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Los Angeles

Service and Program Needs

To Support Foster Students Attending Community College

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Chau Phuong Nguyen Dao

2015

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2015

# ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Service and Program Needs  
To Support Foster Students Attending Community College

by

Chau Phuong Nguyen Dao

Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor Linda Rose, Co-Chair

Professor Robert Rhoads, Co-Chair

There is little doubt that educational outcome for students who experience foster care is far below those of the general student population and that they may be disproportionately impacted by college practices, programs or services. In California over 50,000 children and youths are in out of home placements. It is estimated that approximately 12,000 current and former foster youth are enrolled in California's community college system at any one time. Children enter the foster care system as a result of extreme abuse or neglect inflicted upon them by their biological family. In California, only about one third of the cases where there is a substantiated report of abuse or neglect result in removal from the home, meaning that these are the most severe and difficult cases of maltreatment and neglect. This experience is then often compounded by the circumstances these children face upon entry into the foster care system.

Once in the system, many experience multiple placements that require frequent moves from home to home and may also result in multiple forced school changes and consequent social and academic challenges. By age 24, foster youth experience significantly poorer education outcomes than the general population (Courtney et al., 2011).

Increased educational advocacy for foster students among professionals who work with foster students have taken shape. In collaboration with the legislature, additional bills<sup>1</sup> have been passed to help ease the access to student records and increase support services for foster students to continue schooling into the college and job training levels after high school completion. This increased attention came as a recent study<sup>2</sup> of high school foster students demonstrated large disparities between not only foster students and the general student population but also foster students and other economically disadvantaged students.

The community college sector is where the majority of foster students enter into higher education due to their financial situation as well as their academic unpreparedness. This study sought out to find the service and program needs of foster students attending a community college, using Mt. San Antonio College as an actual study site by investigating the following research questions:

Umbrella question: For students with foster care experience, what are their service and program needs while attending community college?

1. What are the elements or characteristics of a foster youth resource center that has been active for 5 or more years?
2. What are the factors or information that professionals working with foster youth at non-profit agencies say are necessary for them to attend community college?

---

<sup>1</sup> The Uninterrupted Scholars Act (USA), Assembly Bill 12 - The California Fostering Connections Success Act, and Transitional Housing Placement Plus (THP-PLUS) program are examples.

<sup>2</sup> *At Greater Risk: California Foster Youth and the Path from High School to College*, March 2013.

3. What information and/or services do foster students say should be included in a resource center to support foster students attending community college?

According to the results of this study, the following that elements are necessary to demonstrate that the community college acknowledges and supports the efforts of its foster student population to attain a college degree.

1. Access Point for Connection and Engagement
2. Safe Common Space for Assistance and Acceptance
3. Access Point for Collective Voice
4. Provide Opportunities to Give Back
5. Provide Targeted Programming and Services

In the end, this study recommends that a community college institute the following to ensure that the findings are involved: community cultural wealth promotion, ensure basic life necessities are available, and continued advocacy and networking on behalf of foster students. This study provides community college administrators a logic model to show them that building a resource center to support its foster students is possible and needed. Community colleges can be part of the solution in helping foster students increase college completion and improve their life trajectory.

The dissertation of Chau Phuong Nguyen Dao is approved.

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2015

## DEDICATION PAGE

This is for all the foster children out there in our country who, through no fault of their own, have to contend with many serious life questions that counter their right to be children, to be naïve, to be free, and to be daydreamers. The purpose of this small project is to let them know there are strangers in this world who are aware of and care about their plight; I join with other foster youth professionals to support these children, to revive their spirit and move them forward.



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I could never have gotten through this period of my life without the support of my family. Only you understand what I went through these last 3 years to achieve my Doctorate degree, climb my professional career, and steady my health. Through your support, love, and help, I made it! You believed in me and provided me the space to complete what at times seemed impossible. I look forward to spending time with each of you....to shop, to eat, to decorate, to travel, and especially to laugh through life from now on. You are my mom (Me), my father-in-law (Papa), my mother in-law (Momma), my husband (Palak Mody), my brother (Anh Thong), my brother's partner (Susan Chang Chang), my sister in-law (Rupal) and her family, and my neighbor Phil Marszalek. A special message to my husband, who never questioned my ambitions and is always ready to do his part; I knew our marriage was as strong as it could ever be when you slept on the hospital floor next to me to ensure I was not alone or scared.

I also need to acknowledge my dear grandmother, Be Thi Pham, and father, Phuong Dinh Dao, who I know are looking from above, watching over our family. My grandmother passed along her sharp wit and feistiness – giving me the fortitude to get myself up and move when I

was down and ready to give up. She served as my example to always help others who are in need. I have to thank my Dad for instilling the love of learning in me. Through his example, I am able to achieve so much.

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## CHAPTER 1: PROBLEM STATEMENT

On January 14, 2013, President Obama signed the Uninterrupted Scholars Act (USA), a bill introduced by bi-partisan members of Congress that amends the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), so that social workers will have access to foster students’<sup>3</sup> records during their K-12 years. This bill resolves a long-standing issue that many foster care advocates have exposed. Specifically, when social workers, the main group of professionals on whom foster students rely for their welfare and schooling, do not have the right to view academic records, they are limited in their ability to help foster youth with their education. The bill allows social workers to track the educational progress of foster students and act as their educational advocates<sup>4</sup>.

This kind of collaboration in educational advocacy for foster students was started in 2010, with legislation passed in California in partnership with federal and state governments, social services, and the postsecondary sector to help foster students receive the necessary support services to continue schooling and job training after the age of 18. This legislation, called Assembly Bill 12—The California Fostering Connections Success Act, works in combination with the 2001 Transitional Housing Placement Plus (THP-PLUS) program to extend housing and support services to foster students aged 18-24 years old who maintain education enrollment at a trade school or at a California college. These particular laws are aimed to minimize the hurdles many foster students reported such as lack of housing during breaks, registration issues, and financial hardship during the first few years of aging out of care. Since California is the model

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<sup>3</sup> This study will use the term ‘foster student’ rather than foster youth with purpose; the usage of this new term accounts for children who experience foster care as well as their student status. Because this study focuses on students with foster care experience attending community college, ‘foster student’ acknowledges their age of maturity and respects their academic achievement. ‘Foster youth’ will be used from time to time to be consistent with formal naming of legislation and/or programs.

<sup>4</sup> California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office. (2010). *Foster youth success initiative*. Retrieved from <http://extranet.cccco.edu/Divisions/StudentServices/FosterYouthSuccessInitiatives.aspx>



state that many other states emulate in terms of changes in foster youth legislation, it is critical that it continues to pass laws like THP-PLUS and Assembly Bill 12 to ensure its commitment to and understanding of the foster student population. The goal of increasing education outcome for foster students is twofold: increasing the number of foster students getting onto college campuses and providing them with the needed assistance to increase persistence and college completion. This is a key area in which the California legislature, school and social service officials, and other foundations specializing in foster care can continue to partner to make a difference for foster students.

Many California 4-year universities are able and ready to facilitate these two laws because they already have offices that are designated to work with foster students; they provide such services as finding eligible resources, academic counseling, and advisement to understand and navigate the campus culture. A large number of these college campuses began giving registration and housing priority to foster students before legislation enactment. However, due to funding issues, the California community college sector is not as ready as the 4-year college/university sector to provide designated resource centers for foster students (Cooper, Mery, & Rassen, 2008). As the effort to funnel more foster students into the higher education pipeline succeeds, all sectors of higher education must be ready to assist this population. Because foster students tend to enter higher education through the doors of community colleges, it is now necessary for community colleges to plan and establish resource centers to continue this effort.

Based on national statistics from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, at the end of September, 2010 there were 408,425 children in the foster care system with 254,375 children entering and a similar number of children, 254,114, exiting the system (Child Welfare

Information Gateway, 2012). For many of the youth population who grew up within this system, they exit with dire consequences. The educational plight of foster children is drawing the attention of legislators, social service agencies, and school administrators. According to the First Star Organization (2012), 30% of the general population has a Bachelor's degree, whereas only 3% of former foster youth have achieved the same. Statistics on incarceration are equally disheartening with less than 1% of the general population imprisoned whereas 64% of former foster males and 32.5% of former foster females are incarcerated. Given these glaring disparities, it is important to ask certain questions: What are school professionals doing to provide education advocacy for youths in foster care? How can we increase the college success rate for foster students?

### **Background: Education and the Foster Care System**

There is a considerable amount of data on child abuse and neglect in the United States. This phenomenon has been studied since the 1960s, which has led to the creation of many agencies to reduce the number of children going into the foster care system. Agencies also have created many programs to assist children and others who are part of the system to help alleviate the stress of their situations. The voices of these agencies pushed foster care into the national spotlight. The attention focused on reducing the number of children entering into foster care took precedence; this priority makes sense as a child's basic human needs (i.e., safety and welfare) must be addressed first. However, this means less attention is paid to the educational welfare of children in care. The statistics on the education and incarceration of former foster youth provide evidence that foster youth are not able to fully engage in their education. Children in the foster care system tend to fall behind in their education due to their adverse situations. For example, they often endure emotional traumas and the disruptive effects of being pulled away

from what is familiar to them (Barth, 1990; Blome, 1997; Cook, 1994; Krinsky, 2010)<sup>5</sup>. When there is a report of endangerment to the children in a home, the social services system removes the children—not the adults—from the surroundings with which they are familiar. Although this protocol is intended to protect the children, it also gives the impression that it is the children who are being punished. The children can no longer see their family members, have their belongings, or go to the same school. Foster children are forced to detach quickly from their environment and any existing support systems, usually without any explanation; Barth (1990) and Blome (1997) have documented this phenomenon through their extensive research. Due to the initial needs for shelter and safety, the children’s schooling is secondary for social services. This is where non-profit agencies that specialize in foster youth have stepped in to help based on the research previously discussed about foster students’ college attainment compared to foster youth’ imprisonment. To reverse the life outcome for foster youth, non-profit agencies along with social service agencies have collaborated to create support programs to increase foster students’ educational attainment. The initial effort has concentrated in the K-12 system, but education advocacy for foster students in higher education is starting to take shape. As federal representatives pass laws to provide support and funding for foster students to continue their education in colleges, college personnel are following this track; however, the difference in the kind of support and services provided for foster students on college campuses remains profound.

In order to understand the position of foster students when they enter college, it is important to first understand their educational pathway through K-12 schooling. Similar to the Department of Health and Human Services, in July 2011 the Casey Family Programs (2011)

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<sup>5</sup> Although there are more recent studies on children in foster care, studies conducted in the 1990’s by Barth, Blome, and Cook were among the first to be comprehensive with a large sample size, and focus on the impact on their schooling. Numerous current research studies reference these works because these authors were the first to highlight issues children in care face. I chose to also use these studies in my work to give credit to Barth, Blome, and Cook for being the pioneers to put the spotlight on this issue, as well as for their findings to remain valid today.

determined that there were almost 500,000 children in the foster care system. Many well-known researchers on foster youth warn that the foster care system keeps children within the system for too long, so long that it is known as “foster care with tenure” (Barth, 1990, p. 421 ) because as it stands, thousands of children *age out* of this system every year. It is now rather common for many of the children who end up in the foster care system to remain there. Children who continue to move from place to place and school to school experience limited physical stability and emotional attachments. Many foster youth end up living lives devoid of significant physical or emotional connections and have continuously interrupted educational experiences. Due to this disruptive lifestyle, the educational achievement level of foster children is often low (Blome, 1997). Many studies have found that when compared to non-foster children, one-third of foster children perform below grade-level (Blome, 1997; Collins & Clay, 2009; Cook, 1994). The pressures on this group push education to the side as they prepare to be on their own and emancipate from the system at the age of 18. Without consistent parental figures or stable home life, many foster children are not explicitly taught about certain life skills. For example, they may not be exposed to regular discussions about self-esteem, dating, sex, and planning for the future. They also may not have consistent or positive role models when it comes to these life skills. Many foster youth are at a loss when they go out on their own and have to make their own decisions; as research shows, many still rely on social services (Blome, 1997; Cook, 1994; Frerer et al., 2013).

Young adults at the ages of 18 to 24 are at a life stage where they are still defining their identity and are under pressure to figure out what they want to do with their lives. For many foster youth, this is a time when the possibility of losing everything is very real. The risk for many foster youth to become lost and despondent is inevitable and prevents many from

completing a transition to college or employment (Collins, 2001). Based on her study of foster youth who were close to aging out of care, Blome (1997) asserted that with the kind of pressure put upon foster youth to manage their own survival, they are less likely to make education a priority before basics such as a place to live and food to eat. These individuals have to contend with their realities from day to day. Thus, for foster students who manage to complete K-12 schooling and enter college, additional assistance is needed to encourage and support their educational trajectory. Their well-being still needs to be maintained with the addition of new pressures to complete higher education.

Researchers agree that education is a key component to improving the adult lives of foster youth (Collins & Clay, 2009; Conger & Finkelstein, 2003; Crozier & Barth, 2005). However, studies suggest that foster youth are sent a very different message about the importance of education by the way the foster care system bounces them from placement to placement and school to school. Though recognized as a leader in promoting supportive legislation and programs for foster youth, California's statistics are similar to national numbers. As highlighted recently in 2010 by the Orange County Children and Family Services, in the state of California, 46% of foster youth lack a high school diploma, whereas only 16% of the general population does not hold this credential. Less than 10% of the foster youth who completed high school continue on to college, with only 2% attaining a college degree (Orange County Children's Partnership, 2010). However, the statistics on college completion rate for foster students statewide fluctuate among different reporting entities because it has only begun to be tracked recently. However, for years researchers have been tracking the state prison inmate population who were formerly in foster care; this rate is 70% (Shin, 2003). The state of California's recognition of the enormity of this problem is evident through its consistent and

constant implementation of programs to provide support for foster students to continue their schooling through higher education or vocational training. These steps are critical in helping this population, yet more needs to be understood about the resource needs of foster students when they reach college, especially at community colleges. According to Cooper et al. (2008), the community college sector is where the majority of foster students enter into higher education due to their financial situation as well as their academic assessment. When foster students are on the campus, what information and resources do they need? How can the establishment of a resource center assist them in navigating the college culture? How does a community college develop such a center to provide the space and information for this special population? The following research questions focus on the purpose of this study: to gain insight into how to establish a foster student resource center on a California community college campus.

### **Problem and Research Questions**

The goal of this dissertation is to identify the information a California community college needs to start a foster student resource center for its foster youth population. What are the steps to establish such a center and, more importantly, what services and information are needed to effectively assist foster students in their educational goals at the campus? As discussed previously, the rate of college completion is dismal for foster youth; therefore, it is critical to identify knowledge that foster students possess when they come onto a college campus and what further information or resources could improve their likelihood of college completion. Foster students enter the community college with limited knowledge of the college going culture (Cooper et al., 2008; Frerer et al., 2013). This study will gain insight to the kinds of services and information needed to guide foster students through the administrative maze; what must the college do to this group of students to ensure they can navigate the community college culture? In

the various studies on the college success of foster students, all foster students who completed college were found to show great resilience (Blome, 1997; Courtney et al., 2011; Medinger, 2005); they take a proactive approach to their education. The secondary purpose of a resource center for foster youth is to find methods to build upon the resilience that foster students bring with them to make college completion a reality.

This research concentrated on the factors of *how* and *what* a community college needs to consider as it develops a foster youth resource center to facilitate foster youth' college success. This study investigated four research questions:

Umbrella question: For students with foster care experience, what are their service and program needs while attending community college?

1. What are the elements or characteristics of a resource center supporting foster students that has been active for five or more years?
2. What are the factors or information that professionals working with foster youth at non-profit agencies say are necessary for them to attend community college?
3. What information and/or services do foster students say should be included in a resource center to support foster students attending community college?

### **The Research Site**

Mt. San Antonio College (Mt. SAC) was the research site for this study. Recently, the administration at this campus has recognized the need to do more to support foster students' success than the minimum mandated by the Chancellor's Office of the California Community Colleges (CO). Through the Foster Youth Success Initiative (FYSI), each community college must have a designated Foster Youth Liaison on campus to assist foster youth in navigating all academic and student support services and programs. In addition, the FYSI liaisons can answer

foster students' questions about financial aid in general and the Board of Governor's Fee Waiver (BOG) and Chafee grant programs specifically. To meet the requirements of this initiative, Mt. SAC, along with the majority of the community college sector, has done the minimal to assist this group of students: assign a designated staff member in the Financial Aid office to hold this title. The FYSI liaison provides the basic information regarding financial aid and Chafee grants if a foster student contacts this representative. According to Cooper et al.'s (2008) study of 12 California community colleges with a support program, the researcher found that each program had a different interpretation of what counts as a service for foster students; "there seems to be a range of interpretations of what it meant to be 'serving' these youth" (p. 14). It was found that many FYSI liaisons are not yet versed with the knowledge of resources and programs available to foster students on their campuses, let alone the resources and scholarship programs available to foster students through non-profit agencies; this is because many liaisons are current employees who volunteer to take on the added role of FYSI liaison. All 12 schools involved in Cooper et al.'s study shared that their top two future goals are "developing partnerships with external agencies, such as local corporations, private foundations, and county government" as well as "partnerships within the college with a range of departments, offices, and service programs" (p. 17). It is recognized that FYSI is a recent movement with an emphasis to increase efforts to provide current information to all liaisons, but because volunteer liaisons are new to this population, there is a learning curve that needs time and experience to develop a foundation in order to work with foster students more effectively (Cooper et al., 2008). As established in the FYSI, foster students are to seek out the liaison. The current approach does not mandate that the school reach out to its foster students to offer assistance. The initiative does not direct campuses to designate a dedicated space for counseling services, nor does it direct campuses to hire staff



members who are knowledgeable and experienced in working with the foster student population. In recent years, Mt. SAC recognized that meeting the minimum requirement of having a FYSI liaison assigned is not enough to help their foster student population. Because the CO does not mandate the reporting of data on foster students, community colleges do not have statistics on hand to assess the needs of foster students. At Mt. SAC the need to provide a resource center for its foster students are gaining attention from their growth of Chafee grant recipients and reports from categorical programs such as EOPS<sup>6</sup>, CalWORKS<sup>7</sup>, ACES<sup>8</sup>, and ASPIRE<sup>9</sup> on its campus. Foster students at Mt. SAC are seeking assistance through these programs, but due to limited funding, many students, including foster students, are unable to get into these programs. The administration at Mt. SAC is now recognizing that its foster student population is in need of its own program to provide accurate information and resources. Mt. SAC was deemed an appropriate research site because of its size and location. Mt. SAC is recognized as one of the largest colleges in its sector, located at the center of three counties that serve most of the foster student population in the Southern California region. This research will assist Mt. SAC in its endeavor to establish a center for its foster student population.

### **Research Design**

This primarily qualitative study sought to capture the planning steps and services to include when developing a foster student resource center at a community college. To gather the

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<sup>6</sup> EOPS: Extended Opportunity Programs & Services provides access to higher education for students with academic and financial disadvantages. Minimum criteria are be a California Resident, enrolled as full-time with at least 12 units a term, have fewer than 40 units completed, have a at least a 2.0 GPA, qualify for a Board of Governor's Fee Waiver (Method A or B), and be educationally disadvantaged.

<sup>7</sup> CalWORKS: California Work Opportunities and Responsibility to Kids, provides educational/training assistance to students who receive cash-aid through TANF (Temporary Aid to Needy Families).

<sup>8</sup> ACES: Achieving in College, Ensuring Success: part TRIO program that assists students who are low-income and/or the first in family to attend college and/or disabled to obtain an Associates degree and transfer from community college to a 4-year institution.

<sup>9</sup> ASPIRE: provides essential educational support and services to increase the academic success, retention, degree completion, and transfer rates of African-American and other students enrolled at Mt. SAC.

necessary details, perceptions from three specific groups were captured: current foster students at Mt. SAC, foster student resource center coordinators from three California community colleges, and representatives who work with foster youth at non-profit organizations. A short survey was conducted to capture demographic data on the characteristics of the foster student volunteers. No personal information was asked about the foster care experience except for quantitative data that impacted the purpose of this research, such as the number and types of placements and frequency of school changes. Individual interviews were conducted to ask students about their awareness of services available at Mt. SAC, their experience in trying to get these services, as well as their input into what information and services should be included in the development of a resource center for their incoming peers. Coordinators at established resource centers were interviewed individually to gain their knowledge on the steps and considerations that should be involved in the development plans of a new resource center. To obtain a holistic picture of the needs of college going foster students, representatives working at non-profit agencies that specialize in foster youth were also interviewed. Their perspectives added significance to this research.

### **Significance of the Research**

An important outcome of this research will be to provide a foundation for Mt. SAC and other community colleges to develop a foster student resource center. One of the main hurdles community colleges face in establishing such a center is limited funding. This research will provide suggestions that will give college administrators a plan to follow, showing them the possibility of such a space within the limited funding. Furthermore, this study included currently enrolled foster students. The inclusion of foster students' voices signals their importance to the community. Providing foster students with a space to articulate their needs and the hurdles they

face at Mt. SAC can help college staff members launch this issue to the top of the college administration's priority list. Additionally, the research focused on an aspect of foster youth education that has not been addressed widely. Most foster youth research concentrate on the emotional effects of abuse (Blome, 1997) and neglect the *success* stories of those who have made it through college (Barth, 1990); this study, however, concentrated on foster students who make it to college, but have not yet completed college. This research sought to inform the educational and foster care systems about how to assist a group of students who have long been underrepresented in education research. It is important to find out what—from their perspective—will increase their chances of succeeding in college.

College administrators as well as agency workers who work with foster students are now starting to pay attention to the educational attainment of foster students. The significance of this research is to help those in the courts, social services, and schools understand what is lacking on college campuses to aid this population. It is critical to support, encourage, and instill expectations for this highly at-risk group because education is recognized as the key component for economic mobility (Krinsky, 2010). In studies conducted with former foster youth, researchers all concluded that education was the means by which youth were able to improve their lives (Krinsky, 2010). Osgood et al. (2010) found that “[t]hose who succeed tend to be characterized by resilience – the ability to surmount difficulties and to recover quickly from stressful events or mishaps” (p. 218). They also recognized that “[n]ot only is school success a positive outcome in its own right, but it is a valuable resource that enhances success in many domains, particularly employment, which places an ever-increasing premium on education” (p. 218). This finding makes it even more vital for community colleges to plan and aid foster

students who have already made it onto their campuses. These foster students already carry with them a great deal of tenacity and will to further their education.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to a recent study by Courtney et al. (2011), of 593 former foster youth, 31.7% had at least 1 year of college. Older studies by Barth (1990), Blome (1997), Cook (1994), Cooper et al. (2008), Courtney et al. (2001), Krinsky (2010), Merdinger et al. (2005), Osgood et al. (2010), and Shin (2003) all found that foster students aspire to advance their education, but due to circumstances such as finance, family needs, and lack of support, many are unable to finish their college degrees. The foster students reported that they had an “internal expectation that they would attend college and a feeling that there would be negative outcomes in their lives if they failed to do so” (Merdinger et al., 2005, pp. 874-875). Osgood et al. (2010) also found that the main factor of this group’s success was their resilience. These foster students were able to cope with their unique adversity and achieve positive outcomes in their lives. Foster students in college reported being somewhat happy or very happy (89.5%) about their current life satisfaction (Merdinger et al., 2005). As Shin’s (2003) study illustrated, foster students are not different than non-foster students when it comes to college aspirations. When she examined the predictors of academic achievement of foster students who were preparing for exiting care, she found that the most profound factor for achievement was aspiration for higher education. Former foster student participants all insisted that there be more efforts to emphasize higher education to youths who are still in care, especially those who are close to aging out of care. Many indicated that they did not receive the counseling they needed to apply for college or for financial aid. This research sought to identify what is lacking in terms of the information and services given to foster students while they attend a community college. From this insight, college administrators can collaborate to create effective tools and strategies to alleviate the low level of higher educational attainment of foster students. As demonstrated by the aforementioned statistics and research, few foster youth enter college, many have difficulty

completing their college degree, and many have a high tendency to rely on social services once out of care. This research hopes to provide insights and strategies to make much needed change regarding these two facts, as one impacts the other. This study concentrated on how community colleges can provide a resource center to increase the completion rate of foster students in attendance.

