

DROPPING OUT AND STOPPING OUT:  
EXPLORING THE BARRIERS TO EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS  
AMONG FORMER FOSTER YOUTH

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by

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## **Abstract**

In 2011, Texas State University (TXST) began FACES: Foster Care Alumni Creating Educational Success. FACES is a campus-wide support initiative aimed at increasing college retention and graduation rates of foster care alumni. Initial research has shown that FACES outcomes far out-perform national averages with retention and graduation rates of close to 56%, matching the typical college student at Texas State, as well as the national college average (Watt, Norton & Jones, 2013). Though this is a tremendous success, attention still needs to be paid to the students who enroll at Texas State University, but do not finish. Research is needed to understand what risk factors contribute to students' drop-out behavior so that FACES can make programmatic changes to better support these struggling students. This pilot, case study research project with former FACES/TXST students, includes data from semi-structured phone interviews exploring what barriers these students faced, what they are currently doing and what, if any, future plans they still have to pursue an education. Students who were identified for participation in the study were also given resources to address current risk factors, so that the study had a direct benefit to their lives and was not for the sole purpose of collecting data.

## **Introduction**

The foster care system's goal is to promote children's overall well-being by providing for their safety, health, stability and permanency. The foster care system strives to achieve permanency by reunifying children with responsible family members or by finding an alternative permanent arrangement such as adoption or guardianship (Szilagyi, 2015). Children can be placed in foster care voluntarily or involuntarily. Some parents or legal guardians feel as though they are unable to adequately care for their children and voluntarily place them in foster care.

However, less than 1% of children are voluntarily placed in foster care, which is most common in circumstances such as parental illness, hospitalization, incarceration, or because of a child's mental health needs (Szilagyi, 2015). Therefore, most foster care youths are placed in the foster care system due to the risk or actual occurrence of physical, sexual, and/or psychological abuse, neglect, or abandonment (Watt, Norton & Jones, 2013). Other reasons for foster care placement include parental substance abuse and addiction, parental mental illness, parental criminal activity, extreme family violence, extreme poverty, transient living situations or homelessness (Szilagyi, 2015). This means that a majority of children placed in foster care come from families with the most complicated needs and the least psychosocial and financial resources.

Children who live in a safe, stable environment with a strong sense of love and belonging are significantly less likely to be placed in foster care and to experience related traumas. Research shows that if a child has at least one adult in their life that is stable, loving, and attentive, he or she is much more likely to overcome trauma, stress, abuse, and neglect (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2000).

Despite fewer risk factors experienced by children currently outside of foster care, anyone is susceptible to tragedy which could require the intervention of the child welfare system. Examples include: the death or imprisonment of the child's parents or guardians, financial instability or medical conditions that affects the guardian's ability to care for the child. However, youth who are placed in the child welfare system often experience unique risk factors.

## **Risk Factors**

### **Factors Leading to Poor Health**

Foster care youth experience numerous barriers in accessing adequate health care. In fact, foster care children's health concerns are often neglected while in the same system that is supposed to remove them from neglecting homes (Szilagyi, 2015). Young foster children do not receive proper preventive health care while in placement, many significant problems often go undetected. Even if the health issue has been diagnosed, the children often go untreated. Numerous studies show that about 45% of children in foster care had one or more chronic medical problems, 37% required a referral to a specialist for additional evaluation and treatment, and 55% had delayed development (Simms, Dubowitz & Szilagyi, 2000). After a physical examination, about 92% had at least one physical abnormality, and 5% have had occult fractures that were not suspected by their caseworkers.

In addition, moderate to severe mental health problems were found in over 70% of the children, yet only about 16% had ever been treated with medication (Simms, Dubowitz & Szilagyi, 2000). Mental illnesses such as depression, conduct disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, attachment

problems, and anxiety disorders are very prevalent in foster youth. 15% of foster care youth have reported suicidal ideation, and 7% have reported homicidal ideation (Simms, Dubowitz & Szilagyi, 2000).

Although out-of-home care is able to protect children from neglectful and abusive situations at home, it is still a disruptive, invasive and costly option that does not always protect these children from neglect and abuse. While in their foster homes, 78.6% of children experience some form of neglect, 24.4% of children experience physical abuse, 12.3% are sexually abused, and 10.2% experience emotional abuse (James, Landsverk, & Slymen, 2004). In addition, 25% of foster children who have aged out experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (National Foster Youth Institute, 2017).

Unfortunately, most children who enter foster care have chronic medical, mental health, or developmental problems, yet many do not receive adequate health care. In addition, psychological and emotional problems usually worsen throughout the placement (Szilagyi, 2015). These health concerns reflect the neglect and abuse, exposure to poverty, poor prenatal care, prenatal maternal substance abuse, prenatal infection, family and neighborhood violence, and parental mental illness experienced by the child before placement (Simms, Dubowitz & Szilagyi, 2000).

### **Effects of Abuse and Neglect**

Children in foster care have disproportionately high rates of physical, developmental, and mental health problems and frequently have many unmet medical and mental health care needs (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2000). In addition, many children enter foster care at a young age when brain growth is most active. Experiencing complicated, serious physical health, mental health, abuse or neglect at such a vital stage

in their lives can be detrimental to later stages of development by affecting the way these children formulate attachment to caregivers and relationships with others, impacting how they comprehend abuse, neglect and stress, and influencing their decision-making processes (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2000). These physical, developmental, and mental health issues can make successful transition into higher education challenging for these youth, and therefore increases the chance of academic failure at the college level.

### **A Lack of Support**

After aging out of foster care, adolescents tend to lack financial, educational, and family support. Foster youth have difficulty completing primary and secondary education (Unrau, Font & Rawls, 2012). Foster youth often move to new foster care placements, which results in changing schools as well. Students could lose up to four to six months of progress in education each time they change schools due to a lack of coordination between school personnel and the child welfare system and due to the difficulty of transferring school credits from previously attended schools (Kirk & Day, 2011). Many foster youth are likely to drop out of high school or repeat a grade due to falling behind from transfers (Unrau, Font & Rawls, 2012). Also, foster youth often lack support from family members.

Individuals aging out of foster care system are significantly less likely to be able to depend on family members for shelter, adult guidance, and financial help than non-foster youth (Unrau, Font & Rawls, 2012). Higher education could be viewed as inaccessible due to these obstacles in primary, secondary and higher education for foster youth. Financial resources to pay for college is one of the reasons higher education is hard to access for foster youth (Unrau, Font & Rawls, 2012).



Many foster youth may be unaware of the possible financial resources available to them. Examples of these resources may include financial aid or the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program, which provides additional opportunities, funding, and other necessary resources in order to create a smooth transition out of the foster care system and into the higher education system. Benefits of this voucher include grants of up to \$5,000 annually, which last for five years or until the person turns 23 (Education Training Vouchers, n.d.). This program is successful in that it helps many students access and afford higher education, but the number of students that do attend higher education is still low, with only 2-3% of foster care youth obtaining a bachelor's degree (Watt, Norton & Jones, 2013). The policy's requirements are relatively restrictive and difficult for foster youth to meet (Sarubbi, Parker, & Sponsler, 2016). A recent report found that even personnel whose job it is to help foster youth obtain financial aid are confused about how the programs work and how they are financed (Sarubbi, Parker, & Sponsler, 2016). This policy is written with the assumption that foster care youth will attend college at the traditional age, right after high school, despite the fact that only half of foster youth have a high school degree (Watt, Norton & Jones, 2013). Also, most foster youth spend on average two years trying to reconnect with unsupportive parents, which uses up most of their eligibility time frame for the ETV (Unrau, Font & Rawls, 2012).

### **Description of the Problem**

Foster youth in the education system are a distinct subgroup of students who are at an increased risk for poor academic performance and failure (Kirk & Day, 2011). Nationally, only 50% of foster youth graduate high school, and although 84% of foster youth report they want to attend college, only 10% will attend. The college retention and

graduation rates of foster youth show that only 2-3% attain a bachelor's degree (Watt, Norton & Jones, 2013).

Complex trauma, placement instability and educational instability have led to negative educational outcomes for youth in foster care (Watt, Norton & Jones, 2013). Several foster care alumni studies show that without a lifelong connection to a caring adult, and these older youths are often left vulnerable to a variety of adverse situations. While transitioning from foster care into adulthood, 84% became a parent, 51% were unemployed, 30% had no health insurance, 25% had been homeless, and 30% were receiving public assistance (Watt, Norton & Jones, 2013). Research shows that one out of two children who age out of the foster care system will become dependent on substances (National Foster Youth Institute, 2017). In addition, 60% of men who age out of the system will be convicted of a crime, and 70% of young girls who age out of the system will become pregnant before they turn 21 years old (National Foster Youth Institute, 2017).

This issue affects all youth in the foster care system, those who may be placed in the foster care system in the future, and families who are trying to adopt these children. Annually, thousands of teenagers exit foster care in the United States without high school degrees or even family relationships that are stable; which evidently leads to a life of further struggling (Krebs & Picoff, 2006). As studies have shown, these youth who have the greatest need for higher education seldom attend college due to unresolved trauma or a lack of a support system (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2000; Sarubbi, Parker, & Sponsler, 2016).

