The Reality of Aging Out of The Foster Care System

Informing the general public of the issues associated with aging out of the foster system and the leading causes behind them.

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Master of Fine Arts | Thesis

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The Reality of Aging Out of The Foster Care System
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By Katerina Suther

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts in Graphic Design at Liberty University

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Abstract

Nearly half of youths aging out of the foster care system find themselves homeless due to a lack of systematic programs and public awareness. Due to unawareness of the resources available to foster children in the United States, much foster youth end up uncertain how to navigate their lives after emancipation, which often results in homelessness.

This project uses literature reviews, diary studies, and mind mapping to identify the leading causes behind homelessness amongst emancipated foster youths. Reviewing first-hand accounts of children and adults associated with the foster care system provides insight into how youth in the foster care system view their situations and how these affect them.

This project aims to inform the public of the statistical and emotional reality regarding homelessness amongst emancipated foster youth to encourage awareness of the issues associated with the foster care system in the U.S. This is the stepping stone to creating actual change in the foster care system. By raising awareness, more people will be encouraged to become active in assisting foster youth, for example, by becoming foster parents.

This project proposes a solution to homelessness amongst emancipated foster youth. By targeting foster parents, foster care workers, and foster youth through interactive activities from the Beyond Foster Care share box, more attention is drawn to the importance of preparing youth for the transition out of the system. At the same time, a new way for youth to communicate with their foster parents and caretakers becomes available.
CHAPTER 1

The Problem
Nearly half of youths aging out of the foster care system find themselves homeless (Zlotnick) due to a lack of systematic programs and public awareness. This leads to low High School and College Graduation rates and low employment rates. Homelessness amongst emancipated foster youth also leads to increased mental health and behavioral issues.

Those who are directly involved with the system can often become confused about how to navigate it. Many times, foster youth will be unaware of the available resources. This unawareness is often driven by a lack of communication between the foster youth and the foster parents or workers.

This lack of communication often leaves emancipated foster youth unknowing of how to navigate life as adults. Meanwhile, current foster care youth may be struggling with mental and emotional health issues that aren't being treated due to fear of communication. Not addressing these issues can lead to more likelihood of homelessness after emancipation.

I researched the impact that mental and emotional well-being has on the outcomes of the emancipation process. I investigated the emotional effects and other long-term effects that this has on current and emancipated foster youth and foster care staff.

I gained a better understanding of how youth in the foster care system view their situations and how these affect them and make them feel. Additionally, I researched what influences those circumstances have on education.
Several factors make up a knowledge gap in the area of emancipated foster youth homelessness. It would be helpful to determine whether having a relationship with biological parents or relatives reduces the chances of foster youth becoming homeless upon emancipation from the system. Additionally, there is a lack of coordination regarding assistance for the services offered to foster care youth. It is also unclear what factors determine if foster care emancipation age is 21 versus 18 in each state. Lastly, this thesis will benefit from finding out what mental health services are available to foster youth during and after they age out of the system.

Research Questions

1. At what age do foster youth become emancipated?

2. How many emancipated foster youths become homeless each year?

3. What is the average homelessness period for emancipated youth within the first year following emancipation?

4. What mental health factors contribute to homelessness amongst emancipated foster youth?

5. How do school statistics affect the chances of foster youth becoming homeless after emancipation?
I chose to research homelessness amongst emancipated foster youth because it addresses two issues that I care about at once. Firstly, homelessness continues to be a pressing issue in the U.S. and worldwide and deserves to be paid more attention. Secondly, the foster care system touches countless people’s lives while also leaving room for improvement.

When considering these issues, it is not always clear that one contributes to the other. However, the fact remains that there is an absolute correlation between homeless people in the U.S. and their involvement in the foster care system during their youth.

From a personal standpoint, I find that it is essential to pay as much attention to what is happening in the U.S. as other countries, especially those considered in the third world category.

I have a strong sense of justice, and I genuinely believe that this is a problem that can be resolved. Alternatively, at the very least, drastically improved upon.

I have had the pleasure of meeting numerous individuals who have had first-hand experiences in the foster care system throughout my life. Talking to them about their first-hand accounts has provided me with a small glimpse into how the system works. This has proven to be a motivator to further learn about the issues associated with the foster care system to learn how they can be resolved.

I believe that everyone deserves to be helped. I do not think that it is fair for people to judge others and leave them helpless when something can be done about it.
CHAPTER 2

Research
Investigation Reasoning

Homelessness amongst emancipated foster youth needs in-depth investigation because it has a direct and long-lasting effect on tens of thousands of people every year (Pecora). Additionally, homelessness has a significant social and economic impact on communities across the United States (Culhane).

Research Aims

This research aims to gather any information that will help define the issues in the U.S. foster care system that contribute to increasing numbers of homeless emancipated foster youth. It plans to identify areas of need concerning foster youth and how they are currently addressed.

It also aims to identify the emotional and psychological effects that the foster care system has on foster youth and how they contribute to homelessness. Additionally, this research aims to collect information and qualitative data relevant to informing the general public about the current facts of homelessness amongst emancipated foster youth and other outcomes for foster youth in recent years.
Research Methods

**Diary Studies**
This method effectively reviewed existing first-hand accounts of foster care children or workers because they directly observe and interact with their own and the children’s families. This provided insight into what those that are involved with the system believe. More importantly, it allowed for an understanding of the different types of emotions associated with distinct types of relationships of foster care children and parents. Diary studies were crucial in reviewing first-hand accounts of emotional trauma, including the effect family relationships have on foster youth’s mental health. This method also helped identify common factors in the foster care system that contributed to mental health illness amongst foster youth.

**Secondary Interviews**
Understanding the system from the perspective of those immersed in it provided insight into identifying existing gaps. This insight allowed for relevant information to be brought to the attention of the correct people, who have the power to make a change. Otherwise, it allowed for information to be conveyed to foster care children. This information helped identify the services in place and teach them how to gain access to said services. This eliminates some of the coordination issues for the offered services because more information is present that includes clear directions on whom to address to gain access to these services.

**Literature Review**
Reviewing existing government websites regarding the emancipation age led to understanding how the emancipation age was decided upon in each state. This understanding also led to more defined
literature on the services and funding that accompany the age extension to be 21 years old. Lastly, this led to learning more about the differences in the foster care systems in different regions or states, leading to identifying motivating factors of foster care political change. This helped in identifying who precisely advocates for and against the extension of the emancipation age, lastly, what mental health services are available to foster youth during and after they age out of the system.

**Mind Mapping**

Because foster care services differ greatly based on location, a mind map method assisted in getting the information organized by region and state. Mind mapping allowed for a simple overview of the services offered the most by location. It also led to further research on which foster care services are the most and the least utilized. Additionally, this led to identifying data that would showcase which states have the most and least available services for foster youth and families before and after emancipation from the foster care system.
Homelessness

The foster care system varies from state to state in terms of some laws and funding. The system provides an environment for youth that vastly lacks stability, support, and often direct structure. It is no surprise then that a shockingly large number of youths transitioning out of the foster care system become homeless within the first few years of their emancipation. Factors such as gender, race, delinquency history, and emotional and mental well-being impact who is more likely to become homeless after transitioning out of the system. The chances of becoming homeless following aging out from the foster care system are higher if the emancipation age is 18 versus 21 years (Zlotnick).

The definitions of homelessness must be taken into consideration when discussing the foster care system. While being in a shelter is considered being homeless, when placed in foster care temporarily, he or she immediately disqualifies for programs available to homeless children (Zlotnick). Due to the lack of foster families willing to take in older youth, most older youths develop mental health issues as they move an average of six times during their stay in the foster care system and change families each time. As many as 33% of foster care youth become homeless within the first year after aging out. One Midwestern U.S. sample showed that 53% of foster youth became homeless within the first 18 months of aging out (Zlotnick).

About two-thirds of children experience homelessness within half a year of aging out (Heyman).
As many as 25,000 kids age out of the foster care system each year in the U.S. About 37% of former foster youth have experienced homelessness (Rachel). The factors that play a role in foster youth becoming homeless include being male, African American, and LGBT. Additionally, young adults who experienced foster care have a 20% lower employment rate when compared to other young adults. A crucial protective factor from homelessness is the ability to stay in foster care until the age of 21. This extension is in alignment with government policies, in which 28 states have approved the extension of the emancipation age to be 21. Chances of homelessness are higher if the foster youth has a previous history of crime or issues with the law, drug abuse, and had emotional difficulty (Heyman).

**Homelessness Factors**

According to a study conducted in three Midwestern states by Dworsky and Courtney on youth that aged out of the foster care system, those young adults were more likely to be homeless by the age of 19 if: They were placed in a group home, were abused before entering foster care, were involved in more delinquent behavior, did not feel close to either of their biological parents or grandparents and had run away multiple times while in foster care. Their ten-year analysis, following a group of Midwest youths from Iowa, Illinois, and Wisconsin, over a decade, discovered that more than a third had experienced homelessness by the age of 26 (Dworsky).

Another study conducted in Washington State found that youth who were African American, parents, or experienced recent housing instability, were twice as likely to experience homelessness in the year after aging out of the foster care system. Additionally, the study shows that the chances of homelessness were raised significantly if the youth had experienced multiple placements, disrupted adoptions, or was involved with the juvenile system during their time in foster care. Chances
of homelessness were significantly less if the youth were placed with a relative or had a higher grade point average than their peers. This study also confirms that youth who had to change schools four times or more were significantly more likely to experience homelessness after aging out of the system (Shah).

McGee points out that Crawford et al. (2015) and Scannapieco and Painter (2014) “1 in 5 emancipated youth will experience homelessness before age 26.” She goes on to explain that the majority of her sample reported being excited and happy to be emancipated and described it as “being free.” Most of them also expressed that the process is confusing, and they were not clear on it. However, a few youths reported that an independent living program did help prepare them for their future by teaching them essential skills like applying for jobs (McGee).

**Foster Youth Needs**

Compared to the general population, foster youth have a higher need for mental health services due to an increased amount of psychological disorders. This higher need can, in part, be attributed to genetic predispositions and traumatic histories (Villagrana). It is important to note that the quality, consistency, and appropriateness of the mental health services provided by the foster care system can vary.