Children who are in foster care enter the higher education system at a much lower rate than children who are not in care. Research shows that in order for foster children to gain independence from social services, not only must the rate of foster children entering college increase, but also the rate of foster students completing college must also increase. For this to happen, foster students need to understand the college resources that are available to them while they are still in high school as well as when they arrive on a college campus. Since many foster students find themselves on a community college campus, this sector needs to increase outreach efforts and provide foster students with accurate information and resources (Cooper et al., 2008; Courtney et al., 2011; Frerer, Sosenko, Pellegrin, Manchik, & Horowitz, 2013). What is not clear is how California community colleges are providing resources to this population when most do not have a designated center for foster students. Currently, few campuses offer more to their foster student population than just having a Foster Youth Liaison available for advisement. Some community college campuses already established foster student resource centers and have designated staff to help foster youth on a one-to-one basis. The purpose of establishing a support center is to increase the college completion pipeline for foster students. Due to the growing legislation to provide support to foster students while they are college enrolled, it is now more important than ever that the California community colleges set the goal to establish resource

centers for foster students. The aim of this study is to provide information for interested colleges to reach that goal, using a large community college as a study case.

This chapter provides the background research on why foster students need holistic support when they reach college, presenting research on the psychological effects of being in the foster care system and paints the picture of why foster students are considered an at-risk population who are already at a disadvantage when it comes to their schooling. It will be made evident why foster youth are in the social welfare dependency cycle and have difficulty getting out of it. This chapter will also include a discussion of the progress advocates are making with foster students policies and college support programs and resources. Finally, social capital theory will be discussed in order to establish foster students' insufficient knowledge of social capital and how this puts them at a disadvantage in terms of navigating K-12 and persisting all the way to college, thus creating a narrow pipeline into the college system.

### **Foster youth as an At-Risk Population**

Numerous studies show that foster youth are educationally at risk (Krinsky, 2010; Mech, Pryde, & Rycraft, 1995; Merdinger, Hines, Lemon Osterling, & Wyatt, 2005). Because of their trauma, living environment, living arrangements, and lack of emotional support and adult connections, these youths are their own defenders. Many do not know what it is like to have adults to care for their basic needs; they learn to get by in life with survival instincts. Collins (2001) reanalyzed a well-recognized study by Festinger (as cited in Collins, 2001) on young adults who left foster care in the New York area. The study reported that a third of the emancipated youths did not complete high school and that 21% were relying on public assistance. This study was considered comprehensive because there was a response rate of 70%

with 394 participants. Festinger's study validated the argument that foster youth are a population weighing on society as they continue to depend on social services.

Another well-known foster youth researcher conducted a similar study in the 1990s that substantiated Festinger's findings that former foster youth remained an at-risk population and dependent upon the social services that were designed to help foster youth become self-sufficient. Barth (1990) targeted youths living in the San Francisco area that had been emancipated from the foster care system for more than 1 year and were at least 16 years old. Participants were interviewed about their living arrangements, employment, education, and social situations. He found that in his sample of 55 foster youth, 91% were sexually active, 17% reported having had a sexually transmitted disease, and 40% reported a pregnancy. Fifty-six percent of youths admitted to using street drugs and also reported being involved in illegal activity, with 36% having experienced an arrest. Barth also reported that 55% of the sample left foster care without a high school degree and most were making an annual income of \$10,476 at the time of this study. Barth's frequently cited study showed evidence that these foster youth continued their risky behavior into adulthood and had trouble becoming self-sufficient, unable to attain stable employment, education, or living situations to anchor their lives.

### **The Difficulties in Becoming Self-Sufficient**

The experience of aging out of the foster care system is monumental for youth in care. Aging out of care occurs when a foster youth transitions from being a dependent of the state foster care system to being on his/her own as an independent adult. In comparison to their peers who undergo this transformative stage with the security and encouragement from their families, foster youth rarely have such a safety net. As Osgood, Foster, and Courtney (2010) explained, the government differentiates the level of services for youth and adults. This decision is



determined by the person's age; those who are less than 18 years old are considered dependent on the system, and thus can receive more services than those considered adults or independent of the system. This designation means that foster youth are pressured to learn how to sustain themselves once they emancipate because they will not be able to rely upon social services any longer. As foster youth grow older in the system, the expectation is for them to learn life skills needed to emancipate once they reach the age of 18; when they reach this age, they legally become adults. They do not have a choice to stay within the system that for years provided their financial, housing, and healthcare support. Program eligibility for foster youth can end without notice or in phases, depending on the age of the youth. It also depends on the state in which the youth resides; as Osgood et al. (2010) described, it is an "outdated notion" (p. 218) that aging out of care is a quick and easy step for foster youth to become adults. Instead, it is haphazard and filled with perils.

At this difficult adolescent stage, foster youth need skills that their non-foster peers have had years to develop; they must also make decisions on their own while their non-foster peers have adults on whom they can rely for advice. The pressure on this group pushes education to the side as they prepare to be on their own. Because these foster students do not have family to promote life skills, they are required to attend life skills courses. What the foster youth receive in these life-skills courses depends on where they reside and who is teaching the course; the advice they receive may be more technical, such as how to fill out a job application, rather than more serious life topics such as safe sex and good decision making. Many foster youth are at a loss when they go out on their own and have to make their own decisions; as research shows, many still rely on social services (Blome, 1997; Cook, 1997).

Cook (1994) carried out a self-sufficiency study on foster youth who left the system. She and her team interviewed 810 participants to understand their dependency on welfare, education, and employment once out of the foster care system for 2.5 to 4 years. Cook found that this group had a high school completion rate 24% lower than the general peer population, whereas 60% of female former foster youths reported to have given birth to at least one child, this rate is almost three times more likely than the general peer population (24%). This study also showed that 30% of participants relied on public assistance whereas 5% of the general peer group depended on such financial support; this means that former foster youth are six times more likely to depend on social services compared to their general peer group. Cook also illustrated the dire statistics of the young mothers versus the young women who did not become mothers out of this group. The statistics in Table 1 highlight the increased negative outcome for females who have children at a young age.

Table 1

*Life Outcome for Foster Youth Mothers vs. Non-Mothers*

Outcome	Mothers	Non-Mothers
Completed High School	47%	67%
Completed further schooling after discharge	21%	50%
Being employed at time of interview	34%	55%
Maintained a job for at least a year	23%	33%
Being a burden to the community	61%	22%

Cook (1994) also found that the foster youth in her study experienced frequent housing disruptions. One-third reported that they had lived in five or more different places, and one-quarter had experienced at least one night of homelessness. This study highlighted the difficulties that emancipated foster youth experience. They struggled to attain their education and become financially independent. There are many complex issues that foster youth are expected to juggle, without further support from social services once they exit from care. For

foster students who managed to get themselves into college, they do not have the time to celebrate, but instead must worry about how they are going to make it through. There are now added pressures such as paying for tuition, deciding on an academic program, learning how to study, and determining how to find the right courses. These are complex decisions for any new student, let alone foster students who are not well versed in college knowledge and do not have college educated people in their lives to whom they can look as role models. College information needs to be given to foster youth during their K-12 education so that they can start to understand what college is like and the necessary steps they must take once they reach the college campus (Courtney et al., 2011; Frerer et al., 2013).

### **Need to Know Information While in K-12**

Many foster youth struggle with K-12 education, thus only a slight percentage goes on to college. Research has shown that the rate of college degree attainment for this group is at 3% compared to 30% for the general public (First Star Organization, 2012). Even with this low percentage, educators and professionals who work with foster youth in the K-12 setting should understand and pass on information about financial aid to help foster youth ease into the college process. Because of their lack of financial support and dependence on social services, it is imperative that foster youth are aware of such support programs as financial aid that are available for them when they get to college. It is critical for them to understand the requirements to not only qualify for financial aid, but also keep and maintain financial aid throughout their college years. Rules and regulations are constantly changing at the state and national levels in regard to college administration, especially with financial aid. One recent change is that the Ability to Benefit rule<sup>10</sup> (ATB; 34 CFR 668.32(e)(4)) will no longer be accepted as a tool to

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<sup>10</sup> Before July 2012, students without a high school diploma or GED would be able to prove that they have the “ability to benefit” from a college education with financial aid support if they are able to score at a certain level on

measure financial aid eligibility. Students in K-12 must complete their high school curriculum by graduating with a diploma or hold a GED in order to be eligible for financial aid as they move into postsecondary education. Another key change to the Pell Grant Lifetime (Pell LEU) eligibility (34 CFR 690.63 (g)) took effect on July 1, 2012. Pell Grants, one of the largest federal financial aid programs, are designated for the neediest students and families. As foster students fall into this category, they need to understand that there is now a 6-year limit on a full-time basis. What this means for all Pell recipients is that they need to closely monitor their academic plans and progress. For college going foster student, this is even more critical due to their lack of academic support and tendency to fall behind in their learning, causing them to have to take remedial courses in order to catch up to college level courses, thus causing their college degree completion time to be longer. They may run out of Pell Grant eligibility before finishing. The only other resource for someone who runs out of Pell Grant eligibility is student loans. Even though educational loans may be a good investment for certain students, they may not be for foster students due to their record of not being able to complete their college education due to difficulties with finances, family issues, and insufficient social capital. Thus, it is not recommended that this population go into debt as they may be saddled with that debt without the benefits of a college degree (Cooper et al., 2008; Frerer et al., 2013).

Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) information is also important for foster students to know as it determines financial aid eligibility in each term of college enrollment. This information is pertinent for foster students to understand while they are in high school because they need to know that they must keep up with their grades in order to sustain their financial aid to stay on course to complete their college goal. For financial aid recipients, all students have to

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the ATB test, or have college records showing they passed 6 units of college courses without financial aid. After July 2012, only a high school diploma or GED would be accepted to qualify for financial aid.

pass an academic progress measurement at the end of each term. Students need to maintain a 2.0 grade point average complete at least 67% cumulative units compared to all enrolled units, and must not have completed over 150% units of their program of study. SAP is very complicated and has recently become even more stringent. Colleges are now required to monitor individual educational plans to ensure that each student is following his/her plan and is successfully completing each term.

Financial aid rules such as ATB, Pell LEU, and SAP are designed to help steer students to focus on their program of study and finish their college degree in a timely manner. It is important, especially for foster students, to understand the various specifications to begin and maintain eligibility as well as the limits on certain programs. It is imperative that they receive guidance from their high school counselors as well as others who provide them with college information. This study attempted to find out the full scope of information and support systems foster youth students need soon after they arrive on a community college campus. We will learn when and what college information and resources should be supplied to this population to help them maintain their college enrollment and complete their program of study.

### **Conceptual Framework**

As identified in Chapter 1, recent passage of Assembly Bill 12, THP-PLUS, has helped push higher education to gear up to serve the foster youth population through priority registration, housing, and other administrative support services; these services are more readily available for those who enroll in 4-year colleges. However, it is important to note that these laws apply only once foster students matriculate. Foster students who enter college through the doors of California community colleges may or may not receive such comprehensive services (Cooper et al. 2008). With the new USA, social workers will become stronger advocates for foster youth

at the K-12 level because they can now access the academic records of the foster youth for which they are responsible. With this information, they will be able to track foster youth and help them get on course with college requirements, or at least they will be able to work hand-in-hand with teachers and high school counselors regarding the foster youth' education path while in K-12. This will provide foster youth with the access to the social capital to which they have not been privileged due to their circumstances. This section will frame the social capital concept to help focus on the underlying challenges that foster youths face and how they can be assisted in attaining their college degree.

From a sociological perspective, student success can be associated with the conceptual framework of social capital (Fram & Altshuler, 2009). The idea of someone having *capital* is to have wealth and resources to assist his/her position within society. For a person to have social capital in educational settings means that he/she has attained the knowledge and assets of the dominant school culture, has learned the desired language and how to communicate, has internalized the maneuverings of this system, and has developed connections with those who also possess such capital (Fram & Altshuler, 2009; Johansson & Hojer, 2012; Jorgensen, 2005; Plagens, 2011; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Having social capital is a commodity for students as they navigate through the schooling maze. This can make a difference in a student's educational success (i.e., getting into college, leading to graduation). This study used the framework of social capital to capture the essence of the issue surrounding the difficulties for foster students in navigating and succeeding in the college culture. Social capital is a time-honored theory and sociologists and educators alike have emphasized its importance for decades.

John Dewey is often recognized as the person who introduced the idea of social capital in the 1900s through his work using an economics lens (Loomis & Rodriguez, 2009; Plagens,

2011). Dewey wanted to solve issues of economics by observing how the individual was connected to the collective during a time when industry was starting to take shape. Through his observations he found a connection between the needs of the individual and his bond with family, friends, knowledge, and community that either lead to greater or reduced production at work (Loomis & Rodriguez, 2009; Plagens, 2011; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). In order for a person to be able to compete in industry, one has to have attained the “reading, writing, and arithmetic” skills while in school that would determine his economic status (Loomis & Rodriguez, 2009, p. 511). Dewey’s key concept, that one’s economic status does not start when one enters the work sector but rather starts at school, is reflected in social capital ideology. Even though Dewey did not originate this concept, he described the basics of social capital theory that researchers use today. The idea of how society can provide the right schooling for each individual in order to improve society’s economic means led to the conceptualization of social capital (Loomis & Rodriguez, 2009). Dewey’s three concerns for education were: high quality teacher-school exchange with the individual child; involvement with the productive student to ensure a path to engage with society; and the pathway for the individual to access the economy once schooling ends (Zembylas, 2007).

The scholar that is most credited for enhancing this social frame is Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist. This framework has carried all the way to today, such as in the recent work of Plagens. Plagens (2011) stated that the definition of social capital “is an essential element in the advancement of individuals” (p. 43). This is a common belief bridging Dewey’s earlier work with more modern work of social capital. In addition, “Social capital is an important lubricant of knowledge transfer on which the mobilization of an organization’s intellectual capital depends” (Hargreaves, 2001, p. 492). Social capital is the leverage that each individual must attain from

schooling through work that provides one's place in society. Thus, "for the working class to be able to discover that the educational system functions as an instrument of social reproduction, they have to pass through the system" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 98).

The modern framework of social capital carved out three dimensions to further understand its ideology: namely, norms, networks, and relationships (Hargreaves, 2001; Plagens, 2011; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). For an individual to gain strong social ties, the person must possess these three constructs. In order to participate in societal customs, an individual has to have the knowledge of how society works, and the standards in which knowledge operates; these rules make up the norms of society. Internalization and acceptance of these societal norms will provide a means for the individual to have social capital (Plagens, 2011; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). The construct of networks refers to the facilitation of information flow as well as the bridging of social ties. Without strong networks, an individual is limited in his/her participation, thus reducing his/her influence on society. The connection between the individual and associated groups assures the individual's social capital; without access to networks, the individual functions as a singular social agent, not contributing to the whole. Woolcock and Narayan (2000) asserted that "social capital refers to the norms and networks that enable people to act collectively" (p. 226). Without these ties, the individual does not have access to key resources. To foster these norms and networks, the individual must have the *bonding* relationship (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000) necessary to nurture the synergy of social capital. These three constructs work simultaneously to provide social capital continuous mechanism.

College success for foster students is associated with social capital discussed previously. The possession of social capital can make a difference in a student's success. Many foster students have neither the wealth nor the resources to place them in the position to accumulate the



needed knowledge and assets in schools. Thus, they seldom find themselves part of the dominant school culture, often being placed at the bottom in lower tracked classes and seeming lost, having no idea how to access information and advocate for themselves. This connects us to Dewey and Bourdieu's ideology of social capital as a shared position that not all individuals can attain and as the necessary resource to function well in society. This notion then creates a divide among individuals: those who have the resources and norms to position themselves, as well as the networks, and relationships necessary for social capital growth, and those who do not have these resources. Thus, "certain dimensions of social capital contribute significantly to household welfare, and that social capital is the capital of the poor" (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000, p. 240). Bourdieu (1993) recognized this struggle for the working class as "the language of 'leaders' who feel themselves to be legitimized by 'intelligence' and who dominate a society founded on discrimination based on 'intelligence'; that is, founded on what the educational system measures under the term 'intelligence'" (p. 178). Bourdieu's realization of the discrepant treatment people receive due to their class designation has illustrated the domination of society by the privileged, sustaining historical inequities. This study can help reveal if such discrepancy is at play for foster students in their community college schooling in order to determine if their education has been thwarted due to their struggle and circumstance.

To illustrate, "Bourdieu's concern in relation to [social] capital was with its continual transmission and accumulation in ways that perpetuate social inequities" (Plagens, 2011, p. 74), Reay (2010) examined parental choice in regard to the education of their children, discovering that the college knowledge inequities are based on the parents' financial resources and the social capital. Parents who had financial resources and social capital were able to pinpoint their children's academic issues and found ways to assist their children by working with teachers and

funding additional tutors. For parents who did not have such financial resources and social capital, frustration and self-doubt festered, leading the parents nowhere in terms of assisting their children with their academic pursuits. Reay highlighted the school choice issue among the group she studied. For families who are able to afford to move and have the social capital to negotiate their children's admission to selective, high performing schools, they are able to plan and position their children for better schooling. For parents without such means and knowledge, they depend on the school district in which they reside to educate their children as well as possible. Reay found that the current "educational marketplace and the policies underpinning it are allowing the growing middle classes to either re-establish their historical educational advantages or newly achieved status positions" (p. 83). Reay's findings circle back to the divide that is inherent within the social capital framework. Individuals are forced to conform to the norms of society in order to gain the capital to do well; those who are not able to conform will be left with what society is able to provide.

In Farmer-Hinton's (2008) study, she examined what schools can provide to students who come from backgrounds that lack social capital to increase their chance of pursuing a college education. In this small yet important research study, Farmer-Hinton established the lack of social capital of her participants. At Glenn Hills College Preparatory Charter School, 90% of students are African American and are considered low-income. Only 12.6% of the students' parents had graduated from college. School staff engaged in constant college going talks and pushed students to pursue college possibilities. This immersion into a tight network of college talk helped students to believe that they are college material and to develop aspirations for their futures. Not only mentoring provided by staff members gave students the right information about college knowledge, but also the relationships that were developed made a difference for

the students. The encouragement and engagement of mentors made students stay on course during their college application process. Because these students' families did not have the social capital to assist them in this process, students were not able to turn to their parents to ask for advice and suggestions. Through the constant mentoring, students came to understand why college is important. In addition to staff providing college knowledge and establishing personal relationships with students, students were also given the opportunity to experience what college is like. They were afforded to visits well-known institutions such as Brown University and Historically Black Colleges and Universities to give them a sense of college life. Providing them the space to speak to African American college students also assisted in building their motivation to go to college. Farmer-Hinton's study underscores the role that schools play in social capital, especially for students whose circumstances do not include the social capital foundation. She highlighted that "students will need to rely on their school networks where school leaders and teachers with collegiate experiences can supplement familial and local networks that have limited collegiate experiences" (p. 128). Without such assistance from family and school, students without much social capital will be in "spatial isolation of educational attainment" (p. 128).

For the purpose of this discussion, social capital is used to refer to the combination of cultural capital (norms/relationships) and economic capital (networks/relationship). For foster students, cultural capital as it pertains to education means that they are not in home surroundings where adults are available to teach them study skills or how to prepare to go to college. In contrast, many of their non-foster peers have this cultural capital readily available to them. Examples of this cultural capital in education include having help with college admissions, financial aid, and scholarship application processes. Foster students also do not have the

advantage of having economic capital as many do not have financial support from adults; thus, many are unable to afford SAT classes, college application fees, and savings for college.

Foster students lack not only financial means, but also the social foundation and living stability to enable them to meet societal norms and build their social capital (Fram & Altshuler, 2009; Stablein, 2011). They are an at-risk group who are disadvantaged like those in Reay's (2010) study and need the school-based social capital assistance that Farmer-Hinton (2008) showed to be impactful for the low-income students in her research. Foster students do not possess the upbringing to build the relationships that help them acquire social capital. According to social capital theory, "different relationships have different values, depending on what resources, information, and opportunities an individual can access through them" (Fram & Altshuler, 2009, p. 5). Due to their lack of support in their home environment, it is then in the school setting that foster students have another opportunity to gain values of social capital that can help pull them out of their situation. However, researchers have found that the school atmosphere for at-risk groups such as foster students and low-income students make it difficult for these groups to learn the values and language of the dominant culture. In Stanton-Salazar's (2011) study of low-income students and youths, he found that "access to institutional support is usually an extraordinary phenomenon" (p. 1,077) for students from ethnic minority communities and the working-class. He found that in order to assist these students and foster their success, extra work needs to be put forth by institutional agents, such as teachers, administrators, and social workers to develop the learning of low-status students, to help them navigate the schooling system and empower them with social capital. According to Fram and Altshuler (2009), school is a setting in which children, in general, have the opportunity to not only learn academics, but also the social norms of society. In this environment, Fram and Altshuler suggested that there should

be opportunities for each child to acquire skills that will lead to his/her success in life. Yet, as discussed by Bourdieu and others, schools are another environment for the dominant to claim their position of privilege. As stated by Jorgensen (2005), “Schooling is a conservation force that relegates the working class to second class courses” (p. 57). This makes it difficult for foster students who do not have family or school support to become successful in life. The lack of social capital perpetuates their situation. Foster students must rely on the relationships they develop in order to gain capital, as they cannot do it alone. As illustrated earlier, researchers who have studied the troubles of at-risk youths in schools, such as foster students, assert that relationship development and mentoring of these young adults will help empower them. They need adults in the social environment to show them, physically and emotionally, the values they need to be successful in school and society (Jorgensen, 2005; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Ahn’s (2010) study of college access of urban young adults showed that one-on-one mentoring improved their college going and completion success. It is “a one-to-one relationship between someone possessing knowledge and skills and someone who could benefit from that knowledge and skill” (p. 840) that makes the interaction useful and impactful. Providing the real-time help to youths to explore college requirements and the college application process assisted in their success of continuing and completing of postsecondary education.

Relationship building information and practice need to be provided to foster youths. As Grenfell (2009) asserted, aside from social capital, there are other *capitals* upon which individuals in society can build. For example, the *investment* in education building can lead to one’s growth in economic capital. According to Grenfell, “one form of capital can be ‘converted’ into another” (p. 21). To this point, and regarding the data on foster students, it is

imperative that society as a whole find ways to assist this group build their social capital, beginning in education where the mindset of foster students can be nurtured and motivated.

### **Building Social Capital through Education Advocacy**

This next section explores the role of social capital and how it can aid in the lives of young students, especially foster students. When advocates for foster students have an understanding of social capital theory and the training to help foster students acquire the language and skills necessary to be successful in the schools, this translates to connection with an adult for guidance and motivation: someone to whom the foster students can turn for answers.

Mech et al.'s (1995) study is not specific to a college program for foster students, but their findings can be significant in helping shape a resource program for a college campus. Their study gathered information from 29 mentor programs in 15 states. In a 2-year span, researchers interviewed key personnel from these mentor programs to understand the aspects that make these programs work. Foster students, especially at the adolescent age, need guidance and friendship to help them through adjustments of their physical changes as well as their emotional experience with aging out of care. Mentoring from an adult was found to be impactful for this group as the students were able to have a real connection to a reliable adult who was able answer their questions. Mech et al. found that mentors were most effective because they modeled "positive behaviors such as getting to school and work on time, and studying" (p. 324). The foster students were able to learn and emulate these behaviors for themselves.

Other programs that have the same mentoring component also exist, but some also combine tutoring and educational advocacy. The Treehouse program is one such program based in Seattle, Washington. Their focus is to address the educational needs of foster children and increase their schooling through engagement and motivation. They work closely with public

schools, social services, and other advocacy groups to ensure wraparound services for each foster youth case. Wraparound services encompass meetings involving representatives from each agency as well as the foster youth, who has a voice into the discussions. The youth is guided through the decision-making processes and, based on age appropriateness, may be able to make choices about his/her schooling<sup>11</sup>. The present study aims to find out ways in which community colleges can engage with foster students with the same success as the Treehouse study; how do community colleges impact the schooling of its foster student population.