A college education is associated with improved life outcomes, including: practical knowledge and skills, increased job opportunities, higher salaries, networking opportunities, and social capital needed to achieve stability and prosperity (Watt, Norton & Jones, 2013). This makes a college degree even more critical among foster youth because these individuals are much more likely than the general population to rely on public assistance, to abuse substances and become addicted, and to become homeless or incarcerated (Watt, Norton & Jones, 2013).

### **Supporting Theoretical Frameworks**

#### **Attachment Theory**

Attachment theory explains how people initially develop relationship patterns in response to their parents' parenting styles (Hutchison, 2017). This theory can be used to explain how foster youth develop relationships with their foster parents or caregivers.

A child's experience before placement can help predict how the individual will adjust emotionally in foster care and after foster care. For example, when infants' needs are adequately met, they are more likely to form a secure attachment with their caregivers (Szilagyi, 2015). At such an early age, this is the foundation for trust, and it is significant in forming relationships throughout later stages in life. Children who have experienced emotional neglect or physical abuse often form an anxious-ambivalent, avoidant or insecure attachment with their primary caregivers. This is because they may fear potential caregiver abandonment or fear potential abuse from their caregiver. Contrarily, children who have experienced a loving relationship with their primary caregivers are more likely to form beneficial relationships with their foster families. This is because they may

perceive the world as a safe place, with trustworthy people, and they may come to view themselves as worthy of love and trust.

### **Developmental Perspective**

The developmental perspective explains how human behavior develops throughout the course of life through complex interactions involving biological, psychological, and social processes (Hutchison, 2017). This perspective can be used to explain how foster youth change and stay the same over time.

It is not surprising that children in foster care experience numerous mental health issues and psychological difficulties. Transitioning into foster care can be a very difficult process for children, especially for younger children who do not understand why a seemingly random stranger has suddenly taken them to an unfamiliar setting that they must temporarily call home. Many children do not know the location of their parents or siblings, where they are going, when, or even if, they will be able to return home (Simms, Dubowitz & Szilagyi, 2000). They may be in pain from untreated medical conditions or recent abuse and are often hungry, dirty and tired. Also, some children feel as if they are being punished and take on unjustified feelings of guilt for separating their family.

At a young developmental stage, most non-foster youth children have stable homes and families and spend their time playing, learning, exploring and building relationships. Most of these children do not have to go through living with various families, attending various schools, not knowing where they will go next, worrying about potential abuse and neglect, and avoiding social interactions as a means of coping in preparation for the next foster home (Szilagyi, 2015).

After transitioning into foster homes, most children in foster care experience feelings of confusion, fear, apprehension of the unknown, loss, sadness, anxiety, and stress due to the painful experiences associated with the trauma of being removed from one's parents (James, Landsverk, & Slymen, 2004). The process of being removed from their family, even an abusive family, is traumatic for most individuals. Due to the trauma they experience in their youth, most foster care alumni have developmental problems that carry over into their adolescence and early adulthood (Szilagyi, 2015).

### **Social Constructionist Perspective**

A social constructionist perspective explains how people construct a sense of self, meaning, and a social life through interactions with others (Hutchison, 2017). This perspective can be used to explain how foster youth understand the world and their place in it.

Although there are many ways to adapt and react to a new placement, there are a few common patterns. Many children initially seem to adjust well to their new foster homes, despite the fact that they are likely experiencing emotional inner turmoil. However, after about three months, these children may begin to act out and test their foster parents' limits (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2000). Children do this in order to determine how much their foster parents care for them before allowing themselves to be vulnerable and form a trusting relationship. Contrarily, children may initially become depressed, aggressive, or withdrawn, despite their foster parents' efforts to connect (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2000). This is because these children are cautious and weary of growing too close to their foster parents at first. Fortunately, both scenarios can

lead to a strong, positive relationship if the foster parent reacts with sensitivity and understanding.

### **Addressing the Problem**

#### **Foster Care Campus Support Programs**

Amongst the many challenges foster youth face, there are support programs available that can be beneficial towards increasing their success in higher education. These programs are designed to recruit foster youth and provide support throughout their time at university. Several campus-based programs around the United States provide support through resource referrals, help with career planning, and financial assistance. Nearly half of the programs also provide coaching, tutoring, and counseling services (Geiger, Piel, Day & Schelbe, 2018). Engaging foster youth in these programs helps to raise their chances of success in higher education. This mentorship and guidance improves commitment to educational success, social bonding, performance in classes and deters risky alcohol and drug use behaviors (Salazar, Haggerty & Roe, 2016). The process of transitioning into adulthood from foster care can be incredibly difficult; however, providing programs to assist their success in college can be incredibly beneficial in increasing their chances of attaining a degree.

#### **About FACES**

In 2011, Texas State University began Foster Care Alumni Creating Educational Success (FACES). FACES is a trauma-informed, campus-wide support initiative aimed at increasing college retention and graduation rates of foster care alumni with a strengths-based perspective. FACES connects students with trained mentors to promote positive relationships, connection, advocacy and support (Texas State University, 2017). The

FACES student organization aims to connect students with one another through events and volunteer service opportunities. The program also provides students with information about available resources and opportunities both on campus and within the community.

Initial research has shown that FACES outcomes far out-perform national averages. Nationally, university graduation rates of foster care alumni are only 2-3%. However, FACES has tremendously improved retention and graduation rates of foster care alumni at Texas State University of close to 56%, which matches the typical college student at Texas State University, as well as the national college graduation average (Watt, Norton & Jones, 2013). FACES currently serves approximately 120 students who qualify for the tuition and fee waiver (Norton & Watt, In press).

Although FACES has accomplished tremendous success, attention still needs to be paid to the students who enroll at Texas State University but do not finish, in order to further improve educational attainment among foster care alumni. Research is needed to understand which risk factors contribute to students' drop-out behavior so that FACES can make programmatic changes to better support these struggling students.

## **Methodology**

### **Sample**

The sample for this study included foster care alumni who previously attended Texas State University, but who were no longer enrolled or dropped out before graduation. This study utilized a non-probability criterion sampling technique. The participants were recruited via email, phone, social media, and with the assistance of a gatekeeper who was involved in the FACES program, Dr. Christine Norton.

### **Research Design**

This pilot, inductive, qualitative case study surveyed students who formerly attended Texas State University through semi-structured phone interviews. The phone interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for a thematic analysis. All participant demographic data, phone interview recordings and transcripts will be stored in a password protected computer and kept securely for a minimum of three years on Dr. Norton's desktop computer. These interviews explored which barriers these students faced, what they are currently doing and what, if any, future plans do they still have to pursue an education.

### **Informed Consent and Ethical Considerations**

The research proposal #2018309 was granted approval by Texas State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) on 4/6/18 to ensure that no ethical guidelines were violated. The approved IRB form is attached. (Appendix A). The population is potentially vulnerable due to the increased likelihood of complex trauma, placement or housing instability and educational instability.

Participants' consent was obtained through a written consent form distributed through email and was addressed verbally over the phone prior to the start of the interview. The consent form is attached (Appendix A). The interview questions are also attached (Appendix A). As a safeguard, all participant information is confidential, and they have been assigned an alias to maintain consistency and to protect their identities.

Students who were identified for participation in the study were also given resources to address current risk factors, so that the study has a direct benefit to their lives and was not for the sole purpose of collecting data.



## **Results**

### **Case Study 1: Alexis**

Alexis is a female, Hispanic twenty-six-year-old who aged out of the foster care system. Currently, she is unemployed and is not enrolled at a different university. She has no spouse or children. She keeps in touch with her friends from TXST primarily over the phone and on social media. Alexis identifies her time at TXST as “the best of times” and “the worst of times”. She thinks it was “enriching” but felt like she “didn’t really appreciate what a privilege it was to be in school and be educated,” and she misses being in school.

While Alexis was attending TXST, she worked on campus for three years. She enjoyed her job and liked her co-workers. She studied Creative Writing because she loves reading and writing and feels that she is good at it. She eventually wants to write books and novels, and she has considered teaching in the future. Alexis reported that she felt as if her professors cared about her. In her English courses, she stated that “you’re sharing your writing and you’re sharing personal facets of yourself, your identity through your writing.” She said that although it was very personal, her professors were “super professional and accommodating.” She never felt as if they were judging her, and she felt that they were genuinely “invested in helping [her] become a better writer.” Alexis did not enjoy her larger lecture classes. She thinks that she did not learn much from these classes and wishes that the professors were more involved “in the teaching process.” Alexis also feels as though she had a very supportive relationship with her peers. She noted that she met “really cool people in class, and [she] wanted to go to class and engage

with them and learn with them.” She said that being around her peers is one of the main reasons that she misses being in school.

Dropping out of school was very sudden for Alexis. She felt like her mental health was declining one summer, so she took a semester off. “That semester turned into another semester and then another one, so I didn’t really mean to drop out, per say, but the time and distance separated me from my scholarly pursuits.” Alexis explained that she was in an “intense relationship” with a “narcissist” who “made it his effort to... torment [her] psychologically”. Although she is no longer in this relationship, she is still very affected by the relationship. She added that her ex-boyfriend has a lot of friends who have “had no problem interfering in her life.” She noted that she is moving away from San Marcos because she has “had a lot of people bully [her].” She said, “There’s a lot of just spitefulness, a lot of malevolence leveled at me, so I can’t be in school right now. I’ve got to get out of this town. I don’t know who is a friend at this point.” Alexis thinks that if she “hadn’t gotten into that one single relationship” that she would not have taken time off of school.