**Nevertheless, after emancipation from the foster care system, the use of mental health services drastically declines by 54%.** (Villagrana)

A large part of this issue is self-stigma, which affects the self-identity, efficacy (Villagrana), and interpersonal relationship of adolescents upon emancipation from foster care. Self-stigma raises an issue
because mental health disorders among foster youth tend to have a prolonged presence into adulthood, especially when left untreated. One study performed by Pecora et al. shows that 54.4% of former foster care youth experience mental health problems in adulthood, compared to 22.1% of the general population. During the transition out of foster care into adulthood, foster youth living with a mental health disorder or facing other social obstacles are at a much higher risk of adverse outcomes, like homelessness, unemployment, incarceration, dropping out of school, and health complications or drug abuse. Combined with a lack of mental health services offered, it hinders the youth from obtaining self-sufficiency (Villagrana).

**Emerging Adulthood**

Emerging adulthood is the period between adolescence and adulthood in which youth explore different identities (Berzin). However, vulnerable youth experience a less ideal path filled with difficulty, leading to disadvantages in adulthood. There is strong evidence that suggests that during this period, foster youth undergo high rates of difficulties. These difficulties include lower employment rates and lower-earning rates when compared to other youth. Substance abuse and issues with the law are also higher in the emancipated foster youth than any other youth in the same population.

In “Emerging Versus Emancipating: The Transition to Adulthood for Youth in Foster Care,” Berzin states, “In fact, much research indicates that youth who emancipate from foster care experience poor outcomes, such as homelessness, unemployment, unplanned pregnancy, low educational attainment, legal system involvement, and substance abuse.”

Two legislatures support emancipated foster youth: The Chafee Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 issues funds to states to establish and implement independent living services to foster youth. Expanding on that Act is the
Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act 2008 (FCA). The FCA focuses on reunifying with biological families and adopting youth in the care of the state. Federal legislation has allowed for reimbursements for foster care payments made for youths above the age of 18. This has incentivized States to support foster children past 18 into their transition to adulthood (Berzin).

The National Evaluation of Title IV-E Independent Living Programs for Youth in Foster Care shows that only 17% of youth who aged out of the foster care system were completely self-supporting 2.5 to 4 years after aging out of the system. The same study shows that half of the youth were abusing drugs, and a quarter was involved with the legal system. Missouri data shows that as many as 62% of emancipated youth were unemployed when they aged out of the system. Data from California, Illinois, and South Carolina indicates that there was only a 55% employment rate amongst emancipated youth.

Foster youth are underrepresented in high school college preparatory classes. Two major studies were conducted about youth emancipation from the foster care system: the Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth and the Casey National Alumni Study. Both studies confirmed significant hardship regarding higher education attainment among foster care youth than youth living with biological parents. The studies also showed that the household income of recently emancipated foster youth was 35% below the general population. Additionally, one in five emancipated youth experienced homelessness for at least one night within the first year of aging out of the system (Geenen).

**Length of Stay**

The average length of stay for any given foster care placement is two years. As many as 21,000 youths are emancipated from
the foster care system each year. In the “Educational and Employment Outcomes of Adults Formerly Placed in Foster Care: Results from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study,” Pecora evaluates the impact that foster care has on children by taking a look at adults aged 20 – 33 who have spent at least 12 months in the foster care system. It found that one of the main reasons that children are removed from their birth family is due to maltreatment. This, along with learning disabilities and frequent school changes, contributes to intellectual disabilities. The study's population also confirmed that foster youth with a high school diploma had more success as adults when compared to youth that acquired a GED. The study states that GED recipients are twice as likely not to attend secondary education when compared to the general population (Pecora).

Predictors of the length of stay in foster care include child characteristics, age, gender, race, child mental and physical health, episode characteristics, previous removal history, and reason for removal. In “Leaving Foster care—the Influence of Child and Case Characteristics on Foster Care Exit Rates,” Connell focused on reunification, adoption, and AWOL (absent without leave) statistics. Reunification began right away after entering the foster care system and declined a little during the first ten months in care. There was a significant lag in the occurrence of adoption patterns until the ninth month in foster care.

Rates of reunification increased if the child was older and declined if a severe emotional disorder were present.

Cases that had a positive reunification rate were associated with traits such as child behavioral problems and placements in non-relative foster homes.
While cases attributed to sexual abuse drastically reduced the likelihood of reunification, AWOL rates remained relatively low and stable throughout the time spent in foster care. African American children had delayed rates of reunification when compared to Caucasian children. Contrary to the reunification findings, adoption was more likely with infants. The rate of adoption decreased with each successive age group. Children with a sexual abuse history were less likely to be adopted when compared to children who were removed due to neglect. Rates of youth that went AWOL after exiting the system were higher for girls than boys and increased with age (Connell).

**Adverse Events**

A Northern Virginia study focused on 19 foster youth transitioning out of the foster care system due to their age. This study shows that there is a chance of adverse events following the emancipation out of foster care if there have been numerous foster care placements, the youth was on probation, the youth lost government welfare, or if the youth had accumulated fines.

Among the adverse events, employment disruptions were the most common. Less common adverse events include disruption to relationships, education, and housing (Rome).

Preventative aspects consisted of sharing living expenses with someone, being a student, getting educational or housing assistance, having dependable measures of transportation and communication and keeping the same employer throughout the transition year.
Four studies from the U.K. and two studies from the U.S. were included in the statistics that indicate that having a driver’s license among foster youth increases psychological well-being. Those living in urban and more walkable neighborhoods had lower rates of acquiring their driver’s license, the study’s findings still stand. The study shows that in 2013 only 3% of 16 and 17-year-old youths in the foster care system had a driver’s license. Foster youth have a high school graduation rate of 58% by the age of 19 compared to the general population graduation rate of 87%. College graduation rates among foster care youth were 3% by the age of 25 compared to the general population rates of 28%.

Having a driver’s license was associated with having a higher income and increased age (Collins, Jennifer L., Laura J. Thomas).

The objective was to identify different aspects of foster parenthood and how turbulent parenting could lead to placement disruptions. As many as 18.9% of youth have two placements within the first 18 months of entering the foster care system, while 8.5% experience three placements. As many as 64% of foster youth that has been in the system for 24 months or longer experience three or more placements. Children with mental health needs and behavioral problems tend to have more placements, leading to more behavioral problems. This limits the youth's ability to form secure attachments, leading to a decrease in chances of reunification and adoption.

Placement disruption leads to a decline in academic performance, poor physical health, and incarceration in adulthood.

“The strongest predictor for placement disruptions is the experience of the foster parents, surpassing even the child’s behavioral problems.” One solution to his would be to provide help and emotional support to foster parents (Leathers).
Foster youth placement disruption and lack of foster parent support contribute to foster care youth's emotional and mental turmoil. This leads to issues in transitioning out of the foster care system upon aging out and hinders self-sufficiency. Even though legislation exists to address these issues, the support system for foster youth is faulted and lacking once the youth is out of the system.

Case Study 1

Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative

The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative was initiated in 2001 by The Annie E. Casey Foundation in partnership with Casey Family Programs. This organization was founded in 1948 by Jim Casey and his siblings, George, Harry, and Marguerite. They named it after their mother to honor her memory. Currently, this foundation is led by President and CEO Lisa Hamilton. Leslie Gross, the Family Well-Being Strategy Group director, is considered the initiative's expert (Jim).

The project's motivation is to ensure that young people between the ages of 14 and 25, who have spent at least one day in the foster care system, are provided with the necessary resources, relationships, and opportunities they require to achieve well-being and success (Jim).

The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative puts forth an effort to evoke system
change intended to work at a local, state, and national level. It plans to advance practices and policies to meet the needs of young people transitioning from foster care into adulthood in the most effective way. It focuses on providing access for all young people, regardless of origin and background, to what they refer to as the pillars of well-being: Permanence, stable housing, education success, economic security, pregnancy prevention, and parenting support. Their approach to achieving these goals is based on research concerning the brain and employs the following principles: Authentic youth engagement, race and ethnic equity and inclusion, partnership and resources, data and accountability, and public will and policy. Additionally, this initiative has also created tools and resources to assist young people and system leaders (Jim).

The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative has partnered with 17 states, which leaves 33 states not participating. There is also the issue of young people of color being overrepresented in foster care, leading to the conclusion that youth engagement and racial equity go hand in hand (Jim).

The project outcome is quite impressive as the initiative was able to achieve significant changes. Over 200 policy and practice changes affecting young people were implemented in the last five years. New legislation regarding the extension of the foster care age limit inspired new legislation in numerous states. Research and other helpful resources regarding improving outcomes for foster youth transitioning out of foster care dispersed to increase knowledge. The leadership and advocacy skills of the Jim Casey Initiative Young Fellows and other young people around the country increased through youth engagement strategies.

These assets improve long-term outcomes affecting young people’s lives by securing stable housing and pursuing
education and employment. Lastly, the annual leveraging of about $85 million in private and public resources led to better results for young people (Jim).

Visual Analysis

This selection depicts a brochure (Fig. 1, 2) established of a two-page infographic informing the viewer of the organization’s achievements. It also shows the initiative’s main goals and breaks down how it plans to achieve those goals.

The audience consists of people associated with foster care, communities, and states that take an interest in learning about strategies to better respond to the needs of foster youth transitioning out of the system.

People consume the visual solution by visiting the initiative’s website and clicking on “view our brochure.” Alternatively, by being exposed to the actual printed version that was made available to them.

The Opportunity Passport was developed, which saved over $7 million for more than 4,400 young people and purchased $16 million worth of assets.

Relevant elements that connect back to homelessness amongst emancipated foster youth include creating meaningful partnerships and understanding the factors that affect homelessness among foster youth transitions out of the system. Working on a safe place for young people to live positively impacts the attainment of education and employment. Both of those factors are crucial in preventing homelessness (Jim).
This project is embedded in a broader cultural context through the many partnerships throughout 17 states. The tools and resources the initiative provides also contribute to a wider cultural context, along with approximately $85 million in funding it provides to strengthen services that lead to better outcomes for young people. Lastly, the initiative emphasizes young adults of color in foster care.

The interrelation between the images, the form, and the accompanying text is the presentation of information. The images (Fig. 1 and 2) document and visualize the current goals and progress of the initiative.

