Aging Youth in Foster Care

Students Name

University Name

Course Code: Course Title

Instructors Name

Due Date

Aging Youth in Foster Care

The youth have needs as they grow, where at times, they require emotional support and guidance from their mentors. A child growing up in foster care is deprived of the support that a child of the same age gets in their familial environment (Lindner & Hanlon, 2024). The transition to adulthood is marked by milestones such as completing education, entering the workforce, and establishing independent living arrangements. Family support provides a stable foundation that eases this transition and helps the youth progress (Havlicek, 2021). The individuals residing in foster care and aging out of the system become subject to instability, uncertainty, and insufficient resources. “Aging out” is the process wherein foster youth aged 18 to 21 years old, upon reaching a certain age, are no longer eligible for state-supported foster care services (Bennett et al., 2024).

The unique and complex challenges that come their way differentiate their experiences from the general population. The lack of permanent and supportive relationships is are substantial obligation (Doucet et al., 2022). Youth in foster care experience frequent placement changes, moving between multiple homes and schools in a single year. This instability disrupts their academic progress and undermines their ability to form enduring relationships with caregivers, mentors, and peers. The youth who age out of care are at increased risk of homelessness, unemployment, poor educational attainment, and involvement with the criminal justice system (Nuñez et al., 2022). The estimates show that nearly one-third of former foster youth experience homelessness within two years of exiting care.

The inadequate preparation for independent living is a barrier, although many child welfare systems mandate independent living programs and life skills training for older youth. The quality and accessibility of these programs vary from situation to situation, and some youth

receive minimal guidance on practical matters like budgeting, job searching, and navigating healthcare systems (Gunawardena & Stich, 2021). Others lack opportunities to practice these skills in real-life contexts before emancipation. Systemic barriers have limited access to mental health services, educational supports, and affordable housing, hindering a smooth transition to adulthood. These individuals also face gaps in health coverage, resulting in unaddressed mental and physical health conditions (Richmond & Borden, 2021). Educational achievement lags with lower high school graduation rates and lower enrollment in post-secondary education compared to their peers.

The race, gender, and disability status compound the difficulties for the individuals, resulting in systemic racism that amplifies the barriers to success. LGBTQ+ foster youth experience higher rates of rejection and discrimination (Lindner & Hanlon, 2024). Youth with physical, developmental, and mental health disabilities require specialized services and supports that are unavailable after they exit care. Policy interventions and best practices have demonstrated potential in providing an effective approach is extending foster care services beyond the age of 18 (Havlicek, 2021). The individuals who remain in care until age 21 experience better educational, employment, and housing outcomes than those who age out at 18. Extended foster care allows young adults to access financial assistance, housing support, and continued connections with foster families or caseworkers while they complete education and vocational training (Bennett et al., 2024). Providing financial stipends and housing subsidies can reduce the risk of homelessness and economic hardship.

Mentorship programs and relational permanency efforts support aging as programs that connect youth with consistent adult mentors, as court-appointed special advocates and independent living mentors provide guidance, emotional support, and access to resources.

Initiatives that prioritize family reunification, kinship care, and legal guardianship promote lasting relationships that persist into adulthood (Doucet et al., 2022). Increasing access to post-secondary education through tuition waivers, scholarships, and college support programs empowers foster youth to pursue higher education and achieve economic stability. Many states offer education and training vouchers to assist individuals with tuition and related expenses (Nuñez et al., 2022). A trauma-informed and youth-centered approach is necessary to improve the long-term well-being of youth aging out of foster care. Policymakers and child welfare professionals prioritize early and consistent planning for transitions beginning well before emancipation. This includes individualized transition plans that reflect on the strengths, goals, and needs (Gunawardena & Stich, 2021). Making the individuals feel empowered requires partnering with them in decision-making and program design to ensure that services are relevant and responsive to their lived experiences.

The state needs to think innovatively to address this problem, as the hurdles that are faced by the aging youth in foster care need to be rectified, as it jeopardizes their ability to achieve successful and stable adulthood. Factors such as the absence of permanent relationships, inadequate life skills preparation, and systemic barriers heighten the risks for these individuals (Richmond & Borden, 2021). Sustaining the challenges of residing within the society must be introduced through thoughtful policy reforms. This will expand the support services and present a commitment to relational permanency (Lindner & Hanlon, 2024). Pathways need to be created that empower foster youth to thrive beyond their time in care. The commitment of society for its most vulnerable members reflects on its values and shows that the efforts that the governance makes to strengthen the ties of the people (Havlicek, 2021). The moral and practical imperatives

show that efforts are needed for improving the social stance of the aging youth and making them compatible to fit within society.

References

Bennett, A., Ravet, M., & Gabrielli, J. (2024). A systematic review of social support interventions for youth in foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *163*, 107750.

Doucet, M. M., Greeson, J. K., & Eldeeb, N. (2022). Independent living programs and services for youth'aging out'of care in Canada and the US: A systematic review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *142*, 106630.

Gunawardena, N., & Stich, C. (2021). Interventions for young people aging out of the child welfare system: A systematic literature review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *127*, 106076.

Havlicek, J. (2021). Systematic review of birth parent–foster youth relationships before and after aging out of foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *120*, 105643.

Lindner, A. R., & Hanlon, R. (2024). Outcomes of youth with foster care experiences based on permanency outcome–Adoption, aging out, long-term foster care, and reunification: A systematic review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *156*, 107366.

Nuñez, M., Beal, S. J., & Jacquez, F. (2022). Resilience factors in youth transitioning out of foster care: A systematic review. *Psychological trauma: theory, research, practice, and policy*, *14*(S1), S72.

Richmond, A., & Borden, L. M. (2021). Motivational interviewing: An approach to support youth aging out of foster care. *Journal of social work*, *21*(4), 970-985.