After conducting a thorough review of numerous studies to find educational programs specifically geared toward foster youths that helped them to get into college and tracked their college success, only one was found. Jones and Lansdverk (2006) studied the effectiveness of the San Pasqual Academy, designed as a *residential education* boarding school at the high school level for foster youth. Foster youth volunteered to participate in this type of schooling and are provided a family-like environment with few restrictions, unlike group homes. Keeping siblings together was also a priority for this program. Jones and Lansdverk conducted a 5-year study based on a cohort model because the foster youth are enrolled in high school and are organized by grade level. These researchers followed the youths for at least 3 years after graduation or until the age of 20. The sample size at the beginning of this investigation was 206 foster youth. Jones and Lansdverk conducted file reviews and interviews of participants and caregivers to assess their analysis and findings. The school completion rate for foster students who participated in this type of schooling was 78.3%, whereas the rate of this group moving on to higher education was 30%. Though this study showed evidence that foster students still

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<sup>11</sup> Casey Family Programs. (2000). Promising practices: School to career and postsecondary education for foster care youth. A guide for policymakers and practitioners. Retrieved from <http://www.workforcestrategy.org/publications/promisingpractices2.pdf>.

experience social adjustment difficulties once they emancipate, such as challenges finding stable housing and employment, the rate is lower than for those who went through the traditional K-12 system. Another key finding by Jones and Lansdverk that complements Krinsky's (2010) research is that the students who participated in the San Pasqual Academy did not report any involvement in the criminal justice system during or following discharge from care. The youths were able to move forward with their life, given that this wraparound program provided them with the social capital they needed to be on par with their peers while in high school as well as in college.

At the University of California, Los Angeles, foster youth get a taste of college at a special summer academy designed and coordinated especially for them (Luther, 2011). This 5-week program is offered to 24 stellar ninth graders who are in the foster care system. The purpose of this program is to build the youths' social capital and give them an even playing field once they go to college because they will already know what college culture is like. They are brought onto the campus as Bruin Guardian Scholars in a residential immersion program. This is one of the first programs of this type for foster youth in the United States. The success of this program with the majority of participants completing the program is due to its holistic design, bringing in ninth graders for a college crash course during the summer on the UCLA campus. The cohort group stays in residential halls and is treated like college students, attending classes, talks, workshops, and trips. They are also surrounded by professional staff such as residential advisers, peer counselors, and support administrators. The foster youth who make it through the entire program receive college credit. This experience allows these foster youth to get ahead of their peers by attaining a few college credits and also develops the social capital that is critical in giving them a head start in thinking about college.



The need to provide a learning environment that will make foster students educationally successful has come to light in recent years. In Orange County, California, the Starwood Children's Foundation, working in conjunction with the Family Court system and other non-profit organizations, is opening a new high school for foster youth called *The Academy*<sup>12</sup>. The first class was scheduled to begin in Fall 2013. The curriculum for this academy was designed in order for students to be high school graduates and be college ready. The curriculum was designed so that students will learn their subjects in the teaching community environment. Foster students who attend this academy develop residency and receive holistic services, such as therapy and academic counseling. It is everyone's hope that this groundbreaking school design will be the model teaching space for foster youth everywhere in the nation (B. Theemling, personal conversation, December 14, 2012). The Academy is an example of what needs to be done to ensure the educational success of foster students. The holistic approach has been recognized to be the ideal model by professionals who dedicate their work to foster students. This study sought to take the progress that administrators are making for foster students in K-12 and move it forward for the same population at the community college level.

### **Summary**

This literature review has highlighted the need for more foster students to gain access to higher education. The identified gap on which this study focused was a need for community colleges to provide comprehensive services to foster students who make it onto their campuses. The efforts to help foster students need be continuous in order to increase college completion as well as entrance into higher education. The review suggests that only one program highlights a holistic approach to helping high school foster students get to college and stay in college. Prior

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<sup>12</sup> Starwood Children's Foundation, Helping Kids Soar. (2012). *2011/2012 annual report*.

research has reported extensively on the number of cases the foster care system has to handle annually, the daunting task of parenting each child in care, and the emotional and developmental issues that each child endures. Foster students are in conflict each day as they are in a temporary state; they can be moved to a different placement without their input, which means having to attend a new school and being forced to make new friends. All case studies highlighted in this synthesis emphasize the need for better educational programs for these students in order to improve their outcomes. The general consensus among researchers and professionals is that education is the way for this at-risk population to get out of their pre-determined legacy, yet as of now, for those who have fought the odds to matriculate at a California community college, they may not receive the needed holistic assistance to help them be successful.

Recently, legislation was passed in California as well as in other states in partnership with federal and state governments, social services, and the postsecondary sector to help foster students attain the necessary support services to continue schooling and job training. These laws are aimed at alleviating the challenges many foster students have reported, such as housing during college breaks, registration issues, and financial hardship during the first few years of aging out of care. Two such pieces of legislation, the THP-PLUS program and the Assembly Bill 12—The California Fostering Connections Success Act, work in combination to extend housing and support services to foster care students aged 18-24 years old. As administrators and legislatures are working together on behalf of foster students to better their educational attainment, the California community college sector should also move forward in its commitment to the educational success of this student population. This study used a large California community college as a study case. The outcome will provide a blueprint for a community college resource center for foster students, a center that will provide the needed

information and resources that foster students and foster youth professionals agree are necessary for college success.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In the preceding chapters, I have discussed that access to higher education for foster students is very poor and that their college entry rate compared to the general public is dismal (3% vs. 30%; First Star Organization, 2012). The educational hurdles that foster youths have to overcome to get to the community college level points to their need to attain the social capital necessary to be successful in society. Many community colleges around the state are on the verge of setting up foster youth programs to assist this population once they arrive on campus. This qualitative study focused on the real-time planning and development of a foster youth program at Mt. SAC. This study will assist in the implementation process as well as the evaluation planning of the program. The basic foundation of this study is determining what services and programs should Mt. SAC provide in a resource center for its foster students? The case study of Mt. SAC provided a framework for the study.

This study investigated four research questions:

Umbrella question: For students with foster care experience, what are their service and program needs while attending community college?

1. What are the elements or characteristics of a resource center supporting foster students that has been active for five or more years?
2. What are the factors or information that professionals working with foster youth at non-profit agencies say are necessary for them to attend community college?
3. What information and/or services do foster students say should be included in a resource center to support foster students attending community college?

## **Research Design**

This study used qualitative methods to capture the data needed to form an effective and holistic foster youth resource center at Mt. SAC. Research has shown that providing a holistic center for foster students that offers comprehensive services and resources in one location allows for easier adjustment to higher education. Foster students have one place to go to obtain help with navigating the community college, which enables them to better concentrate on their academics. This research identified specific services and programs to help foster students succeed at a community college.

According to Creswell (2009), qualitative research provides a holistic account in order to “develop a complex picture of the problem or issue under study” (p. 176). A qualitative study was deemed the most appropriate method for this study because I wanted to identify and explore the services that will best serve the foster youth population attending Mt. SAC. I intended to provide a full picture from the experts who work with the foster youth population from three established foster youth resource sites and three non-profit agencies, as well as the foster students attending Mt. SAC to guide the planning of a resource center at the institution. I decided to conduct individual interviews and document reviews of the three selected foster youth resource centers that have been established for more than 5 years in order to develop “multiple perspectives, identifying the many factors involved in [this] situation” (p. 176). In order to collect these data effectively, I needed to speak with experts: the foster students who are currently attending school, coordinators who are managing an already established resource center at their campus, and professionals who closely work with foster students on a daily basis in the larger community. A quantitative study would not have gained the foster students’ perspective and the historical insight from resource center coordinators at partner schools. Quantitative

methods would not have given foster youths the opportunity to describe their stories and experiences, thus minimizing their voices. Understanding historical insights from local schools helped me assess and prepare Mt. SAC to establish its own foster youth resource center based on its own history; I sought to understand how each school assessed the needs and determined the services they eventually developed for their foster youth center. Historical perspectives emerged during data analysis and helped to provide recommendations regarding challenges to avoid when possible. The shared perspectives will also assist in Mt. SAC's preparation to handle lessons learned based on the similarities and differences in the histories of the local college and Mt. SAC. Individual interviews with foster students provided them a space to voice their community college experience, specifically their troubles navigating the administrative maze that all students are expected to maneuver. Currently, because Mt. SAC does not have a physical space for foster students to receive information and services, nor does it offer a specific program or process for this group, the voices of foster students are not being heard. However, Mt. SAC knows that foster students are troubled by their college experiences because many seek out assistance by applying for other programs for specialized populations such as EOPS, CalWORKS, ACES, and ASPIRE. These programs currently provide tailored services to their accepted students. Due to restricted funding, each program is limited in the number of students it can serve; thus, if a foster youth student is not able to meet each of the program's unique criteria, he/she is not able to get the guidance he/she seeks on the campus. This study sought to find out from foster students their triumphs and/or difficulties in navigating the campus's administrative environment. Their participation allowed them to share their needs as community college students and as current or former foster students; they were asked to share what information or services would help students like them navigate the administration maze at Mt. SAC.

It is important to understand the culture of this population in order to understand their difficulties and needs. According to Merriam (2009), “In order to understand the culture of a group, one must spend time with the group being studied” (p. 28). Through individual interviews, I discussed with and learned from the foster youth population at Mt. SAC the services they perceive they need in order to start, maintain, and complete their college education. I asked each participant to complete a short background questionnaire (5 minutes) as part of the consent step to participate in this study in order to gather pertinent demographic data on each individual. These data helped me to interview each individual and added to the data collected. This background questionnaire did not ask for specific foster care experiences, but instead ask for generalized foster care information such as the number of placements and the number of K-12 and higher education school changes they have experienced. These details assisted me in my analysis of the issues and troubles foster students have had with schooling and enabled me to identify the informational gap this group may face when entering Mt. SAC.

Though it would have been possible to conduct a quantitative survey involving the experts at other institutions and foundations, the results would have provided a limited perspective on the information necessary for the resource center planning. Rather, it was deemed more important understand the process that these coordinators went through to start a resource center; in order to gain this insight I needed to enter into an interview dialogue, as engaging in in-depth conversations could provide the nuanced details that could not be elicited by a survey.

It is critical that the development of the resource center involves building local partnerships. The design of this study is one way of reaching out to local community partners to learn from them as well as to engage them in order to continue in the important work of assisting foster youth’ success in college. This process addressed research question 4 by interviewing

staff of nonprofit organizations such as the John Burton Foundation and California Youth Connections (CYC) to gain their expert opinion on the needs of college going foster students. The staff members at these agencies are in touch with foster students each day, and in many cases provide the resources that foster youths need to stabilize their living situations. To exclude this group of experts in my study would ignore a large number of professionals who work with foster students.

Having a small research sample with the three different groups is consistent with Maxwell's (2013) assertion that "Qualitative researchers typically study a relatively small number of individuals or situations, and preserve the individuality of each of these in their analyses" (p. 30). It was my intention to elicit the unique perspectives of each person through individual interviews. It was important to do this in order to understand the process a community college needs to take to design and plan an effective foster student resource center.

In summary, I sought answers to my research questions from the following three groupings: college staff at three long running foster student resource centers (sub-question 1), staff at three community nonprofit agencies specializing in foster youth work (sub-question 2), and foster students attending Mt. SAC (sub-question 3). The findings to these three sub-questions answered the umbrella question: For students with foster care experience, what are their service and program needs while attending community college?

### **Site**

Mt. SAC serves a student population of approximately 45,000 each academic term in the Los Angeles area of California, with 70% qualifying for at least some kind of financial aid assistance in the 2011-2012 academic year. The federal Pell Grant, a resource designed to assist the neediest families access higher education, reached \$41.1M in volume at this site for the



2012-2013 academic year. According to the 2011-2012 financial aid information reported to the CO, 67% of Pell Grant recipients are Hispanic and African American; these students were awarded over \$26.5M dollars to assist them with college costs. At Mt. SAC, the 2011-2012 make-up of students who identified themselves as Hispanic or African American was 55% of the total population (52,954), with 2% of the population identifying as multi-ethnic and 17% as Asian (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office [CO], 2013). Mt. SAC serves the financially neediest<sup>13</sup> families as well as a large percentage of students from underrepresented minority groups.

### **Foster Youth Population**

Though it is not mandated to collect data on foster students, Mt. SAC has tried informally to maintain some records in the Financial Aid Office due to its administration of the Chafee Grant program and the priority registration requirement for foster students. For the past 3 academic years from 2010-2011 to 2012-2013, Mt. SAC has seen an increase in the number of awards, from 25 to 45 Chafee Grants. Each award is worth \$5,000 a year for a foster student to assist with schooling expenses. The award is given in addition to any other grants and scholarships they may already receive. Qualification for the Chafee Grant is stipulated by the Department of Social Services and funding allocation is very limited due to its dependency on the federal budget. There is a long waiting list of foster students who meet all requirements that may never be able to receive funding because they eventually fall out of eligibility due to aging out or finishing schooling by the time they get to the top of the waiting list.

The CO, the authority in the administration of 112 California community colleges, mandates priority registration for students who identify themselves as current or former foster student: a mandate given in the Student Success Initiative, established in 2012 as Senate Bill

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<sup>13</sup> Term of 'neediest' refer to financial need; socio-economic status.

1456. At Mt. SAC, this practice is already instituted for its foster student population. In 2011-2012, 115 students were given priority registration, whereas for 2012-2013, 224 students received this benefit. Priority registration means that these students are able to get the earliest appointment once registration opens up for each term within the academic year. This almost guarantees that students with priority registration will be able to select their required courses without worrying about closed classes or wait lists.

Based on information in Mt. SAC's financial aid database, in 2011-2012, 199 students reported on the financial form (FAFSA) that they were part of the foster youth system, whereas that number for 2012-2013 was 142. The data currently collected about foster students are inconsistent. The priority registration data for foster students is pulled from the admissions database. It would be ideal if the number of foster students on the Mt. SAC campus were accurate from one database to another. With the establishment of a resource center for foster youth, it will be possible to obtain accurate data about foster students on campus and provide information to this population so that they do not miss out on critical resources such as financial aid.

### **Data Collection Methods**

The approach of pulling in community partners, foster youth resource center coordinators, and foster students stems from what Maxwell (2013) calls "process theory," which seeks to "see the world in terms of people, situations, events, and the processes that connect these" (p. 29). In conducting this study, I was searching for the *how* in the implementation process for a resource center for foster students; to that end, I researched the mechanisms that need to be in place to have an effective center that foster students will utilize. This process involved obtaining a comprehensive understanding of the affected people and culture.

Individual interviews were conducted with at least 20 foster student volunteers, four resource center coordinators, and three non-profit agency representatives for a total of 27 individual interviews, with seven interviews from professional staff members who work directly with foster students. These interviews were 1-1.5 hours long in order to fully gather experiences and perceptions. According to Merriam (2009), “Interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them” (p. 88). Because I was gathering perceptions from professional staff on their perceptions of the needs of foster students in addition to gathering historical information on the development of foster youth resource centers, it was then “necessary to interview when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate” (p. 88).

### **Resource Center Models**

For research questions 1 and 2, I conducted a search of all community colleges in California with foster youth resource centers and interviewed resource center coordinators. The criteria I used identify the three ideal models were based on the suggested best practices that the CO recommends in its Foster Youth Initiative. Each community college is recommended to have a designated program for its foster youth population that provides comprehensive services, from basic needs such as how to apply for financial aid and tutoring assistance, to introducing students to the college culture to help with future planning. Through these services, workshops are conducted for foster students to help them gain skills to develop their social capital. From learning how to live on a student budget to study skills and searching for jobs, the foster students who receive this kind of information may learn life skills that will foster academic success. The Foster Youth Initiative also suggests that resources be allocated to foster students to help them

manage their educational expenses, find alternative housing, and plan for their needs after college.

To identify three foster youth resource centers, I collected demographic data about possible sites from the Data Mart database. California community colleges are required to report information about their students each year through the reporting protocol of the CO. The data are then organized in the Data Mart database. I focused on foster youth resource centers that have existed for 5 or more years because I wanted to learn how the resource centers emerged and developed; the selected establishment time of at least 5 years should have been an ample amount of time to track the development and of each of the centers. I wanted to ensure that the selected school models came from institutions that serve a comparable student population. The criteria I used to determine comparable student population included campus population size of at least 20,000 students with similar demographic characteristics and similar foster student statistics to Mt. SAC. Mt. SAC is considered to be a large community campus, serving over 20,000 students based on CO data and reports. Choosing college campuses that serve a population of at least 20,000 students allowed me to have a comparable pool of possible models from which to select. It is also important to note that due to budget issues and other competing priorities, not all of the California Community Colleges have established a foster youth resource center, let alone have had one running for at least 5 years.

### **Non-Profit Agency Selection**

To answer the third and fourth research questions, interviews were conducted with current foster students attending Mt. SAC, coordinators at the three selected model sites, and professionals at selected non-profit agencies in order to identify information about services to consider when planning a foster youth resource center for Mt. SAC. Professionals at nonprofit

agencies (i.e., community partners) specializing in foster youth were interviewed to glean their professional insights. The criteria I used to select the three agencies were based on the focus of the agency's programs and number of years in existence. The agency's program should have included advocacy, mentorship, and/or direct service and financial support components for the foster youth population. Agencies should have established services that entail direct interaction with foster students. The selected agencies will have been functioning at least 5 years and should share focus on college success and provide support services for the population they serve. It is also useful to find agencies that are active in policy advocacy for the needs of foster students, especially policies that promote change in the foster care system as well as improvement in the educational outcomes of this population. Agencies that have the majority of the aforementioned components show an in-depth understanding of the foster care system and a sustained commitment to assist children who are affected by foster care. I identified these agencies by assessing their websites as well as their year-end reports. For non-profit agencies, as a reporting requirement to operate, each has to provide an annual report to their supporters and community, documenting their activities for the prior year, challenges, and future goals.

### **Mt. San Antonio College Foster Student Sample**

Twenty individual interviews were conducted with foster student volunteers, lasting 1 hour each. My aim was to elicit their experiences and perceptions about the services they received while attending Mt. SAC; they also had an opportunity to provide feedback regarding what services are lacking. Doing so provided a space for these foster students to voice their needs and concerns. During the interviews, I collected information related to the social capital needed by foster students at Mt. SAC, as social capital has been identified in previous chapters as the source that foster students are lacking in order to be academically successful. The data

gathered through these methods were analyzed to find themes that would show the *how* a resource center can be implemented and *what* needs are in order to be effective for the population it serves.

The researcher anticipated that it might be difficult to obtain a sample selection of foster students currently attending Mt. SAC. Often they do not like to identify themselves as foster students due to their belief that there is a stigma attached to being in the foster care system. My goal was to identify 20 participants with an independent recruitment flyer (Appendix A), and also with the assistance of the directors of the EOPS, CalWORKS, ACES, and ASPIRE programs, knowing that foster students may already be participating in these programs. Program directors helped me find students who were willing to volunteer for my study. I sent an email<sup>14</sup> (Appendix B) requesting assistance from the program directors detailing the purpose of this study and asking that program directors provide interested students with a packet that included: Participation Letter (Appendix C), the Background Questionnaire (Appendix D) and Consent Form (Appendix E). The Participation Letter highlights the purpose of the research study, my involvement as the researcher, and the involvement of the Program directors along with directions for next steps. The Background Questionnaire was used to collect demographic data on the student volunteer, and again reminded participants that participating in this study was completely optional. Interested students also needed to complete the Consent Form, and were given a self-addressed, stamped envelope to return the Background Questionnaire and Consent Form to me. I needed the assistance of program directors due to the difficulty of identifying this population. I depended on the program directors to solicit participation on my behalf as they know their service population best. The staff personnel in EOPS, CalWORKS, ACES, and

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<sup>14</sup> In the email, the purpose of this study was described, as well as the expectations of program directors and the role of the Background Questionnaire. Expectations for research participants were explained, such as time commitment and compensation for their participation.

ASPIRE programs already had a working rapport with foster students, so using this method I hoped to find my sample and benefit from this connection by being able to acquire a large enough sample for this study. Thus, the program directors bridged the connection I needed to establish trust among the foster student volunteers in my study. I also needed to depend on the initial group of foster youth participants to spread the word to other foster students they know, assisting me with recruitment. By using snowball sampling in conjunction with the assistance of the specialized program coordinators, I hoped to identify 20 foster students at Mt. SAC to interview individually. Table 2 summarizes my methods in alignment with each of the research questions.

Table 2 *Summary of Study Methods*

Research Question	Data Collection Method	Participant/s	Data Analysis Method
Umbrella: For students with foster care experience, what are their service and program needs while attending community college?	Individual Interviews; Document Review; Demographics survey	Total of 27: 4 coordinators at 4 model resource centers; 3 non-profit agency representatives; 20 foster student volunteers (90 minutes each)	Coding of interview transcripts for themes; Logging of information provided on page on protocol log sheet
1. What are the elements or characteristics of a resource center supporting foster students that has been active for five or more years?	Individual Interview	4 coordinators at model resource center (active for at least 5 years) at similar institution (90 minutes)	Coding of interview transcripts for themes
	Document Review	Institutional Resource Center Web Pages	Logging of information provided on page on protocol log sheet
2. What are the factors or information that professionals working with foster youth at non-profit agencies say are necessary for them to attend community college?	Individual Interview	3 non-profit agency representatives (90 minutes)	Coding of interview transcripts for themes
3. What information and/or services do foster students say should be included in a resource center to support foster students attending	Individual Interview with short survey at beginning (demographics collection)	20 foster student volunteers (90 minutes)	Coding of interview transcripts for themes

## **Document Review**

I performed a review of the websites of the three selected resource center models and non-profit agencies as discussed in the Research Design section of this chapter. I then analyzed the information provided on each webpage in order to identify each organization's resources, services and activities, and partnerships with other local colleges and nonprofit agencies. The information collected from analyzing web pages and other center materials (such as reports, handouts, and calendar) allowed me to triangulate with data that were collected from interviews of the model resource center coordinators. Historical relevance could also be detected through this document review method as "historical account of a program might be solicited to illuminate the present situation" (Merriam, 2009, p. 149). It was also my hope that communication methods, service protocols, and strategic planning could be gleaned from this document analysis. I also asked center coordinators for documents that were not available on the center web pages or on the college's web pages. Merriam (2009) stated that document review "can furnish descriptive information, verify emerging hypotheses, advance new change and development, and so on" (p. 155). Through this process, I hoped to gain insight that would help Mt. SAC understand the *dos* and *don'ts* of designing and implementing a resource center for foster students.

## **Interviews**

I planned to interview coordinators of the three foster student resource centers, representatives of non-profit agencies, and the 20 foster student volunteers from Mt. SAC. For the resource center coordinators and non-profit agency workers, I planned to interview two to three in each group regarding the development of their foster youth program and the needs of foster students in the semi-structured format. Interviewees were selected based on their title as



*coordinators* or job description including the responsibilities similar to that of a coordinator at the selected model site. As for professional staff at nonprofit agencies, selected interviewees had responsibilities working with foster students directly, especially assisting foster students with their education and/or were involved in any form of education advocacy within the agency. Interviews were approximately 90 minutes long depending on the development of the conversation. Interviews were audio recorded for transcription and recollection of information. I developed an interview protocol that was piloted with professionals with knowledge of establishing a foster youth resource center in their career; the questions were flexible with the goal of eliciting the same kind of information from each interviewee. This interview format was deemed the best means of gaining information on how each foster youth resource center was implemented and designed; it also established a network of partner agencies for Mt. SAC. By engaging in conversations with these coordinators and representatives, I hoped to learn what was done in establishing these resource centers, or *the how*, as well as understand what not to do and what factors to consider in terms of new developments such as new laws that currently affect foster students. I also connected with and interview representatives from well-known foundations that work with foster students such as the John Burton Foundation and CYC to capture their professional knowledge and insights. These conversations were transcribed soon after for analysis and as recommended as a research best practice. It was also my hope that I could initiate a partnership between these agencies and Mt. SAC.

Interviewing individual foster students who are currently attending Mt. SAC gave me first-hand knowledge of their experiences as foster students on campus. The interviewees from this group were volunteers solicited from the EOPS, CalWORKS, ACES, and ASPIRE program directors on my behalf. Coercion did not take place as I had no direct contact to the foster youth

population at Mt. SAC; instead, I relied on Mt. SAC personnel to request these volunteers, and in turn, foster youth participants were compensated appropriately for their time within the standards of both UCLA and Mt. SAC internal review boards. The interviews (approximately 1.5 hour long) were audio recorded and transcribed.