When asked about additional barriers that she faced while attending TXST, Alexis explained that she was not “equipped with enough support that a lot of traditional students have” because she did not have parents, “especially parents who went to college for themselves, so [she] felt like [she] was out on [her] own for the most part.” She also felt like she “didn’t have as much personhood as a lot of [her] peers. Not a lot of like autonomy or agency.” She explained “I never had certain experiences before I went to college. I couldn’t even go into a grocery store by myself without being monitored, so

when I went to TXST, there was a lot of freedom all at once, and I didn't really know how to handle it or where to start."

Alexis held an officer position in FACES. She mentioned that she had a lot of fun and met a lot of good people. The most helpful and valuable thing that FACES offered her was a support network of peers who had similar experiences that she could relate to. When asked if she had any recommendations for FACES, Alexis said that she felt that they were "very accommodating in helping [her] stay engaged to TXST" and that FACES provided her with helpful resources and support.

When asked what she would tell a student who was contemplating dropping out, Alexis advised that the student should "think it through and make sure that they are doing it for the right reasons...It's so subjective, I mean, people have to do what they have to do, But I would just urge them to do what they felt was right for themselves." She also thinks that students should "appreciate being in college while they have the chance to because...the big world is scary and daunting, and if you can just be in school and learn and have a chance at a better future, then I would encourage them to pursue that wholeheartedly and for them to follow their bliss."

Alexis doesn't "feel like she really left because it's still part of [her] life plan." She wants to take a few classes at a community college in another town to boost her academic standing and her academic confidence, so that she can return to TXST. In five years, she hopes that she would have either graduated or would have gotten really close to graduating. She explained, "In five years, I'm still going to be young, and right now, I'm just following my bliss and exploring what life has to offer outside of academia. But,

you know, graduating from college has always been and I think will always be a goal of mine. So if it takes forever, then I'm going to die trying.”

### **Case Study 2: Ben**

Ben is a White, twenty-seven-year-old who was adopted out of the foster care system at a young age. He is married but has no children. Ben graduated from TXST with a degree in Finance during the Summer semester of 2014; however, he had to “stop out” for one semester due to health issues. Currently, he is employed at an oil and gas contracting agency. Ben said, “Finally, I can say I like my job. It’s been a struggle the last few years, but I think I finally found the place I feel happy at.” He thinks this company is a good “cultural fit” for him, he “meshes well with the people that work there,” and “there’s really good management.”

Although he studied Finance while attending TXST, he works in the accounting field. He recently started a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) program at Austin Community College (ACC) so that he can become a licensed CPA, and he will finish this program in the Fall semester of this year. He did not return to TXST for his Associate’s in Accounting because TXST “wanted [him] to take like 30 hours of a bunch of extra hours that he didn’t technically need.” Ben explained, “I’d have to end up getting my undergrad in accounting and then taking some master’s level courses.” He felt like this was “too much work” because he could take both the master’s and undergraduate level courses that he needed in a year and a half at ACC. It would take him two to three years at TXST.

Overall, Ben had a positive university experience. He began college at a university in his hometown and transferred to TXST because he “wanted to get out of

[his] hometown and experience life in another city.” Also, he was dating his current wife who attended TXST, and “the distance was difficult.” Ben feels like he received “a really good education...made a lot of friends and had a lot of life experiences” at TXST. When Ben first attended TXST, he was a Graphic Design major. He felt like his grades were too “subjective...instead of a factual thing.” He considers himself to be “a very analytical person” and thinks that finance was “natural” for him.

Ben had a positive relationship with most of his professors at TXST, and he felt like they cared about him while he was attending TXST. He made an effort to get to know most of his professors on some level by introducing himself in the beginning of the semester and occasionally go to their office hours. Ben also had a positive overall experience with his peers. Ben held an officer position in the Financial Management Association. “I made a lot of friends that way. I really tried hard to be active and meet people. It's not always the easiest thing. But I think it has been good in the long run.” He mentioned that he had a lot of fun, and he was able to travel with this organization. He attended a few other organization’s meetings but was not as involved or interested in them. Ben said that he “stayed away from the fraternity crowd.” He is not on social media very often, and he keeps in touch with his friends from TXST primarily over the phone and in person. Some of his friends live in different cities, but some live nearby. They like to “hang out around town” and catch up a few times each month.

While Ben was attending TXST, he worked at several different jobs. He worked at his apartment complex, which gave him “a pretty good discount on rent” and then he ended up getting his real estate license to work at his friend’s office. The real estate job was his favorite because he had “a lot more freedom with his time.” He explained, “It

was all commission based and since San Marcos is such a booming town. You really don't have to try that hard to find business. They had a really good spot on campus. People just came in and you just help them as they walk in. I could do my homework while I was technically at work. Cause you're not paid hourly or anything like that. I really like that freedom.”

Ben was diagnosed with cancer on his second day of his second semester at TXST. He “wasn’t sure what to do or how to handle” the diagnosis, especially after “not knowing what it’s like living on your own for very long.” Ben decided to go back home and stay with his parents during his treatment process. He found a good doctor, the treatment went well, and he was able to return to TXST the very next semester. He is currently in remission.

When asked what he would tell a student who was contemplating dropping out, Ben said that he “would really ask them to analyze their situation...whatever reason is causing them to drop out” and “to really think about the long-term effects” because “some things seem like a really big deal now...it feels that way in the moment but to really think about the long term effects of dropping out versus the long term effect of staying in school.” Ben mentioned that he had a friend who he convinced to attend college. He gave him a place to stay “for about a year or so,” rent-free. He added, “We never expected anything from him. Just wanted to give him a good environment to be in so that he was able to make some good choices for himself.” Ben explained that his friend’s mom could not work, his family was not very financially stable, and “he had a lot of influence from his family to not go to school.” Ben said that his friend felt like it was

his responsibility to take care of his family, but Ben thinks “he was a really smart guy” who “could be a lot better if he had stayed in” school.

Ben remembered having a mentor in FACES that he met with a few times to talk about school. He said that “she was very friendly and helpful.” Ben mentioned that he “always kind of wanted to be” more involved with FACES than he was. He thought “it seemed like a really neat organization because [his] other college didn’t have anything like that who are from an adoption or foster care background.” He added, “I guess I didn’t make time to go to the meetings or anything like that. My main priority was school and that’s kind of all I did. I went to school and I worked. That kind of took up everything outside of school. If I wasn’t at school, I was at work.”

When asked what FACES offered him that he found to be most valuable and helpful, he noted that the mentoring program is “a really interesting and unique thing to have on campus, especially for people who are new to the town and don’t have a lot of friends” because “it provides them with an opportunity to break the ice and get out of their comfort zone a little bit.” Ben did not really know anyone except his wife, and he thinks that FACES helped him “be less of an introvert and try to make friends and just put myself out there.” Ben also remembered receiving many emails from FACES about various community events. He thinks that FACES should continue to “find things that bring people together and keep people engaged.”

Ben stated that he currently does not have any plans to pursue additional higher education in the future, but that he is “not opposed to going back and getting a master’s degree” if he needs to. In his current state, he does not think he would need any additional support for that to happen. Ben’s dream job “is to one day run [his] own

business... that one day [he is] able to generate [his] own income.” He does not know what kind of business he wants to run yet, but he knows that he wants “the freedom to do [his] own thing.” However, he has considered opening a restaurant.

In five years, Ben hopes to “be in some kind of supervisory role in [his] current place of employment... like the accounting manager or something like that.” He wants to be a mentor for someone new to either the accounting field or the finance field. Ben stated that he had some really negative mentors, while entering the workforce after college, and that he really wants “to be a positive influence for people coming out and starting in the workforce.”

### **Case Study 3: Cassidy**

Cassidy is a biracial, female twenty-one-year-old. She identifies as African and Hispanic. Cassidy aged out of the foster care system. She has no spouse or children. She is currently employed as a waitress. She likes her job because it is “pretty easy” and “it’s just a lot of repetition.” Cassidy is currently studying Biology because she wants to be a dentist. Before she attended TXST, she attended two other universities. She attended TXST for four semesters, and then transferred to the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) “to be closer to home.”

Cassidy thinks that her overall university experience at TXST was “definitely a lot more challenging than any other school [she] went to.” She felt like she began emotionally dropping out of TXST in her first semester. Cassidy added that she “faced a lot more personal problems” while she was at TXST. She elaborated, “I ended up in the hospital at one point. I got raped several times there. It just wasn’t a very good environment.” Cassidy became “really depressed” and went to a university counselor.



She said they helped because they gave her administrative withdraws because she “missed like whole semesters.” She added, “I feel like transferring definitely helped.” When asked what she would tell a student who was contemplating dropping out or leaving TXST, she responded “Honestly, I wouldn't really know what to say just because in my experience it was just a whole lot better dropping out.”

Cassidy is still in touch with a couple of friends from TXST, primarily on social media. When asked how close they are, she responded “Just like the normal level of friendship. Not best friends but I guess more than acquaintances.” She felt like her overall relationship with her peers was “pretty superficial... Just a lot of going to the Square and drinking.” Cassidy was a member in the Hip Hop Congress organization. She added, “I liked it. It definitely made me like enjoy school and...I made a couple friends there, so it was one of the good experiences I had there.” She also tried taking a couple Honors courses at TXST but felt that they were “hard” and that she “didn’t really have time for it.” Cassidy did not feel like her professors cared about her. She stated that her relationship with her professors “wasn’t very close.” She “didn’t really form a personal bond with them.” Cassidy had a lot of larger classes and did not have much contact with her professors at TXST.