The composition of the brochure is overall well organized and aesthetically pleasing. It is a bi-fold brochure that has an image-focused front cover and overview-based back cover. An extensive infographic spans across both pages of the interior of the brochure. Color blocks separate and highlight different sections.

The visual content on the front cover consists of positive and encouraging photographs of foster youth, leadership, and families. The back cover consists of a simplified map of the U.S., highlighting the states that are part of the initiative. Icons and text were used to clarify information further. The interior of the brochure consists of one large vector graphic spanning horizontally across the entire page. Pieces of this graphic correspond with the information presented above the graphic.

The icons presented in the brochure are clean and simplistic. Two leading circles help identify the context of each subsection. One is a green circle embodying white subjects, and the other is a white circle with blue motifs that break the bounding circle by a fraction. The rest of the icons across the brochure are not contained in a bounding shape and are either green or blue and mostly depict people, places, and vehicles.
The iconography of the brochure is clear in meaning and purpose. The graphics used throughout the brochure are clarifying factors to make the division of the information on the page more accessible. People represent groups of people, and a book represents resources, a clipboard represents research, an apple stands for education, a birthday cake stands for age, a graduation cap stands for graduation, and so on.

The aesthetic choices that led to the success of the visual solution include the limited color pallet, the cohesive use of fonts, and the arrangement and alignment of text. The choice to use a vibrant blue and green color pallet provided good contrast and made it easier to transition between different brochure sections. Additionally, the minimalistic use of the icons added to the intention of each section.

The aesthetic choices connect back to homelessness amongst emancipated foster youth in that they all support the factual information presented. The colors are pleasing but serious, the information is divided into logical sections, the supporting icons help clarify important issues, and the photographs are encouraging change.

https://www.aecf.org/work/child-welfare/jim-casey-youth-opportunities-initiative
The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative

The project’s motivation is to ensure that young people between the ages of 14 and 25, who have spent at least one day in the foster care system, are provided with the necessary resources, relationships, and opportunities they require to achieve well-being and success.

https://www.aecf.org/work/child-welfare/jim-casey-youth-opportunities-initiative
Case Study 2

Finally Family Homes

Finally Family Homes was started and is led by Christina Dronen, who initiated and is responsible for the Finally Family Homes blog and organization (The Problem).

The project’s motivation is to provide support for foster youth aging out of the foster care system without having a home. This organization was formed because 20,000 foster youth turn 17 each year without ever finding a forever family and home. The organization strives to break the unfortunate statistic that shows that only 5% of foster youth 12 years and over will get adopted (The Problem).

One of the main goals is to shield these youths from homelessness. They achieve this by offering transitional and family-oriented housing, empowering the youth to build an economic foundation and self-sufficiency, and inviting them into a permanent community of healthy relationships and out of isolation (The Problem).

This project attends to foster youth transitioning out of the system, addressing their need for security, belonging, and self-actualization.

The main challenge this organization faces is that there is not enough help. Leaving youth completely alone and less equipped for success in comparison to their peers that have families. Another challenging aspect this organization has to face is hearing emancipated foster youth say, “I
did not think anyone cared about me at all.”
It is no easy task convincing these youths
that there are people who care and want
to invest in their lives to see them happy
and successful. Lastly, this organization is
small and is therefore primarily active in
California. It will take some time before it
can expand to other states (The Problem).

The project outcomes include the
establishment of “keys to success.” These
guide the youth through the following
steps: Setting goals the right way, how to
be prepared for the unexpected, learn
how to manage time wisely, get organized
for success, and learning from others who
rose to success. Next, they have a set of
tools to help those who have advanced
through the previous keys to success; they
call this “rising to success.” Consisting of the
following steps: How to take advantage of
stress, how to store & organizes essential
documents, and the importance of note-
taking. Lastly, the organization also provides
a few motivational tools. These include

free motivational quote coloring pages
and inspirational phone wallpapers.

Relevant elements that tie back to
homelessness amongst emancipated
foster youth include the different resources
and support that Finally Family Homes
provides to those transitioning out of the
system. They address the gap created
in foster youths’ lives when they age out
of the system and provide all-around
support to fill that gap (The Problem).

**Visual Analysis**

The selection depicts a Pinterest campaign,
(Fig. 3, 4, 5, 6) a collection of different pins
that offer encouragement, offer support,
and inform the public of the issues while
providing and promoting solutions.

The audience consists of foster youth
and adults interested in being involved
with the foster care system overall. Also,
anyone exposed to Pinterest or Google
image search may not be aware of the
issues associated with foster care.

People consume the visual solution digitally, through the Internet. More specifically, through the Pinterest website or any other social media that allows pin sharing.

This project is embedded in a broader cultural context in that the pins showcase a variety of ethnicities and ages. They also target a variety of people and groups in their imagery and content. They address topics that would be relevant to people that are not associated with the foster care system.

The interrelation between the image, the form, and the accompanying text lies in the content of the pins. Most of the pins are literal in that the imagery directly supports the written content in meaning. The images are designed well to fit the Pinterest format and allow the text to be readable but remain relevant.

The composition of the visuals is mostly unified in colors but not in layout or component selection. Some of the pins have photographs, and others only provide blocks of color, texture, and content in the form of text. Some combine photographs and other design elements, while others rely solely on image and text.

The content of the pins varies drastically. While some of the imagery and text are purely inspirational and encouraging, other content is specific. The pins vary from promoting stress-reducing tips to tips on dealing with different behavior issues in teens. Some of the pins target potential foster parents, while others are generic.

Not all of the pins include the foundation’s web address. Lastly, some of the pins strongly lean toward a religious tone.

There is not much use of signs or symbols in the Finally Family Home’s pins. Aside from the religious cross typically associated with Christianity, the pins do not feature much of any semiotics.
A lot of the pins include photographs of people, teenagers, and middle-aged women and men. These are representative of foster families and foster youth. Most other imagery is generic in terms of genre but conveys a motivational mood mainly through color.

The decision to have a wide variety of design elements creates a disconnect within the visual solutions themselves and the primary cause. While some pins represent Finally Family Homes through color, logo, and text, others lack a reference point that ties them back to the central brand. Additionally, the pins that use people show the entirety of their faces, making it more difficult for the audience to relate to the message.

The aesthetic choices relate to homelessness amongst emancipated homeless youth because they attempt to establish an emotional reach towards their audience. Most of the information conveyed brings attention to the issues that contribute to homelessness amongst emancipated foster youth.

https://finallyfamilyhomes.org

The content of the pins varies drastically. While some of the imagery and text are purely inspirational and encouraging, other content is specific.
Finally Family Homes

This project attends to foster youth transitioning out of the system, addressing their need for security, belonging, and self-actualization. One of the main goals is to shield these youths from homelessness.
Fig. 5

10 Keys to Success
What Are You Missing?

Fig. 6

God sets the lonely in families.
Psalm 68:6 NIV

finallyfamilyhomes.org
Case Study 3

The National Foster Youth Institute
The National Foster Youth Institute is responsible for the project, Foster Youth Initiative. As the name states, this is a national institution based in Los Angeles, CA. It is currently running under the leadership of Rebecca Louve Yao, Executive Director (Housing).

The motivation of the project is to fully transform foster care reform to improve outcomes for foster youth.

The ultimate goal is to create a nation where all children can grow up safely with loving parents.

In this vision, the child welfare program provides hope for families in need (Housing).

The two main fields this project operates in are leadership development and civic engagement. The leadership development part consists of leadership corps, job shadowing and internships, and a shadow day program. The civic engagement part consists of congressional dinners and listening tours. The National Foster Youth Institute focuses on several issues, including adoptions, child welfare, child care, education, workforce readiness, health and healthcare, housing, and sex trafficking (Housing).

One of the main challenges that the Foster Youth Initiative faces is making a change in legislation. For example, recently, a bipartisan bill has been introduced to provide emergency support to foster youth and child welfare services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently, the initiative is calling for help informing members of Congress of the importance...
of supporting foster youth and families during the pandemic. Another major issue faced by the initiative is systematic racism. Their primary way of addressing this issue is by encouraging those associated with the child welfare system to speak out by filming a video in which they discuss their encounter (Housing).

Many of the project outcomes are still in progress. However, some of the existing successful results include a partnership with twelve like-minded organizations and seven significant funders. The Foster Youth Initiative continues to connect foster youth and former foster youth with resources and assistance to help prepare them for life after foster care (Housing).

Some relevant elements connected to homelessness amongst emancipated foster youth include the active effort to prepare foster youth for life after foster care. Additionally, there is an ongoing effort to make legislative changes to encourage systematic changes within the national child welfare program (Housing).

**Visual Analysis**

The selection depicts a website (Fig. 7, 8, 9) that provides valuable insight into the initiative’s goals. There are resources for anyone in the foster care system or anyone who would like to assist in reaching the initiative’s goals. Helping the initiative includes volunteering for the initiative, sharing personal encounters, or donating money.

The audience of the Foster Youth Initiative includes current and former foster youth, those who want to help and see a change within the child welfare system, and politicians capable of making legislative change.

People consume the visual solution by accessing the Internet and navigating to the National Foster Youth Institute website.
This project is embedded in a broader cultural meaning because, in addition to addressing the issues of foster youth and aging out of the system, it also communicates the core issues of systematic racism. More importantly, it is putting forth active efforts to abolish both problems on a national level.

The interrelation between the image, the form, and the accompanying text lies in showcasing the institution’s relationships with those they serve. All of these elements complement each other and work well together in conveying the primary mood and message.

The composition of the website is clean and well organized. The layout is professional and provides a clear overview. It is overall easy to navigate and well structured.

The images directly support the written content of the website. The photos are relevant because they are not predictable stock photos. The photos primarily consist of people, especially group shots of youth and leaders. The written content is consistently on topic and up to date. There is an effective visual hierarchy among the text, making it easy to identify the main subjects of the following body texts.

The website does not offer much in terms of semiotics. The only exception to this is the social media icons that universally address what social media platforms they represent.

The images are shown throughout the website convey a genuine feeling of motivation and impact. They are the documentation of the ongoing progress that comes as a result of the initiative. Both the youth and adults appear more than happy to be present and partake in the cause of the initiative.