### **Data Analysis**

This section describes in detail my data analysis method. A structured coding was used with the interviews I conducted. For each group of interviewees, a set of questions were used; the purpose was to find consistency in the answers offered to then code by obvious themes that evolved. My goal was to record themes and subthemes that came up frequently and deemed important to the research questions, using verbatim quotations to categorize and show evidence in my reporting. I also used this structural analysis method as I conducted the document review of my study sites.

During the document review, I looked for the kinds of information supplied as well as the services provided for foster youths at resource centers and non-profit agencies. In reviewing the website data from these two entities, I hoped to identify themes related to information and services offered to foster students; this helped to inform my recommendations for Mt. SAC. From these themes, I was also able to understand any differences between what the coordinators from these foster youth resource centers and community partners say are helpful to foster students and what foster students say are the benefits or challenges at the college. I was also able to compare the themes analyzed from interview transcripts with community partners with the themes analyzed from interview transcripts with staff at the selected resource centers to understand if the needs of college-going foster students are currently being addressed. Doing so

provided me with the additional advantage of understanding what is needed to create a holistic resource center to support foster students at Mt. SAC.

Transcripts were coded immediately after the transcripts were checked by the participants. Providing participants an opportunity to review and check their own transcript ensured accuracy of my transcription work and also allowed participants to further explain any unclear explanations. Doing so increased my study's validity. It was my hope that themes would emerge from an in-depth structural analysis of these interview transcripts and that these themes would add to the purpose of this research. It was my hope that capturing themes such as a need for mentorship, one-on-one assistance in navigating the campus and administrative maze, and precise and accurate information on eligible resources would help with the ultimate goal of convincing administration to commit financial support to start and grow a foster youth program at Mt. SAC. These themes have been suggested by numerous research studies as discussed in the prior chapters; thus, to illuminate these themes again through my own research will serve as a supportive argument for the foster students at Mt. SAC. With help from different voices of coordinators, non-profit agency representatives, and foster students, I hoped to identify what information and services should be provided to foster students to increase their college success rate. From the social capital perspective, lack of capital in the form of self-belief, study skills, and financial literacy knowledge have prevented foster students from achieving their adult goals, one of which is attaining a college degree. Research study after research study has found that non-foster care students are able to achieve college attainment because they are given social capital knowledge as part of the natural course of family upbringing; however, due to their disconnect with family, foster students are not provided the same stable upbringing as their peers, and therefore do not have the social capital that would aid them as they become adults.

From the themes gathered in this study, I formulated findings and implications for future research on foster students by using the theoretical framework of social capital.

### **Program Theory**

In analyzing the data, this yielded a theory of change within the results of my study, whereas a theory of action was concluded in my recommendations. This yield is aligned with my final goal. My goal was to display the issues of foster students attending community college as outlined in Chapter 4 while finding solutions to meet these needed changes for this group. Thus, Chapter 5 displays a theory of action in the recommendations I made to help solve the issues that foster students and professionals say exist that prevent foster students from succeeding in college. I developed a logic model to be presented to the stakeholders at Mt. SAC as part of the development plan; this is a visual representation of the program theory that includes the issues (what needs to be done to change) and what actions should be taken to address change. Alkin (2011) explained that a logic model is a useful tool that is the “depiction or diagrammatic representation of the various activities, which are shown in a way that indicates their progression and their linkages” (p. 72). The logic model was helpful in describing the findings of the dissertation and will provide a pictorial diagram for stakeholders at Mt. SAC regarding the establishment of a resource center to meet the needs of its foster student population. Using the model, I was better positioned to communicate the findings of the project as well as help stakeholders understand the findings from the research; it is critical that everyone involved have a shared vision or understanding of project. A logic model defines factors in the categories of inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes, enabling the decision makers to have a visual representation of the necessary details that would need to be in place in order for the foster youth center to take shape. The logic model also shows the timeline that is needed to facilitate the

development of the program. The logic model is a useful tool for discussion to aid the prioritization of a foster student resource center.

### **Credibility**

To increase this study's credibility, all interview protocols were reviewed by professionals who work with this population, but who were not participants in the study. The results of the interviews were triangulated to help professionals at Mt. SAC understand the needs of college-going foster students as well as the actions that must take place to design a successful foster youth resource center. Analysis from the document review also added credibility to this research project by showing whether what is currently provided to foster students at the resource centers is what is needed (based on the interviews with foster students, coordinators, and representatives).

Member checks were used in this study as well. Each participant was encouraged to review his/her transcript to ensure that what he/she expressed was recorded accurately and to enable him/her to add to his/her comments. I was prepared for reactivity if foster students had the urge to share what they thought I wanted to hear during the interview. To counter this behavior, I described the purposes of the study at the start of the interview session and found time to provide a reminder in the middle of each interview. This helped participants maintain their focus and allowed their true perspectives to be expressed. I reminded participants that candid answers were most helpful to form a plan for a foster student resource center in order to maintain this project's credibility.

Due to the small sample size and small number of colleges, generalizability is an issue. The findings may not be applicable to other community colleges. The study's purpose, though, is for Mt. SAC to understand the needs of foster students through the eyes of its population as

well as from those who work with foster students. There may be themes from the research that can be used should other campuses seek to do the same for their foster student population.

### **Ethical Considerations**

I abided by the Mt. SAC “Research Project Approval” protocol (Appendix H) through its Research and Institutional Effectiveness Department and received approval before conducting individual interviews with foster students attending Mt. SAC for this study. I also gained approval from UCLA’s Institutional Review Board.

As a stranger in the field of foster student resource center coordination, I approached this study with a new lens. Though this may have helped me to be objective, it also put me at somewhat of a disadvantage because of my lack of understanding of terminology of the field. As stated previously, I had my interview protocols reviewed by professionals in the field. According to Sampson (2004), piloting is a tool that can “refine and develop research instruments” (p. 385), in my case my interview protocols; it can also “assess degrees of observer bias” (p. 385). Piloting the interview instruments strengthens validity and reliability as expected in a strong research study. Each interview was digitally recorded and a verbatim transcript was prepared to ensure accurate capturing of participants’ voices. Member checks were used to address the validity threats of misinterpreting participants’ responses.

In working with foster students, it is especially important to protect their identity. As a result, no personal identifiers were included in the study. Each participant was assigned a code or a pseudonym (P1 to P20). The personal identity of the participants was only known to the researcher. At the end of the study, all items related to the identification of the interviewees were destroyed. During the study, data and items for this study were password protected on my computer and were kept at my home, in a study room to which only I have access.

There was a possibility in working with foster students that they would have wanted to share their personal hardships and traumas. To prepare for this, I was clear about the purpose of this study through my communication to solicit volunteers; I also planned to review the purpose before beginning each interview to assure participants that no questions would be asked of their foster care experience. If the foster students volunteered such information, I respected their confidences and only used the information that pertained to the study. Resources in a form of a handout were made available (Appendix G) should a youth have needed to seek help due to reflections about his/her foster youth's past that generated an emotional response. The purpose of this handout is to obtain the foster student the correct assistance he/she may have needed, as it was not the intention of this research study to harm participants, but to gather data to improve services for foster students at Mt. SAC. It was my hope that my affiliation with CASA<sup>15</sup> would instill trust in foster students, and provide a connection to produce significant data from the interviews.

It should also be known that I hold a position of authority at Mt. SAC; I am the Financial Aid Director, under the division of Student Services. Because of this position, my supervisor has pinpointed me as the appropriate manager to create a foster youth program. In our initial planning, it was agreed that my research study would be appropriate and needed before any decision and planning take place. My research study will be used to inform a comprehensive proposal to be provided to President's Cabinet, the administrative arm at Mt. SAC, to seek approval to start the planning of Mt. SAC's foster student resource center. While I hold a

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<sup>15</sup> CASA: Court Appointed Special Advocate. A CASA volunteer visits with a child on a regular basis, interacts with all professionals involved in the child's case, and makes recommendations directly to the court, ensuring the child's best interests are heard. A CASA volunteer will address a child's educational needs, help find a permanent home, and provide the guidance and resources necessary for an independent future. I have been a CASA for 7 years, including volunteering with "Family Connections;" this is another branch of the CASA organization in which efforts are made to connect foster youths with long lost relatives.

position of authority at the college, I do not have oversight over any of the existing departments that were involved in the study.

I needed to be clear in my communication with all participants, especially the foster student volunteers, about my dual role while conducting this research study. I offered an explanation as to why this subject was of interest to me, and why it made sense for me to take the lead in developing a foster youth resource center at Mt. SAC. I have become an advocate for such a foster youth project at Mt. SAC through my financial aid work as well as my volunteer work with CASA. Over my 17 years of professional work in helping needy students find the funding to pay for college, I have developed a strong sense of empathy for college foster students struggling through college, from finances, to academic progress, to graduation; I have had the privilege of hearing many powerful stories from foster students. I am at a merging point of my academic and profession careers, being in a key position to be able to advocate for foster students in higher education as my platform. I direct the financial aid office at one of the biggest California community colleges that lacks a foster youth resource center; my study is appropriate in terms of bringing to light the needs of foster students at Mt. SAC and as a goal to make my doctorate work practical, so to turn this work into a proposal is ideal.

During the research part of my study, I also needed to separate my roles for myself: namely my roles as the Financial Aid Director and the researcher. I needed to be conscientious about the dual roles I play at Mt. SAC. I requested time off from my duties for all my interviews. I also conducted the interviews in a separate physical location than my work area, if requested by foster student volunteers that they wanted to meet me on the Mt. SAC campus; doing so helped me maintain my two roles separate.



## Summary

The varied methods described in this section as well as the selection of participants in my study ensured that data sources could be triangulated. The document review of current foster youth resource centers and non-profit agencies, as well as individual interviews with coordinators, foster youth agency workers, and current foster students at Mt. SAC, provided the data for me to make recommendations for a plan to design an effective resource center at Mt. SAC for foster students. More importantly, they helped me understand the processes and issues in developing a plan to create a foster student resource center, the elements or characteristics of a foster student resource center, the information and/or services that foster students say should be included in a resource center, and what factors or information that professionals working with foster students at non-profit agencies say are necessary for foster students attending community college. The timeline of the development of Mt. SAC's foster youth resource center is outlined subsequently based on academic year, the standard timing used for most college planning projects (see Table 3). The timeline is based on the findings from the data analysis, which is discussed in the next chapter.

Table 3

*Proposed Timeline: Development of Foster Student Resource Center at Mt. San Antonio College*

Item	Who	Academic Year/Term	Contingency
Proposal Submission	Director, Financial Aid	2014-2015	Completion of Doctoral Study
Finalize Proposal	Vice President, Student Services	Spring 2015	Workload and Student Services Projects
Logic Model to fit Mt. SAC structure	Director, Financial Aid and Vice President, Student Services	Summer 2015	Workload and Student Services Projects
Approval of Proposal	Vice President, Student Services present to President's Cabinet (PC)	Summer 2015	Funding and Student Services Projects
Adjustment to Proposal/Finalization w/ PC Recommendation/s	Director, Financial Aid and Vice President, Student Services	Fall 2015	Workload and Student Services Projects
Approval from Board of Trustees	PC	Fall 2015	Funding and Mt. SAC

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Start Up Plan	Director, Financial Aid and Planning Committee	Spring 2016 to Summer 2016	projects Funding and Mt. SAC projects
Hiring/Reorganization of Staff for Foster Student Resource Center	Director, Financial Aid and Student Services Managers	2016-2017	Funding and Mt. SAC projects
Opening of Foster Student Resource Center	Mt. SAC	Fall 2017	Funding and Mt. SAC projects

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## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The previous three chapters discussed the problem that community colleges are not equipped to provide programming and services to their foster student population. This population is at a disadvantage, with no housing, troubled K-12 schooling, and family instability. For foster students who manage to complete their K-12 education and are able to move on to college, most enroll in a community college. The findings from this qualitative study identify the programming and services community colleges need to provide to foster students in order to enable them to complete and be successful with their college education. In sum, this section highlights a theory of change; the issues that foster students have while they attend community college, mainly at Mt. SAC. These issues need to be address in order to increase the college success rate for foster students. Mt. SAC gave permission to study its foster student population in order to understand how it can build a program with the necessary services that will serve and engage its foster students.

This chapter will begin with demographic descriptions of each of the three groups that were interviewed; the sequence of demographic descriptions is of community college resource center coordinators, non-profit agency representatives, and then the foster student participants. A table summary of each group will round out each section. The core of this chapter will discuss the findings that were illuminated during data analysis to answer the umbrella research question: What are service and program needs of foster students while attending community college? This chapter is further organized to answer sub research questions, broken down by participant groups based on their knowledge of and experience regarding the needs of foster students. Social and cultural capitals are included in this chapter as it informs the findings. The following outline

summarizes the organization of this chapter, aligning the themes with the umbrella research question and sub-questions.

### **Thematic Findings Related to the Research Questions**

The thematic findings for the umbrella research question and its two sub research questions are described subsequently.

**Umbrella Research Question:** For students with foster care experience, what are their service and program needs while attending community college?

- Sub Research Question 1: What are the elements or characteristics of a resource center supporting foster students that has been active for 5 or more years?
- Sub Research Question 2: What are the factors or information that professionals working with foster students at non-profit agencies say are necessary for them to attend community college?
  - Main Theme 1: Establishment of a Community Atmosphere of Care
    - Subtheme 1.1: Access Point for Connection and Engagement
    - Subtheme 1.2: Safe Common Space for Assistance and Acceptance
    - Subtheme 1.3: Access Point for Collective Voice
- Sub Research Question 3: What information and /or services do foster students say should be included in a resource center to support them while they attend community college?
  - Main Theme 2: Services to Support Independence and Development of Self-Empowerment
    - Subtheme 2.1: Provide Opportunities to Give Back
    - Subtheme 2.2: Provide Targeted Programming and Services

The research questions will be answered in two sections that discuss the two main themes that emerged. Each main theme has subthemes; this organizational strategy will help answer each research question clearly. Due to the straightforward and common findings from both community college resource center coordinators and non-profit agency representatives, the first two sub research questions are answered together by the first main theme; there was no differentiation among the answers from these two groups. Two large themes emerged from the 27 interviews that were conducted with Mt. SAC foster students, community college resource center coordinators, and professionals at non-profit agencies that specialize in the foster care system. The first theme is “Establishment of a Community Atmosphere of Care.” The second theme is “Services to Support Independence and Development of Self-Empowerment.” Because the research questions led me to collect insights from not only foster students but also professionals who work with foster students at the community college and non-profit organizations, this discussion includes data from each group to support triangulation of data. For each finding to be considered, a measure of 70% was used as the cutoff, meaning at least five of the seven professionals or 14 of 20 foster students gave similar answers during each of their interviews. This measure was determined to be the most logical cutoff from the findings tallied after careful analysis.

Subthemes are used in the discussion of each of the main themes to expand the explanation of each main theme; this is where the details are presented. Theme 1 includes the following three subthemes: Access Point for Connection and Engagement, Safe Common Space for Assistance and Acceptance, and Access Point for Collective Voice. Theme 2 includes the following two subthemes: Provide Opportunities to Give Back, and Provide Targeted Programming and Services.

The discussion of the themes and subthemes will begin by depicting the participants. A discussion of the characteristics of each group will follow with a summary table at the end of the section to tie each discussion together. Data regarding resource centers and non-profit agencies came from the document review. The document review of community college resource centers and non-profit agencies was designed to determine the selection of participants. Demographic data of Mt. SAC foster students were collected via a short questionnaire at the initial stage of recruitment. The questionnaire was used for two purposes: study qualification and statistics. The conclusion of this chapter will present a logic model, to depict the program theory of change and action, to show how both themes as well as their subthemes are all tied together. The themes and subthemes are intertwined and necessary when building a resource center to help foster students at Mt. SAC as well as other community colleges. These findings will serve as insight for the recommendations made in Chapter 5.

### **Demographics of the Three Participating Groups**

#### **Four Community College Resource Centers**

Four community college resource centers were part of this study; interviews were conducted with coordinators were to find answers to sub research question 1: What are the elements or characteristics of a resource center supporting foster students that has been active for 5 or more years? The criteria for the selection of the resource centers were 5 or more years of establishment as a foster youth resource center, affiliation within the California Community Colleges, and demographics similar to those of Mt. SAC. Though the criteria may not seem daunting given that there are 112 community colleges in California, due to the subject group of foster students I selected for my research and the sensitivity around this group, it was difficult to find four schools that met my criteria. Table 4 provides a summary of the characteristics of the

four campuses that were identified. Two are in northern California, although one is very small compared to Mt. SAC based on data provided by the CO (2013). Even though this college did not meet the student population criterion, it met the rest of the criteria, so I chose to have the staff be part of this study. It is also because of their geographical area that I thought they would serve a substantial number of foster students. College A<sup>16</sup> serves around 23,000 students a year, having the top three ethnic groups as Asian, White, and Hispanic/Latino, with a Pell grant volume of \$31.9 million. College A's Guardian Scholars Program was established in 2006 with one full-time coordinator to serve approximately 230 foster students a year. College B serves 7,100 students, having the top three ethnic groups as White, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian with a Pell Grant volume of \$14.3 million. This program is called YESS, a spin-off of the Youth Empowerment Strategies for Success grant they received. This program was established in 2009 with one part-time staff member to serve approximately 120 foster students a year.

The other two programs are at community colleges in the southern California area. College C has a student population of about 17,000, with the top three ethnic groups as Hispanic/Latino, White, and Asian with a Pell Grant volume of \$34.5 million. The support program, established in 2007, is called LINC (Leaders Involved in Creating Change) with two full-time positions; this program now serves over 500 foster students. The fourth participating community college, College D, serves a student population of 16,600, with the top three ethnic groups as White, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian with a Pell grant volume of \$16.5 million. Like College A, their program is also called Guardian Scholars. It was established in 2009 with two part-time staff members to serve about 240 foster students a year.

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<sup>16</sup> Pseudonyms are used for all four colleges participating in this study.

Table 4

*Summary of Resource Center and College Characteristics<sup>17</sup>*

	Mt. SAC	College A	College B	College C	College D
Population	25,000	23,000	7,000	17,000	16,600
Top 3 Ethnic Groups	His/Latino 53%	Asian 29%	White 71%	His/Latino 61%	White 36%
	Asian 17%	White 25%	His/Latino 12%	White 12%	His/Latino 31%
	White 12%	His/Latino 22%	Asian 3%	Asian 7%	Asian 20%
Pell Grant (indicator of Low-Income status)	\$42M	\$32M	\$14M	\$35M	\$17M
Name of Program	N/A	Guardian Scholars	YESS	LINC	Guardian Scholars
Established Year	N/A	2006	2009	2007	2009
Staffing	N/A	1 full-time	1 part-time	2 full-time	2 part-time
Number of Foster Students Served	168	230	120	550	240

**Three Non-profit Agency Representatives**

Three non-profit agency representatives participated in this study in search of findings to answer sub research question 2: What are the factors or information that professionals working with foster students at non-profit say are necessary for them to attend community college? Table 5 below provides a summary of characteristics of these agencies. All three agencies specialize in working for and with students in the foster care system. Each has its own focus and service area, but as a collective they become the advocate voice for children in foster care. Seeing that this research could help foster students and their higher education attainment, they agreed to share their insights in order to assist as much as possible. The first agency coordinator that I interviewed is based in northern California; her title is Program Director and she has worked in the nonprofit arena to support foster youths for over 20 years. Agency E<sup>18</sup> was created in 2004 to serve organizations that directly help homeless children and children in the foster care system.

<sup>17</sup> Data provided by the Data Mart with data parameters established by the CO. Data have been rounded to help maintain confidentiality; data were extracted for the same academic year as comparison baseline. Data on the number of students served is acknowledged as inaccurate because this is an optional field for students to select when they apply for community college admission; no formal mechanism is in place for colleges to report actual number of students with foster care experience.

<sup>18</sup> Pseudonyms used for all three non-profit agencies.



The coordinator provided a summary of the agency's work and she shared, "We are not a direct service provider. We don't work directly with foster youth...we're more of an intermediary. We provide technical assistance and training to people who are running or hoping to start foster youth programs at college campuses." Their support has expanded since its inception and includes Backpack to Success Program (providing gift cards, laptops, and school supplies statewide), grants to community based organizations, as well as legislation advocacy to create policies to improve the lives of children in foster care. This foundation extends its support to K-12 school districts as well as colleges in order to increase school success and the college-going pipeline for foster children.

The second organization, Agency F, was founded in 1988 with the mission of working with foster children to educate them about state government, how proposals become policy and then law, as well as develop the skills necessary for foster children to become their own advocates. This foundation is based in Los Angeles, but has three other regional branches in the state. The coordinator I interviewed explained that this foundation helps "find solutions that impact youth in foster care and mainly, the vehicle for which they were going to advocate was via policy change." Part of their unique mission is to reach out to college-going foster students, establish chapters on the college campus, and help foster students educate and advocate for their college specific needs. In a sense, this group is empowering foster students with political and leadership skills so they can improve their own lives via self-advocacy. Their trainings provide help foster children to become informed, self-sufficient adults. This coordinator holds the title of Program Director and has been affiliated with this agency for more than 20 years.

The third organization, Agency G, was selected due to its special focus on the mentorship aspect of working with foster children. Their belief is that children in care need the one-on-one

relationship that their non-care peers have readily with adults. Therefore, this organization solicits adult volunteers to become well-trained advocates for the foster children, with a direct connection to the court system. Advocates are expected to not only spend social time with the assigned child, but also speak for the child mentee in the courtroom, as well as have authorization to track the well-being of the child mentee. Most volunteers are also asked to monitor education progress and provide educational feedback to school teachers and administrators as well as the court. In 2011, this organization became aware that they needed to help children become stable adults by providing help to those who continue their education on a college campus. They realized that little support was given to foster children to learn about the college process or gain an understanding of what it is like to attend college. In concert with Zetlin and Weinberg (2013), this organization realized that they and

Policymakers and practitioners have to come to realize that the child welfare and school systems cannot operate in isolation to resolve the academic and behavioral problems, and the bureaucratic barriers, that impede the educational progress of children in foster care. (p. 61)

They created an Education Liaison program to increase the college-going rate for those under their care. The coordinator interviewed for this research study has been the agency’s Education Coordinator for the last 3 years.

*Table 5 Summary of Non-profit Agencies*

Characteristics	Agency E	Agency F	Agency G
Service Area	Statewide (CA)	Statewide (CA)	Orange County with National Affiliation
Specialty Focus	Support schools (K-16) to provide services to Foster Students	Support foster children through leadership development with direct participation in governmental process	Mentorship of foster children and direct connection with Court System; program to connect with foster alumni who continue on to college
Date Established	2004	1988	1985
Funding Source	Private	Private	Private
Number of Staff Positions	5	18	29
Governing Board	Advisory Board of Directors	Board of Directors	Board of Directors and Advisory Board

## **Demographics of the 20 Mt. SAC Student Interviewees**

As part of the study design, I conducted interviews with 20 foster student volunteers at Mt. SAC. Their insights provided answers to sub research question 3: What information and/or services do foster student say should be included in a resource center to support foster students attending community college? Conducting a research project that involved participation from those who had been in the foster care system is often difficult due to the interviewees' sensitivities. I used three strategies to solicit participation on the Mt. SAC campus: a flyer, assistance from Special Program Directors, and the snowball sampling method. Two students were recruited through the flyer, 15 students were recruited by referral from Program Directors (Assessment, ACES, Bridge, EOPS, Foster Youth Liaison, Veterans, and Student Life), and three students were referred by peers who had completed the interview. I was able to conduct 20 extensive interviews with Mt. SAC students who fit my criterion of having experienced the foster care system. These students provided many insights, not because they had to, but because they said they were excited that such a project was being done. They understood the importance of sharing their perspectives in order to help those who come after them. This section will describe the student participants' demographic data as a group (see Tables 6 and 7 for a summary of participants' demographic information).