Cassidy does not think anything could have been said or done to prevent her from deciding to leave TXST. She thinks UTSA has better accommodated her. She added that “Even though it is big, it feels a lot smaller. A lot more straightforward...Meetings with my advisor have been more helpful. I've made a lot more friends.” She explained that she thinks it is more straightforward because she “knows what to expect” because “the tests come from the homework”. Cassidy feels less overwhelmed by the content because “the

teacher basically goes over the book as well in a summarized version on their PowerPoint.”

When asked about her involvement with FACES, she said, “I went to like maybe three meetings, but it just kind of like slipped my mind and I didn't really go too often.” She thought that the most helpful thing that FACES offered her was supplying textbooks. She added that “they connect you with students who are also going through the same struggles.”

Cassidy plans to go to dental hygiene school after attaining her bachelor’s degree in biology. When asked if she would need any additional support for this to happen, she stated “I guess like just books. The rest I can do on my own like study.” In five years, she thinks she will be a dental hygienist. Eventually, Cassidy would like to open up her own practice.

## **Discussion**

### **Adoption vs Aging Out**

Alexis and Cassidy aged out of the foster care system, but Ben was adopted out of the foster care system at a young age. Ben is White and was able to return to school and graduate after taking only one semester off, whereas Alexis and Cassidy are racial minorities who both aged out of the foster care system and have not yet graduated.

Former foster youth that have been adopted tend to have more financial, educational, and familial support than youth that aged out of the foster care system (Unrau, Font & Rawls, 2012). They are also more likely to be able to depend on family members for shelter, adult guidance, and financial help than youth who aged out (Unrau, Font & Rawls, 2012).

In addition, African American and Hispanic children have a historically disproportionate representation in foster care compared to the general population (Barth, 1997). The child's ethnicity, age and length of time in care were found to be significant factors that impact the likeliness of adoption (Barth, 1997). The likelihood of a Caucasian child being adopted is 10.8 percent higher than for a Latino, African American, or other minority child who is available for adoption with the same number of years in care (Barth, 1997). Being a racial minority also strongly correlates with longer waiting periods for temporary foster care placement. Caucasian children are adopted at twice the rate of Hispanic, African American, and other non-Caucasian children (Barth, 1997).

### **Complex Trauma**

Complex trauma describes an individual's exposure to prolonged interpersonal trauma which results in many long-lasting effects (Greeson et al, 2011). All three participants have likely experienced many of the complex traumas associated with being in foster care, such as abuse, neglect, being removed from their family, etc. However, layered on top of those early childhood traumas, all of these students experienced new trauma as college students. Alexis mentioned that she experienced an emotionally abusive romantic relationship while attending TXST. Cassidy experienced trauma from being raped and sexually assaulted while attending TXST. Although he did not specifically say so, Ben could have experienced trauma surrounding his cancer diagnosis. Trauma can have a significant impact on academic distress (Sarubbi, Parker, & Sponsler, 2016).

Rape and sexual assault are highly prevalent among college campuses, and former foster youth may be more at risk than non-foster youth students due to a history of

complex trauma and a lack of self-regulation (Tyler et al, 2001). Traumatized individuals are often disconnected from their own emotional experiences and may internalize their trauma which can result in feelings of shame, isolation and self-blame (Kinniburgh et al, 2017). Without the ability to effectively self-regulate one's emotions related to trauma and to identify unsafe relationship patterns, not perpetuating and replicating the cycles of violence becomes increasingly unlikely (Kinniburgh et al, 2017).

### **Mental and Physical Health**

Although he never mentioned or presented any signs of mental health challenges, Ben was diagnosed with cancer at the beginning of his second semester and decided to move back home while undergoing treatment. Alexis and Cassidy both mentioned experiencing mental health challenges, which stemmed from either emotional or physical abuse. The presence of mental and physical health challenges can significantly impact an individual's academic pursuits (Kitzrow, 2003). Students with higher levels of physical and/or psychological distress typically also experience higher test anxiety, less effective time management, lower academic self-efficacy and are less likely to seek academic assistance (Kitzrow, 2003).

### **Relationships**

Alexis stated that she endured mental and emotional abuse while in an "intense relationship" with a "narcissist." Ben is married in a supportive and loving, long-term relationship. Ben also had a loving and supportive relationship with his adoptive parents. Cassidy struggled to find deep, meaningful friendships.

While growing up, foster care youth lack significant primary attachment relationships and family connection which seems to affect their decisions in social and

romantic relationships. Many emancipated foster care youth also lack exposure to healthy relationships in their childhood, which can normalize abuse in their ideas of romantic relationships (Hanson, 2013). This impacts their understanding of what healthy relationships look and feel like. These youth are likely to endure and stay in unhealthy, abusive romantic relationships due to a strong need for connection and a sense of love and belonging (Hanson, 2013). To fulfill their unmet needs, foster youth are much more likely to make life-altering decisions regarding their relationships in early adulthood (Hanson, 2013).

### **Institutional Support**

Alexis felt supported by her professors, her peers and by FACES. Ben felt supported by his professors, his peers and by the Financial Management Association; however, he encountered bureaucratic barriers at TXST when he decided he wanted to pursue an additional degree in Accounting. Cassidy felt supported by Hip Hop Congress; however, she did not feel supported by her professors, her peers, or by the university. She did not feel associated with the university and lacked a sense of belonging.

Nearly fifty percent of Black, Hispanic, and Native American male students fail to graduate from high school (Garza, Ryser & Lee, 2009). Although other factors contribute to academic failure and student disengagement at school, various institutional practices such as teachers ineffectively connecting with students, segregating students by ability and students perceiving teachers as uncaring (Garza, 2009). Culturally informed caring is necessary to address the racially disproportionate number of students who drop out of school. Research has shown that students are more likely to remain in school when they perceive their teachers as caring through behaviors such as: enhancing students' potential,

valuing their opinions, fostering their self-esteem and respecting them as individuals (Garza, Ryser & Lee, 2009). Additionally, students who are more involved in organizations or their community report a greater sense of autonomy, connection, belonging and a more clarified sense of purpose, whereas uninvolved students reported the opposite (Foubert & Urbanski, 2006). Students who hold officer or leadership positions or who are active members in organizations tend to report greater satisfaction and more personal development than those who just attend a meeting or so (Foubert & Urbanski, 2006).

### **Sense of Future and Determination**

All three students seemed to have a strong sense of their future and were determined to complete their degrees, although not all participants were determined to do so at TXST. In a study conducted by Steinmayr & Spinath (2009), the researchers found that motivation contributes to educational achievements beyond intelligence. Some motivational concepts were even able to predict the participant's subsequent performance.

In addition, fostering positive feelings and emotions such as enjoyment, enthusiasm and overall contentment while learning in an academic setting has been linked to academic success (Corradino & Fogarty, 2018). Encouraging happiness in the classroom can help students maintain a sense of mindfulness, resilience and even physical health, whereas negative emotions such as anger, anxiety and discontent tend to worsen memory and slow learning (Corradino & Fogarty, 2018). Ben reported positive feelings in the classroom while attending TXST, and he was able to graduate successfully. Alexis reported positive feelings in the classroom while she attended TXST,

and she is motivated to return to complete her degree. Cassidy experienced negative emotions in the classroom while attending TXST; however, she is now experiencing positive feelings in the classroom at UTSA.

### **Strengths**

Alexis maintains an unwavering desire to finish her degree. Ben was able to overcome cancer and return after only one semester to complete his degree. Cassidy was able to transfer to another university that can better accommodate her needs.

Despite the challenges and trauma that these students have experienced, they all demonstrate resiliency and possess remarkable strengths. The challenges that these students have endured have helped them develop character, tenacity, empathy and resilience (Norton & Watt, In press). Research and higher education often fail to recognize these assets (Norton & Watt, In press). By recognizing these assets and broadening the definition of potential, universities can provide disadvantaged students with meaningful advantages and contribute to their mission of enhancing diversity and inclusion (Norton & Watt, In press).

### **Limitations**

Because this research study included such a small sample size, the conclusions drawn are non-generalizable. Also, the participant's bias of self-reporting can skew the data, as the data was not triangulated from other key stakeholders such as professors, friends, peers and organization members. However, the researchers wanted self-reports in order to give the students a voice, which is often limited for foster care youth. In addition, students were cautious about providing background data regarding foster care history and additional traumas experienced. Although this was not the focus of the study, it could

have provided a better understanding of the students and their responses to various situations.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

#### **For Four-Year Universities**

Four-year colleges and universities should strive to generate opportunities for cumulatively disadvantaged students by helping them build resilience in education (Norton & Watt, In press). They need to be more supportive and flexible to accommodate their students, especially non-traditional students or students experiencing physical or mental health challenges. They need to improve counseling and advising services, and they need to be more flexible and less bureaucratic when assisting students with their degree plans. Although Texas State University has the Department of Occupational, Workforce and Leadership Studies (OWLS), none of the students interviewed were aware of its services. This program offers non-traditional approaches to attain a degree, by providing individualized degree plans, awarding credits for relevant life and work experiences, and offering courses at more convenient times and locations to better accommodate busy and working adults (Texas State University, 2018). Universities should better promote these programs.

