two participants who selected “other” after starting college, advised that one lived with his/her boyfriend’s parents and another participant lived with his/her adopted family. Data on the different living situations can be seen in Table 3 below.

<p>| Table 3 |
|---------------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Different Living Situations Prior to and after Starting College | Prior to Starting College | After Starting College |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group Home</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Foster Home</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative (Parents, Uncle/Aunt, Grandparents, etc.)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On my own or with roommates</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless/Couch Hopping/Staying with Friends</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorms</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apartment</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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In addition to participants’ current living situations, participants were asked if they have ever experienced homelessness while in college or after college. Three participants reported experiencing homelessness while in college. One participant reported being homeless over the summer and another participant wrote, “Wasn’t working out in my foster home so I stayed with some friends and family then got a place about 3 months in from starting college.” These students were homeless during holiday breaks, while school was in session and during the summer. One participant who advised that he/she experienced homelessness did not explain. Of those who had experienced homelessness while in college, this researcher wanted to know how many times they were homeless. One participant reported that they were homeless or couch hopping once and the other participant reported experiencing homelessness twice. These participants reported that the length of time they were homeless averaged between one and three months. Participants were also asked if they experienced homelessness after leaving college. One participant reported that he/she was homeless or couch hopping once for two weeks between leases.

Financial Support

Participants were asked to report their financial stress level while attending college. A scale from one to ten was used. One represented a low stress level and ten represented an extremely high stress level. Figure 1 below represents their responses.

**Figure 1. Financial Stress Level While Attending College**
The mean stress level was 6.95. The minimum was 3 and the maximum was 10. Five (13%) participants reported that the ETV did not take away some of their financial stress and 34 (87%) reported that the ETV did take away some of their financial stress. Eighteen (46%) students reported receiving financial assistance from another source besides the ETV while 21 (54%) reported not receiving any additional financial assistance. Table 4 below represents where 18 students received additional financial assistance. It should be noted that participants were asked to check all sources that apply to them. With this, some students selected more than one source of financial support.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources of Financial Support in College</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Federal Financial Aid</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Aid</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Funds</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Savings</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The majority of participants (70%) reported having a job while in college. One (4%) reported having three jobs, 7 (26%) reported having two and 19 (70%) reported having one job during a typical school year. Participants also reported how many hours a week they worked during a typical school year. The results are displayed in table 5 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Hours Students Worked in a Week During a Typical School year</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 or more</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This researcher wanted to know if students were working on or off campus. Twenty-three (85%) students reported having a job off campus and nine (33%) reported having a job on-campus. It should be noted that students were asked to select all that applied; therefore, some students may have reported working both on and off-campus.

**Emotional Support.** Participants were asked from whom they received the most emotional support prior to and after starting college. Table 6 below shows how the participants responded. Six students selected other and were asked to explain. For the participants who selected “other” for the emotional support they received prior to starting college, one student reported receiving the most emotional support from his/her therapist, and other participants listed multiple sources including grandparents, social workers, school staff, SELF program helper, friends, admissions counselors, foster parent and mentor. For those that selected “other” after starting college, two participants listed their therapist as the source of the most emotional
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support. Two participants listed numerous individuals as their main source of emotional support including foster parents, significant others, biological family members, social workers and friends. One participant reported that he/she was their main source of support and one student stated that they are still attending college and did not answer the question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Emotional Support Prior To and After Starting College</th>
<th>Source of Emotional Support Prior To Starting College</th>
<th>Source of Emotional Support After Starting College</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster Parent</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth Parent</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Worker</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandparents or other biological family member</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Friend</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRIO</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Staff (Social Workers, Counselors, etc.)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants were asked if this source of emotional support changed once they started college. Fourteen (36%) reported that this source of emotional support did not change and 25 (64%) reported that this source of support did change once they started college. Participants who advised that this source of emotional support did change were asked how it changed. Distance was one theme that was identified that impacted the main source of emotional support. One participant wrote, “Long distance support, phone calls vs. face to face.” Another student wrote, “I was further away…”, about the reason for emotional support changing after starting college.
A second theme was identified as *disconnect and change of services*. One participant stated, “I didn’t have the support I did while in HS.” A second participant reported, “I moved foster homes. I only have my therapist supporting me.”