Table 6

*Summary of Foster Care Arrangements of Student Participants*

Student	Age Entered into Foster Care	Time in Foster Care (Year)	# of Placements	Type of Placement <sup>19</sup>	Type of Placement
P1	1	18	2	Kinship	Relative
P2	7	12	23	Foster Family	Group home
P3	4	9	3	Foster Family	
P4	10	3	10	Group home	Foster family
P5	2	19	2	Long Term Permanent Placement	
P6	11	7	7	Group home	Foster family
P7	4, 5, 7, and 9	5	5	Group home	Foster family
P8	13	2	1	Foster home	
P9	6	3	4	Foster home	
P10	17	1	2	Relative	Foster home
P11	2.5	7	3	Group home	Foster family
P12	1	2	1	Foster family	
P13	15	2	1	Group home	
P14	0	18.5	2	Foster Family	
P15	13	4	1	Relative	
P16	13	5	10	Group home	
P17	12	5	1	Relative	
P18	14	5	4	Relative	Group home
P19	0	18	1	Foster family	
P20	1	17	2	Foster Family	

Table 7

*Summary of Participant Characteristics*

Student	Adopted? (Yes/No) (Yes/Age)	Age out of Foster Care	# of School Changes	Gender	Ethnicity	Program of Study	Current GPA*	Years In College
P1	N	18	4	M	African American	Kinesiology	2.8	3
P2	N	19	23	F	Hispanic	AA/transfer for Business or Medicine	2.8	8
P3	N	15	3	F	Hispanic	Psychology	2.5	2
P4	N	13	7	F	Latina	Child Development	2.0	2
P5	N	21	1	F	Latina	Business/transfer	2.7	5
P6	N	18	0	F	Hispanic	AA/transfer for Film/Television	3.4	1999 <sup>^</sup>
P7	N	9	10	M	Hispanic	Criminal Justice	2.2	1.5
P8	N	17	1	M	Native American	Criminal Justice	4.0	1
P9	N	15	4	M	White	Restaurant	2.9	1.5

<sup>19</sup> There is more than one column for Type of Placement because for foster students who experienced multiple placements, the type of placement can change.

Student	Adopted? (Yes/No) (Yes/Age)	Age out of Foster Care	# of School Changes	Gender	Ethnicity	Program of Study	Current GPA*	Years In College
P10	N	18	3	F	White/ Hispanic	Management Medicine/Law	4.0	0.5
(continued)								
P11	Y	7	6	F	African American	Business Management	2.5	1
P12	Y	2	0	F	African American	Language Arts	1.7	3.5
P13	N	17	0	M	Hispanic	Unknown	2.0	1
P14	N	21	5	M	Hispanic	Culinary	1.5	5
P15	N	17	0	F	Hispanic	Film Production	2.8	4
P16	N	18	2	M	Human/Afric an American	Information Technology	1.8	0.6
P17	N	18	4	M	African American	Kinesiology	2.9	1
P18	N	19	2	F	White	Psychology	2.7	4
P19	Y	18	2	M	Black/Cuban	Business Administration	2.1	2
P20	N	18	3	F	Biracial	Psychology	2.0	9

*Note.* \*Current GPA was provided by student participant based on recollection of most current GPA. ^Student reported attending college on and off since 1999.

Their data reflect similar demographic statistics as in documented research (Barth, 1990; Blome, 1997; Casey Family Programs, 2011; Collins, 2001; Cook, 1997; First Star Organization, 2012; Frerer et al., 2013; Osgood et al., 2010). As a group, foster students at Mt. SAC entered the foster care system from 0 years old to the age of 17. The range of length of time in the system was reported to be 1-19 years, and the number of placements was reported to be from 1-23 with a mean of 4.6. The majority experienced foster family or group home placements with two reported to be placed with relatives: their grandmothers. It needs to be stated that many of those who lived in a foster home emphasized that they felt fortunate to have their foster family. Many said they established strong relationships with those in the family, and continue to refer to their foster family members as dad, mom, brother, and sister. One student said that she did not experience school change, whereas the rest had up to eight school changes throughout their foster care time. The gender make-up was equal, 10 males and 10 females, and the ethnicity make-up was reported as follows: three Biracial, one Native American, two Caucasian, six

African American, and nine Hispanic/Latino/a. It is also important to report that six out of the 20 participants reported that they are veterans.

The participants reported studying in a wide range of academic programs that include Kinesiology, Business, Child Development, Film/Television, Criminal Justice, and Restaurant Management. The GPA reported at the time of this research ranged from 1.5 to 4.0 with two participants in the Mt. SAC Honors program. At the time of the interview, the range of time attending a community college was 0.5 to 9 years.

### **Theme 1: Establish a Community Atmosphere of Care**

The first overarching theme of my findings is establishing a community atmosphere of care. This theme includes the following three subthemes: Access Point for Connection and Engagement, Safe Common Space for Assistance and Acceptance, and Access Point for Collective Voice. The following sections discuss how each subtheme is defined to support the first main theme.

#### **Subtheme 1.1: Access Point for Connection and Engagement**

Foster students said that they want to feel a connection to the campus when they arrive and that they are welcomed. They want encouragement and a feeling of belonging to the campus community when they begin their college career. Professionals who have worked with foster students say that the access point needs to be established and developed for this to happen. Welcoming foster students in the beginning goes a long way. Professionals say this access point not only provides foster students the feeling of belonging to the college, but also confers a dual benefit where the college now has access to each foster student and the opportunity to create a relationship with them. Without connecting with foster students, the work of helping them never begins. Due to their circumstances, foster students as well as professionals who work with foster

students say foster students suffer from a stigma related to their foster care history that they have face each day; professionals report that foster students say they yearn for the care that they have failed to receive throughout their lives. It is now critical that the community college campus provide a place to serve foster students with the care they deserve. In order to show care to and connect with foster students, the campus must find a way to track foster students who utilize services and programs. By monitoring each student's progress and using measured participatory data, assessment of programming can be analyzed and enhanced effectively to improve services and support. Showing foster students the campus's efforts of improving services for them will instill the message of care and maintain their engagement. This also indicates to foster students that they are held accountable for their own college progress.

### **Subtheme 1.2: Safe Common Space for Assistance and Acceptance**

Foster students have many issues and responsibilities that they have to take manage on their own, especially when they start college. At this point, many are on their own, having to find housing, manage finances, and decide on a program of study and a life profession; they have to do this all without much support. Professionals say that foster students need a consistent location that they know would help them access the right assistance when they need it. Foster students do not want to be handed a diploma, but rather desire a fair chance to be a *normal* student and strive for a college education; they want to try hard, but when challenges seem insurmountable, they do not have adequate support, leading many of them to stop and start college frequently. A consistent location with well-trained staff to provide assistance and acceptance is greatly needed. A definitive space symbolizes autonomy as well as priority by the college for this population. Appropriate staffing is critical; consideration of the number of staff members as well as the positions of the staff members is important. All staff members need to

be well-informed about the foster care experience and be able to adjust to crises. Staff on the front lines can make or break a program supporting foster students. If foster students are unable to connect with and trust the staff, they will not seek assistance and not participate.

Foster students are forced to juggle many responsibilities due to lack of parental support, and at times they experience a multitude of emergencies and issues; professionals say foster students need to know where and to whom they can reach out for help. Foster students are known to have turbulent histories due to their circumstances and so they need a safe and secure place to go to on campus to give them stability and peace of mind. This common space for assistance and acceptance will give foster students the nurturing and help they need to make them successful at college.

### **Subtheme 1.3: Access Point for a Collective Voice**

Professionals stated that in order to let foster students know they are cared for on campus, it is necessary to continue advocacy on behalf of their population. The college needs to share foster student success stories and keep pushing for support. Foster students need to not only see the care in the programming, but also hear about support from the school. The campus community needs to be reminded of foster students' circumstances and issues as they try to earn a college degree. Foster students said that at most times they are reluctant to speak up for support on behalf of themselves and their foster peers due to the fear of being singled out and labeled under the foster care stigma, but would get involved with group activities so that they can be part of a blended collective. Rallying community support for the foster student population needs to be continuous and signals to them and others that they are an important part of the community. The collective voice will be louder and more effective when it is supported by



continued participation from well-engaged foster students making progress on their college journey.

### **Discussion of Theme 1: Establish a Community Atmosphere of Care**

When foster students are left on their own, research shows that they are not as successful in the college setting as those who receive support (Zetlin & Weinberg, 2013). Professionals at non-profit agencies and community college resource centers unanimously agree with foster students that establishing a caring community atmosphere is critically needed. In this atmosphere, one point of entry to receive all services and allow for access to opportunities to connect, engage, get help, and be part of a collective voice will ensure buy-in from foster students; by giving them the same foundation as their non-foster care peers to compete on an even playing field, many will strive and succeed on the college campus.

#### **Subtheme 1.1: Access Point for Connection and Engagement**

A theme of what a caring community looks like emerged from the study participants' responses. Such a community connects foster students to college staff, professors, and the larger community and vice versa. This access point allows for engagement and interactions, which will translate into building the foster student population into a well-informed and successful entity of the college. The care has to be constant and consistent, otherwise both professionals who work with adolescents in foster care and the foster students agree that the formation of a trusting community will not come to fruition. This requirement challenges college staff to keep foster students' perspectives in mind at all times. As Watt, Norton, and Jones (2013) learned in their research that staff had to work "to create a survivor's identity, to instill a sense of pride that they have made it to college, and to celebrate that identity rather than to approach the students as vulnerable, deficient individuals in need of assistance" (p. 1,412). Thus, bonding to build

connection and engagement with foster students is a critical motivational factor for foster students; doing so will demonstrate the care foster students need to see and feel in order to gain their trust and willingness to participate. A caring environment conveys to foster students the efforts administrators, staff, and professors put forth to ensure their well-being while they get through college. This environment also allows for peer-to-peer connection, from foster student to foster student, engaging with each other to create a support system.

In all 27 interviews with members of the three groups, emphasis was given to establishing an atmosphere of community care. The act of establishing community lays the foundation for an effective resource center that engages foster students on a college campus; this needs to be done from the beginning planning stage because, as administrators need to realize, due to trust issues that foster students have had to face all their lives, foster students only give people one chance. With that one opportunity, it is a “make it or break it” decision for foster students to determine if the services will work for them. For one coordinator, getting foster students to participate in her center meant that her center staff had to be ready to receive foster students whenever they come in for assistance. The resource center staff and its services had to be accessible based on the timing of the foster students’ needs; “It’s a walk-in basis and students come in, can see us, and can use the computer if they want, but we just really want to make our center and our services accessible.”

As of 2014 at the Mt. SAC campus, foster students do not have access to specialized staff or services to help them. Sixteen of 20 Mt. SAC students who were interviewed described their initial assessment of coming onto the campus as “intimidating,” “scary,” “lonely,” and “overwhelming.” One student mentioned that she was not taught that high school rules were different from college rules. That is, in college, you are expected to be accountable for yourself;

for example, students are expected to attend class, but if they don't, the professor is not going to report attendance each day to the college president. The college president would not in turn contact the parents regarding truancy, as the K-12 system. The foster student found out that she did not need to ask permission to use the restroom in college. Until she figured this out on her own, she was intimidated and did not feel comfortable walking out of class for a restroom break.

Many foster students expressed during their interview that their college experience was very daunting at first due to their lack of college knowledge. They did not know what to expect and felt alone; they had to find their own way to survive in this new environment. One student remembered:

I didn't know the rule of the first day to get there an hour before your class. It was very intimidating. I didn't know that you could just go to the bathroom without asking your professor like in high school. It was just really intimidating.

Another described her experience as:

It was a little intimidating at first because this community college is one of the biggest in California. I didn't know where nothing was when I first set foot on this campus. I was lost and I just kind of, I just found my own way.

Another student described her first day at Mt. SAC in a similar way. It was overwhelming, as she did not have anyone supporting her. She felt lonely and people were rude to her when she tried to ask for help. Although these feelings of loneliness and fear can be said to be the norm for all students stepping onto a college campus for the first time, it needs to be recognized that for foster students, the degree of impact can be greater because they do not have access to adults who they can readily call to get help, nor do they have the skills to ask the right questions. One student admitted,

I kind of got overwhelmed and it was just because I was trying to hold onto doing five classes. My whole assumption was, well, if I can get through five classes in high school, then why can't I do it in college?

The lack of knowledge about college that could come from having social and cultural capital puts them at a disadvantage. These students did not have a place or access point to connect to a school representative when they started at Mt. SAC. They did not feel they were part of a community, and no one seemed to care for them, as they were left to figure things out on their own. When asked how they figured out what they needed to do, many indicated that they used their “instincts” as well as their circle of friends to keep going. These students were forced to use their own capital they brought with them to adjust and find their way around campus. One student disclosed in his interview,

I didn't feel like I had a support system and that's mainly the reason why it's taken me three times [starting college] because after me looking for a support system and building it for myself, having to learn, teach myself how to do that really with no guidance has taken me the whole 8 years that it's taken me, from [age] 18 to 26.

This example depicts a foster student being able to connect with staff and professors, which helped him stay engaged in the college environment and progressed in his college goals.

Although it took this student 8 years to build sufficient resiliency to finally progress through college, the type of bond he established is critical for all foster students. Professionals who work with foster students emphasize that an access point to connect and engage with foster students is key to providing this population with a smooth college start while creating the opportunity to develop individual relationships with each foster student. One professional pushed the idea that “the college needs to acknowledge their foster student population, take ownership and create an access point for engagement with foster students.”

As one foster student shared, the critical factor that has helped him push through college was the connection he had with one adult: his foster dad. “I was blessed to be put in a foster home where I got the motivation; I got the support to do something with my life.” This student is now in the Honors program and is on his way to transfer to a university with the goal of

becoming a chef. Although this student's connection is with his foster dad, many foster students do not have such experience; once they get onto the college campus, they are truly on their own and do not have positive relationships with adults who provide them with the encouragement and care to help them through their college experience. This connection with adults is what professionals say is needed, and community colleges like Mt. SAC are able to create an access point for connection and engagement. This access point shows the true care that will help foster students realize their place on the college campus: to give them a positive perspective on their struggles as they try to get through college. As one coordinator stated, "Part of the challenge for many of these young men and women is that they may have been told to go to college by a social worker or other adults in their life, but there was no context given." This is where staff can come in to provide foster students with a different perspective and teach them how to view issues in different angles. Professionals say that when foster students are able to change their mental attitudes about college and personal adversity, they gain the hope and courage to do well. One foster student articulated how a simple connection can go a long way when in his mind he tells himself, "You're grown so you've got to do it by yourself, that's the mentality, and you're like, damn, nobody is going to help you. That's when the stress and stuff comes in and that's when people drop out."

However, he was fortunate to have someone "after him" all the time. He had a staff member looking after him, sending him text messages. "She sent text messages, encouragement throughout the day and I don't really respond back to it." However, what this does for him is, "when you look at it, it helps you during the day." These messages helped him keep a positive mindset about why he is in college. The caring that moves a foster student forward conveys the message that tells him/her that he/she cannot quit. One foster student reported that he wanted to

quit studying as well as playing for Mt. SAC as an athlete because it was getting too difficult. He recalled a memory when one of his coaches took him out to lunch to talk to him about life, recalling that the coach told him “[College] is a path that I can take and I can be successful in it.” In that conversation, he was told “No, don’t quit. You’ve got too much to lose; you’ve got too much talent, just keep going.” Although it may seem these sentences are inconsequential and often said to adolescents by adults, foster students hear these messages from adults relatively rarely. They often do not receive adequate attention, nor do they get one-to-one time with caring adults. The message this foster student received carried him a long way; he was able to reflect upon this memory – I will remember the big smile on his face when he relived this interaction. At that moment, he knew that someone cared about his life and yet gave him the respect to make his own decision as to which path he will take.

Another student who has been in foster care all her life also shared how one person’s care made all the difference for her to continue to push herself through college.

Oh my God, I feel like I’ve been through hell and back in these last couple of years, but I really feel like I could have quit so many times, and I didn’t so many times because I was able to either step into the office or chance had it that I got a phone call from a counselor, checking in on me.

She also alluded to the same counselor who was not afraid to bluntly tell her at times, “These are the things you need to take care of. Go, you need to take care of it.” Because of the pre-existing relationship between the counselor and foster student, the quick and firm directive reinforced the counselor’s care, showing her faith that her student is able to take care of business.

One resource center coordinator imparted that encouragement and motivation can come in the form of social events. That coordinator’s center makes it a point to host a Thanksgiving dinner for their students. The underlying message to these students is that they understand the students’ circumstances and want them to know that they deserve to experience life traditions

like others who are not from a foster care background. Because the effort was put forth to partner with the culinary department on campus, this showed the community care that encourages these foster students to move forward. According to College C coordinator, “In the fall around the holidays, we also have a banquet around Thanksgiving where we have the culinary arts department who put on a really nice buffet for us.” This event created the *community* and *care* aspects that many student students say are greatly needed.

I think it’s one of our nicest events and such an emotional time for everybody. Most of these students don’t have anywhere to go for the holidays, so to just be able to share a meal with all of us, to express what they’re grateful for; it tends to be a very bonding moment for a lot of the students; for us, too.

This event connected foster students to their college community with staff members and their peers. The college’s efforts to ensure foster students receive a Thanksgiving celebration continue to build upon its community of care; this has become an annual expectation by the foster students and staff due to positive outcomes of the event. In a sense, from the community that has been created, this event has become a tradition to support foster students at this college.

Another way of maintaining connection and engagement with foster students while they attend college is to monitor their progress. All of the non-profit agency professionals and resource center coordinators in this research revealed that showing care is about tracking foster students: to have a mechanism to measure new participants for a baseline comparison level, provide them with strategies to get to their goal, and also continue to track and check on their progress. One resource center found that developing a cohort model made progress tracking easier and better received because the foster students understood that the basis of such tracking is to express care for how they are doing. They start with an assessment with each foster student, making sure each understands the accountability they hold for the students’ own progress. This assessment also documents each foster student’s unique circumstances, such as housing needs or

disability, and if one is having challenges with food and/or mental health. This method also allows staff to provide immediate triage if deemed necessary. This change in their program was due to staff members' observations as they took in more and more foster students.

Then we started noticing that the mental health piece of it and it was becoming apparent, so out of that came our ambition to go for larger grant funds. We developed a cohort model where we put students into different cohorts based on their academic preparedness and some of their basic needs. (College A Coordinator)

To further the foster students' accountability, they are required to meet with a staff member to talk about their progress; these students learn quickly that their grades and other measures will help staff gauge if they truly are being accountable. Another resource center coordinator also shared a similar strategy of individual intake process as well as one-to-one progress checks.

One non-profit agency maintains communication with its foster students, following them as they move forward on their college path from community college to transferring to a university, and at times to graduate school. This tracking shows the organization believes care is needed to provide the encouragement for foster students to continue their college education. It is important to the non-profit agency to know where their students are, both physically and emotionally, and to provide support where and when needed. The representative from Agency E expressed that this is important not only for documentation, but also for continued advocacy, since foster student success is the most credible evidence for policy support. With continued monitoring, this non-profit agency is able to provide care and support for foster students; even when they are on a college campus. Foster students maintain a relationship with the college in order to help foster students while continuing to teach them how to develop relationships in their new environment. For those foster students who came out of their program, many are close to graduation or have graduated with a 4-year college degree. As alumni of this program, foster students have come back to share their stories with their younger peers who are about to embark



on the same journey. These foster students often implore their peers to “take the opportunity of access to connect and engage with college staff who are there to help,” and also “take the college opportunity seriously as it can make life better.” All seven professionals shared foster student success stories throughout their interviews, not only because they are proud of the work that they have done, but also to show evidence that providing access for foster students to connect and engage on the college community college campus actually works, yielding positive outcomes for foster students as well as the college. As one non-profit professional stated, when foster students “are not able to connect with someone on the college campus, they will go search for another college campus that can give it to them.” This is what is happening at one of the colleges in this study; due to their established program, many foster students are willing to travel long distance, “even 2 to 3 hours one-way” to the campus to have that access point of connection and engagement.

### **Subtheme 1.2: Safe Campus Space for Assistance and Acceptance**

All participants from the three interview subject groups agreed on the need to build a community of respect, trust, support and stability. One student described the foster care population as similar to a balloon, filled with pressure. Providing foster students with the space to release this pressure would be like when “you put that little hole in the balloon and everything just kind of pops, spills out at once.” In other words, given the space to allow students to be students and not have to worry about other life responsibilities, their educational progress will align to expectations. This is because, according to one resource center coordinator at College D, “this is a place where they can be really normal; they’ll walk into a class and nobody knows that they’re homeless, that they haven’t eaten; they look like every other college student.” At College B, the resource center coordinator noticed that foster students “are very connected to

college. They want to be [on campus], they want this to be their lifeline,” especially when they know that they are able to get the help they seek. A non-profit agency representative urged that it is important to create a “stable kind of place where youth have identified individuals who can really meet them where they’re at.” Well-trained staff members will possess an understanding of the foster care experience and needs of foster students. Staff members should have the ability to triage individual foster student cases and provide support and advice to help foster students move past difficult situations and stabilize their circumstances and redirect focus towards their college learning.

Another coordinator added that the space must have the flexibility to adjust to this population’s challenges, due to their unique circumstance, noting that “youths will just kind of show up on your doorstep a week before school starts” and expect that help be available. Having a program that is flexible to assist last minute requests shows an understanding of foster student circumstances; they often need help to resolve “emergency situations” or “emotional issues” that allow them to start school. One student stated, “Maybe one doesn’t have enough clothes in their foster home or relative and are struggling with work or trying to find work. They just need an environment of compassion and support” when they get on the college campus: an access point where foster students can go and get help to return to the right track when they start at a college, where they can sit down with someone who will help them organize what needs to get done and how to get those needs met. One coordinator observed the heavy load foster students carry in terms of life responsibilities and emotional struggles, even while attending college, stating, “I started to focus on foster youth and we just learned so much about what the challenges that they’re experiencing outside of school. I kept hearing it so much.” This is reflected in how one student articulated his troubles; “for a lot of foster care youth, you come out institutionalized.

You come out having been groomed and prepped for prison. There are certain views that you have of yourself; you limit yourself in your mind.” This student alluded to the heavy emotional burden placed on foster students while they are in the foster care system, and how one needs to get rid of the negative connotations about coming out of the foster care system. He, along with the rest of the participants, pushed for “a positive environment” in order to help students believe in themselves and their abilities and be accepted.

This common space lets foster students “know that there’s a place to fall back to, but for those who want to kind of move forward and who don’t necessarily want to identify with that population, but to be able to still feel the support.” One non-profit professional stressed that providing flexibility and not forcing foster students to access help will actually earn their trust to seek help when they are ready and on their terms. One foster student who is enjoying the college experience and being out of the foster care system said, “I wasn’t having to be different, having court dates and all that. I was kind of done with it.” She wanted to blend in with the general population, but stated that knowing there is such a community to support her is a “safety net” she wishes she could have had.

One coordinator provided similar insight that although many community colleges do not have a full account on the number of students coming from foster care, but stated, “If you build it, they will come,” meaning that as long as the community that has been created is safe and trusting with an access point to get help when foster students are ready, they will come in eventually. This coordinator said his resource center has records to show that foster students would bear a long commute, 1-2 hours, to come to his community college because these foster students know of their foster student program. Community colleges near Mt. SAC do not provide a support program with targeted services for foster students. Another resource center

coordinator said that she hears similar comments from the foster students she serves. Foster students indicate that there is a scarcity of foster student support at community colleges, so they will seek out this support and make necessary sacrifices to attend a specific campus.

One student wanted to remind administrators that the environment from which foster children come does not allow them access to adults who have the knowledge to help them think about college and share with them what college looks like. This is the most profound call for help from foster students who reach the college campus. She expressed that “Most staff [at group homes] do not have a college degree or have been to college, so there’s no one to really talk to when they’re at the group home, either, about it.” She reminded me that even if foster children do not have this knowledge, it does not mean that they do not want a college education or do not have the aptitude to continue with school. She urged the campus community to be sensitive to this point; administrators need to recognize and address the fact that foster students lack the necessary social and cultural capital when they step onto a college campus. She said,

it would be nice to have a safe zone in school in just do our homework or something. I go to the learning lab most of the time and just sit by myself at a computer, but it would be nice to sit with other former foster youth in a room and just study.

She alluded to the importance of a common space where foster students can count on getting help when they need it. They want to be regarded as individuals with the aptitude to learn and be successful in college and deserve a place to which they can go, where they feel safe releasing their problems, and know that staff will be supportive and provide nonjudgmental triage and guidance.