Universities also need better sexual assault support programs, domestic abuse support programs and better bullying support programs. They should create and enforce better policies aimed at preventing various forms of abuse and reprimanding those who commit abuse. They should strive to have smaller classes and clear expectations for their students. They need to hire culturally-informed, trauma informed, caring professors.

#### **For Foster Care Support Programs**



Foster care support programs should connect students with others who share similar life experiences. They should engage students with one another and with the university through community events to promote a sense of belonging through friendships. Healthy personal relationships, the normalization of traumatic experiences and peer support are vital for foster youth because these factors have a strong positive impact on mental health (Perry, 2006). In addition, they should provide mentoring, support, additional resources and assistance with purchasing books.

### **For Social Work**

Foster care alumni face a multitude of barriers throughout their lives. This is important to social workers because hundreds of thousands of children have been removed from their homes and struggle to transition both into and out of foster care (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017). As social workers, it is imperative to advocate for these vulnerable children, to take preventative measures to ensure that they are in safe and stable environments, to educate and promote awareness about the barriers they face, to create and promote optimal policies and to create additional opportunities for them in the future.

Social workers must promote awareness about foster care support programs and services in order to engage foster youth. Social workers must advocate for these youth by working to collaborate with schools and the child welfare system in order to minimize educational delays and to improve retention rates. Social workers should work to spread awareness about financial resources to these youth and advocate for better foster care support programs and additional resources such as mentoring and counseling services to help these youth transition into adulthood more smoothly. Social workers must also

promote collaboration between the health care system, the education system, the child welfare system, the criminal justice system, etc. Social workers can use their knowledge of various evidence-based theories and perspectives and cultural competencies in order to best advocate for this vulnerable group of people.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, former foster care youth are a distinct subgroup of vulnerable students who need additional support to attain academic success. Further research is needed with more participants in order to discover and generalize themes. Although this research is non-generalizable, these are important narratives of risk and resilience that allow us to shine a light on challenges faced by former foster care youth. In addition, even though this research was focused primarily on the barriers faced by these students, the researchers also noticed many of the students' strengths. Alexis is determined and has a persistent desire to complete her degree. Ben was able to overcome cancer and return after only one semester to complete his degree. Cassidy was able to find and transfer to another university that is able to better meet her needs.

Based on this study, FACES should promote additional career counseling resources such as OWLS to further assist students with the bureaucracies associated with their degree plans. FACES should also consider implementing a sexual assault focus group in order to connect student survivors with peer support aimed at normalizing their experiences.

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## Appendix A: Approved Institutional Review Board Application



In future correspondence please refer to 2018309

February 20, 2018

Savannah Knott  
Texas State University  
601 University Dr.  
San Marcos, TX 78666

Dear Ms. Knott:

Your application 2018309 titled, "Dropping out and stopping out: Exploring the barriers to educational success among former foster youth" was reviewed by the Texas State University IRB and approved. It has been determined there are: (1) research procedures consistent with a sound research design and they do not expose the subjects to unnecessary risk; (2) benefits to subjects are considered along with the importance of the topic and that outcomes are reasonable; (3) selection of subjects is equitable; and (4) the purposes of the research and the research setting is amenable to subjects' welfare and producing desired outcomes; that indications of coercion or prejudice are absent, and that participation is clearly voluntary.

1. In addition, the IRB found that you need to orient participants as follows: (1) informed consent is required; (2) Provision is made for collecting, using and storing data in a manner that protects the safety and privacy of the subjects and the confidentiality of the data; (3) Appropriate safeguards are included to protect the rights and welfare of the subjects. (4) Compensation will not be provided for participation.

**This project is therefore approved at the Expedited Review Level until January 31, 2019**

2. Please note that the Institution is not responsible for any actions regarding this protocol before approval. If you expand the project at a later date to use other instruments, please re-apply. Copies of your request for human subjects review, your application, and this approval, are maintained in the Office of Research Integrity and Compliance.

Report any changes to this approved protocol to this office. A Continuing Review protocol will be sent to you in the future to determine the status of the project. Notify the IRB of any unanticipated events, serious adverse events, and breach of confidentiality within 3 days.

Sincerely,

Monica Gonzales  
IRB Regulatory Manager  
Office of Research Integrity and Compliance  
Texas State University

CC: Dr. Christine Norton

OFFICE OF THE ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH  
601 University Drive | JCK #489 | San Marcos, Texas 78666-4616  
Phone: 512.245.2314 | fax: 512.245.3847 | [WWW.TXSTATL.EDU](http://WWW.TXSTATL.EDU)

*This letter is an electronic communication from Texas State University-San Marcos, a member of The Texas State University System.*





*The rising STAR of Texas*

## IRB Application

### Texas State University Institutional Review Board

#### Section I: Filling Out and Saving the Form

Save this application on your desktop. Upon completion, upload it along with all supplemental documents to the applicable project listed on your on-line IRB Home Page.

#### Section II: General Information

##### 1. Title of Study

Insert the project name below. It should be identical to the title of any related internal or external grant proposal.

Dropping out and stopping out: Exploring the barriers to educational success among former foster youth

##### 2. Investigator (Primary Research)

First Name	Last Name	Title (i.e. grad student, student, etc.)
Savannah	Knott	student
Degree Program/Department	Texas State Email Address	Phone Number
Social Work/Honors	slk97@txstate.edu	817-999-2264

If you are a student, is this application for your thesis or dissertation research?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

##### 3. Co-Investigator or Texas State University Sponsoring Faculty (if applicable)

First Name	Last Name	Title (i.e. grad student, student, etc.)
Christine	Norton	Sponsoring Faculty
Degree Program/Department	Texas State Email Address	Phone Number
Social Work	cn19@txstate.edu	512-245-4562

##### 4. Project Dates

Anticipated Start Date: March 1, 2018

Anticipated End Date: December 15, 2018

### 5. Key Personnel

List the names of all other Key Personnel (including students) who are responsible for the design, conduct, recruitment of participants, data collection, or reporting of the study.

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Email</u>
1.	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
2.	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
3.	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

### 6. CITI IRB Training

Have you, any Co-Investigator, Student Investigator, and all other Key Personnel completed the CITI training course ("Social and Behavioral Research")?

- ☒ Yes  
☐ No

*If you answered "No," this training is required for all Key Personnel before your study can be approved. The CITI course may be accessed by visiting: <https://www.citiprogram.org/>. Training is valid for 3 years and will require a refresher course when it expires. Your application will not be approved until all required training is completed and current.*

### 7. Funding Information (if applicable)

Has external or internal funding been proposed or awarded for this project?

- ☐ Yes  
☒ No

If yes, please include the OSP Proposal/Project Number (external) or Texas State account number (internal) for this project.

OSP Proposal/Project Number:

Texas State Account Number:

### 8. Financial Conflict of Interest Disclosure (if applicable)

Do you or any other person responsible for the design, conduct, or reporting of this research have an economic interest in, or act as an officer or a director of, any outside entity whose financial interests would reasonably appear to be affected by the research?

- ☐ Yes  
☒ No

For externally funded research, Texas State University requires the Principal Investigator, Co-Investigator, project director, and all other personnel with responsibility for designing, conducting, or reporting of externally funded research to complete an online Financial Conflict of Interest disclosure each fiscal year.

### Section III: Risk Review

Please click the box indicating your answer to each of the following questions:

1. Will your research study involve any vulnerable populations such as children, prisoners, pregnant women, mentally disabled persons, cognitively impaired elderly, or minority ethnic groups?  
☐ Yes  
☒ No
2. Could public disclosure of any identifiable data you collect place the participants at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the participants' financial standing, employability or reputation?  
☐ Yes  
☒ No
3. Will your study involve data collection procedures other than surveys, educational tests, interviews, or observation of public behavior?  
☐ Yes  
☒ No
4. Will your study involve the collection of sensitive data such as: illegal drug use, alcohol abuse, victims of violence, health history, prior diagnosis of mental disorders, sexual activity, criminal activity, or personal academic history?  
☐ Yes  
☒ No
5. Will your study involve audio or video-recording research participants?  
☒ Yes  
☐ No
6. Will your study involve obtaining individually identifiable information from health care providers, clearinghouses, or plans?  
☐ Yes  
☒ No
7. Will you be collecting anonymous data (results cannot be linked to individual participants)?  
☐ Yes  
☒ No
8. Will you be using data that was previously approved by the Texas State IRB?  
☐ Yes  
☒ No

If yes, please provide the Texas State IRB approval number:

9. Will you be using data that was previously approved by a non-Texas State IRB at an another institution, organization, center?

☐ Yes

☒ No

If yes, please provide the name of the institution/organization and upload the applicable original IRB approval that authorized the data collection:

Were you provided and instructed to sign and complete a Data Use Agreement (DUA)?

☐ Yes

☒ No

If yes, please provide a copy of the agreement. Please note that the AVPR is the only University official authorized to sign this legally binding document.

10. Does this project SOLELY involve analysis of publicly available existing database?

☐ Yes

☒ No

If yes, please provide the complete URLs for all databases that are relevant to this application:

*\*If you answered yes to questions 8, 9, or 10, please submit the appropriate documents and only complete the Purpose of Study (1), Previous Research (2), and Publication of Results (1 f) in Section IV of this application.*

## Section IV: Research Protocol Information

### 1. Purpose of Study

Provide a brief summary of the proposed research. Include the hypothesis and research design.