The researcher wanted to know what college staff members provided students with emotional support while the student was in college. Table 7 below represents the students’ responses. Two students chose “other” and one described that his/her support came from coworkers and one reported that support came from his/her boss.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College Staff Members that Provided Students with Emotional Support</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Services/Counseling Staff</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Admissions Staff</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professors</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid Counselors</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resident Advisors/Resident Assistant (RA-In the dorms)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Advisor</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants were asked how this college staff member provided them with emotional support. The majority of students advised that these college staff members provided them with guidance. A student wrote, “My teacher helped me with an internship and was there for me when I needed help with personal problems”. A second student advised, “Was comfortable to talk with about certain issues and gave me good advice back and was able to emotionally help with those
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issues as well.” Finally, a student stated, “They were there to listen to me and help guide me through the process.”

Participants were asked if they had a mentor while in college, who it was and how often they communicated with their mentor. Fifteen (41%) reported having a mentor while in college while 22 (59%) reported that they did not have a mentor. Of those students who reported having a mentor, five (33%) reported communicating with them more than once a week, three (20%) reported communicating once a week, two (13%) two or three times a month, two (13%) once a month and three (20%) a few times. Participants reported that their mentors were friends, current and former social workers, youth workers, pastors, big sister from the Big Brothers Big Sisters program, boss/co-worker, life coach, and college faculty and staff members.

This researcher also wanted to know how these mentors were helpful. One student reported that his/her mentor, “gives advice, shared her thoughts honestly, showed empathy and understanding.” Another student wrote that his/her mentor, “helps me stay strong while in school”. A third participant wrote that his/her mentor, “helped me with [the] FAFSA, taxes, tuition, [the] ETV application and career choice”.

**Education and Training Vouchers Program**

Participants were asked how many years they have received the ETV. Eleven (31%) reported receiving the ETV for one year, seven (19%) for two years, ten (28%) for three years, six (17%) for four years and two (6%) for five or more years.

**Hearing about the ETV program.** ETV recipients were asked how they heard about the ETV program. Two (6%) participants reported hearing about the program online, 8 (22%) from a foster parent, one (3%) from a family member, 22 (61%) from a social worker or youth worker, 4 (11%) from a guardian ad litem, 6 (17%) from ETV staff and 3 (8%) from somewhere or
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someone else. No participants reported hearing about the ETV program from a school counselor or college staff member.

**ETV program being helpful.** The majority of participants advised that the ETV program has been helpful to them. Several themes were identified in the participants’ responses. Reduction of financial stress, allowing students to work less and assisting students in purchasing college necessities were the three themes that were identified. One student wrote, “[It] helped alleviate the fiscal burden of college.” Another student wrote, “I would not be able to afford to go to school at all without it. It has been essential to my education and I am very grateful.”

Many students reported that the ETV allowed them to work less. One student wrote, “The ETV program helps me by assisting me financially so I can focus more on school which is my top priority. I recently was able to ask for a break from my job as my school work load was beginning to be a lot and I would have never been able to do that w/o [the] ETV.” Another student reported, “My last 2.5 years of college were really demanding, causing me to work less… It helped me put more focus on my academics rather than focusing more on working…”

Finally, recipients reported that the ETV assisted them in purchasing college necessities. One student wrote, “ETV helped support me financially by making it so that I could afford to buy books, car insurance and take less loans.” Another student wrote that the ETV, “Paid for books and a bus pass.”

**ETV better serving students.** Participants were asked how the ETV program can better serve students. In the responses, three general ideas were presented. Students reported that the ETV program could be more helpful if the process was smoother to apply and get funds, there was more flexibility with spending and if additional support was provided. In regards to the process, one student requested, “Get them the money they requested when they request it instead
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of waiting a semester.” Another student suggested, “Sending in check requests that aren’t reimbursed/paid for two weeks is very inconvenient. The ETV staff isn’t as sufficient as they could be.”