The aesthetic choices that led to the website’s success include the limited color pallet, high-quality photographs, and well-
organized content. The color pallet consists of yellow, blue, purple, and orange. These colors are used throughout the website to help with separating and distinguishing content and assisting in navigating the site’s different pages. The photos are not dull and predictable, but they maintain a level of professionalism and unity. Lastly, the content is well-organized in terms of alignment, font choice, and size.

The aesthetic choices relate to homelessness amongst emancipated foster youth in that they call attention to the most important demographic, older foster youth. The website’s overall aesthetic provides a welcoming environment that allows youth to understand the cause and locate their desired destinations based on their need.

https://nfyi.org
The National Foster Youth Institute

The motivation of the project is to fully transform foster care reform to improve outcomes for foster youth. The ultimate goal is to create a nation where all children can grow up safely with loving parents.
Fig. 8

Fig. 9
Experiences

When reviewing former foster care youth in the context of their experiences in the system, it can be concluded that one of the main factors causing issues amongst foster youth is placement instability. With each placement move, foster youth constitute feelings of disconnect from their peers, loss of control over their lives and social institutions. The older a child is, the higher the chances are of more placements and instability.

Instability and more placements are an issue because the second-largest population entering the foster care system, after infants, is older youth.

There is a correlation between child maltreatment and the number of placements.

A more significant number of placements, on the other hand, is associated with disruptive behavior (Havlicek).

There is not much known in terms of how foster youth comprehend their experiences in the system. A project that worked with 23 preadolescent foster children (ages 7-12) provides insight into their environments and understanding. Havlicek collected stories of first-hand accounts from different foster children and their situations. Eleven-year-old Brian expresses frustration with
placement instability: “You have to keep moving, and moving, and moving until finally, someone keeps you. That kind of sucks.” Hearing children in the system describe their lives provides valuable insight in understanding how they experience surrogate families. This insight is also vital as there is a general lack of data regarding foster care and institutions. Understanding the experiences of foster care children can raise social awareness and positively impact foster care policies. As Whiting states, “Collecting and disseminating their stories provides representation in two ways: description and advocacy.”

To properly shape foster programs and their effects on children, it is essential to get input from youths currently and formerly immersed in the system. Understanding how children navigate the system can help uncover gaps in the system and help meet the children’s needs. Lastly, telling their stories can be therapeutic for foster care children. Storytelling can assist the practitioners in providing case training and treatment (Whiting).

The interviews consist of three main research domains: Culture and ecology, biological and foster families, and the child’s emotions and personal characteristics. In the culture and ecology domain, children describe the horrific state of the places they lived and what social effects that had on them: “Other children would say ‘Yeah, ha ha ... Junius lives in a dope house, laugh at him.’” Other issues surfaced, such as other children making fun of African American foster children that lived with white families and distrusted the family and the foster child due to racial differences (Whiting).

In the biological and foster families domain, over half of the children recalled negative experiences from their birth families related to abuse and neglect that they have either experienced or witnessed. Eight-year-old Jessie recalled, “My grandma ... whipped me, put me in the closet.” Two brothers,
Deondre and Daniel, stated that their mother’s boyfriend would hurt them: “Like, she would be mean in the morning, like all the time, and then she had this man, and he used to beat us ... yeah, you know like a piece of a table, the leg, it had nails in it, and he used to beat us with that ... but he said that when you get back, if you go, then you is going to get beat again. He didn’t say ‘beat,’ but he said ‘you know what is goin’ to happen.’” The author notes that a theme developed, showing a significant reliance between siblings, causing considerable dismay when siblings separated in the foster system (Whiting).

In the third domain, children’s emotions and personal characteristics, the children reflected on being confused about why they were in the system and what would happen to them in the future. The children also questioned their feelings of self-respect and accountability. Additionally, they exhibited strong negative feelings towards the foster care system and expressed significant loss, fear, and anger. Keith stated: “Yeah, foster care is just sick! I don’t want to hear about it at all. You get taken away from your parents. It ruins your life! Your heart is totally destroyed, and the only thing that is left working in your body is your brain. ... That is why I want out of this foster care right now!” the children were also able to self-assess well, describing their behavior and how they see themselves. Brian explains: “Then I went to [a group home] and [a worker]... threatened to tie me up with a rope ... and then I left because the people couldn’t deal with me. I kept going into the hospital because of my behavior. If I was bad there they would give me a shot in the butt ... and I got one, too (Whiting).”

The experiences and first-hand accounts described above can provide a better understanding of children’s experiences. Understanding what each child is experiencing is crucial in knowing how to interact with that child, especially during interventions. There is a fundamental
need for more empathetic interventions due to the conflicting feelings that these children experience. Practitioners have a responsibility of better-informing children about the reason they are in foster care. Whiting states: “Workers who deny foster children information may further contribute to the feelings of disempowerment and helplessness that is pervasive in foster children (Whiting).”

**Stories**

The “Sibling Relationship in Foster Care: Foster Parent Perspective” study interviewed 15 foster parents to determine their stance on sibling relationships in the foster care system. The interview consisted of a total of 17 questions, such as: “How are sibling relationships promoted within the foster care system?”

The themes that emerged from these interviews are: “understanding the complexity with sibling placement, the importance of time spent with one another, and sibling visitation (Wojciak).

In the first theme, understanding the complexity of sibling placement, an overwhelming number of parents believed that siblings should not be separated. One parent states: “I think if they are separated and they were close to begin with. If they leaned on each other for support while they were with bio-parents, I think it is going to impact their behavior. They might act out or they might shutdown. (FP28)”

Sometimes it is a matter of space. However, other times it may be an age preference: “Maybe someone only has room for one boy, or a boy and a girl or someone
only has so much room. I think the age has a big impact. Someone will take the nine-year-old, but won’t take the sixteen-year-old sibling. (FP16) (Wojciak).”

When discussing the themes of visitations and the importance of time spent with one another, parents showed support and acknowledged the importance of siblings seeing each other: “This [sibling relationship] is in all likely the one stable relationship they are going to maintain from the cradle to grave. So, whatever we can do to make sure that if they are separated that they get together and they still see each other as family and as siblings, the better the chances that the relationship will stand to be healthy after they have been through the system.” Some parents also mentioned the drawbacks of supervised visitations: “They go to a visit and usually they are not fun because they are confined to a room, or a living room, or the majority of ones I’ve seen are all supervised. Sometimes they go out to the mall or to the park, but um when they’re supervised they have to be confined to one room. They can’t, like if it’s supervised one social worker has to be watching both of them at the same time and if one child has to go to the bathroom at a restaurant they all have to go so that one is not left alone. . . . I think those visits are the most damaging to children. I mean the system will never portray it that way. They want to portray that these are really good things to get kids back together, but when all the hurt happens and all the anxiety happens, it’s always at visits. It is not when they are away from visits. . . . If you want to promote more sibling

Even if foster parents want to keep siblings together, they may only be licensed for one foster child.
bonding and interaction, there needs to be more focus on the kids.” (FP6) (Wojciak).

When asked how the foster care system should treat sibling relationships, one parent pointed out the faults of the system: “A lot of times, the [siblings] are not protected because they either have their individual caseworkers or there is such a high turnover of CPS caseworkers, that the system doesn’t even recognize or make the effort to have these children grouped together or make an effort for them to see each other on a weekly or monthly bases. (FP28)” Other parents expressed concern with the priorities that different social workers have. Some may be concerned with simply placing everyone somewhere, while others do their best not to separate siblings.
Mind Map 1

According to the National Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, in 2017, 51 percent of children adopted from foster care were adopted by their foster parents.

| An estimated 437,283 children were in foster care on September 30, 2018. | 250,103 children exited foster care during 2018. |

Foster Care In the U.S. (Foster)

**Placement**
- 6% in institutions
- 46% in non-relative foster family homes
- 32% in relative foster family homes
- 5% on trial home visits
- 4% in group homes
- 2% in supervised independent living
- 1% had run away

**Outcomes**
- 49% were reunited with parent(s) or primary caretaker(s)
- 25% were adopted
- 11% went to live with a guardian
- 7% were emancipated
- 7% went to live with another relative
- 1% had other outcomes

A conclusion we can draw from this information is that most foster care placements (78%) that occur are to foster family homes, further emphasizing the need to focus on foster parents regarding spreading awareness about the risk factors of homelessness associated with emancipated foster youth.
The “Voices of Youth Count” from Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago reported the following findings regarding youth homelessness (Sarah).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Youths aged 18-25, and roughly 3% of teenagers have experienced homelessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27%</td>
<td>Homeless LGBTQ youths reported exchanging sex for basic needs compared to 9% of non-LGBTQ youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29%</td>
<td>Homeless youths have been reported addicted or abusing alcohol and other controlled substances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62%</td>
<td>LGBTQ youths reported being physically abused while homeless compared to 47% of non-LGBTQ youths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69%</td>
<td>Homeless youths have reported mental health problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50%</td>
<td>Homeless youths have been in the juvenile justice system, jail, or detention</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Goals

This thesis aims to spread awareness of the issues associated with foster care that lead to homelessness amongst emancipated foster youth. Furthermore, this thesis intends to provide an incentive through a visual solution to address these factors during the youth’s stay in foster care by informing others of this issue.

The goal is to develop a solution to reach foster institutions, foster parents, and foster youth.

Upon further consideration, a decision was made that this visual solution should also provide a practical aspect that would help foster youth directly.

The final deliverable of this thesis will consist of a kit that includes the following items:

1. An 18 x 24-inch information poster to provide information on homelessness, education, and employment.

2. A parent brochure giving insight into foster care stay and placement, risks of aging out, mental health, and a personal youth statement.

3. A share box that will be mailed flat in an envelope and require assembly upon arrival.

4. An instruction sheet detailing how to assemble the box.

5. An 18x24-inch poster explaining the benefits of sharing and providing examples of things to write.

6. A hand-bound notepad to be used for the share box.
Process

This share box kit is meant to be sent out to foster parents and institutions, especially those with new placements. One of three different designs will be sent out based on the age of the foster youth.

The idea is simple, a parent or institution that receives the kit sets it up in a common area with high visibility. The posters and brochure help spread awareness about the leading causes behind homeless emancipated foster youth. The box provides a space for foster youth to ask questions and share their thoughts and feelings.

I began the process by reviewing all of my research and compiling the critical findings in one document. I then divided the information into the following logical groups: Education, homelessness, employment, foster care stay, placements, risks, mental health, and personal experiences. After that, I grouped the topics that flowed well together. I ended up with two posters and one brochure as described above.