There are approximately 27,000 children in the foster care system in Texas, with about 1500 aging out of the system (turning 18) every year. Foster youth in the education system are a distinct subgroup of students who are at high risk for poor academic performance and failure. Complex trauma, placement and educational instability have led to negative educational outcomes for youth in foster care. Nationally, only 50% of foster youth graduate high school, and though 84% report they want to attend college, only 10% will attend. The college retention and graduation rates of foster youth are even worse, with research showing only 2-3% of foster youth attain a bachelor's degree. For this reason, in 2011, Texas State University began FACES: Foster Care Alumni Creating Educational Success. FACES is a campus-wide support initiative aimed at increasing college retention and graduation rates of foster care alumni. Initial research has shown that FACES outcomes far out-perform national averages with retention and graduation rates of close to 56%, matching the typical college student at Texas State, as well as the national college average (Watt, Norton & Jones, 2013). Though this is a huge success, attention still needs to be paid to the students who enroll at Texas State University, but do not finish. Research is needed to understand what risk factors contribute to students' drop-out behavior so that FACES can make programmatic changes to better support these struggling students. This pilot, qualitative study will survey former FACES/TXST students through semi-structured phone interviews exploring what barriers these students faced, what they are currently doing and what, if any, future plans they have.

### 2. Previous Research

Briefly summarize previous research leading to the formulation of this study, including any past or current research conducted by the Investigator that leads directly to the formulation of this study.

In the United States, there are nearly 428,000 children in the foster care system; there are about 30,000 children in the foster care system in Texas (AECF, 2017). About 20,000 foster care youth in the United States age out of the system by turning 18 every year, and about 1,500 foster care youth in Texas age out each year (Watt, Norton & Jones, 2013).

Nationally, only 50% of foster youth graduate high school, and although 84% of foster youth report they want to attend college, only 10% will attend. The college retention and graduation rates of foster youth show that only 2-3% attain a bachelor's degree (Watt, Norton & Jones, 2013).

Foster youth in the education system are a distinct subgroup of students who are at high risk for poor academic performance and failure. Children can be placed in foster care voluntarily or involuntarily. Some parents or legal guardians feel as though they are unable to adequately care for their children and voluntarily place them in foster care. However, most foster care youths are placed in the foster care system due to the risk or actual occurrence of physical, sexual, and/or psychological abuse, neglect, or abandonment (FACES Professional Development PPT, 2017).

Complex trauma, placement instability and educational instability have led to negative educational outcomes for youth in foster care. Several foster care alumni studies show that without a lifelong connection to a caring adult, and these older youths are often left vulnerable to a host of adverse situations. While transitioning from foster care into adulthood, 84% became a parent, 51% were unemployed, 30% had no health insurance, 25% had been homeless, and 30% were receiving public assistance (FACES Professional Development PPT, 2017).



### 3. Recruitment of Participants

Describe the source(s) of subjects and the selection criteria. Include the gender, racial/ethnic composition, age range, occupation, etc. Specifically describe how will you recruit and contact potential subjects. Also, include the anticipated number of research participants. All recruitment materials such as flyers, e-mails, verbal scripts, advertisement, etc. are required to be submitted and approved by the IRB.

Participants will be recruited for this study via email, phone and/or social media. Former Texas State students in the FACES program will be identified by FACES program staff and Retention, Management and Planning staff. We will create flier to elicit interest in the study. Though we do not have exact demographic statistics for these former FACES students, we anticipate they will match our current FACES demographic data, which include the following:  
Sex: 40% Male, 60% Female  
Age range: 19-27  
Race/ethnicity: White 32%, Hispanic 11%, African American 25%, Bi-Racial 30%, Other 4%  
First generation: Parent did not attend college 43%, Parent did not receive Bachelor's degree 76%  
No occupational data available at this time.  
We anticipate 15-20 participants in this study.

### 4. Vulnerable Populations

Please identify any vulnerable populations that will be recruited to participate in this study:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Children                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Pregnant Women   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prisoners                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Mentally Impaired  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cognitively Impaired Elderly             | <input type="checkbox"/> Ethnic Minorities, Non-English Speaking Individuals                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: Please list: <input type="text"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A, this study will not use vulnerable populations as research participants. |

If applicable, describe any special precautions that will be taken for the inclusion for identified vulnerable populations. I.e., use of informed assent and parental consent for minors or consent documents in an alternative language for individuals who do not speak English.

## 5. Informed Consent

Describe the consent process and upload all consent documents. If you are requesting a waiver of signed informed consent, please state the rationale and how consent will be alternatively obtained (verbal, "clicking" an on-line button or link, participation will imply consent, etc.)

All participants will be asked to sign an informed consent letter if they are interested in being interviewed over the phone. The informed consent letter will be emailed to them, and they will be asked to provide an e-signature or sign and scan the letter to return by email. Copies of this consent letter have been included in our IRB application.

## 6. Procedures

Provide a step-by-step description of each procedure, including the frequency, duration, and location of each procedure. Also, for data collection sites other than Texas State that involves the authorization and coordination with an outside agency, please upload a signed and dated letter on the cooperating institution's letterhead granting approval for the data collection.

The researcher will contact students via email, phone and/or social media to recruit them for the study. Interested participants will then be emailed a letter of informed consent, and will be asked to provide an e-signature or sign and scan the letter to return by email. Once consent forms are returned, the researcher will set up phone interviews with the participants. Phone interviews will take place only one time per participant, and will follow the semi-structured interview process using the questions included with this IRB application. Interviews will take no more than 30 minutes. With participant permission/consent, interviews will be recorded and transcribed by the researcher.

## 7. Confidentiality

Describe the procedures that will be used to maintain the confidentiality of all personally identifiable data. (Please note: All data must be securely kept for a minimum of three years on campus. The location of the secured data should be listed below.)

All participant demographic data, phone interview recordings and transcripts will be stored in a password protected computer and kept securely for a minimum of three years on Dr. Norton's desktop computer. Participant data will be de-identified, and each participant will be given an alias for the purposes of protecting their identity when writing up the findings.

## 8. Risks

Describe any foreseeable or anticipated risks that may be presented to the participants as a result of taking part in the study. Please describe all of the precautions that will be implemented to minimize such risks.

The risks to participants in this study are minimal; however, former students being interviewed may experience negative emotions surrounding being asked to reflect on barriers they faced that may have contributed to academic failure. For this reason, the researcher will also ask what they are currently doing and what, if any, future plans do they still have to pursue an education.

## 9. Benefits

Describe the anticipated benefits to subjects, and the importance of the knowledge to your field that may reasonably be expected to result.

Students who are identified for participation in the study will also be given resources to address current risk factors, so that the study has a direct benefit to their lives, and is not for the sole purpose of collecting data. It is our hope that the interviews will give former students a chance to reflect on their lives and academic goals, and move forward with re-enrollment in higher education.

## 10. Compensation

Describe any compensation subjects will receive for participating in the study. Include a description of the compensation, timing for payment, and conditions for receipt of such compensation. Please note: If extra course credit is offered as an incentive for participation, the instructor must provide an alternative form of extra credit to students who do not want to participate in the research.

Students will not be given any compensation for participating in this study.



#### 11. Publication of Results

Please identify all methods in which you may publicly disseminate the results of your study.

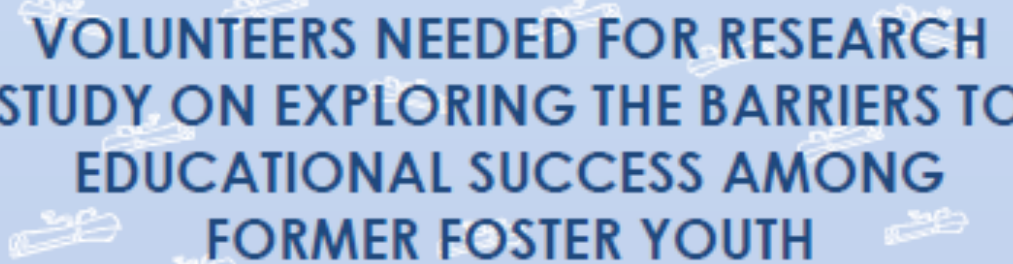
- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Academic Journal                 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Thesis or Dissertation                            |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Academic Conference Presentation | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Texas State University Scholarly Works Repository |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Academic Conference Poster       | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: Please list <input type="text"/>                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Book or Textbook Chapter                    |   |

#### Section V: Investigator Certification

- ☒ By checking this box, I am certifying that the information in this application is complete and accurate. I agree that this study will be conducted in accordance with Texas State IRB Guidelines. I will request IRB approval before making any modification to the research procedures or forms. I understand that neither recruitment nor data collection will be initiated until final IRB approval is received. I will notify the IRB any unexpected or otherwise significant adverse events and general problems within one week of the incident. I understand that if these conditions are not met, this research could be suspended and/or not recognized by Texas State University.

This application and all supplementary documents must be submitted together to be processed for review. The IRB will contact you if additional information or revisions are needed for approval. All revisions must be submitted within 30 days of the request. After that time all the application will be discontinued. If your application is discontinued you will be required to resubmit another application.

Contact The Office of Research Integrity and Compliance at (512) 245-2334 or [avpr-irb@txstate.edu](mailto:avpr-irb@txstate.edu) for any questions concerning the approval status of your application.