Participants suggested more flexibility in spending the ETV funds. One student stated, “Letting me use the money for groceries”. Another student suggested, “Be more flexible with choices of expenses.”

Some students suggested providing additional support, such as mentoring to assist students. One student suggested, “depending on the student, a bigger award or more one on one interactions like a check in to see how the student in doing in school, if the student wishes to have that kind of interaction.” Another student reported, “Simply listening to them and hearing their stories”. A third student stated, “Not sure if some kind of counseling support is offered. If not, that would be helpful.”

Assistance in graduating college. Participants were also asked “what would be helpful for you in college to assist you in graduating from your program”. Many participants reported that they have what they need to graduate. Other students suggested additional emotional support from professors, a mentor or academic advisors. One student stated, “Helping the student look for a job of that degree once out of college. Or helping with a resume and composing one together”. Another student suggested, “More tutoring resources”. A third student reported that, “closer relationships with my professors” would be helpful.

Many students suggested additional financial support. One student suggested having, “more financial support beyond age 23.” A second student reported that, “getting help with paying bills” would be helpful in graduating. Another student advised, “I have very little funding. I need financial support and the ETV has helped so much with that.”
The purpose of this study was to gather information on the experiences of youth who have received or are currently receiving Minnesota’s Education and Training Voucher (ETV). There were three objectives to this research project. These objectives included: to assess what characteristics, connections and supports were common among youth who had participated in the ETV program, what the impact and efficacy of the ETV program was in Minnesota and what the postsecondary educational experiences were of youth receiving (or having received) the ETV.

Previous research suggests that foster youth have low educational attainment, high percentages of homelessness, low levels of perceived social support and are not prepared upon leaving care to be self-sufficient (Berzin, 2008; Delgado et al., 2007; Courtney et al., 2010). Research suggests that social support is key in being successful. Support is necessary to strengthen the quality and consistency of relationships with family, friends, school and foster youth staff in order for these youth to be successful. Through these relationships, foster youth gain a sense of competence, usefulness, belonging and empowerment (Bryant, 2012). With this, relational permanency was also suggested to be a key element in the success of foster youth (Williams-Mbengue, 2008). The data aligned with previous research on what helps youth become successful.

Key Findings and Considerations

Permanency. The foster youth in this research study were very well connected with supports. These youth went to high school in a variety of different settings including urban, suburban and rural areas. Stability appeared to have been a common characteristic of this group. Over 50% of the participants reported attending one high school, over 25% reported attending two high school and less than a quarter attended three or more high schools. With this, the
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population researched appears to have had some stability in high school and possibly within their foster homes. This contrasts with previous research about foster youth as the general foster youth population has little stability in placements. About 73% of children who had been in care for longer than four years have had at least three different foster home placements. When children change foster homes, they usually experience a loss of relationships (Williams-Mbengue, 2008). These relationships can include friendships and positive adult relationships. Because participants in this study reported attending fewer high schools, it is likely they had fewer foster home placements throughout high school than the general population of foster youth. Because these youth had more consistency and stability in their high schools, it is likely that they experienced relational permanency. Relational permanency is critical for youth to be healthy and successful as an adult in society (Williams-Mbengue, 2008).

Another common characteristic among the population surveyed is that they appear to have been emotionally well supported and have emotional permanency. Over half of this population lived with their foster families prior to starting college and 36% chose to stay with their foster families until the age of 21. It is likely that this population connected well with their foster families and were receiving emotional support from them. The majority of participants reported receiving the most support, prior to college, from their foster families and friends. After starting college, this population reported receiving most of their emotional support from their foster families and significant others. Also, 41% reported having a mentor which provided additional emotional support while in college. As stated in the literature review, supportive relationships help youth acquire independent living skills as well as learn ways to maintain their own emotional health. Through engaging in relationships, foster youth can gain a sense of competence, usefulness, belonging and empowerment. The connections that youth develop while
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in foster care can help foster those qualities and skills so that they can become successful after leaving care (Scannapieco et al., 2007).