This student’s description of the Mt. SAC campus implied that the enjoyment of one’s college surroundings is important while studying at the campus. She expressed that Mt. SAC is “a beautiful campus. I can sit anywhere on this campus and do my homework, sit under a pretty

tree, and just watch. It's very pretty and peaceful." The comfort and ease in her statement is what professionals and foster scholars are requesting in building a community. One cannot enjoy what the surroundings offer if one is not emotionally, mentally, and physically grounded; the community can create such a mental state for foster students. Creating a space for foster students to get the help they need will improve their college experience and allow them to blend into the general population and have as normal a college experience as possible.

In agreement with what foster students want, community college resource center staff stated that creating one space for foster students to come for assistance whenever they have a question is helpful and serves this population better than forcing foster students to figure out what college business they need to complete and figure it out on their own. One staff member said, "What we found was that by having them go to multiple places, we would lose them." Foster students have already made it clear that they come to the campus with limited college knowledge, and research from McDonough (1997) and Watt et al. (2013) also confirmed this notion. "Foster care alumni are also at an academic disadvantage. Frequent school changes and a lack of college preparatory classes affect their academic preparation" (Watt et al., 2013, p. 1408).

It is important to staff the center with well-informed and well-trained personnel to help foster students overcome their challenges. One resource center staff reflected on how their first attempt to staff the new resource center for foster students did not go well. The reason being was that "It just got to be too overwhelming for them [the staff] because they don't have the student services or social work background, so our one liaison was getting really burned out because of the high level of need that the students have." To mitigate burnout for staff in working with foster students, it is critical to have a staff that understands the needs of foster students and the impact of their experiences. One foster student indicated that she needs a "place to hang out

[and] feel accepted” because “being a former foster youth, a lot of the youth are on their own and a lot of them don’t know how to use the help that’s out there.” This is why foster students like her are adamant about Mt. SAC and other community colleges providing a space for them to go, to belong, and to get help. All 20 foster students said that when they first came to the Mt. SAC campus, they did not realize all the things they needed to get done, such as attend orientation, activate their Mt. SAC account in order to access formal communication from different administrative offices, enroll in classes, etc. One student shared that foster students have to “grind for everything by themselves, no help.” He suggested that Mt. SAC needs to develop a program for foster students with the understanding that “Sometimes they need their hand held for just a little bit and then you let them go.”

Establishing a space is important, but what also needs to be recognized is that this location needs to be maintained and be stable for foster students to rely upon anytime they need assistance. Even more important is to allow foster students to make this space their own. As one student stated from his experience in seeking assistance, “A lot of [resource centers] were short-lived. That’s why I never went to any organizations, you know, to school, before I joined the military. I just figured that they weren’t going to be there later.” When foster students cannot rely on organizations to assist them, they do not even try because they already know it would be fruitless. Another student participant reiterated this point as she said,

A safe place...if you do get the program, make sure it’s going to last. We’re so used to things being snatched from us; we don’t want to have a center for a couple of months or for a year and then come back and it’s gone because it didn’t make it.

These data were supported by what one resource center coordinator pointed out from her 7 years working with foster youth, “Consistency is extremely important for them. If they don’t see

consistency, they don't rely on anything...People are going to drop the ball and then they just won't even look for that help."

The four resource center coordinators said that they consciously designed their space to be accessible and functional for their foster students. One coordinator said "It's really a functional place for them and we get a lot of students who, that's just where they hang out on campus to go do their homework." This design provides foster students an opportunity to maintain their studies as well as opportunity to network with their peers. Foster students can see that there are peers like them who are also striving for a college education. Creating this kind of atmosphere is what Yosso (2005) would describe as creating "community cultural wealth" (p. 77) because it allows foster students to see the "behaviors and values that are learned, shared, and exhibited by a group of people" (p. 75) who want to be successful in college. One foster student recognized that a benefit of creating this type of culture is the fluid and automatic promotion of a "big brother system. [Peers] can get a mentor and they can help each other and aspire to get to their goal, whether it be long term or short term."

With the establishment of a common space for a resource program for foster students, all study participants also expressed that having the right kind of staff to manage this center is also critical. The staff should possess knowledge and a comprehensive understanding of the foster care experience, including the emotional, physical, and mental aspects of what children in the foster care system have gone through, as well as the common challenges they face and how to read certain signs that foster students may exhibit. Staff members who work with foster students must be trained to "help the students develop their sense of self-efficacy and sense of accomplishment" (Watt et al., 2013, p. 1412). A non-profit agency professional shared that her organization has recognized this, thus making it an emphasis of the foundation to create and run

a project named California College Pathways to serve as an intermediary for schools in California. This project provides “technical assistance and training to people who are running or hoping to start foster youth programs at college campuses” described Agency E’s representative. For a college campus that has had its foster student support program running for 5 years, the coordinator of this program emphasized the need for staff to have a balance of administrative responsibilities versus triage/social time with their foster students; this is why their staffing is divided into two roles. One staff member maintains all administrative work while the other is free to work with students one-on-one as well as participate in group activities. This person “does intakes with the students, coordinates the campus tours, and coordinates programs, along with the different events that the program offers.” This organizational structure shows that this program understands the fact that foster students need individualized time with staff as well as group activities to help them build their social skills and cultural knowledge.

At another community college resource center, College C, the staff members emphasized that they “try to keep it a little private for the LINC students and we don’t really bring in anyone who doesn’t understand the foster youth experience.” This resource center not only mandated staff to attend specialized trainings, but also created an internship partnership with local community agencies in order to provide foster students with professional counseling. The staff understood that to reach foster students and gain their trust, the staff has to know the language and culture of this population. A foster student was adamant when asked what is needed in a resource center, replying, “Definitely the staff need to be experienced and successful, themselves; emotionally there for the kids.” This in turn is what Yosso (2005) described as “community cultural wealth” (p. 77); the staff intuitively understood that even though these students do not possess the normed social and cultural capitals of schooling, they still bring their



own capital to campus. To help them bridge the college culture effectively and succeed, the staff must serve as the intermediary between the two worlds.

The reason for the need for well-trained staff is that they are able to pinpoint the needs of the population with whom they work. Each foster student has unique issues, and the need also exists to create and implement activities for the foster students as a group to develop social and cultural skills and knowledge. This work takes an understanding of the foster care experience, knowledge of campus resources and protocols, and skills to advocate and gather community support. A well-trained staff will be able to help identify triage needs for each student in addition to specific programs to develop foster students.

The Thanksgiving event established at College C has worked so well and serves as a good example of well-informed staff making the right assessment of foster students' needs; due to its impact on foster students and the community, it has become an annual event. A student participant said that foster students need someone who is able to ask the right questions in order to understand the foster student with whom he/she is working. The staff member must have the skills to talk to the foster student and be able to adjust to each individual in order to pull out the information that will help develop the right assessment and course of action for each foster student. According to the same participant, asking the foster student the right questions shows that the staff member "understands the atmosphere that foster youth came from." Two coordinators also iterated the importance of staff members who can relate to and connect with foster students. Based on her time working at her college's resource center, she stated, "One of my theories is that [college is] where they can be really normal; they'll walk into a class and nobody knows that they're homeless, that they haven't eaten – they look like every other college student." However, these students know to come to the resource center to get food and study.

Another coordinator, from College A expressed the same notion that “crisis intervention strategies we had to develop, which is the nature of the beast based on who we were serving and the kind of issues we were seeing come up.” For example, he shared that they “have to deal with the prospect of theft which has been a common issue for a number of our students – if they had a laptop, it’s been stolen because the place they live in is not secure.” It takes a skillful person to work with foster students in order to triage the foster student’s immediate situation, and have her/him follow the staff member’s guidance to resolve the situation. A staff member who lacks the understanding and knowledge of foster students will unintentionally push the foster student further away. As one foster student put it, sometimes what gets them into the door is not the tangible resources that they need, but the person who will work with them. She declared that foster students need support from “someone who has a really, really deep heart and a concern for foster youth.” The connection to this population has to be established first, before services and activities can be rendered.

In the end, this established common space will allow transformation to happen, enabling staff and foster students to connect and engage with each other on a community college campus. This space serves as the meeting point for foster students to receive triage care and services from well-trained staff in order to obtain the assistance they need to then focus their energy on learning. These two themes of access to connection and engagement and a safe common campus space for assistance and acceptance will contribute to foster students’ development of a collective voice, the third and last subtheme of the first main theme.

### **Subtheme 1.3: Access Point for Collective Voice**

Lastly, advocacy is a key factor in creating a community of care where foster students feel that their collective voice is heard. This point was made over and over again by resource

center and non-profit agency professionals. One method of advocacy is showcasing foster students' success. Coordinator from College A stated "We've certainly referenced some of our students in our grant writing to reference the successes of the program and to have these examples" help stakeholders understand what foster students face as well as how they have been able to overcome adversity. By hearing the achievements of foster students, stakeholders also receive evidence that the support given by the center's services and programs is helpful; foster students do take advantage of the help being offered to them. In turn, when foster students hear these success stories on campus and elsewhere, they have proof that the campus is putting forth efforts to bring support to help foster students get through college. It helps to let foster students know that school administrators understand their plight. As one professional reiterated, "They just want the privacy and they want to feel like, you know, just because I'm a foster youth doesn't mean I'm lower than anyone or I'm less of a person." When this population sees and hears advocacy on their behalf, it alleviates the pressure on them to reveal their foster status; others are doing it for them, joining in with them to create a collective voice.

The collective voice to continue advocacy is needed because, as one foster student reminded me, "There are things that we have to deal with emotionally and sometimes that takes a little bit of time" to get in order, to then get grounded for a college education. The care shown through advocacy can change the minds of foster students who are reluctant to seek services. As one foster student said, "They [staff] have to get out there to them [foster students] so that they [foster students] know about it." In a sense, advocacy serves as not only a mechanism to solicit financial and political support, but also a recruitment tool to let foster students know what is available for them without feeling like they have to reveal their foster status before they can get any help at the campus.

In summary, the community of care for foster students not only needs to provide access points for connection and engagement as well as for foster students to get assistance and acceptance, it also needs to provide a collective voice for continued advocacy. This is what resource center and non-profit professionals say will show foster students that they are important and considered a priority on campus. When asked about what a foster student thinks about the idea of creating such a community at Mt. SAC, the foster student replied “if a foster center comes up...It shows that people are actually caring about the system.” The effort in developing a resource center to help foster students is evident of care for students with foster status. One student said it best by stating,

making things look appealing to the demographics that you’re trying to reach. Then, who was sent out to deal with these foster youth; it’s not so much what you say, it’s how you say it. It’s not so much what you’re able to do; it’s how it looks like what you’re able to do.

## **Theme 2: Services to Support Independence and Development of Self-Empowerment**

As discussed in Theme 1, all three groups emphasized the critical role of a community college to create a program with a designated space to provide foster students with services that underscore an understanding of their circumstance and help them become self-sufficient and empowered. In tandem with Theme 1, Theme 2 discusses the services to support independence and development of self-empowerment. A community college’s commitment in helping foster students shows in its provision of opportunities for foster students to give back to the community, as well as targeted programming and services. Without these two key elements, foster students usually do not feel they are part of the community and also get lost in the shuffle of campus and academic life. All 20 foster student participants at Mt. SAC expressed feelings of being lost and overwhelmed because they have to figure out the college maze all by themselves;

even with a friend's advice, many maintained a sense of not fitting in. This next section answers the third and last sub-question in this research study:

3. What information and/or services do foster students say should be included in a resource center to support foster students attending community college?

It is important to recognize that the findings presented in this section came from the collective voice of foster students at Mt. SAC. Their answers echo what professionals who work with foster students say are needed in a resource center. The following sections highlight the themes that emerge from foster students' input; it is critical to display their collective voice. This section is divided into two subthemes:

1. Provide Opportunities to Give Back: Foster students bring to the college campus a wealth of skills and knowledge, and as they grow as college students, they want to give back to the younger students who come after them as well as to the community that gave them so much. They voiced that if they were given opportunities to give back, they would do so without hesitation.
2. Provide Targeted Programming and Services: Foster students are not shy about their needs because they themselves have had to overcome a variety of issues. They want targeted programming and services they feel were lacking in the K-12 and Independent Living Programs in which they participated before coming to college. They believe that, given the targeted programming and services, foster students will be given the same advantages as their non-foster care peers, giving them the opportunity to succeed in college.

## **Subtheme 2.1: Provide Opportunities to Give Back**

The voices of the foster students who participated in this study were loud and clear regarding their desire to give back because they realized how much others have given to them. They own their situation, have internalized how much they had to go through to get to college, and in turn want to step up and help those who are coming after them. They recognized that a program to support foster students at a community college needs to incorporate development of soft skills, such as self-efficacy and leadership, to ensure foster students have a positive outlook on themselves in order to gain confidence to become leaders of their own peers. In other words, there are no better advocates and leaders than to the younger foster students than those who came out of the same circumstance. This finding is aligned with what Watt et al. (2013) found in their study when they interviewed foster alumni in Texas. They reported that “foster care alumni prefer a support program that values their autonomy, allowing them to make their own decisions and to rely on each other to stay on a constructive path” (p. 1,415).

Many of the foster students who were interviewed have found ways to navigate the campus at Mt. SAC and have built the internal resilience needed to keep going to classes and progress. Many of these students say that they had to reach within themselves, using the failed stories they came across as examples of what not to do. Here are two direct quotes from students that speak louder than any explanation.

If they [foster students] do it right, then they don't have to become a statistic. When they have kids, they don't repeat that cycle and end up like me. I love my children and I'm so glad that I finally broke the cycle. It needed to be broken. (Student became young single mother, but willed herself to finally finish her college degree.)

I just kind of realized that I was getting older and no one would be there for me, that my transitional housing was going to run up. They kept telling me the funding was going to run out and I would be on my own. I saw a lot of my peers get kicked out of transitional housing and become homeless. The girl I grew up with in the group home was homeless, sleeping in a Wal-Mart parking lot after she had dropped out, after a semester of

community college. That motivated me a lot. (Student is finishing up last year at Mt. SAC and will be transferring to a 4-year university.)

The internal strength and other skills that foster students bring with them to the community college campus need to be cultivated. This is what Yosso (2005) suggested in her concept of “community cultural wealth” (p. 77). She postulated that rather than deem a group of students who are not successful in school to be deficient in skills and knowledge, professionals should adopt a mindset to acknowledge what skills and knowledge this group may already have in place, acknowledging their community cultural wealth. Professionals can work with the pre-existing community cultural wealth, to then build upon it to help the group become successful in school. This is what the foster students voiced as they showed that they have the skills to survive in society, even with a lack of support, and can still get themselves to college. They want to be part of the solution: to ensure that foster students like themselves have a clear support path to attain a college degree. Mt SAC and other community colleges need to integrate a program to develop foster students’ self-empowerment and allow peers to support peers. All of the foster students in this study said something to this effect. For example, one stated, “I think I connect more to people that were in foster care than not, definitely. I have a core group of friends who, only they will understand what it was like being in a group home kind of thing.” Another noted,

Someone who knows or someone who has gone through it – even former foster youth who might be a little older like myself and who can mentor the kids, the 18-year-olds, if they have the time. Sometimes it can be a little bit stressful, but someone like me who is a former foster youth and has been through the system, I’m so concerned about the 18-year-olds who are graduating high school and want to go to college.

Foster students stated that, if given the opportunity, they would help those who are coming after them. They would be the best candidates to connect with younger foster students, and would love to mentor and give advice that they wished they received when they started college. This desire shows their understanding of their circumstances and willingness to not only

get themselves out of their own situation, but also care enough to help others do the same. It was also equally important for foster students to have the opportunity to give back to the community that supported them. They know it is out of care that the community supports their endeavors to attain an education. They wanted the community to know their gratitude and to return what has been given to them. These desires were also confirmed by all the resource center coordinators and non-profit professionals, who suggested developing a mentor program, not only for community members to get involved with foster students, but also to allow foster students to mentor their peers, giving opportunities to connect and share the ins and outs of college life. One resource center has two programs to help grow self-empowerment for the foster students they serve. They have a peer advisor program where second and third year foster students mentor younger foster students; one responsibility is accompanying new foster students around campus so that the initial tour does not seem so lonely and daunting. The other program is for foster students to run their own club, called the Foster Club. Foster students are given the opportunity to hone their leadership skills by volunteering for governance positions as part of the club.

One non-profit professional mentioned that their program works well because “There is a lot of peer-to-peer support amongst members, older and younger. The younger members come in really inexperienced and really look up to a lot of our older youth.” This organic connection has helped keep the momentum moving to achieve the goals of the program. In summary, one non-profit agency professional from Agency G commented:

I think that [foster student support] needs to be a centralized program for them and there has to be some buy-in from their end, for sure, but there also has to be some give-back. I think that that’s been the most wonderful thing; I’ve watched our youth kind of grow through these programs and to see them involved in the communities within the campuses.



## **Subtheme 2.2: Provide Targeted Programming and Services**

Mt. SAC's foster students have spoken up and voiced their needs for programming and services they would like to see as part of the foster student support program. Based on foster students' input, this section shows the necessary programming and services needed to ensure their college completion. These programs and services may already be available in different areas of the college campus, but it is critical to have them in place at the resource center for foster students. At times, foster students shared that if they are unable to resolve a hurdle such as a way to get to and from school, they give up and do not attend at all. With the support of administrators to create a resource center for foster students, small problems like transportation can be resolved. This is what foster students say are the information and services they need in a resource center designed to serve their population will need. The professionals who work with foster students have also recognized these common issues foster students face when they transition to a college campus. These professionals also suggested that because the foster student population is different on each college campus, administrators must build in flexibility for the resource center staff and foster students to request and/or enhance services. Acknowledging the resource center's need to be flexible truly shows an understanding of and commitment to foster students. The following listing of programming and services surfaced from the responses given by all three participant groups who were interviewed.

**Housing assistance.** When foster children emancipate from the foster care system, some are able to qualify for housing assistance if they continue their education at the college level. Many need help understanding how their housing assistance works as well as to how to go about finding a suitable place to live while they attend school. All foster students and professionals interviewed contend that housing is the major factor where foster students have a difficult time

sustaining stable college enrollment. Many foster students seek stable and affording housing in order to stay in school, yet when their living situation becomes unstable it will take precedence over school. Many foster students do not understand the process and requirements when it comes to renting and living with roommates. One foster student said:

I feel like if they had some form of housing program, where maybe we pay a small fee or even get jobs on campus to pay for rent while having 12 units or more, that program would be such a benefit. It would make me see the lights at the end of the tunnel. Sometimes it's very difficult when work gets caught up and you have other priorities. You have to put school second.

One resource center professional said:

that young person might have no idea how to find an apartment or what to do with the fact that they have no credit. Is anybody going to rent to them? And if they do find something and they're going to look for a roommate situation, how do they know what to look for in a roommate? Once they move in, how do they make sure they're being a good tenant? How do they manage conflict with their roommate or issues that come up with the landlord? All of those are things that are involved in actually keeping housing.

**Food.** Food is a basic need of every human being; foster students, due to their lack of a support system, are on their own in caring for themselves. Food is essential to offer to foster students because many do not have the means to eat the recommended three meals a day; many eat whatever they can afford or get their hands on. As reported by foster students, having food available is a much-needed service; no one will verbalize this need, but food will be eaten if offered with no questions asked. There is shame in having to admit that one is hungry. Yet, there is a strong message of understanding to foster students, if food is made available for the taking. One foster student said: "Just basically anything that's going to point them in the right direction, resources for housing, for food, you know?" One resource center professional said, "The other one was food. We noticed that a lot of them had limitations on food or funds available for food. So, a food pantry was developed, which is funded through the financial aid office."

**Financial literacy.** K-12 education does not teach students how to handle their own money. Parents usually take care of all their children's finances, thus when students enter college, they lack the knowledge to help them budget their expenses and money as well as understand the risk of going into debt and taking on credit card debt. For foster students this is also the situation they encounter, with the exception that they have no one to fall back on when they need advice with their finances. They are expected to suddenly handle thousands of dollars on their own, with no education about financial literacy. One foster student said:

I got all this money from financial aid and, like, I really didn't know what to do with it. I knew I needed to buy my books so I bought my books first. Then, I got a car, and just whatever I needed to get around and to make sure I was doing what I needed to do. It was still kind of mind-blowing and I was kind of lost in my first year.

One non-profit professional said:

I think the kids need help with that [financial aid] money, though, and how to manage that money. What are they going to do? Are they going to spend it? Foster kids don't have a financial backing, a safety net, so it they can learn as early as possible about how to make that money grow in some way, or to keep it.

**Counseling.** Community college students seek out the assistance of the counseling department to help them pave their educational path, then to decide on a career with consideration of their personal strengths/weaknesses and family obligations. Due to the rationing of counselors, many students are unable to obtain counseling in a timely manner to help them to develop a road map to complete of their degree or to transfer. This challenge hurts foster students as they are unable to get an appointment with a counselor; foster students take whatever classes they can get in or give up altogether. As one foster student noted, "I'm not focused; I'm not really following through, and I'm just in general kind of lost." This student was referring to her academic progress and career goals. For this reason, many foster students as well as professionals stress the need for a designated counselor for the foster student support program.

Designating a specific counselor is also logical due to the trust issues that many foster students experience. As discussed previously, when foster students cannot trust a person, they may avoid that person, no matter what services they can receive from that person's office. One foster student said, "Individualized counseling where there may be 100 students and 3 counselors instead of like 1,000 students and 3 counselors, so we can get a lot of individualized attention, a lot of individualized tutoring." Another foster student said, "I took the wrong classes, I really didn't go and see a counselor. I took the classes that my friends were taking, didn't really know much about financial aid." A non-profit professional from Agency F said:

It is so critical for a designated counselor for the foster student population. The counselor can emphasize all kinds of information, such as financial aid and how to keep financial aid; the importance of keeping a certain GPA, how to meet satisfactory academic progress. Foster students tend to take the wrong classes which lead them to using up all their financial aid eligibility before they complete their academic program.

**Transportation.** The inability of foster students to get to school may be linked to a lack of funds to afford a reliable car or a public transportation pass. According to seven professionals and 17 Mt. SAC foster students, assistance needs to be provided in helping students meet transportation challenges. Here are a few scenarios Mt. SAC foster students have reported as transportation problems. Many of the foster students are unable to manage their money and run out of funds to afford passes to take public transportation or put gas in their car. Many are unable to earn or save enough money to set money aside for emergencies, such as mechanical problems with their cars. Also, many times when professors assign projects that require students to go to a museum or an off campus event, foster students are at a disadvantage due to lack of reliable transportation. Because of safety issues and the public transportation schedule, foster students are unable to complete or experience off campus assignments. Foster students with no reliable transportation are limited in the hours they can study on campus, having to worry about

catching the bus to get home. One foster student said, “The only thing I was worried about was transportation, how I was going to get to school and stuff like that.” A non-profit professional said, “We contract with a few different tutoring companies and a lot of times, it’s ones that will go to their house or their school just because transportation can be such as issue for our youth.” One indirect solution that Mt. SAC has come up with is to partnership with the main public transportation authority in the area, Foothill Transit. Due to Mt. SAC’s large student population and Foothill Transit’s need to increase ridership, Mt. SAC negotiated free bus passes for Mt. SAC students. As advocates for foster students, staff members working with foster students must also be aware of such partnerships, to speak on behalf of foster students, if such partnerships can help alleviate hurdles for them. Another possible solution is for the support program staff to make use of the shuttle vans available on campus. Although this takes planning to reserve and coordinate outings and trips, this method can alleviate the safety issue discussed above in regards to public transportation. Once the campus realizes the popular usage of shuttle vans, they will find a way to fund additional vans; again staff members who work on behalf of foster students must be part of the conversation, in order to alleviate the transportation issue for foster students.

**Learning equipment: Books and computer lab/printing.** Books and learning equipment for college courses are large expenses for students, and for foster youths, this issue is particularly difficult for them to resolve. Foster students do not have the knowledge to look for used books nor do they always have reliable access to computers and the Internet to shop for the lowest prices as others can do. Lack of equipment jeopardizes their learning progress because they are unable to study and complete their homework on a consistent basis. Without any support, many tend go without books, perform poorly in the courses, and/or drop out altogether.