The top half of the flyer is decorated with numerous small, white, hand-drawn scroll icons scattered across a light blue background.

## **VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH STUDY ON EXPLORING THE BARRIERS TO EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS AMONG FORMER FOSTER YOUTH**

The purpose of this research study to learn more about risk factors that contribute to students' drop-out behavior. The information gathered will be used to make programmatic changes in FACES to better support struggling students.

Participation will consist of a brief 30-minute phone interview.

During the interviews, you will be asked to reflect on barriers you faced that may have contributed to academic failure, what you are currently doing and what, if any, future plans you still have to pursue an education.

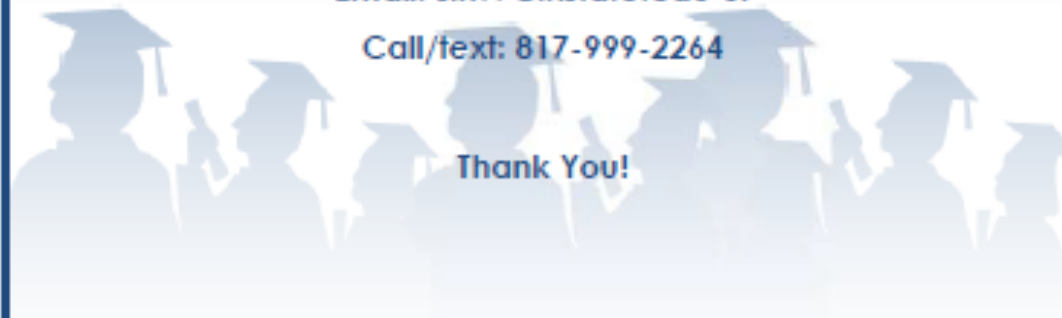
For more information:

Contact Savannah Knott

Email: [slk97@txstate.edu](mailto:slk97@txstate.edu) or

Call/text: 817-999-2264

Thank You!

The bottom of the flyer features a row of white silhouettes of graduation caps (mortarboards) against a light blue background, with a solid dark blue bar at the very bottom.

## Recruitment Email Message Template

To: [Use this line for individual addresses or your own address if BCC line is used]  
From: Savannah Knott  
BCC: [Use this line when sending the same email message to multiple addresses]  
Subject: Research Participation Invitation: Dropping out and stopping out: Exploring the barriers to educational success among former foster youth

This email message is an approved request for participation in research that has been approved by the Texas State Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Dear XXX,

You are invited to participate in a research study to learn more about risk factors that contribute to students' drop-out behavior. The information gathered will be used to make programmatic changes in FACES to better support struggling students. You are being asked to participate because you are a former Texas State student and a foster care alumnus.

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to participate in one brief phone interview. After you have signed and submitted the informed consent form, we will set up a time convenient for you to speak with one of the investigators over the phone. Each interview will last approximately 30 minutes. During the interviews, you will be asked to reflect on barriers you faced that may have contributed to academic failure, what you are currently doing and what, if any, future plans you still have to pursue an education. The interview will be audio-recorded, and the researcher may take notes as well.

Students will not be paid for participating in this study. Students who are identified for participation in the study will also be given resources to address current risk factors, if any, so that the study has a direct benefit to their lives, and is not for the sole purpose of collecting data. It is our hope that the interviews will give former students a chance to reflect on their lives and academic goals, and move forward with re-enrollment in higher education.

Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Your name will not be used in any written reports or publications which result from this research. Data will be kept for three years (per federal regulations) after the study is completed and then destroyed.

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw from it at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

To participate in this research or ask questions about this research please contact Savannah Knott at 817-999-2264 – (slk97@txstate.edu).

This project 2018309 was approved by the Texas State IRB on February 20, 2018. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB chair, Dr. Denise Gobert 512-245-8351 – (dgobert@txstate.edu) or to Monica Gonzales, IRB Regulatory Manager 512-245-2334 – (meg201@txstate.edu).



## RECRUITMENT PHONE SCRIPT

### On the Phone:

"Hello, my name is Savannah Knott. I am a researcher at Texas State University. I am conducting a research study about to learn more about risk factors that contribute to students' drop-out behavior. The information gathered will be used to make programmatic changes in FACES to better support struggling students. You are being asked to participate because you are a former Texas State student and a foster care alumnus. I am calling to ask if you would be willing to let me interview you. It should take about 30 minutes to complete the interview.

If you would be interested in participating in this interview, we can set up a time now or you can let me know when a good time would be to schedule it."

If interested, investigator will set up a date and time and will provide subject with investigator contact information.

"I have you scheduled for an interview on \_\_\_\_\_. If you have questions, I can be reached at 817-999-2264 – (slk97@txstate.edu).

Thank you for your help."

If not interested, investigator will end the call:

"Thank you for your time."





## INFORMED CONSENT

**Study Title:** Dropping out and stopping out: Exploring the barriers to educational success among former foster youth

**Principal Investigator:** Savannah Knott  
Email: [slk97@txstate.edu](mailto:slk97@txstate.edu)  
Phone: 817-999-2264

**Co-Investigator/Faculty Advisor:** Dr. Christine Norton  
Email: [cn19@txstate.edu](mailto:cn19@txstate.edu)  
Phone: 512-245-4562

**Sponsor:** N/A

This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this research study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate as well as any known risks, inconveniences or discomforts that you may have while participating. We encourage you to ask questions at any time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and it will be a record of your agreement to participate. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

### PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

You are invited to participate in a research study to learn more about risk factors that contribute to students' drop-out behavior. The information gathered will be used to make programmatic changes in FACES to better support struggling students. You are being asked to participate because you are a former Texas State student and a foster care alumnus.

### PROCEDURES

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to participate in one brief phone interview. After you have signed and submitted the informed consent form, we will set up a time convenient for you to speak with one of the investigators over the phone. Each interview will last approximately 30 minutes. During the interviews, you will be asked to reflect on barriers you faced that may have contributed to academic failure, what you are currently doing and what, if any, future plans you still have to pursue an education. The interview will be audio-recorded, and the researcher may take notes as well.

### RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

The risks to participants in this study are minimal; however, you may experience negative emotions surrounding being asked to reflect on barriers they faced that may have contributed to academic failure. Also, the survey will include a section requesting demographic information. Due to the make-up of Texas State University's population, the combined answers to these questions may make an individual person identifiable. We will make every effort to protect participants' confidentiality. However, if you are uncomfortable answering any of these questions, you may refuse to answer.

In the event that some of the survey or interview questions make you uncomfortable or upset, you are always free to decline to answer or to stop your participation at any time. Should you feel discomfort after participating, you may contact the Hill Country MHDD Centers: Scheib MH Center for counseling services at 512-392-7151 or call 1-877-466-0660 for their 24-hour crisis line. The Counseling Center is located 1200 N. Bishop Suite 200, San Marcos, TX 78666.

**BENEFITS/ALTERNATIVES**

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. Students who are identified for participation in the study will also be given resources to address current risk factors, if any, so that the study has a direct benefit to their lives, and is not for the sole purpose of collecting data. It is our hope that the interviews will give former students a chance to reflect on their lives and academic goals, and move forward with re-enrollment in higher education. However, the information that you provide will allow us to understand what risk factors contribute to students' drop-out behavior so that FACES can make programmatic changes to better support struggling students.

**EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY**

Reasonable efforts will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private and confidential. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. The members of the research team and the Texas State University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) may access the data. The ORC monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.

Your name will not be used in any written reports or publications which result from this research. Data will be kept for three years (per federal regulations) after the study is completed and then destroyed.

**PAYMENT/COMPENSATION**

You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

**PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY**

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw from it at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

**QUESTIONS**

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Savannah Knott: 817-999-2264 or slk97@txstate.edu.

This project was approved by the Texas State IRB on February 20, 2018. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB Chair, Dr. Denise Gobert 512-245-8351 – (dgobert@txstate.edu) or to Monica Gonzales, IRB Regulatory Manager 512-245-2334 – (meg201@txstate.edu).

**DOCUMENTATION OF CONSENT**

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement and possible risks have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand I can withdraw at any time.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Study Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Study Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I agree to be audio recorded

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Study Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Study Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

IRB approved application # 2018309  
Version # 1



Page 3 of 3

## **Interview Questions**

### **Demographics**

What is your race/ethnicity?

What is your gender?

What is your age?

### **Present Day**

Are you currently employed?

If so, where and what do you do there?

Do you like your job? Why or why not?

Are you currently enrolled at a different University?

If so, where?

Why did you transfer?

Are you still studying the same major?

Do you have a spouse or children?

Are you still in touch with any of your friends from University?

In what capacity? How close are you?

### **Barriers/Risk Factors**

What was your overall University experience like?

What were you studying while you were at Texas State?

Why did you choose that major?

How was your relationship with your professors?

When you were at TXST, did you feel like your professors cared about you?

How was your relationship with your peers?

When do you feel that you began emotionally dropping out of school?

What was going on at that time?

What barriers did you face while you were attending Texas State University that may have contributed to academic failure (if applicable)?



Do you feel that there was anything that could have been said or done that could have prevented you from deciding to drop out/leave TXST?

If so, what would that have been?

Why did you leave Texas State University?

### **Protective Factors**

Were you involved in any extracurricular activities, sororities/fraternities, organizations, or volunteer groups?

If so, which ones?

What was your overall experience in them?

If not, why not?