**Changing relationships in college.** When these participants started college, many were separated from their families and friends. For 36% of these participants, their support systems changed. When asked about which college staff members provided emotional support, the results were alarming. On the positive side, almost half of the participants reported receiving the most support from their professors, and 17% reported receiving the most support from both psychological and counseling services and from their academic advisors. Unfortunately, 34% of participants reported not receiving any emotional support from any college staff members. Because support is so critical in the success of foster youth and young adults in general, it is unfortunate that so many youth experienced so little support from their school. Little research has been conducted on the educational experiences of foster youth in postsecondary education; however, it is known that college retention rates are low for foster youth. Few schools have implemented programs for foster youth to help with college retention. These programs offer additional support in hopes to keep students in school (Winerip, 2013). If foster youth had support that continued into college, they would be much more likely to finish their postsecondary education program. With this, postsecondary institutions should offer support services for former foster youth. Social workers working with these youth while they are in care, should help connect these foster youth to additional supports prior to leaving foster care so that they are well supported after high school.

**Financial support.** Not only do these youth appear to be well supported emotionally, but many of them also appear to have financial support to assist with paying for college. Just under half of the participants received financial support outside of the ETV program. The most
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common sources of financial support included federal aid, state funds and scholarships. Only one participant reported using family savings to assist in paying for college. Funding provided to general foster youth population is not meant to help pay for college so many youth have difficulty finding the resources to assist them. As stated in the literature review, the average foster family in Minnesota receives only about 91% of the total cost to raise a child and because of this, finances can be limited (Davooght & Blazey, 2013). Because of the limited funding, saving for college is not very feasible for foster families to do for their foster youth. Additional resources are needed in order to make college a possibility. It is likely that the population surveyed in this study were well connected within their communities. Someone likely taught them how to find financial resources in order to assist in paying for college.

Almost 75% of these participants reported having a job while attending college in order to help with finances. Sixty percent of these participants reported working between 11 and 30 hours per week and over a quarter of them reported working over 31 hours per week. These youth appear to be hard working and willing to put in the hours of work in order to earn money to pay for their education. With these youth being so hard working, it would beneficial to society to foster their potential by assisting them in completing a postsecondary education program. If these youth are better educated and are highly motivated, they could make a positive impact on society and give back to their community.

The 36% of foster youth surveyed who remained in foster care until the age of 21, likely had an advantage financially. They were receiving money for food, clothing and shelter while attending school. Even though staying in foster care requires continued work with a social worker, these youth likely benefitted from the additional support. As stated in the literature review, many youth choose to end foster care because they want to be done with the foster care
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system. Usually at the time of leaving care, youth are not prepared to live independently as evidenced by rates of homelessness, incarceration, lack of education attainment, lack of employment and early parenting (Craft, 2014). With this, it is important that foster youth take advantage of extended foster care in order to help them be successful in their future. Extended foster care should be encouraged not only by social workers, but by foster families as well.

**Motivation for College.** Many participants reported that they would not have gone to college if it were not for the support they received from their friends, family, social workers, teachers, etc. They reported that they also had personal motivation to avoid financial struggles in the future and wanted to make a better life for themselves. The majority of participants thanked the ETV staff for supporting them throughout their postsecondary education. As stated in the literature review, resilient foster youth are able to recognize the key role that others played in their success and despite their difficult circumstances, feel grateful for the support of others (Hass & Graydon, 2014). Because the participants in this study recognized all of the people who played a role in their success, it suggests that these foster youth are resilient. Their resilience likely helped them graduate high school and start a postsecondary education program. Because of their ability to recognize other people’s roles in their success, they likely sought out additional supports in their college experience to help them maintain success. Resilience can be brought about by protective factors such as support from their school, family and friends. This population reported a high level of support from family, friends and significant others; therefore, it is likely that these relationships acted as protective factors in fostering resiliency.

Educational goals for these participants changed from when they started college until now. The educational goals of the participants increased once they had completed some college. This is significant as it could imply that once students start college and see some success that
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they continue to create new goals that are more challenging. It is possible that if foster youth are given the opportunity to attend college right after high school, they may be more likely to continue on with their education after college.