To mitigate this hardship, all resource centers should recognize this need and provide book vouchers for foster students who participate in their program. Many resource centers also provide a computer lab for foster students to have a place to study and complete their homework. Free printing is also provided at many resource centers so foster students will be able to submit their assignments on time. All foster students who were interviewed shared that lack of learning equipment was one of the basic needs that increase their stress about attending college. A foster student said, “The biggest issue I had here was getting my homework done. The homework wasn’t hard. It wasn’t rocket science. It was that I didn’t have the proper material/equipment at my house.” A resource center professional from College B said:

We have a huge computer lab. The students tend to use these computers because we offer free printing services, so those computers are always booked. Ideally, it would be nice if we had a larger computer lab so more students could be able to use the computer lab and to really let them work on what they need to work on.

**Health services/education.** Health services and information are also a critical piece in educating foster students on the community college campus. Research has shown us that due to the foster care experience, many foster students may still be dealing with emotional and mental health issues, so by providing opportunities for foster students to take care of their health needs, they will be able to concentrate on their classes. Information on varied health topics will also encourage foster students to help themselves live healthier lives in order to be college successful.

One foster student shared her concern about how she keeps seeing her foster peers getting pregnant, “Sex education is needed so they [female foster students] don’t get pregnant. A lot of girls really do get pregnant.” Another foster student asked for health education, “Have us sit down and watch a video on something that pertains to some healthy food, or on Diabetes, what is the cause, the types of the disease, etc.” A resource center professional from College D stated,

We have taken them as a group to other events on campus, if there's a mental health awareness event or a Veteran's event that we think is appropriate topically, and we'll take them to these kinds of things... We also established a relationship with an off-campus mental health provider some number of students expressed reluctance to use on-campus mental health services that we do provide.

**Workshops to develop soft skills.** Foster students as well as professionals who work with them recognize that foster students lack the soft skills that are needed for them to connect with the college community as well as progress in class. Soft skills that are important for foster students to develop include public speaking, networking, time management, and study and leadership skills. A foster student stated, "I want to see workshops on study skills, test-taking skills, managing stress and time, how and when to apply to certain programs." Another foster student suggested:

I think field trips will be good since the summer is coming. I'm pretty sure as a group, we would want to go on an adventure, maybe, to the mountains, camping, something like that. This is so we can feel some kind of connection and learn how to work together.

A non-profit professional shared:

We really try to kind of balance [our program] with a fun aspect as well. We have two or three aspects throughout the year where we have a beach barbeque or a softball game, or we had a kickball tournament this last year. This was to help them be able to develop social skills to be able to interact with each other.

A resource center professional from College D stated:

We've been conducting leadership meetings on campus, giving foster students a chance to see and interact in leadership conversations... Then on Fridays, we still offer the workshops, the social connection, the interpersonal support so they can get connected with each other and develop their social skills.

**Inclusive orientation program.** Foster students as well as resource center staff recommend an inclusive orientation program for new foster students coming to the college campus. This ensures that they feel welcome, and having the opportunity to meet pertinent staff in-person will also start the building of rapport. The coordinator from College B advised to have

continuing foster students as participants to show consistency of the program, allow peer to peer advising, and for the foster students to meet each other. Some also made a recommendation to provide new foster students with a packet as reference guide as well as a reminder to follow the step by step college process in order to get everything done. One foster student suggested:

I think what would be helpful is having some type of guide – you get here, here’s a book written by you [your peers] for you of what you need to know, what you need to do, and not a bunch of big complicated words, but just steps.

Another offered:

Orientation, specifically for foster youth because our perspective on how we go about things is going to be a little different because we don’t have mom and dad, necessarily, to help us sometimes. It’s just us and we need that.

A resource center professional from College B said:

Just to kind of walk [the student] through the process, the way that it works is, we have an orientation and they all come together. Then, we go over the rules of the program such as everyone having a set of appointments to take care of.

**Partnership with high schools and community.** Foster students say and professionals who work with them agree that the community college should set up partnerships with high schools and community agencies to ensure that the hand-off of foster students from high school to college is seamless. Many foster students have internalized their situation, and even though many do not talk about it, they understand their potential life outcome if they do not finish a college program. They need all the help they can get. Professionals who work with foster students also agree that partnerships are critical in the success of foster students attaining a college degree. It takes all community efforts to build up foster students and give them the necessary knowledge, resources, and confidence to meet their goals. Rather than operating on a deficit model, many professionals say that they find it more impactful when they use every opportunity possible to share the successes of foster students; this allows foster students to hear



for themselves their talents and accomplishments and reject a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure.

One foster student said:

It's unfortunate, like myself, I wasn't aware of these programs until a late age. I think the earlier, the better. At high school, if they even speak out about [college]. I think it would be good if college staff can go to the high schools to talk to foster youth about college.

Another foster student stated:

Well, I think reaching out to ILP<sup>20</sup> services is a really great idea. I know my group home would be really down to like take a field trip to have foster youth see the campus. It would spark interest in the kids to they will do more to get to college.

The resource center professional from College C said:

Our ILP agency workers came on campus and provided trainings and workshops for students and staff. Students in high school were also invited for these workshops; giving them a glimpse of a college campus as well as information about our partnership with ILP.

The resource center professional from College A said, "I started working with my partner institutions, 4-year institutions to ensure that our students are handed over when they transfer with care."

### **Summary of Findings**

This chapter paints the full picture of my findings from interviews with resource center coordinators, non-profit agency professionals, and Mt. SAC foster students. These findings answer the main research question about the service and program needs of community college foster students. By interviewing three different expert foster care groups, the data allowed for reliability and triangulation. According to resource center coordinators and non-profit agency professionals, a resource center for supporting foster students should have a Community Atmosphere of Care marked the following factors: Access Point for Connection and Engagement, Safe Common Space for Assistance and Acceptance, and Access Point for

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<sup>20</sup> ILP: Individual Learning Plan

Collective Voice. While Mt. SAC foster students say the resource center should provide Services to Support Independence and Development of Self-Empowerment, with Opportunities to Give Back and Targeted Programming and Services.

Foster students should be able to turn to a safe common location on campus to seek assistance and feel accepted. They should be able to receive help from understanding staff members as well as their peers on campus in a caring community space that is reliable and that they can call their own. One non-profit professional summed up this finding by declaring that foster students need “to be able to have a place to go hang out on campus and feel included and involved in; to have services at the fingertips in one location.”

For foster students attending community college, an impactful method to build their self-empowerment will value their community cultural wealth and build upon it to develop additional social and leadership skills that will encourage them to help themselves. Foster students as well as the professionals who work with them expressed that foster students will be the first to reach out to peers who need help. Additional development in their social and leadership skills will enhance their self-empowerment. Foster students want to belong to their college campus, and providing opportunities for them to assist their peers as well as giving back to the community are two ways to do this. Establishment of a common space with a caring community feel and targeted programing and services will not only give voice to the foster student population, but also support and encourage foster students to focus on their higher education goals as well as provide equity to a group that is highly underrepresented on college campuses.

### **Program Theory of Change and Action**

The following logic model, presented in Table 8, shows the change and action details necessary to incorporate in planning a foster student support program on a community college. It

is my hope that this model will be used as a tool for community colleges when planning their own resource center to support their foster student population. This model is designed to provide an example for what community colleges should and can do, giving room for flexibility and adjustment to the specific needs of the uniqueness of each foster student population. This logic model includes inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes. According to Alkin (2011), the use of “the logic model depiction of a program theory would provide a guide for examining specific program activities and their proper implementation” (p. 73). The purpose of this logic model is to provide the details to be considered in designing a support program for foster students at a community college, and more importantly to develop interventions that can fill the social capital gaps in the lives of foster students. It summarizes the program theory yielded in this study, that is a theory of change and a theory of action to address the issues foster students experience while attending community college, as well as to provide possible solutions to the issues.

Table 8

*Logic Model to Create Foster Student Support Program*

Input	Activity	Output	Outcome
Identify problem: Data to show how foster students are performing on campus.	Identify problem with questions to study	Determine findings (themes) through data analysis.	Determine ample support to build foster student support program.
	Identify stakeholders	Theme 1: Establishment of a Community Atmosphere of Care	Determine who, when, what, and why to provide in proposal; include findings.
Financial Resources (Institution/Community)	Main Question: For students with foster care experience, what are their service and program needs while attending community college?	Theme 2: Services to Support Independence and Development of Self-Empowerment	Draft proposal and implementation plan include timeline, considering campus processes/timeline to attain request budget and staffing support.
Leadership: Administrators, Staff (Special Program Directors)	Additional Question 1: What are the elements or characteristics of a resource center supporting foster students that has been active for 5 or more years?	Determine subthemes within main themes.	Include foster students as active participants in implementation plan.

Input	Activity	Output	Outcome
Foster Students: Input/ Insight	<p>Additional Question 2: What are the factors or information that professionals working with foster youth at non-profit agencies say are necessary for them to attend community college?</p> <p>Additional Question 3: What information and/or services do foster students say should be included in a resource center to support foster students attending community college? Decide on type of study to conduct. Recommendation: qualitative with individual interview.</p>	<p>Subtheme 1.1 Access Point for Connection and Engagement</p> <p>Subtheme 1.2 Safe Common Space for Assistance and Acceptance</p> <p>Subtheme 1.3 Access Point for Collective Voice</p> <p>Subtheme 2.1 Provide Opportunities to Give Back</p> <p>Subtheme 2.2 Provide Targeted Programming and Services</p>	Provide programming and services for foster students on campus in order to help them successfully complete college degree.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Current research suggests that the college going and completion rates for foster students have not increased. This rate continues to be low, even compared to other disadvantaged student groups (Barrat & Berliner, 2013; Watt et al., 2013; Wiegmann, Putnam-Hornstein, Barrat, Magruder, & Needell, 2014). According to Watt et al. (2013), “Foster care alumni are also at an academic disadvantage. Frequent school changes and a lack of college preparatory classes affect their academic preparation (*for higher education*)” (p. 1408). There is now increased attention to understand and curtail this issue by professionals in the education field, from K-12 and higher education levels as well as from the legislature (Barrat & Berliner, 2013; Cooper et al., 2008; Watt et al., 2013; Wiegmann et al., 2014; Zetlin & Weinberg, 2013). Foster students who lack knowledge or understanding of the college system lack social and cultural capital, and according to Putnam (1995), the lack of capital results in “millions more [people] [withdrawing] from the affairs of their communities” (p. 67). The low number of foster students entering higher education and the low completion rate for foster students may reflect the impact of their lack of social and cultural capital.

This study set out to determine the programming and service needs of foster students who enroll in community colleges with the understanding that by pinpointing these needs, community colleges will be able to support foster students’ goals to further their education by providing them with the social capital they need to succeed. This study identified the key factors that a community college needs to consider when planning a support program for its foster student population; this would result in an action plan to mitigate the ongoing issues foster students and professional have reported. I was able to find direct and necessary action elements and service needs to include in the design of a foster student support program for Mt. SAC to increase the

social capital of foster students. This chapter will discuss recommendations to encourage community colleges to build their own support program and resource center to assist their foster student population, after a short review of Chapter 4's findings. I will then talk about the limitations of the study. Finally, I will convey how this study contributes to practice and policy in education.

### **Summary of Chapter 4 Findings**

In Chapter 4, I discussed the findings of my study regarding what information and services are needed by foster students attending community college. The first of the two main themes that emerged was Establishment of a Community Atmosphere of Care, and the second theme was Services to Support Independence and Development of Self-Empowerment. For theme 1, the findings for the first two sub research questions were answered by the four resource center coordinators and the three non-profit agency representatives. Their input led to the identification of three subthemes: Access Point for Connection and Engagement, Safe Common Space for Assistance and Acceptance, and Access Point for Collective Voice. The second theme was able to address the third sub research question of this study. Two subthemes were identified with respect to the third sub research question: Provide Opportunities to Give Back and Provide Targeted Programming and Services. Therefore, the overarching research question can be answered thusly; for foster students attending a community college, the following are needed to ensure their degree completion and success:

1. Access Point for Connection and Engagement
2. Safe Common Space for Assistance and Acceptance
3. Access Point for Collective Voice
4. Provide Opportunities to Give Back

## 5. Provide Targeted Programming and Services

These elements are necessary to show foster students that the community college acknowledges and supports their efforts to attain a college degree. These five elements were collected through the voices of individuals who work with foster students as well as foster students themselves. At the end of Chapter 4, Table 8 was created to show the necessary elements in planning and implementing a foster student support program at a community college campus. This highlights the elements of who, what, when, where and how to plan and implement a foster student support program. Table 9 below shows the alignment of the findings in Chapter 4 to the recommendations in this chapter.

### **Recommendations from Findings**

Table 9

#### *Alignment of Findings to Recommendations*

Recommendation	Findings
Community Cultural Wealth Promotion: Involve Foster Students in Design, Plan, and Implementation of Support Program	1. Access Point for Connection and Engagement 2. Safe Common Space for Assistance and Acceptance 3. Access Point for Collective Voice 4. Provide Opportunities to Give Back 5. Provide Targeted Programming and Services
Ensure Basic Life Necessities are Available	1. Access Point for Connection and Engagement 2. Safe Common Space for Assistance and Acceptance 3. Access Point for Collective Voice
Continued Advocacy and Networking on Behalf of Foster Students	4. Provide Opportunities to Give Back 5. Provide Targeted Programming and Services

### **Recommendation to Involve Own Foster Students on Campus**

All the Mt. SAC foster students showed excitement about my study when I met with them for individual interviews. They all expressed that the recognition of the need to provide direct help to foster students has taken a long time; such a project to determine what Mt. SAC

can do to help foster students is a good start. They all mentioned that this study showed that Mt. SAC has finally recognized that foster students have been doing things on their own on campus. Foster students expressed that they do need help because they have challenges that the general student population does not have, such as housing and transportation. What was even more revealing as I spoke to participants was their willingness to participate. Each reminded me that he/she has always had aspirations to be successful in life; one way to do this is to get a college education. They do not want to be mere statistics; rather, they want to be successful and in turn give back to the people and community that have helped them throughout their lives. The Mt. SAC foster students I talked to pushed for involvement; they want to be included in the design, planning, and implementation of a support program for students like them. Foster students bring many skills, varied experiences, and collective knowledge that make them excellent resources. Per Watt et al. (2013) and Yosso (2005), the use of community cultural capital (also referred to as cultural community wealth) is an effective way to nourish and involve the group that a program is trying to help. This additive perspective involves participants and takes into account the knowledge, ideas, and skills they already possess. According to Yosso, “community cultural wealth is an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression” (p. 77). In the case of foster students, the cultural community wealth they bring to the community college campus needs to be recognized and bridged through a support program. Doing so shows foster students that the support program “values their autonomy, allowing them to make their own decisions and to rely on each other to stay on a constructive path” (Watt et al., 2013). The idea of a support program accounting for the knowledge and skills that foster students already have means that the campus acknowledges their unique social and cultural capital, and in a sense helps



develop this capital further with specific college tools. By arming foster students with specific tools to help themselves, they will be poised to participate in the services and programs that are offered and focus on their college completion.

Historically, a deficit view existed of college foster students and their involvement in their schooling since they do not participate in school activities and tend to drop out. This deficit view of college going foster students weighs on the lack of valuing education or academic achievement among this population (Cooper et al., 2008). However, my findings demonstrated that the foster students in my study were making every effort to complete their college education. Many foster students shared dire circumstances of illness, housing issues, and finances that forced them to drop out. The majority of those who had to drop out of college found a way to return, especially to Mt. SAC. Because of their lack of a support system and their need to be self-reliant, foster youth are unable to participate in school activities nor can they truly have the option to experience the college life that the average college student may have the privilege of experiencing. The foster students in this study stated that if services and programming were available on the campus, the pressure on them to have to find a way to get resources they need would reduce exponentially. This builds their cultural and social wealth, allowing them to truly focus on school. They all urged me to get a support program going and graciously offered their help in doing so. Involving foster students to help design and implement a support program to serve foster students makes a great deal of sense as it will garner buy-in from their peers and create trust from the onset. This is one strategy to reassure foster students that the foster care stigma they may carry inwardly is not the basis of this support program; rather, the focus is to support their college goal from start to finish. This recommendation is aligned with all five of the findings of this study. Involving foster students and including their own community cultural

wealth creates an access point for connection and engagement, a safe common space for assistance and acceptance, and an access point for a collective voice that provides opportunities to give back and targeted programming and services.

### **Recommendations to Ensure Basic Life Necessities are Available**

In order to ensure foster student involvement with the support program, the campus needs to institute support that will ensure foster students are able to have their basic life necessities, such as: food, housing, appropriate clothing, job opportunities, and gas money. Many foster students are forced to be self-reliant because they do not have family members on whom to rely. With this pressure, they have to maintain a steady job to support themselves financially. Whereas their non-foster classmates do not have to worry about housing, books, and gas money, most foster students do. They have to make sure that they have a steady stream of funds coming in each month to make sure that they do not put themselves in predicaments such as having to choose to pay for food or rent. The foster students I interviewed all had experiences where they chose to go hungry to ensure that they had a warm and safe place to stay. Many said that they often get sick because they do not have appropriate clothing to help shield them from the rain and cold; they make do with what they have. They would rather be cold and make sure that they get to class or work, otherwise else they would put themselves in deeper debt. In this study, when asked about the needs of foster students attending Mt. SAC, the majority explained that if they did not have to worry about basic life necessities and had the same advantages as their peers, they would be able to focus more on their schoolwork. In terms of schoolwork, many foster youth do not have the resources to own a computer and printer. Lacking these basic resources forces foster students to find ways to get access to these resources; this requires more time consuming methods such as work more hours to afford a computer and printer, or using

resources provided at the school library, meaning that foster students must contend with limited hours and long wait times, especially peak times such as mid-term and final periods. These hurdles may become deal breakers for foster students, as each attempt chips away at their hope and energy.

In agreement with the most recent research on education outcomes of students in foster care called *The Invisible Achievement Gap, Parts 1 and 2* (Barrat & Berliner, 2013; Wiegmann et al., 2014), this recent report underscores that lack of basic life necessities faced by children in foster care, put them at an unfair disadvantage in terms of their learning and education outcomes. Even when compared to other at-risk groups such as children from low socioeconomic status (SES), English learners, and students with disabilities, children in foster care fare more poorly than all three groups, since their circumstances prevent them from coming to school prepared to learn. As emphasized in *The Invisible Achievement Gap*, foster students are “amazingly resilient, and when they receive adequate academic and social supports, they can persist and succeed in school” (Wiegmann et al., p. 42). I advocate for the same at Mt. SAC and other community colleges; that is for campuses to provide needed academic and social supports that the general student population have readily at home that foster students do not have. This effort is an intervention to fill the cultural and social capital gaps. Foster students remain in need of the basic foundations of life: knowing that they are able to get something to eat or have a place to do their homework and print out their assignment lessens their worries and places them at the same level as their peers, giving them hope that their circumstances do not need to be a detriment to their college ambition.

Community colleges need to pay special attention to housing as this hurdle is reported to be the number one cause of foster students dropping out of college (Cooper et al., 2008; Watt et

al., 2013). Although foster students in California may have the benefit of housing financial support through AB-12 and THP-PLUS, they may not know how to go about obtaining these benefits. Foster students need help developing skills to look for appropriate housing under their given budget. Many do not know how to talk to a landlord and asking the right questions. They may not know what key factors to consider when looking for a place to live such as distance from the campus, safety concerns, and what qualities they should consider in roommates. The foster students I interviewed voiced that they wished they had someone to whom they could turn to help them understand a rental agreement and negotiate a fair rental price so that they do not get themselves into a situation that is too expensive or too difficult to get out of. Any support program for foster students must address the housing issue, as it is a basic survival necessity and, according to the professionals I interviewed, the number one factor in keeping foster students engaged at the college campus. Staff members working foster students student can at the very least develop a "Housing Guideline" to address the factors foster students need to consider when looking for a rental space. This guideline can be a diagram with some humor, pointing out what to do and what not do. Multiple workshops should be conducted, to review the guideline to ensure that the majority of foster students receive this information. Also, as an added service, provide a review of rental agreements with foster students, on a one-on-one basis. As well as become the foster student's advocate, by going with the foster student on the apartment hunt; this time will not only be educational for the foster student, but also a benefit to the staff member as time spent to get to know the foster student. To continue to advocate for housing support for foster students, campuses should look into ways to provide housing on campus or with off-campus partnerships for this group.

A trend is taking shape for the community college sector to provide on-campus housing for its students. Mt. SAC has started looking into this opportunity for its campus. Once I heard this, I was the first to volunteer and raise concern that a portion of available on-campus housing needs to be reserved for foster students. Acting as an advocate on behalf of foster students while in the middle of my research, I had ample data and information to share with the Housing Advisory Committee assigned to this project. Another strategy to help foster students with housing is for staff from the support program for foster students to reach out to the adjacent areas of the campus community and serve as bridge between landlords and foster students. Most community members are more likely to help if they understand the plight of foster students; to do this without putting the foster student in the spotlight, program staff can reach out to community members to educate them about the support program, as well as what services and support Mt. SAC is providing to its foster students. Establishing a rapport with the support program staff and community members will simplify the referral process for foster students. Foster students will not have to explain to their possible landlord their situation and circumstance. This referral assistance is being used at all of the four institutions in this research. It also came recommended by the professionals working at the non-profit agencies who participated in this study.

This recommendation of ensuring that basic life necessities are available for foster students aligns with three of the five findings of this study. This recommendation provides an access point for connection and engagement, a safe common space for assistance and acceptance, and an access point for foster students to share in a collective voice. Providing foster students with the basic necessities of living will illustrate to them that the campus understands and cares about their circumstances. If administrators want foster students to do well and succeed on

campus, and therefore should provide them with access to basic needs that others have so readily.

### **Recommendation for Continued Advocacy and Networking on Behalf of Foster Students**

In order to gain campus support and receive financial and moral buy-in at a community college campus for any purpose takes advocacy, timing, and dedication. The advocacy work to support a student group such as foster students takes diligence, care, and patience. Given that this group of students may be small in number compared to the general population, their needs for services and programming is much greater due to their circumstances and lack of cultural and social capital. A college campus must weigh a new proposal in terms of the amount of focus and funds going to a small group of students versus the benefit to the entire campus community. Thus, staff and administrators who are passionate about building a support network for foster students will need to strive for continued and consistent advocacy; bringing together a network of on-campus and off-campus community supporters will increase the legitimacy of this issue. Pulling a group of foster students to speak for their needs and project their own voices on the college campus also raises awareness for the leaders on campus. As one of this study's first recommendations, involving foster students with building a support program includes them in the proposal process as well as the maintenance process to begin and keep the support program running. Not only will foster students have opportunities to learn about the community college governance process and gain leadership skills, but this participation will also increase their self-esteem and shed light to the issue. This will allow foster students to step out of their circumstances to gain social and cultural capital to bridge their two worlds: foster care and college. The best advocates are those who come from the circumstances that a support program is trying to help. In this way, foster students can be their own best advocates.

Involving outsiders such as non-profit agencies who specialize in foster care can also confer an advantage. Rather than just using campus data and foster students, bringing in experts from the foster care field can add emphasis, providing a full picture of the impact of foster care on children and their education outcome. The key is to educate the college community about the full impact of foster care on children and the children's education outcome, with emphasis on how the community college can be part of the solution. Thus, continued advocacy and networking are critical to sustain support, placing the future of foster students at the forefront of a support program. The issue of education attainment for children from foster care is too large for any one institution to solve, but when college leaders have a clear picture of how a support program on campus can have a profound impact on those foster students who have found their way to the campus, it will not only enhance buy-in, but will also yield an increased population of foster students who graduate from college campuses. College leaders will soon be able to see that the efforts put forth to build a support program for foster students are worth the time and money when the benefits for the college as well as for the foster students are increased. The college success for foster students will fully align with the college's mission to instill learning and improve the lives of those who pass through the campus.