What did FACES offer you that you found to be most helpful/valuable?

Why?

What would you tell a student that was contemplating dropping out?

Are there any changes you would recommend that FACES make to help current and future students?

### **Future Plans**

Do you plan to pursue a higher education in the future?

Why or why not?

What support do you need for this to happen?

What is your dream job?

Where do you see yourself in five years?

## Appendix B: Institutional Review Board Modification Request

### Modification Request Texas State University Institutional Review Board

**Purpose:** Complete this form when you would like to change the key personnel, data collection sites, protocol (e.g., compensation, study procedures, etc.), and/or Informed Consent/Assent Form in a research study that has already received IRB approval. Submit this form along with copies of any new or modified materials or documents you describe below. If modifications are more extensive than can be easily described on this form, please submit a new IRB application. NOTE: You may not implement any changes to an IRB-approved study until your Modification Request has been approved.

#### Filling Out and Saving the Form

Please type in the blue fields. Check "No" or "Yes" on items #5-9 and elaborate on "yes" answers as indicated. Save this form on your desktop and when ready submit this application along with all supplemental documents to the IRB Office as an attachment. All documents should be saved as First Name or Initial, Last Name, and one-word description, with no extra spaces or special characters other than underscores. Acceptable examples: JohnSmithapplication, J\_Smith\_application.doc, JohnSmith\_consentformEnglish.pdf, JSmithconsentformSpanish.doc

#### 1. IRB Application Number:

2018309

#### 2. Title of Study

Must be identical to the title of any related internal or external grant proposal.

Dropping out and stopping out: Exploring the barriers to educational success among former foster youth

#### 3. Investigator (Primary Researcher)

First Name

Savannah

Last Name

Knott

Title (i.e. grad student, faculty, ect.)

undergraduate Honors thesis SSW student

Degree program/Department

Social Work/Honors

Texas State Email Address

skd77@txstate.edu

Phone Number

817-999-2264

#### 4. Co-Investigator/ Texas State University Supervising Faculty (if applicable)

First Name

Christine

Last Name

Norton

Texas State E-mail Address

cn19@txstate.edu

Form designed and maintained by Texas State University ORIC, JCK 489, 512-245-2334. Last updated on March 2016  
OHRP Federal wide Assurance: FWA00000191

Department or University

GSOMK

Title (Associate Professor, Professor, Dean, ect)

Associate Professor

Phone number

512-757-8778

5. Are there changes in key personnel assisting in the research project?

☒ No

☐ Yes - List changes below and have all new key personnel complete CITI training The CITI course may be accessed by visiting: <https://www.citiprogram.org/>.

Names and Texas State Affiliation of new Key Personnel:

Names of Key Personnel to be Deleted:

6. Are there any additions or changes to sites where the data will be collected?

☒ No

☐ Yes - Identify specific data collection sites or agencies below. In addition, submit a signed letter on official letterhead approving data collection at each site (other than Texas State University).

7. Are there any proposed changes to the informed consent/assent form(s)?

☐ No

☒ Yes – Provide a brief description of and rationale for proposed changes below. In addition, submit a tracked/highlighted revised informed consent/assent form(s) showing the changes and a clean copy of the informed consent/assent form(s).

We added a line that participants will now be eligible to receive a \$20 VISA gift card for volunteering to participate in the study. A revised version of the informed consent forms has been attached.

8. Are there any proposed changes in the protocol requested (e.g., recruitment procedures, data collection instruments or procedures, compensation)?

☐ No

☒ Yes – Provide a description of and rationale for proposed changes below. In addition, submit copies of any recruitment materials, data collection instruments, etc. that have been modified or added since your last IRB approval of this study.

The PI received the Undergraduate Research Fellowship and will now be able to provide thirty \$20 VISA gift cards to participants in the study. Revised recruitment flier, phone/email scripts and informed consent letter reflecting this incentive change have been included.

9. Are there any proposed changes not described above?

☒ No

☐ Yes – Provide a brief description of and rationale for the proposed changes.

#### Investigator or Supervising Investigator Certification

☒ By checking this box I am certifying that the revised information provided for this project is correct and that no other procedures or forms will be used. I confirm that no changes will be implemented until I receive written approval for the changes from the Texas State IRB.

The application and all supplementary documents must be submitted together to be processed for review. Applications submitted will only be valid for 30 days. If your application expires after 30 days you will need to resubmit another application.

If you have questions, please contact The Office of Research Integrity and Compliance at (512) 245-2334.

**Save**

## **Appendix C: Undergraduate Research Fellowship Application**

### **Proposal**

In the United States, there are nearly 411,000 children in the foster care system, and there are about 30,000 children in the foster care system in Texas (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017). About 20,000 foster care youth in the United States age out of the system by turning 18 every year, and about 1,500 foster care youth in Texas age out each year (Watt, Norton & Jones, 2013). Nationally, only 50% of foster youth graduate high school, and although 84% of foster youth report they want to attend college, only 10% will attend. The college retention and graduation rates of foster youth show that only 2-3% attain a bachelor's degree (Watt, Norton & Jones, 2013).

Foster youth in the education system are a distinct subgroup of students who are at an increased risk for poor academic performance and failure. Children can be placed in foster care voluntarily or involuntarily. Some parents or legal guardians feel as though they are unable to adequately care for their children and voluntarily place them in foster care. However, most foster care youths are placed in the foster care system due to the risk or actual occurrence of physical, sexual, and/or psychological abuse, neglect, or abandonment (Watt, Norton & Jones, 2013).

Complex trauma, placement instability and educational instability have led to negative educational outcomes for youth in foster care. Several foster care alumni studies show that without a lifelong connection to a caring adult, and these older youths are often left vulnerable to a host of adverse situations. While transitioning from foster care into adulthood, 84% became a parent, 51% were unemployed, 30% had no health insurance, 25% had been homeless, and 30% were receiving public assistance (Watt, Norton & Jones, 2013).

A college education is associated with a variety of improved life outcomes, including: practical knowledge and skills, increased job opportunities, higher salaries, networking opportunities, and social capital needed to achieve stability and prosperity (Watt, Norton & Jones, 2013). This makes a college degree even more critical among foster youth because they are much more likely than the general population to rely on public assistance, to abuse substances and become addicted, and to become homeless or incarcerated (Watt, Norton & Jones, 2013).

In 2011, Texas State University (TXST) began FACES: Foster Care Alumni Creating Educational Success. FACES is a campus-wide support initiative aimed at increasing college retention and graduation rates of foster care alumni. Initial research has shown that FACES outcomes far out-perform national averages with retention and graduation rates of close to 56%, matching the typical college student at TXST, as well as the national college average (Watt, Norton & Jones, 2013). Though this is a tremendous success, attention still needs to be paid to the students who enroll at TXST, but do not finish. Further research is needed to understand what risk factors contribute to students'

drop-out behavior so that FACES can make programmatic changes to better support these struggling students.

This pilot, qualitative study will survey former TXST/FACES students through semi-structured phone interviews exploring what barriers these students faced, what they are currently doing and what, if any, future plans they still have to pursue an education. Students who are identified for participation in the study will be compensated \$20 for their time. Participants will also be given resources to address current risk factors, so that the study has a direct benefit to their lives and is not for the sole purpose of collecting data.

This study will provide me with knowledge, research experience, and interviewing experience which will be useful in my graduate pursuits and in my future professional social work practice. I believe this research has the potential to assist current and future students by improving foster care alumni programs at TXST and at universities all over the nation.

### References

- Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2017). *Children 0 to 17 in Foster Care*. Retrieved February 18, 2018, from <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/6242-children-0-to-17-in-foster-care#detailed/1/any/false/573,869,36,868,867/any/12985,12986>
- Watt, T. T., Norton, C. L., & Jones, C. (2013). *Designing a campus support program for foster care alumni: Preliminary evidence for a strengths framework*  
doi://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2013.06.002

## **Project Timeline**

**Fall 2017:** I spent this semester developing my thesis topic and gathering relevant literature. On December 16, 2017, I submitted my research proposal to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Texas State University.

**Spring 2018:** Once I receive IRB approval, I will recruit participants and begin phone interviews in March. I will spend the remainder of the semester interviewing participants and collecting data.

**Summer 2018:** I will continue to recruit participants and conduct interviews. I will also analyze the data I have already collected.

**Fall 2018:** I will be enrolled in HON 4390B and will spend the semester revising and editing my thesis. If recruiting is slow throughout the Spring and Summer semesters, I have allocated time throughout this semester to continue interviewing participants. Lastly, I will present my findings at the Honors Thesis Forum and the Undergraduate Research Conference. In addition, I will submit my research to *The Texas State Journal of Undergraduate Research*.



### Budget Narrative

Product	Price Per Unit	Amount	Cost
Participant Compensation	\$20	X30	\$600
High Quality Audio Recording Device	\$40	X1	\$40
Transcription Service	\$12	X30	\$360
		<b>Total:</b>	\$1,000

Compensation is necessary to incentivize participation among former students who may no longer feel associated with TXST due to their drop-out status.

A high-quality audio recording device will improve the results of the research by enhancing the clarity of the audio and reducing background and static noise. Higher quality audio recordings also make the transcription process easier, cheaper, and more accurate.

The transcription service is listed at \$0.40 per minute, and each interview should take approximately 30 minutes to complete. Therefore, each interview should cost about \$12 each to transcribe.