**Education and training voucher program.** There are a variety of different people from whom these participants learned about the ETV program. The most common sources are the participant’s foster parents and from their social workers/youth workers. Unfortunately, not a single student reported hearing about the ETV program from their school counselor or a college staff member. This is alarming as these professionals may come into contact with students on a daily basis and may not have knowledge about this program to assist youth in paying for college. It is extremely important for foster parents and social workers to be educated about the options available for foster youth to attend college. It is also important that educators are aware of the ETV program as well.

The majority of participants reported that the ETV program has been helpful to them in providing financial support. Many participants reported that the ETV has allowed them to work less and focus on school. It has also provided them with an extra cushion to take away some of their financial stress. There was a participant who reported that the ETV program has not been helpful at all. The assistance that these participants report was provided to them goes along with the ETV goals to assist foster youth and former foster youth in paying for postsecondary education and the expenses associated with it” (John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program”, 2012). The extra cushion that the ETV provides likely allows participants to work less and focus more on school work. This assistance may help with college retention rates of students.
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When participants were asked how the ETV program could improve, participants reported that additional financial and emotional support would be helpful. Flexibility in spending was recommended. Students currently can use their funding on “tuition, fees, books, housing, transportation and other school-related costs and living expenses (“John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program”, 2012). Some participants also suggested that additional academic support would be helpful. Many participants reported that they have no complaints with the ETV program and recommended that the ETV staff keep doing what they are doing. These recommendations strongly support what research suggests about success for foster youth. It emphasizes the importance of support with this population and how critical it is to success (Lenz-Rashid, 2009).

Practice Implications

Based on the data collected through this research this population of foster youth is resilient. It is critical as a community to foster their resiliency to increase success among this population. Previous research has shown that resiliency can be fostered by believing a child can be successful, providing individualized help, providing connections to resources and just spending time with the child (Williams-Mbengue, 2008). The ETV youth are an example of what success can be made when resiliency is fostered. It is important that school teachers, foster parents, social workers and mentors are aware of their impact on the success of these children and do what they can to help them achieve success.

Based on the results of this study, the ETV program is doing great work with foster youth in Minnesota. As with any program there are always ways to improve and increase success within the program. This research study suggests that it would be helpful to provide a mentor or additional emotional support to foster youth receiving the ETV. Providing additional financial
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support and flexibility with spending would also assist these foster youth in being successful in college. Finally, it is critical that the ETV staff educate both high school and college staff members about the ETV so that all foster youth and former foster youth can be aware of the financial resources available to them. In this research study, not a single participant reported hearing about the ETV program from a school counselor or college staff member. By increasing the knowledge of school counselors and college staff members, more foster youth could become aware that they have additional financial resources. This knowledge could potentially encourage more foster youth to attend postsecondary education.

It was stated in the literature that some participants in other ETV programs received a lot of helpful advice and assistance in setting goals from the ETV staff (“Eight States Have Partner with FC2S to Help Current and Former Foster Youth Pay for College and Provide the Support they Need to be Successful”, 2013). Students in this study did not report assistance with such things. The participants in this study focused more on the financial support that the ETV program offered them. It would be beneficial to foster youth to provide additional supports such as providing advice and assistance in setting goals to help these youth stay on track for success.

Throughout all of the data collected on emotional and financial support, these youth are crying out for support. When they are reporting that they would like more support from the ETV program, it is important to understand that these youth are asking for more support in general. It is not necessarily an issue with the ETV program but is a systemic problem in child welfare. Youth need a network of support in order to achieve a sense of permanency. This support could include family, friends and other supportive adults. Permanency is key in order for a child to grow up to be a healthy and successful adult in society (Williams-Mbengue, 2008). If this information is already known, then the community needs to step up and focus on finding foster
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Youth both emotional and relational permanency through connecting these youth with the community and supportive adults.