**Beyond Poster**

After grouping the topics, I began laying out the information in an 18 x 24-inch InDesign document (Fig.16). The poster’s title is “Beyond Foster Care” because it is intended to provide information on the outcomes of foster care youth. The purpose of the poster was to provide a perspective to youth and parents on the emancipation outcomes.

**Parent Brochure**

Similarly to the informational poster, I laid out the information parent brochure in four panels on a two-sided 11 x 17-inch InDesign document (Fig 17, 18). I stayed within the initial color palette of light blue and orange.
This mood board showcases some inspirational patterns and images. It also provides examples of different fonts and type pairings. Lastly, it explores the initial color palette. All of this provided a great start to the beginning of this project.

Spectral
Karla

Valera Round
Noto Serif

Proza Libre
Open Sans

Abril Fatface
Poppins Light

UNICA ONE
Crimson Text Roman

PERMANENT MARKER
Overpass Regular
**Beyond Foster Care**

**ABOUT 21,000 YOUTHS ARE EMANCIPATED FROM THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM EACH YEAR.**

### HOMELESSNESS

- **53%** of foster youth became homeless within the first 18 months of aging out

- **20%** of emancipated youth will experience homelessness before age 26

- **37%** of former foster youth have experienced homelessness

Youth that aged out of the foster care system were **more likely to be homeless** by the age of 19 if they:

- Were placed in a group home
- Were abused before entering foster care
- Were involved in more delinquent behavior
- Did not feel close to either of their biological parents or grandparents
- Had run away multiple times while in foster care

A crucial protective factor from homelessness is the ability to stay in foster care until the age of 21

### EDUCATION

**HIGH SCHOOL**

- Graduation rate by the age of 19:
  - **Foster Youth 58%**
  - **General Population 87%**

**COLLEGE**

- Graduation rate by the age of 25:
  - **Foster Youth 3%**
  - **General Population 28%**

GED recipients are twice as likely not to attend secondary education when compared to the general population.

### EMPLOYMENT

**YOUNG ADULTS WHO EXPERIENCED FOSTER CARE HAVE:**

- **20%** lower employment rates than other young adults
- **35%** lower household income than the general population

**PREVENTATIVE ASPECTS OF ADVERSE EVENTS INCLUDE:**

- Sharing living expenses with someone
- Being a student
- Getting educational or housing assistance
- Having dependable measures of transportation and communication
- Keeping the same employer throughout the transition year

Fig. 16 Beyond Foster Care Poster Draft 1
Frequent placements limit the youth's ability to form secure attachments, leading to a decrease in chances of reunification and adoption. Due to the lack of foster families willing to take in older youth, most older youths develop mental health issues as they move an average of 6 times during their stay in the foster care system and change families each time. Children with mental health needs and behavioral problems tend to have more placements, leading to more behavioral problems. Having a driver's license among foster youth increases psychological well-being. The average length of stay for any given foster care placement is 2 years. The National Evaluation of Title IV-E Independent Living Programs for Youth in Foster Care shows that only 17% of youth who aged out of the foster care system were completely self-supporting 2.5 to 4 years after aging out of the system. The purpose of this brochure was to provide context to the foster parents or leaders of the foster institution. This can also be used as a mailer to potential foster parents, such as those involved in taking the foster license classes. This is a tool designed to help them understand the extent of the difference they could make in foster youth's lives.
**Box Design**

I began the box design by creating different individual elements to be included (Fig. 19). Firstly, I changed the light orange color to a more vibrant orange. Then I used Photoshop brushes to create an organic splatter pattern. I continued by making a flower pattern in Illustrator by combining two circles. I created a secondary pattern by combining circles and squares. Lastly, I chose to use quarter and half-circles for the rest of the supporting visual elements (Fig. 19).

I created a box design that included orange, green, and blue colors using the newly developed elements (Fig. 20). Then I made a secondary box design that uses only green and orange colors (Fig. 21).

Both box designs use all of the created elements from figure 19. This is to create a dynamic and visually exciting design to engage the audience.
**Share Poster**

The “Ask & Share” poster (Fig. 22) followed an identical process of the informational layout. The primary purpose of this poster is to provide context to the users. It is intended to hang near the box in a common area of the foster home or institution. It provides examples of questions that can be asked or concerns that can be voiced. This provides motivation for the foster youth to share their thoughts and feelings with their caretakers that they otherwise may not have shared. The goal of opening up a new channel of communication is to ensure that the mental and emotional needs of the foster youth are met.

**Beyond Foster Care**

After laying out all of the information shown in figure 16, I incorporated design elements from figure 19 into the poster design. This proved more difficult than I anticipated as I wanted to share a lot of information. Upon completing the poster showing in figure 23, I realized that I had a setback. Because I included so much information in one poster, it turned out to be cluttered and visually busy rather than attractive. At this point, I decided to eliminate incorporating the blue circles in my design as they fought with the visual elements of green and orange. After further contemplation and discussion, I concluded that it would be in the best interest of the aesthetic design to only pick one or two main points from the entire poster that was flooded with information and rethink the deliverable for the rest of the information.
To properly shape foster programs and their effects on children, it is essential to get input from youths currently immersed in the system.

Understanding how children navigate the system can help uncover gaps in the system and help meet the children’s needs.

Telling their stories can be therapeutic for foster care children. Storytelling can assist the practitioners in providing case training and treatment.

Practitioners have a responsibility of better-informing children about the reason they are in foster care.

Ask & Share!

To properly shape foster programs and their effects on children, it is essential to get input from youths currently immersed in the system.

Ask Questions!

- Why am I here?
- When can I see my family again?
- What happened to my siblings?
- How long will I stay here?
- Where will I go to school?

Share Your Feelings!

Today I feel sad because...

- I am happy about...
- I am scared of...
- I am thankful for...
- I hope to...

Fig. 22 Ask & Share Poster Draft 1
Beyond Foster Care

**Employment**

Young adults who experienced foster care have:

- 20% lower employment rates than other young adults
- 35% lower household income than the general population

Preventative aspects of adverse events include:

- Sharing living expenses with someone
- Being a student
- Getting educational or housing assistance
- Having dependable measures of transportation and communication
- Keeping the same employer throughout the transition year

**Homelessness**

Youth that aged out of the foster care system were more likely to be homeless by the age of 19 if they:

- Were placed in a group home
- Were abused before entering foster care
- Were involved in more delinquent behavior
- Did not feel close to either of their biological parents or grandparents
- Had run away multiple times while in foster care

- 53% of foster youth became homeless within the first 18 months of aging out
- 20% of emancipated youth will experience homelessness before age 26
- 37% of former foster youth have experienced homelessness

**Education**

High school graduation rate by the age of 19:

- Foster Youth 58%
- General Population 87%

College graduation rate by the age of 25:

- Foster Youth 3%
- General Population 28%

A crucial protective factor from homelessness is the ability to stay in foster care until the age of 21.

About 21,000 youths are emancipated from the foster care system each year.

Fig. 23 Beyond Foster Care Poster Draft 2
**Parent Brochure**

The intention behind the parent brochure was initially to inform parents of placement instability issues, risks of homelessness, and mental health.

In much the same way as in the case of the “Beyond Foster Care” poster, I was not satisfied with the result of the parental brochure, as seen in figures 24 and 25. This also seemed to be much too busy to be aesthetically pleasing or visually engaging.

It was at this stage that I realized that I was using too many different elements. The half-circle, the quarter circle, and the rectangles, along with the rounded header “arrows,” were entirely too disheveled to an almost comical point. The textured background was also working against being in that it contributed to the messy nature of the overall design and took away from the layout elements.

Lastly, I was also unhappy with the amount of information that was still present in the brochure. Even after diluting the information, it still seemed like it was an overwhelming amount.

I began rethinking the true purpose of the brochure and how I should translate that to the final deliverable.

Eventually, I decided to convert some of the information into separate interactive card activities. One activity will be solely for the foster parents or workers, and another for the foster parents and the foster youth.

It is worth noting that I hired my friend and her family as a talent for a photoshoot to use their family pictures in the final brochure.
The average length of stay for any given foster care placement is: 2 years

Youth who emancipate from foster care experience poor outcomes like:
- Substance Abuse
- Unemployment
- Homelessness
- Low Educational Attainment
- Unplanned Pregnancy
- Legal System Involvement
- Aging Out

The National Evaluation of Title IV-E Independent Living Programs for Youth in Foster Care shows that only 17% of youth who aged out of the foster care system were completely self-supporting 2.5 to 4 years after aging out of the system.
Children with mental health needs and behavioral problems tend to have more placements, leading to more behavioral problems. With each placement move, foster youth constitute feelings of disconnect from their peers, loss of control over their lives. Frequent placements limit the youth’s ability to form secure attachments, leading to a decrease in chances of reunification and adoption. The older a child is, the higher the chances are of more placements and instability. Mental Health

Children with mental health needs and behavioral problems tend to have more placements, leading to more behavioral problems.

54.4% of former foster care youth experience mental health problems in adulthood, compared to 22.1% of the general population.

STORIES
Due to the lack of foster families willing to take in older youth, most older youths develop mental health issues as they move an average of 6 times during their stay in the foster care system and change families each time.

“You have to keep moving, and moving, and moving until finally, someone keeps you. That kind of sucks.”
Brian, 11

Placement
THE SECOND LARGEST POPULATION ENTERING THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM, FOLLOWING INFANTS, IS OLDER YOUTH.

PLACEMENT DISRUPTION LEADS TO:
- Academic performance decline
- Poor physical health
- Incarceration in adulthood

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Poor physical health
Incarceration in adulthood

Placement disruption leads to:

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Brian, 11

Placement
THE SECOND LARGEST POPULATION ENTERING THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM, FOLLOWING INFANTS, IS OLDER YOUTH.

PLACEMENT DISRUPTION LEADS TO:
- Academic performance decline
- Poor physical health
- Incarceration in adulthood

With each placement move, foster youth constitute feelings of disconnect from their peers, loss of control over their lives.

The older a child is, the higher the chances are of more placements and instability.

Mental Health
Children with mental health needs and behavioral problems tend to have more placements, leading to more behavioral problems.