It is time to invest in the future of foster youth by helping them financially and supporting them in attaining a postsecondary education. Foster youth are currently disproportionately represented in the juvenile justice and criminal justice system. The government is putting a lot of money into prisons in order to support former foster youth. It is critical that the government invest in foster youth when they are young to prevent this sort of behavior. Research suggests that providing a safe and supportive environment for youth to spend their time, positive role models or mentors that believe the child is capable of success and community engagement dramatically decrease involvement with the juvenile justice or criminal justice systems (Krinsky, 2010). Data collected for this study demonstrates what is possible when giving foster youth a bit of financial and emotional support. These youth have a bright future ahead of them because someone chose to invest in them.

Areas for Future Research

Little research has been conducted on the long term success of recipients of Minnesota’s ETV program. It would be helpful in the future to conduct a long-term study on where Minnesota’s ETV recipients are years after receiving the ETV. It would be interesting to determine whether or not this population of ETV recipients has a lower rate of homelessness, more positive relationships, better emotional health, less involvement in the criminal justice system, lower rates of public assistance and higher rates of educational attainment than the general foster youth population a decade after leaving college.

Another area for future research could be on the retention rates of foster youth in college. It would be beneficial to know what supports or characteristics are common among foster youth
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who finish their postsecondary education program versus foster youth who drop out. With the information collected from conducting this research, programs could be implemented in postsecondary educational institutions to better support foster youth in completing their program.

Researching college completion rates and extended foster care would be helpful to learn what impact extended foster care has on college completion rates. The results of this study could help encourage all states to adopt extended foster care practices and allow foster youth to stay in foster care until the age of 21.

Finally, additional research on how to foster resilience would be beneficial in order to assist the foster youth population. With this data, schools, foster families and county workers could implement additional supports in order to assist youth in gaining resilience to help them become successful.

**Conclusion**

Youth who age out of the foster care system are at a higher risk of being on public assistance, experiencing teen parenthood, being involved in the criminal justice system and having low educational attainment (Berzin, 2008). Some foster youth have seen some success by attending postsecondary education with help from Minnesota’s Education and Training Vouchers Program. These youth were provided with some educational stability, relational permanence and were highly motivated and supported. These common characteristics and experiences likely helped these foster youth achieve more success than the general foster youth population. By focusing on what characteristics and experiences are common among this population of foster youth, these elements can be replicated in order to help other foster youth become more successful and attend postsecondary education. The impact of the ETV program should not be overlooked in assisting foster youth in achieving postsecondary academic success.
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Appendix A

December 8, 2014

Dear Larissa:

I am pleased to confirm that you have the support of the Minnesota Department of Human Services Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program to carry out an evaluation of the Minnesota ETV program. I understand that you will be conducting an electronic survey of current and former recipients.

As a community partner in this evaluation project, I understand that ETV program staff will assist in the design and implementation of the evaluation project. This includes developing and refining the survey, disseminating the electronic survey to current and former ETV recipients. We may also act as advisors throughout the study, to ensure that it meets our shared goals.

I understand that you will not begin your research until you have obtained the approval of the Institutional Review Board at the University of St. Thomas. I also understand that the findings from your research will be shared through presentations and publication.

I do not anticipate any direct benefit or risk to our organization or program, nor to our staff and current or former recipients. However, I do believe that there will be indirect benefits from your research, in that you will be adding to the knowledge base about the implementation, efficacy, and impact of the ETV program.

I applaud you for undertaking this important work. I want to restate my support and remind you that I am here to help you in facilitating your work in completing your study.

Sincerely,

Jill Von Holtum
Education and Training Voucher Coordinator
Minnesota Department of Human Services
This is a study about Minnesota’s Education and Training Vouchers program. You were selected as a possible participant in this research because you have been or currently are a recipient of the ETV. Please read this page and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Larissa Peyton, School of Social Work, University of St. Thomas and Saint Catherine University.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of the Education and Training Voucher program (ETV), which is a scholarship available to young adults who have aged out of foster care. The study will examine the experience of the young people prior to starting their postsecondary education or training program, as well as once they are enrolled in postsecondary education and training. Data is being collected for this study though a survey of current and past ETV recipients.

If you agree to be in this study, you will complete a short (15-30 minutes) survey. There are no direct risks or benefits to participating in this study.

Compensation:

There is no compensation for participating in this research study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report we publish, we will not include information that will make it possible to identify you in any way. The types of records I will create include databases of survey responses. These will be kept on a password protected computer in a locked room and not shared with anyone other than the researcher.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the ETV program, the Minnesota Department of Human Services, or any of its contracting agencies. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time up to and until you complete the survey. Should you decide to withdraw data collected about you will not be used. You are also free to skip any questions.

Contacts and Questions

The researcher in this study is Larissa Peyton. If you have questions later, you may contact Ms. Peyton at (320)293-3650 or Dr. Hill at (651)962-5809. You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-6038 with any questions or concerns.

If you consent to participate in the survey please click HERE
Appendix C

Online Survey Questions

NOTE: The term ‘college’ includes college, university, trade, vocational and technical schools

Demographics

Age

☐ 18
☐ 19
☐ 20
☐ 21
☐ 22
☐ 23
☐ 24
☐ 25 or older

Race/Ethnicity (Check all that apply)

☐ African American/African/Black/Caribbean
☐ Asian/Pacific Islander
☐ Caucasian
☐ Hispanic/Latino
☐ Native American
☐ Other
☐ Prefer not to answer

Gender

☐ Male
☐ Female
☐ Transgender

Are you currently in extended foster care?

☐ Yes
☐ No

If not, at what age did you choose to leave foster care?

☐ 16
☐ 17
☐ 18
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☐ 19
☐ 20
☐ 21

If you are in extended foster care, what is your living setting?

☐ Foster home
☐ Group home
☐ Independent living, such as an apartment or dorm
☐ Other, explain ___________________

How many different high schools did you attend before high school graduation or GED diploma?

☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5
☐ 6 or more

In what setting did you attend high school?

☐ Rural
☐ Urban
☐ Suburban

What type of college program do or did you attend?

☐ Vocational training program
☐ Community/Technical College
☐ State College or University
☐ Private College or University
☐ Other: __________________

Housing

1. What kind of setting did you live most often while you were in high school?
   ☐ Urban
   ☐ Rural
   ☐ Suburban

2. What was your living situation before you started college?
   ☐ Group home
   ☐ Family foster care
   ☐ Relatives (grandparents, aunt/uncle, etc.)
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☐ On my own or with roommates
☐ Homeless/couch hopping/staying with friends
☐ Other: _______________________

3. What is or was your living situation while you were in college? (check all that apply)
☐ Group home
☐ Family foster care
☐ Relatives (parents, grandparents, aunt/uncle, etc.)
☐ On my own or with roommates
☐ Homeless/couch hopping/staying with friends
☐ Dorms
☐ Apartment
☐ Other: _______________________

4. Were you ever homeless or couch hopping while attending college?
☐ Yes
☐ No

If yes, how many times?

☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5
☐ 6 or more?

If yes, on average, how long was each instance of homelessness or couch hopping?

☐ A couple weeks
☐ Less than a month
☐ 1-3 months
☐ 4-6 months
☐ 7-12 months
☐ More than a year

If yes, when?

☐ During holiday breaks
☐ Summer break
☐ While school was in session
☐ Other. Please explain.

___________________________________________

5. Were you ever homeless or couch hopping after leaving college?
☐ Yes
☐ No

If yes, how many times?
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- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6 or more?

If yes, on average, how long was each instance of homelessness or couch hopping?

- A couple weeks
- Less than a month
- 1-3 months
- 4-6 months
- 7-12 months
- More than a year

**Finances**

6. Do you or did you have a job while attending college?

- Yes
- No

If yes, how many jobs do you or did you work during a typical school year?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4 or more

If yes, were your jobs on or off campus? (Check all that apply):

- on-campus
- off-campus

If yes, about how many hours do you or did you work a week?