54.4% of former foster care youth experience mental health problems in adulthood, compared to 22.1% of the general population.

Academic performance decline
Poor physical health
Incarceration in adulthood

Placement disruption leads to:
CHAPTER 4
Final Solution
The Share Box

Initially, the share box was explained only in the “Ask & Share” poster (Fig. 22). However, I realized this was an opportunity to create a more engaging solution. That is why I created the group activity game “Exploring Foster Care,” as seen in Figures 26 - 39.

The game serves as a connecting point between foster parents or workers and the foster youth. The primary goal of the share box is to be sent out along with new youth placements in a foster home. This group activity is intended to break the ice so that foster youth feel more comfortable with their foster parents or caretakers. This ties directly back to the research when considering that, according to the National Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, 78% of foster youth are placed in foster family homes.

With this in mind, I chose a vibrant color palette that would convey positive and energizing feelings. The green and orange hues provide a well-balanced contrast that draws the viewer’s attention to the content and activities.

The activity starts with the foster parents making their intentions clear and stating why they began fostering or initially took an interest in becoming foster parents. Then it is followed by an ice breaker for the foster youth. Each of these components is divided up into numbered steps and assigned to a consecutive card. This system clarifies how the cards should be used and offers an easy transition from one card to the next.

The foster youth picks one of the blue cards, as seen in Figures 40 - 59, and reads the question aloud before answering it. This opens up discussion as the foster parents also answer and engage in discussion. I made sure to include a mix of light-hearted and more developed questions to pick a different one if the youth do not feel comfortable answering one of the questions. The primary purpose of these
cards serves to establish a certain level of trust so that any given placement can be prolonged. As the research states, placement instability is a leading factor of homelessness after aging out (Shah). Therefore, if trust can be established early on and communication can be maintained, chances of placement disability decrease.

I chose the color blue for these cards, which is not used in any other deliverable designs. These cards are the critical component in the interaction between the foster caretakers and the foster youth. I found the color blue fitting for this aspect of the share box because of its calming effect on people. The white text on the simple blue background allows for easy legibility due to the high contrast and the heavier weight of the type.

Next follows the explanation of the share box. The group activity includes this so that the foster youth can learn by doing. The foster parents are prompted to take a piece of the notepad that will be included in the box, as seen in Figure 62, and to fill it out and then place it in the designated spot that is inside the actual share box. The cards specify to use the method of demonstration, regardless of age, because it encourages the use of the provided notepad outside of the dedicated activity time. By seeing it be done, a potential barrier of uncertainty is removed by eliminating any questions of how to use the share box and the chances of the box being utilized to increase its most significant potential.

This methodology is also the reasoning behind the design of the actual notepad itself. By providing a guided experience, the youth has a good starting point, leading to better use of the notepad. The design of the notepad also assures that critical details are not left out, such as the date and name of the youth that writes that particular note. The research shows that foster youth have a higher need for mental health services. This need can be identified
sooner and easier by providing a safe space for the foster youth to express themselves non-verbally through the notepad.

Lastly, the activity is concluded by encouraging the foster youth to use the share box and choosing an agreed-upon time and date to check the share box together for new notes. If there are no new notes, the group activity consists of simply choosing a blue card and engaging in conversation. This concept is why it is essential to place the share box with its accompanying Ask & Share poster in a high-traffic common area accessible to the foster youth.

Using the share box consistently, leads to communication between foster youth and parents or workers becoming easier to maintain. Showing the foster youth that there is a defined interest in their well-being will benefit their mental and emotional health needs and help prevent future adverse outcomes in adulthood, such as homelessness and dropping out of school (Villagrana).

Furthermore, the better the line of communication between foster youth and foster parents or workers is, the lower the chances are of developing conflict that may lead to multiple placements.
It is essential to provide a safe space for foster youth. Foster parents, start by discussing why you began fostering. It can be challenging for foster youth to understand why they were placed in foster care.

This activity is designed to help foster youth understand their circumstances and discuss their thoughts and feelings.

Let’s Learn Together

Let the foster youth discuss their answer to the provided blue card prompt, then respond. Foster parents, get the included notepad and answer the provided prompt. Please place it in the dedicated spot for notes in the box. Explain that they can write notes and use the box anytime they want. If there is nothing to address, choose one of the blue cards and discuss your answers.

Pick a day of the week and a time to all come together and address the notes in the share box.
1. It is essential to provide a safe space for foster youth. Foster parents, start by discussing why you began fostering.

2. Open up the discussion by letting the foster youth pick out one of the blue cards.

3. Let the foster youth discuss their answer to the provided blue card prompt, then respond.

4. Foster parents, get the included notepad and answer the provided prompt.

5. Read your written example out loud.

6. Please place it in the dedicated spot for notes in the box.

7. Explain that they can write notes and use the box anytime they want.

8. Pick a day of the week and a time to all come together and address the notes in the share box.

9. If there is nothing to address, choose one of the blue cards and discuss your answers.
It is essential to provide a safe space for foster youth. Foster parents, start by discussing why you began fostering.

It can be challenging for foster youth to understand why they were placed in foster care.

Learning by DOING!

Let’s Learn Together

Getting Started

Pick A Time

Pick A Blue Card

Explain The Box

4. Foster parents, get the included notepad and answer the provided prompt.

5. Read your written example out loud.

6. Please place it in the dedicated spot for notes in the box.

7. Explain that they can write notes and use the box anytime they want.

8. Pick a day of the week and a time to all come together and address the notes in the share box.

9. If there is nothing to address, choose one of the blue cards and discuss your answers.

This activity is designed to help foster youth understand their circumstances and discuss their thoughts and feelings.

2. Open up the discussion by letting the foster youth pick out one of the blue cards.

4. Foster parents, get the included notepad and answer the provided prompt.

5. Read your written example out loud.

6. Please place it in the dedicated spot for notes in the box.

7. Explain that they can write notes and use the box anytime they want.

8. Pick a day of the week and a time to all come together and address the notes in the share box.

9. If there is nothing to address, choose one of the blue cards and discuss your answers.

This activity is designed to help foster youth understand their circumstances and discuss their thoughts and feelings.

Fig. 34 Group Activity Card Front

Fig. 35 Group Activity Card Back

Fig. 36 Group Activity Card Front

Fig. 37 Group Activity Card Back
It is essential to provide a safe space for foster youth. Foster parents, start by discussing why you began fostering. It can be challenging for foster youth to understand why they were placed in foster care.

Let's Learn Together

This activity is designed to help foster youth understand their circumstances and discuss their thoughts and feelings.

Getting Started

1. It is essential to provide a safe space for foster youth. Foster parents, start by discussing why you began fostering.

2. Open up the discussion by letting the foster youth pick out one of the blue cards.

3. Let the foster youth discuss their answer to the provided blue card prompt, then respond.

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8. Pick a day of the week and a time to all come together and address the notes in the share box.

9. If there is nothing to address, choose one of the blue cards and discuss your answers.

Fig. 38 Group Activity Card Front Print File

Fig. 39 Group Activity Card Back Print File
What is your favorite food?

What is your favorite candy bar?

What is something that your foster parents do that you appreciate?

What is your favorite YouTube Channel?

What is something you have always wanted to do?

What is something that you feel you need but don't have?

What activities do you enjoy doing?

What is your favorite memory?

What kind of job do you want to have when you grow up?

What is something you would like your foster parents to know about you?

Do you have any hidden talents?

What is your favorite food?

What is something that your foster parents do that you appreciate?

What is your favorite candy bar?

Do you have anyone that you would like help staying in touch with?

Describe your best day ever.

What is something that your foster parents do that you wish you could change?

Have you traveled to other states/countries? If not, where would you like to go?

What kind of music do you like?

What is something you have always wanted to do?

What is something that you feel you need but don't have?
Describe your best day ever.

Have you traveled to other states/countries? If not, where would you like to go?

What is something you have always wanted to do?

What activities do you enjoy doing?

What is your favorite memory?

What is something you would like your foster parents to know about you?
What is something that you feel you need but don’t have?

What is something that your foster parents do that you wish you could change?

What is your favorite YouTube Channel?

What kind of job do you want to have when you grow up?

What kind of music do you like?

Do you have any hidden talents?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>What is your favorite candy bar?</th>
<th>What is something that your foster parents do that you appreciate?</th>
<th>Do you have anyone that you would like help staying in touch with?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Describe your best day ever.</td>
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<td>What is something you have always wanted to do?</td>
<td>What activities do you enjoy doing?</td>
<td>What is something that you feel you need but don’t have?</td>
<td>What is your favorite YouTube Channel?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your favorite memory?</td>
<td>What is something you would like your foster parents to know about you?</td>
<td>What kind of job do you want to have when you grow up?</td>
<td>Do you have any hidden talents?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 58 Blue Card Front Print File

![BEYOND Foster Care](image1)

![BEYOND Foster Care](image2)

![BEYOND Foster Care](image3)

![BEYOND Foster Care](image4)

Fig. 59 Blue Card Back Print File
Ask & Share!

FROM: ____________________________ DATE: ____________________________

TODAY I FEEL: _______________________________________________________
☐ Joyful          ☐ Awkward          ☐ Anxious
☐ Happy           ☐ Bored             ☐ Horrified
☐ Calm            ☐ Confused          ☐ Scared
☐ Excited         ☐ Jealous           ☐ Sad

I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT: ___________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Fig. 62 Group Activity Notepad Front
Fig. 63 Group Activity Notepad Final Mockup
Beyond Foster Care

After realizing that the “Beyond Foster Care” poster was too busy, I broke down the information into two different deliverables.

The main statistical points were intended to educate foster parents and workers on the realities and outcomes of foster care on kids that age out of the system. Because I did not want all of this information exposed to the actual foster youth, I decided to make a guessing card game. However, after further consideration, it seemed inappropriate to make such a devastating topic into a game. This is why I changed direction on this and decided to approach it from a discussion standpoint. I named this activity “Conversation Starters” to be discussed with fellow foster parents or caretakers.

Each card has a front and back (Fig. 64 - 93) and a folding element that holds the answer. I designed the card with a folding element so that others would not read the answer as if it were placed on the back of the card. However, this also means that these cards have to be folded and stacked in opposite directions so that the card stock as a whole remains even and does not lean to one side.