- Less than 10
- 11-20
- 21-30
- 31-40
- 41 or more

7. What is or was your financial stress level while attending college?

Very High          Moderate          Very Low
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8. Do you think ETV (Educational and Training Vouchers) program funds helped take away some of your financial stress?
   - Yes
   - No

9. Did you receive financial assistance from anyone besides the ETV Program?
   - Yes
   - No
   If yes, from who? (Check all that apply)
     - Federal Financial Aid
     - Private Aid
     - State Funds
     - Scholarships
     - Family Savings
     - Work
     - Other: Please Explain _________________________________

Emotional Support

10. From whom did you receive the most emotional support from **when in foster care** (Check all that apply)?
    - Foster parent
    - Birth Parent
    - Social Worker
    - Grandparents or other biological family member
    - Mentor
    - Family friend
    - Significant other
    - TRIO
    - Friends
    - School Staff (Social Workers, Counselors, etc.)
    - Other: __________

11. Did this source of emotional support change once you started college? If yes, please explain.

_____________________________________________________________________

12. Who did you receive most emotional support from **after** starting college?
    - Foster Parent
    - Birth Parent
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☐ Social Worker
☐ Teacher
☐ Grandparent or other biological family member
☐ Family Friend
☐ Significant other
☐ TRIO
☐ Friends
☐ College Staff
☐ ETV program staff
☐ Other: ________________

13. Do you or did you receive emotional support from any college staff members (Professors, Counselors, Financial Aid workers)?
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No
   If yes, who? Please explain _______________________

14. Mentor: Someone who teaches or gives help to a person
   Do you or did you have a mentor while attending college?
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No
   If yes, how often do you or did you meet or talk with them?
   ☐ Not at all
   ☐ A few times
   ☐ About once a month
   ☐ Two to three times a month
   ☐ About once a week
   ☐ More than once a week

   If yes, who was it (such as friend, college staff, formal mentor program staff/volunteer)?
   ___________________________________________

   If yes, how was your mentor helpful?
   ___________________________________________

Education and Training Vouchers Program

15. How did you hear about the ETV Program? (Check all that apply)
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- Online
- School counselor
- College staff or advisor
- Foster Parent
- Family Member
- County or tribal agency social worker
- Private agency social worker/youth worker
- Guardian ad Litem
- ETV staff
- Other: ___________

Education

16. Are you still attending a college?
   - Yes
   - No

   If yes, what year are you in college?
   - 1<sup>st</sup> year
   - 2<sup>nd</sup> year
   - 3<sup>rd</sup> year
   - 4<sup>th</sup> year
   - 5<sup>th</sup> year
   - 6<sup>th</sup> year or greater

   If no, do you have a job?
   - Yes
   - No

   Is your job in your in your field of study?
   - Yes
   - No

17. How many years did you or have you receive an ETV?
   - One
   - Two
   - Three
   - Four
   - Five or more

18. Did you finish your college program?
   - Yes
   - No

   If yes, how many years did it take you to finish your college program?
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☐ One
☐ Two
☐ Three
☐ Four
☐ Five or more

19. When you started college, what was your highest educational goal:
☐ vocational licensure
☐ 2 year degree
☐ 4 year degree
☐ Graduate degree (doctor, lawyer, master’s degree, etc).

20. If you are in college, what is your highest educational goal at this time?
☐ vocational licensure
☐ 2 year degree
☐ 4 year degree
☐ Graduate degree (doctor, lawyer, master’s degree, etc.).

21. If you finished your college program, what degree did you receive?

☐ vocational licensure
☐ 2 year degree
☐ 4 year degree
☐ Graduate degree (doctor, lawyer, master’s degree, etc.).

22. Have any of the following areas impacted your college attendance? (Check all that apply)
☐ Mental health
☐ Health or medical
☐ Chemical health
☐ Family crisis
☐ Pregnancy or parenting
☐ Transportation
☐ Financial problems
☐ Housing
☐ Extended foster care ended
23. How has the ETV program been helpful to you?

24. How can the ETV Program serve students better?

25. What has helped you achieve your goals and attend college?

26. What would be helpful for you in college to assist you in graduating from your program?
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