The activity itself is simple, one person draws a card and reads the question out loud. The other(s) then guess the answer. After everyone is done guessing, the person that drew the card will fold it open and read the answer.

After receiving the answer, the group discusses the meaning of the provided information. Following the discussion, it is encouraged that the participants of this activity research methods that would help solve the presented problem.

The thinking behind making such a heavy topic into an interactive activity lies in the more significant likelihood of retaining the information if it is presented interactively. Additionally, research shows that infants are more likely to be adopted
and that the adoption rate decreased with each successive age group (Connell). By informing foster parents and workers of the realities of foster care and the effects that they as foster caretakers can have on the future of foster youth, foster parents may be more inclined to adopt foster youth beyond the stage of infancy.

The rest of the information on the original “Beyond Foster Care” poster, as seen in Figure 23, has been divided into two additional but separate posters. These posters are specifically designed for public places where they would be exposed to potential and existing foster youth and foster parents or workers. The primary intention of these posters is to make people aware that they can make a difference in their own lives or the lives of others.

As seen in Figures 94 and 95, both posters are simple in their layout and content. They have established a header, an attention grabber, a silhouette representing older foster youth, and a call to action in the form of a link. I chose this minimal design so that the audience can easily understand the central message of each poster and has a clear pathway to possible solutions.

I included the silhouettes specifically because I wanted to avoid using pictures that depict a person’s face. So that it will be easier for the people exposed to these posters to imagine themselves or someone they know in that particular situation. Doing this increases the potential reach that these posters can have on the targetted audience.

The poster targetting foster youth, as seen in Figure 94, targets youth that is approaching their emancipation age. It asks a simple question, “Aging Out?” and then follows with a significant statistic that can be considered relevant to the general public. Lastly, it calls for the foster youth to visit a link that can assist in the transition out of foster care. This
is especially relevant because, based on the research, foster youth aging out of the system face adverse difficulties. These include, but are not limited to: Low employment rates, drug abuse, and involvement with the legal system (Geenen).

The poster that is addressing the general public calls for people to make a difference in the title. It informs the viewer what to make a difference about, which assists foster kids that are transitioning out of the foster system. Lastly, it provides context relevant to the issue to encourage a response.

By doing this, people can help foster youth rise against the odds. They can assist in ensuring the youth finishes High School or receives a GED, find stable employment, assure reliable housing, and avoid issues with the law (Berzin).
Foster Parents

Conversation Starters

Please read the question out loud and discuss the meaning of the answer.

Use these questions as guidelines to get conversations going with your fellow foster parent or other foster parents you may know.

Placement

On average, how many times does an older foster youth move during their stay in the foster care system?

6 Times

Fig. 64 Conversation Starters Card Front

Fig. 65 Conversation Starters Card Back

Fig. 66 Conversation Starters Card Front

Fig. 67 Conversation Starters Card Back
Fig. 68 Conversation Starters Card Front

Aging Out
What percentage of youth who aged out of the foster care system were completely self-supporting 2.5 years after aging out of the system?

Fig. 69 Conversation Starters Card Back

17%  

Fig. 70 Conversation Starters Card Front

Placement
The average length of stay for any given foster care placement is?

Fig. 71 Conversation Starters Card Back

2 Years
**Mental Health**

What percentage of former foster care youth experience mental health problems in adulthood?

**Fig. 72 Conversation Starters Card Front**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mental Health</th>
<th>54.4%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Fig. 73 Conversation Starters Card Back**

**Population**

Following infants, what is the second-largest population entering the foster care system?

**Fig. 74 Conversation Starters Card Front**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Older Youth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Fig. 75 Conversation Starters Card Back**
**Homelessness**
What percentage of foster youth became homeless within the first 18 months of aging out?

- Foster Youth: 53%
- General Population: 20%

**Homelessness**
What percentage of emancipated youth will experience homelessness before age 26?

- Foster Youth: 37%
- General Population: 20%

**Homelessness**
What percentage of former foster youth have experienced homelessness?

- Foster Youth: 3%
- General Population: 28%

**Homelessness**
What percentage of foster youth became homeless within the first 18 months of aging out?

- Foster Youth: 53%
- General Population: 20%
Homelessness
What percentage of former foster youth have experienced homelessness?

Fig. 80 Conversation Starters Card Front

37%

Fig. 81 Conversation Starters Card Back

Education
What is the High school Graduation rate by the age of 19 for foster youth versus the general population?

Fig. 82 Conversation Starters Card Front

Foster Youth 58%
General Population 87%

Fig. 83 Conversation Starters Card Back
**Education**

What is the college graduation rate by the age of 25 for foster youth versus the general population?

**Foster Youth 3%**

**General Population 28%**

Fig. 84 Conversation Starters Card Front

**Mental Health**

Having what amongst foster youth increases psychological well-being.

Fig. 86 Conversation Starters Card Front

**Driver’s License**

Foster Youth 3%

General Population 28%

Fig. 87 Conversation Starters Card Back
### Foster Parents Conversation Starters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Placement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The average length of stay for any given foster care placement is?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mental Health</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What percentage of former foster care youth experience mental health problems in adulthood?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aging Out</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What percentage of youth who aged out of the foster care system were completely self-supporting 2.5 years after aging out of the system?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Following infants, what is the second-largest population entering the foster care system?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Use these questions as guidelines to get conversations going with your fellow foster parent or other foster parents you may know.**

- **Placement**: The average length of stay for any given foster care placement is?
  - **Mental Health**: What percentage of former foster care youth experience mental health problems in adulthood?
- **Aging Out**: What percentage of youth who aged out of the foster care system were completely self-supporting 2.5 years after aging out of the system?
- **Population**: Following infants, what is the second-largest population entering the foster care system?

**Fig. 88 Conversation Starters Card Front 1 Final Print File**

| **Please read the question out loud and discuss the meaning of the answer.** |
| **Use these questions as guidelines to get conversations going with your fellow foster parent or other foster parents you may know.** |
| **2 Years** |
| **6 Times** |
| **54.4%** |
| **17%** |
| **Older Youth** |

**Fig. 89 Conversation Starters Card Back 1 Final Print File**
Fig. 90 Conversation Starters Card Front 2 Final Print File

Fig. 91 Conversation Starters Card Back 1 Final Print File
Fig. 92 Conversation Starters Card Front Final Mockup

Fig. 93 Conversation Starters Card Back Final Mockup
About 21,000 youths are emancipated from the foster care system each year.

GET HELP TODAY!
Careeronestop.org/GetMyFuture/
Help youth transitioning out of foster care by visiting: lifesetnetwork.org

Young adults who experienced foster care have 20% lower employment rates than other young adults.
Ask & Share!

I am thankful for...
I am scared of....
I hope to...
Today I feel...

Ask Questions!

Why am I here?
How long will I stay here?
Where will I go to school?
When can I see my family again?
What happened to my siblings?

LEARN MORE AT CHILDWELFARE.GOV

Fig. 96 Ask & Share Final Poster
Aging Out?

About 21,000 youths are emancipated from the foster care system each year.

GET HELP TODAY!
Careeronestop.org/
GetMyFuture/

Fig. 97 Aging Out Poster Mockup
Help youth transitioning out of foster care by visiting: lifesetnetwork.org

Young adults who experienced foster care have 20% lower employment rates than other young adults.
Fig. 99 Ask & Share Poster Mockup
Parent Brochure

Because I was already rethinking the deliverables for the “Beyond Foster Care” poster, I decided to incorporate some of the factual information from the parental brochure, as seen in Figures 24 and 25, within this new solution. Some of the factual and statistical information that used to be on the parental brochure has been rerouted and is now included in the “Conversation Starters” activity, as seen in Figures 64 - 93.

After much deliberation, I decided to use the brochure (Fig. 100 - 102) as a directive for parents to utilize affirmation and become informed on important mental health factors that pertain to foster youth. The mental health section further emphasizes the difference that foster parents and workers can make in the lives of foster youth simply by using affirmative language. I chose the form of a four fold brochure because all of the specific information needed to be presented as a whole. The flow of the content is set up to engage the audience and to provide an incentive to continue reading.

The information on the brochure is separated in two parts. On the front of the brochure foster parents and caretakers learn about the importance of affirmation and how to implement it with foster youth. Whereas the backside provides information on the mental health consequences on foster youth of not implementing affirmation.

In terms of design I stripped the many varying design elements that were present on the brochure to only a select few. This provides better use of space and allows for an easier flow of the content. I also included a script font to provide more visual interest to the overall piece and to help distinguish each foldable section from the other. I chose to keep the splattered background. However, I lowered the opacity of it, so that its effects would be muted and have
more of a calming effect rather than act as a fill for the negative space. This also helps create a more unified effect of the whole brochure. Once it is folded up, it is the only element that flows from one folded section to the next.

After test printing all of the deliverables I made the decision to lower the font size on almost all parts of the design, including the parental brochure. The larger fonts seemed necessary only on screen, but seemed to take away from the overall sophistication of the piece.

Test printing also confirmed that my chosen colors printed darker than they appeared on the screen. This worked in my favor as it provides much needed contrast between the type and the background color elements. This makes it easier for the audience to read and digest the information.
It is vital to provide words of affirmation to foster youth as frequent placements significantly impact their mental health (see the back of brochure).

**Why?**

- I am here if you need me.
- I care about how you feel.
- It’s okay to make mistakes.
- You are important.
- I believe in you.
- That is a great question.
- You are so brave.
- I like how your mind works.

**Examples**

- I am proud of you because...
- I really appreciate you when...

**How?**

Incorporate affirmation into your daily vocabulary when conversing with foster youth.

Use words that confirm, support, uplift, and positively empathize with foster youth.

Fig. 100 Brochure Front Final Print File
A Look At Mental Health

With each placement move, foster youth constitute feelings of disconnect from their peers and loss of control over their lives and social situations.

The older a child is, the higher the chances are of more placements and instability.

Placement disruption leads to:
- Academic performance decline
- Poor physical health
- Incarceration in adulthood

Frequent placements limit the youth's ability to form secure attachments, leading to decreased chances of reunification and adoption.

Youth who emancipate from foster care experience poor outcomes like:
- Homelessness
- Unemployment
- Unplanned Pregnancy
- Legal System Involvement
- Substance Abuse
- Low Educational Attainment

You are not alone, learn more here: https://www.childwelfare.gov/organizations/

Fig. 101 Brochure Back Final Print File
Fig. 102 Brochure Final Mockup
**Physical Box Design**

The physical box design (Fig. 103) was intended to create the mood for the contents of the share box. I strived to make the box look like fun so that both foster parents or workers and foster youth would want to explore it. By using bright but contrasting hues and geometric and organic shapes, the design is able to evoke curiosity and intrigue the audience.

The loud colors and patterns are designed to stand out and call attention to themselves. Because this is an activity set, I used shapes to convey a sense of dynamic motion. This is directly indicative of the interactive nature of the share box.

The share box is meant to be displayed in a common area of a home or establishment with the Ask & Share poster hung above it on a wall. The call to action is in the title of the poster, “Ask & Share,” to make the primary intention of the box clear.

The content of the box consists of all deliverables (Fig. 104):

1. Group Activity cards
2. Group Activity notepad
3. Ask & Share the poster
4. Parental Conversation Starters cards
5. Parental brochure on affirmation
6. Two public awareness posters

Most importantly, the box also provides a space for foster youth to place their notes that are written using the group activity notepad. This space, the contents, and placement of the box and poster and its attention-seeking design encourage the continuous and reoccurring use of the box.
Fig. 103 Box Final
Fig. 104 Box Contents Final

Fig. 105 Box Final Mockup
CHAPTER 5

Conclusion
This research attempts to solve homelessness amongst emancipated foster youth in that it identified factors contributing to the leading causes. By identifying areas in the foster care system that need improvement, I defined a visual solution to inform foster parents and workers of these issues and helped open up a new communication channel between foster parents or workers and the foster youth through engaging group activities.

The share box helps inform the foster parents or workers about some of the leading causes of homelessness amongst emancipated foster youth through its parental brochure and the “Conversation Starters” activity. These causes include placement instability and mental health and behavioral issues.

The box informs the foster parents or workers of how they can address issues such as mental health through words of affirmation, also presented on the brochure.

The “Conversation Starters” activity provides the foster parents or workers with factual information and context to fully understand the impact on the lives of foster youth that their involvement can make. By engaging in this activity, they can learn about the outcomes of foster youth in terms of education, employment, and critical factors in avoiding homelessness.

Using the two posters that stem from the original “Beyond Foster Care” poster, the public can become aware of the issues and risks associated with aging out of the foster care system. They are also encouraged to help foster youth avoid these issues, primarily homelessness, by following the call to action on each poster.

Most importantly, by creating the interactive group activity, a connection between foster youth and foster parents or workers is established while also providing them with a safe space to communicate their concerns and needs.
Future Goals
Providing an effective visual solution that can help impact countless lives of foster youth in the United States has not been an easy journey. Creating a design that would be engaging and successful in drawing attention from such a variety of age groups proved difficult. However, once I settled on a working color palette, each consecutive step in the process became more manageable.

In the future, I aim to meet with foster parents and foster group housing establishments to refine the existing content and fill any gaps that may be present based on the feedback I receive.

Eventually, I would like to mail out the share box to various in and out-of-state foster homes and group establishments to test out the product and refine it based on feedback from those who have tried it out.

My next step would be creating a website where foster parents and other organizations can request a share box or put in an order for several of them. Naturally, I would have to secure funding before this.

My ultimate goal remains to minimize the number of homeless emancipated foster youth.

Final Thoughts
The Beyond Foster Care Share Box provides numerous assets designed to address the leading factors of this issue. Doing so provides an opportunity for foster parents or workers and foster youth to communicate about important topics that play a crucial role in minimizing this issue.

I would like to see this project decrease the amount of homeless emancipated foster youth.
Personal Reflection

Completing this project has provided me with a newfound perspective regarding homelessness and foster care issues. I have learned that these two issues are more interrelated than I initially thought. Regardless, doing this research and executing this project has provided me with feelings of content and hope. During the process, I discovered that there is a growing number of organizations that are focused on assisting those affected and on resolving the core issues.

I have grown in that I have learned a substantial amount about the leading factors that lead to this issue. However, I was also able to learn about the many methods that are in place to provide solutions.

My perspective on the matter has changed because many more people are aware of these issues than I initially believed. I find comfort in knowing that many others are actively working towards helping youth in foster care, youth transitioning out of foster care, and youth already aged out.

What is even more encouraging is that there are efforts to promote change at a political level. Some legislature has already been passed that allows states to extend the legal emancipation age to be extended to 21 if they so choose.

Overall, I was happy to learn that there are organizations at both federal and state-level that effectively assist foster youth in ways that are preventative to homelessness after emancipation.
Appendix

Figures 1 - 2

Figures 3 - 6 Were used with permission from Finally Family Homes. See release form on page 112.

Figures 7 - 9

Figures 10 - 15 Were taken from Unsplash.com under the following creative commons licence:

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Figures 24, 26, 38, and 60 Photo present in these Figures was taken by me, Katerina Suther, and is being used with permission from Sara Gerver and Erik Gerver. See model release forms on pages 113-115.
COPYRIGHT RELEASE FORM FOR ARTWORK

RE: Artwork Release Notice
TO: Katie Suther [Recipient of rights]
FROM: Christina Dranen PHONE: [redacted]
ADDRESS: Valencia, CA 9135
COMPANY: Finally Family Homes
E-MAIL: info@finallyfamilyhomes.org
DESIGN DESCRIPTION: pinterest-pins

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN: By receipt of this letter, I (we), designer and original copyright owner of the described design, do hereby release and grant permission to Katie Suther (Recipient(s)) to use the design described above. Also, I (we) grant permission to reproduce this design by any printing service of the recipient’s choice for prints, enlargements, and any type of product to advertise and promote materials, including but not limited to Internet and/or commercial printing and fabrication services. I hereby release and grant permission and ownership of the design copyright to the Recipient(s).

Signed: [redacted] (Designer/Company)
Date: 1/03/21

Signed: ____________________________ (Recipient of rights)
Date: ____________________________
MODEL RELEASE FORM

To the photographer: Katerina Suther (name)
Address: [Redacted] Waukee, IA 50263

From the model: Sara Giever (name)
Address: [Redacted] West Des Moines, IA 50266

Photographs taken on June 9, 2021 (date)
at West Des Moines, IA 50266 (location)

In exchange for receiving (check/tick as appropriate):
☐ modelling fee in the amount of $_________ 
☐ free prints

I, the model grant you, the photographer, usage of the photographs subject to the following conditions:

- I understand that the photographs taken of me during this session can be used wholly or in part in any publication (commercial or otherwise), portfolio or public display (delete any that aren’t applicable).
- The photographs may be used to represent an imaginary person and any wording associated will not be attributed to me unless my name is specifically mentioned.
- Any special conditions on usage agreed between the model and photographer:

______________________________________________________________

Model: ______________________ Photograph: ______________________
both parties to sign here to agree to these special conditions.

I acknowledge that by signing this form, subject to the usage restrictions above, I give up all claim of ownership of the photographs, and assign copyright to the photographer named above. No further payment will be due. Use of the photographs may be granted to third parties, however the photographs will remain the property of the photographer.

I have read this form carefully and fully understand the implications. I am 18 years old or over.

Signed: ___________________ (model) Date: 7/26/21

If the model is under 18 years of age, a parent or legal guardian must sign:
Parent/guardian: ___________________ Date: ______________
Address: _______________________________ Phone: ____________
MODEL RELEASE FORM

To the photographer: Katerine Suther

(name)

Address: 345 Main St, Waukee, IA 50263

Phone:

From the model: Erik Gerver

(name)

Address: 123 West Des Moines, IA 50266

Phone:

Photographs taken on June 9, 2021

(date)

at West Des Moines, IA 50266

(location)

In exchange for receiving (check/tick as appropriate):

☐ modelling fee in the amount of $___________  ☑ free prints

I, the model grant you, the photographer, usage of the photographs subject to the following conditions:

- I understand that the photographs taken of me during this session can be used wholly or in part in any publication (commercial or otherwise), portfolio or public display (delete any that aren't applicable).
- The photographs may be used to represent an imaginary person and any wording associated will not be attributed to me unless my name is specifically mentioned.
- Any special conditions on usage agreed between the model and photographer:

__________________________

Model: _____________________ Photographer: _____________________

Both parties to sign here to agree to these special conditions.

I acknowledge that by signing this form, subject to the usage restrictions above, I give up all claim of ownership of the photographs, and assign copyright to the photographer named above. No further payment will be due. Use of the photographs may be granted to third parties, however the photographs will remain the property of the photographer.

I have read this form carefully and fully understand the implications. I am 18 years old or over.

Signed: _____________________ (model) Date: ____________

If the model is under 18 years of age, a parent or legal guardian must sign:

Parent/guardian: ______________ Date: ____________

Address: _____________________ Phone: ____________
MODEL RELEASE FORM

To the photographer, Katerina Suther

Address: [Redacted] Waukee, IA 50263

                                    Phone:

From the model: Matthew Grewe

Address: [Redacted] West Des Moines, IA 50266

                                    Phone:

Photographs taken on [Redacted] (date)
at [Redacted] West Des Moines, IA 50266 (location)

In exchange for receiving (check/tick as appropriate):
  □ modelling fee in the amount of $ [redacted]
  □ free prints

I, the model, grant you, the photographer, usage of the photographs subject to the following conditions:

  • I understand that the photographs taken of me during this session can be used wholly or in part in any publication (commercial or otherwise), portfolio or public display (delete any that aren't applicable).
  • The photographs may be used to represent an imaginary person and any wording associated will not be attributed to me unless my name is specifically mentioned.
  • Any special conditions on usage agreed between the model and photographer:

                                      Model: ___________________  Photographer: ___________________
                                      both parties to sign here to agree these special conditions.

I acknowledge that by signing this form, subject to the usage restrictions above, I give up all claim of ownership of the photographs, and assign copyright to the photographer named above. No further payment will be due. Use of the photographs may be granted to third parties, however the photographs will remain the property of the photographer.

I have read this form carefully and fully understand the implications. I am 18 years old or over.

Signed: ___________________ (model)  Date: ___________________

If the model is under 18 years of age, a parent or legal guardian must sign:

Parent/guardian: Sarah Grewe  Date: 7/10/21

Address: [Redacted] Phone: [Redacted]
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