Timing is also critical when it comes to getting a proposal through a college governance process. Staff will need to be aware of upcoming mandates from the state or nation, and know if the support program for foster students can be weaved into these mandates. Having the law as a foundation will allow colleges to more easily secure the buy-in needed for a support program for foster students. The California Community Colleges are mandated to have a Student Equity Plan in place starting in January 2015 in order to receive funding from the state; this plan is designed to help increase access to higher education and completion for student groups who are

underrepresented or considered at risk (CO, n.d.b). All campuses are forced to look at their student programs and align them to the new Student Equity guidelines. Given that the guidelines mandate each college campus to recognize and increase services for underrepresented and at-risk groups, with emphasis on foster students and veteran support, the timing is perfect to raise the issue of how foster students are being served on a community college campus, and how best to enhance, expand, and support this group. Building a network of on-campus and off-campus supporters and experts will continue to be advantageous in this endeavor, as shown by the results of my study. All of the college coordinators stated that they are connected to non-profit agencies in the surrounding communities to ensure that the resources and services provided to their foster students are comprehensive. I purposely chose to interview not only current foster students, but also school coordinators and non-profit agency representatives because, based on the readings I have done and my own volunteer experience, it is critically important to have collaboration among different administrative offices due to the needs of foster students. The shared purpose of improving the lives of foster students is the overarching motivation for information sharing. Given this shared purpose, the active collaboration among administrators create a natural network of sharing information, such as current changes to legislation or processes that impact foster students. Establishing a network will only support the purpose of increased college access and college completion for foster students in the community college arena.

Ensuring continued advocacy and networking serve two of this study's findings: providing opportunities to give back and targeted programming and services. Foster students are able to use their community cultural wealth to advocate for a support program, whereas persistent advocacy and networking from college staff will ensure that the support program will be able to continue to provide targeted programming and services to foster students. These



targeted programming and services are solutions to build up the cultural and social capital that foster students may lack. Enabling foster students, college staff, and community agency representatives to work together on a crucial project is beneficial to the community college at large; the efforts to contribute to the dire issue of foster students' low college attainment will highlight the care and accountability of each college campus.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Although this study provides meaningful insights into the service and programs needs of foster students and how a community college campus can start the planning and implementation of a support program for its foster students, there are limitations to consider. This section will address limitations on researcher's role on her own campus, the small number of participants, and generalizability.

### **My Official Role at Mt. SAC**

I hold the official role as the Financial Aid, Scholarship, and Veterans Director at Mt. SAC. This role affords me authority over the Financial Aid process at Mt. SAC, especially how funds should be divided among financial aid recipients. Additionally, this role provides me with access to almost all student data. When I planned my study, I was highly aware of my role and how it might have hindered the willingness of foster students and professionals to participate in my study. I developed three recruitment tools to find an acceptable number of volunteers to complete my study. The most efficient tool was through referrals from Mt. SAC program coordinators. The coordinators were able to refer interested foster students to me for participations. The program coordinators and I maintained transparency to all volunteers in this study. We all acknowledged my official role at the college, and my secondary role as researcher for this study. Given that we were clear about the purpose of the study and how I was going to

use the collected information, all volunteers expressed a sense of gratitude that the Financial Aid Director was conducting this study because it made sense under my official role due to cross over matters with college funding for foster youth<sup>21</sup>; it was also recognized that I carved out bandwidth from my official role to work on this issue.

### **Small Number of Participants**

I was able to recruit 20 foster students to interview for my study. This process took me over 2 months due to the stigma that some foster students experience as a result of their experiences. Program coordinators and I had to spend time with interested foster students, explaining the purpose of my study and the reasons why I was so passionate about this research. Once trust and understanding were established, foster students became excited about the purpose of my study, and continued to dialogue with me even after the study was complete, wanting to be part of the official implementation of a support program for foster students at Mt. SAC. I believe that although the study only had a small number of participants, their voice as a group came out loud and clear in my study. While I was working on completing this dissertation, I was simultaneously completing a proposal for Mt. SAC to build a support program for foster youth. Mt. SAC has now approved the proposal with a committed space, and is on its way to hiring staff to continue with planning this program. The achievements so far could not have been accomplished without the input from student volunteers in my study. I was also only able to find three foster care non-profit agencies and four community colleges with foster student support programs to participate in my research. The input from the non-profit agencies highlights the fact that the issue of college access and education outcomes for foster students is escalating; their programs are now focusing on how to help foster students be ready for and access college. One

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<sup>21</sup> The term “foster youth” is used here because this is the official terminology still used by the Department of Education on the financial aid application form, FAFSA.

agency already started its own higher education team. As addressed in previous chapters, the California Community Colleges sector is in support of building programs to help foster students. Given this information, I was elated to find four campuses that had programs that are making progress in helping their foster student population be successful. Each coordinator was more than happy to share his/her program details and strategies to build their program because they share the same belief that network building will provide more comprehensive support for foster students. Overall, the 27 volunteers from my study spoke eloquently and poignantly about the needs of foster students attending community college.

### **Generalizability**

Unfortunately, the findings of this study are not generalizable for all foster students because of the uniqueness of the participants as well as the research site. Also by design, this study included only 27 participants, thus restricting the findings in this study from being generalizable. Foster students are unique, and given the multifaceted factors that each foster student can experience throughout each of his/her lives, individual input from them should be honored as distinctive, and cannot be considered representative of foster students as a whole. Also, the professional representatives from non-profit agencies and colleges also experience exclusive experience working with their own foster student population in their respective locations. Although their insights are valuable, their input is not representative of all non-profit agencies who work with foster students. However, the findings in this study are likely to be transferrable across the state as well as the nation as it is reasonable to assume the factors affecting foster students attending college are similar.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

In conducting this study, I hoped to generate momentum for community colleges to build support programs for their foster students. Once support programs are established, the next step would be assessment of the programs' progress. If support programs are established everywhere from K-12 to higher education, the possibility for future studies to concentrate on the holistic education outcome of children from care can be realized. This has been the underlying concern from the foster care community (Zetlin & Weinberg, 2013). Accurate and comprehensive data to track the education progress of children in care will provide agencies and schools a tool to inject timely learning triage; this effort will refocus professionals to look at children in care as students in the education forum, rather than disregard them due to their foster care circumstances.

It is my hope that this study will highlight the need to help foster students with college access and completion. Continued advocacy and networking for this population will build upon the most recent collaboration between colleges, and foster care non-profit agencies with the K-12 system. Along with the John Burton Foundation, through the California College Pathways initiative and funding from the Stuart and Walter S. Johnson Foundations, K-12 system has partnered with Ed Results in order to make foster youth data more readily available to campus practitioners through the CalPASS Plus System. CalPASS Plus is managed by Ed Results and will offer various mechanisms for accessing campus level data. Each community college district will be able to upload data into the central CO MIS system,<sup>22</sup> and the CO in turn will upload the information into CalPASS Plus. In addition to obtaining data from community colleges, CalPASS Plus obtains data from California K-12 school districts and 4-year universities, offering

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<sup>22</sup> Management Information Systems (MIS system) is a database system that the CO uses as a vehicle for all community college campuses to report required student data for the CO to track and assess. Funding for each campus/district is contingent on reporting in the MIS system.

an opportunity to provide more robust tracking and analysis than any one system could provide independently.

In the future, Mt. SAC will participate in this collaboration through MIS reporting and CalPASS Plus. The necessity to track and understand the educational and career trajectory of foster students has been identified and it is crucial to identify cracks in the education system for foster students in order to build and improve upon services and programming. The data collected through CalPASS Plus will allow additional education research on foster students.

### **Effects of Research on Practice**

The findings from this study can increase the urgency for community college campuses to implement a support program for their foster students, especially when a theory of action was yielded and is currently put in motion at Mt. SAC. Mt. SAC is the example of how a community college, even with its limitations, can implement a plan to build a support program for its foster student population. This study outlines factors that need to be considered in this process, especially during the planning and implementation phases. Because these findings came from individuals who work with foster students daily as well as the foster students themselves, it is important to focus on these factors and add to them as the support program gains tenure and engagement from foster students. As a lesson learned by Mt. SAC, it is critical to receive support from the campus governance process to have ample funding and support to build a comprehensive support program; when the emphasis of care and commitment are not there, foster students will stop participating.

It is hopeful that, through Mt. SAC's example, other community college campuses will implement a support program for foster students in the next few years. Once this attention radiates, it will bring to light the large issue of education outcome for foster students in the

community college system. As a known and effective practice, area experts from community colleges meet to share information, especially best practices; it is my hope that this collaborative network would increase in number. Staff from foster student support programs can begin to dialogue and collaborate for the sake of providing assistance to all foster students who come through the doors of the California Community Colleges.

### **Effects of Research on Policy**

Currently, the CO does not have funding allocated for schools to assist their foster students, even when a school has a formal support program instituted and running. It is my hope that with an increase of support programs for foster students through its campuses, the CO will realize the seriousness of this work and start to back its words with funding. At present, there is a mandate for community colleges to participate in the CO's FYSI; currently this entails assignment of a campus Foster Youth Liaison for foster students to contact, in addition to participation in periodic conference calls with the CO. To truly have an impact on each foster student on community college campuses, the CO needs to recognize that its current support is insufficient and is not aligned to the original mission of FYSI, "to create a statewide outreach and retention effort to better serve current and former youth from care" (CO, n.d.a, para. 2). Formal recognition and funding will be necessary to build the collaborative effort that FYSI set out to establish. It is my hope that with advocacy and effort from the California Community Colleges to establish formal support programs, the CO will follow up with funding to maintain these efforts. This is a possibility given the current example of the student veterans' group. For the past 6 years, community colleges had to build and maintain veterans' programs throughout California on their own, even when the CO mandates support for student veterans, but without funding. It has taken over 6 years, but the CO has recently realized that without funding, the

management of these successful Veterans programs will fail. There is now funding commitment from the CO to ensure that the efforts and work of each of the campus can be maintained in order for student veterans to continue to receive the services and programming they need to access and complete college.

It is also my belief that when the California Community College sector commits to full programming support for foster students, this sector will join with the California State University and University of California sectors to ensure that foster students will be supported statewide when they pursue higher education. This trend speaks volumes for foster students everywhere in the state, and also serves as a great challenge and example for all states to commit to the same support in their higher education systems. The ripple effect that will provide support and reach every foster student on a college campus in this country is the kind of policy impact that I envisioned when I set out to conduct this study.

### **Reflection**

With this research project I hoped to gain a deeper understanding of what I could do differently at my school site to support foster students. When I originally planned this project, my focus was on what Mt. SAC can do through administrators and staff to build a support program for foster students. As I interviewed current Mt. SAC foster students, I began to hear and understand how much richer this support program could be with the acknowledgment of the community wealth that foster students bring with them. They want to be part of the solution, so it is critical to allow them to take part and, during the process, have well-trained staff collaborate with foster students for an exchange of skills, knowledge, and relationship development.

This project demonstrates that foster students care about their own education outcome and are actively seeking opportunities to make sure that the educational experience can be better

for those in care who will come after them. They want to be part of the solution to give younger foster students a less stressful path through K-12 and ensure that they get to college.

I have found, and it is important to acknowledge here, that the governance process at any college is very cumbersome, and may be even more cumbersome at a community college due to the variety of challenges unique to this sector. I bring this up as to point out that, as administrators, we have the readily available information and guidelines to follow and get through this process. We have authority and access to others who can help. Thus, community college administrations must remain focused on improving the lives of foster students and utilize their authority and privilege to be part of the process. College administrators need to recognize that the efforts to build a support program for foster students are worth all the trouble, even when it means multiple rewrites of the proposal, networking time, and continuous advocacy in the form of emails, meetings, and phone calls. Ultimately, the impact of such a program on the lives of foster students is enormous. My main take away in conducting this study is that all students matters in education, especially those who were unfortunate enough to lack a support system that nurtured them and encouraged them to be mindful of education and career development. For these foster students who pushed through and got themselves to community colleges campuses, college leaders must receive them with care and build upon their resilience.





## APPENDIX B

### Recruitment Email Message to Program Coordinators

January 2014

Dear Manager/Coordinator,

I am writing to ask you to assist me in my Doctorate study. My research project is to investigate the needs of former foster youth at the community college. The purpose of this project is to inform California Community Colleges about the types of services and programs it should include when planning a resource center to support the foster students on campus.

Because of your knowledge and rapport with the students you serve, I need your help to find my research sample. My aim is to find at least 20 current student volunteers who are currently or former in foster care. My research proposal has been reviewed and approved by UCLA supported by Dr. Linda Rose and Dr. Richard Wagoner. I have also met Mt. SAC's "Research Project Approval" protocol through the Research and Institutional Effectiveness Department.

The results of my study may be used to help leaders in higher education, especially the California Community College segment better support the academic and personal needs of former foster youth through establishing a resource center. This center is intended to provide foster students a space to receive accurate information, and to have one-on-one connections with staff, to assist them navigate the administrative maze. This study will provide a logic model for administrators to follow, with details of the service and informational needs of community college foster students.

**If you are willing, please let me know with a reply to this email. I will provide you with the requested number of packets to give to possible student volunteers.** The packet will include a Letter of Participation, Background Questionnaire, and Consent Form. I ask that you review the packet, and help each student understand my research study, and have them return the Background Questionnaire and Consent Form in the enclosed, self-addressed envelope. I will be happy to provide you with additional packets should you need more. I am also counting on students "spreading the word" about my study. Please encourage students to help solicit their friends/classmates on my behalf. The goal is to gather multiple perspectives from foster youth, thus the more interviews I can conduct the more holistic my findings will be.

Thank you so much for your support in this research - together we can make a difference. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Regards,

Chau

## APPENDIX C

### Foster Youth Invitation to Participate Letter

February 2014

Dear Student:

You are invited to take part in an important research project. I am trying to find out the needs of community college students with foster care experience. The purpose of this project is to create a blueprint for California Community Colleges to plan resource center to support foster students on its campus.

I have requested the Extended Opportunity Programs & Services (EOPS), California Work Opportunities and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKS), Achieving in College, Ensuring Success (ACES), ASPIRE coordinators help me find foster students to interview.

My name is Chau Dao and I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership Program at UCLA; the focus of my doctoral dissertation is to examine the services and programs that former foster youth need to succeed at community colleges. This study has been reviewed and approved by UCLA's Institutional Review Board (IRB) as well as the Research and Institutional Effectiveness Department at Mt. SAC.

If you want to participate in this research, you will take part in one interview lasting 60 minutes. The interview will ask you for your candid input on your experience in navigating Mt. San Antonio College and about receiving services. The interview will take place at a time/location convenient to you.

**You need to do two things to be part of this study:**

- 1) **Return the packet to me in the self-addressed, stamped envelope: review the consent form for this research and sign it; and complete the brief background questionnaire.**
- 2) **I will contact you to schedule an interview session.**

As a participant, you will receive a \$20 gift card after the interview session. Your input in this study is extremely valuable to improving college success of foster students. If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me by email at [REDACTED].  
Best regards,

Chau Dao  
Educational Leadership Program, UCLA



**Page 2 of 2**

10. What is your current approximate Grade Point Average (GPA) on this campus?

GPA: \_\_\_\_\_ (fill-in)

11. How many years have you attended this community college?

Year: \_\_\_\_\_ (fill-in)

12. When did you enter this community college? (check one)

Right after High School \_\_\_\_\_

Change from another community college \_\_\_\_\_ (if checked, please answer questions below)

How many other community colleges have you attended?

(do not include this campus) \_\_\_\_\_ (fill-in)

Change from a 4-year university \_\_\_\_\_ (if checked, please answer question below)

How many 4-year universities have you attended? \_\_\_\_\_ (fill-in)

13. Where did you live prior to entering this community college? (check one)

Foster home \_\_\_\_\_

Relative \_\_\_\_\_

Group home \_\_\_\_\_

On your own \_\_\_\_\_

Transitional housing \_\_\_\_\_

Or combination of housing \_\_\_\_\_, please explain:

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Personal Profile: If you wish to participate in an interview, please include your name and contact information.

A. First Name Only: \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in)

B. How do you identify with Gender: Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_ Transgender \_\_\_\_\_ (check one)

C. How do you identify with Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in)

D. Preferred Contact Information (please print clearly so that there is no delay in contacting you for the interview):

Phone (include area code): \_\_\_\_\_ and/or Email:

---

***Thank you for your consideration in participating in this very important study. Please return this questionnaire in the enclosed, self-addressed, stamped envelope.***

## APPENDIX E

### Consent Form

University of California, Los Angeles

#### **CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

A qualitative research study with Foster Youth, Foster Youth Resource Center Coordinators, and Non-Profit Foster Youth Agency staff examining essential information and resources needed to successfully develop a Foster Youth Resource Center at a California Community College.

Chau Dao, under the faculty sponsorship of Professors Dr. Rose and Dr. Wagoner from the Department of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) are conducting a research study. Dr. Rose can be contacted at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. Dr. Wagoner can be contacted at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

Barbara McNiece-Stallard, Director, Research & Institutional Effectiveness of Mt. SAC, is overlooking this project. She can be reached at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a Foster Youth, Foster Youth Resource Center coordinator, or a staff member at a Non-Profit Foster Youth agency. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

#### **Why is this study being done?**

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the development of a Foster Youth Resource Center at a California Community College. The project aims to develop a resource tool to inform college administrators. The objective is to utilize the experiential knowledge of Foster Youth, Foster Youth Resource Center coordinators, and Non-Profit Foster Youth Agency staff to find a general consensus as to what a Foster Youth Resource Center should provide to its specialized served population. The goal of this research is to create a comprehensive Foster Youth Resource Center at a California Community College, providing adequate and appropriate information and resources for the Foster Youth population. It is also the goal to share this development plan with all California Community Colleges that have yet to create such a center.

#### **What will happen if I take part in this research study?**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

- Participate in one 60-minute interview at your selected site. Foster Youth will also be asked to complete a 5-minute Background Questionnaire to collect demographic data on each Foster Youth participant.
- Answer interview questions regarding your experience and perception as a Foster Youth, Foster Youth Resource Center coordinator, or staff at a Non-Profit Foster Youth Agency.

- You will be asked for permission to have the interview audio recorded.

### **How long will I be in the research study?**

Participation will take a total of 60 minutes for the interview.

### **Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?**

- There are no anticipated risks or discomforts. (For Foster Youth, you will only be asked about your college experience; what information you received about college requirements and resources available to you. You are not expected to share your foster care experience.)

### **Are there any potential benefits if I participate?**

By participating in the study, you will be offering insight for the development of a Foster Youth Resource Center at a California Community College. It is also the goal of the researcher to share this study with other California Community Colleges who may be interested in developing a center, thus your input will have statewide impact.

The results of the research may improve services and resources provided to Foster Youth who attend a California Community College.

### **Will I be paid for participating?**

- Foster Youth: you will receive a small gift card (\$20) to Target.
- Foster Youth Resource Center Coordinator and Non-Profit Foster Youth Agency staff: you will receive a small gift card (\$10) to Starbucks.

### **Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of pseudonyms and your real name and work site will not be identified or shared with anyone.

### **What are my rights if I take part in this study?**

- You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.
- Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you, and no loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.
- You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.
- You may refuse to have the interview audio recorded.

**Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?**

- **The research team:**

If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to the one of the researchers. Please contact:

Chau Dao, Graduate Student, UCLA Department of Education and Information Studies



- **UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):**

If you have questions about your rights while taking part in this study, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers about the study, please call the OHRPP at [REDACTED] or write to:

UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program  
11000 Kinross Avenue, Suite 211, Box 951694  
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694

**You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.**

**SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I give permission to the researcher to audio record the interview. I understand that the recording and any transcription of the interview will be kept confidential and stored in a locked room. \_\_\_\_

**Initial**

**SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Contact Number

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



APPENDIX F  
Student Volunteer Interview Protocol

READ to volunteer:

Thank you for agreeing to participate. Your participation will make a difference for those who come after you. Your input today will help me to understand what services former or current foster youth need when they first enroll on campus.

Please know that your identity will be kept confidential; you will not be identified by name in my report. You are free to leave at any time during this interview. This interview is being recorded and a transcript will be made. You will have the opportunity to review the transcript, and let me know of any changes that need to be made or if you want the opportunity to expand on any of your answers. After the written report is complete, all recordings will be destroyed. Again, I thank you for your time and participation. Let's get started; you are free to choose not to answer any question.

1. Tell me why you decided to go to college. (warm-up)
2. What are you studying? What is your life goal? (warm-up)
3. Can you share your first memory of stepping on campus? What was it like for you?
4. What was your first college year like? What did you like most? What, if any difficulties did you encounter?
5. What are some of the resources/services you know you can get on a college campus?
6. Where and how did you get information about these resources/services?
7. Describe what resources/services if any that you are utilizing.

Probe for the following resources/services; ask follow up about how helpful/difficulty with each; reiterate that it is "OK" if student does not know.

- a. Priority registration for classes
- b. DSP&S
- c. Academic Advising/Counseling
- d. Financial Aid/Chafee Grant
- e. FY Liaison in Financial Aid Office
- f. ACES
- g. Upward Bound while in HS
- h. CalWORKS
- i. Bridge
- j. The Writing Center, writing assistance
- k. The Learning Center, for tutoring
- l. Veterans Resource Center
- m. Scholarship Workshops
- n. Workshops by the Transfer Center such as: CSU/UC application, Resume writing, job/internship search, etc.
- o. Other \_\_\_\_\_

8. Please describe your experience as a foster student on campus. What are the benefits of using these services? What challenges, if any, of using these services. What services are the most helpful? What services are the least helpful?
9. What types of services do foster students need? Remember that we are looking to build a program so please be specific as to the type of service you need.
10. Describe your ideal resource center for the foster student population.
11. I thank you for your time and effort. What you shared with me is very helpful, and will assist this college to move forward with its plans. Is there anything you would like to add before we end this interview?

## APPENDIX G

### Community Resources and Referrals

Mt. San Antonio College

Student Health Services

#### COMMUNITY RESOURCES AND REFERRALS

##### San Gabriel / Pomona Valley

##### AIDS

Bienestar Human Services/Pomona (prevention, education, peer support) .....	(909) 397-7660
California HIV/AIDS Hotline.....	(800) 367-2437
East LA Women's Center HIV-AIDS Hotline .....	(800) 400-7432
Foothill AIDS Project/Claremont.....	(800) 448-0858
Whittier Rio Hondo AIDS Project (HIV testing, counseling, resources).....	(562) 698-3850

##### ALCOHOL/SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Aegis Medical Systems (low-cost tx for opiate addiction)	
Covina.....	(626) 915-3844
Pomona.....	(909) 623-6391
Alcoholics Anonymous/Glendora.....	(626) 914-1861
Aurora Charter Oak/Covina (free assessments, 12 step meetings, IP/OP).....	(800) 654-2673
BHS/American Recovery Center (OP, detox, counseling, fee for service).....	(909) 865-2336
Canyon Ridge Hospital/Chino (free assessments, IP detox) .....	(909) 590-3700
National Council on Alcoholism/Pomona (substance abuse self-help grps, anger mgmt).....	(909) 629-4084
Pacifica Recovery/Claremont (IP/OP program for chemical dependency).....	(909) 447-5081
Pomona Community Crisis Center (substance abuse tx, batterer's classes, sliding scale) .....	(909) 623-1588
River Community Recovery Services/Covina (OP for co-occurring disorders).....	(626) 974-8122
Social Model Recovery Systems/Covina (various tx programs).....	(877) 507-6242
SPIRITT Family Services/So El Monte (substance abuse tx, sliding scale).....	(626) 442-4788
Federal Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration treatment referral routing service .....	(800) 662-4357

##### CHILD/ELDER ABUSE

Child Abuse Hotline .....	(800) 540-4000
National Child Abuse Hotline .....	(800) 422-4453
Elder Abuse Reporting Hotline .....	(877) 477-3646

##### DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

East LA Rape & Battering Hotline (Bilingual).....	(800) 585-6231
Haven House/Pasadena (24-hr hotline, info, referral, emergency shelter) .....	(323) 681-2626
House of Ruth/Claremont (24-hr hotline, counseling, emergency shelter) .....	(909) 988-5559
L.A. County Victim-Witness Assistance Program.....	(800) 380-3811
Pomona Community Crisis Center (batterer's treatment & anger management).....	(909) 623-1588
Project Sister Family Services (rape crisis hotline, counseling, advocacy) .....	(909) 626-4357
YWCA-WINGS/Covina (domestic violence help line, shelter, counseling) .....	(626) 967-0658
National Domestic Violence Hotline.....	(800) 799-SAFE
National Sexual Assault Hotline.....	(800) 656-HOPE
National Dating Abuse Hotline (teens and young adults).....	(866) 331-9474

##### EATING DISORDERS

Center for Discovery (tx for adolescents 10-19 only).....	(800) 760-3934
Overeaters Anonymous SGV- IE Intergroup.....	(626) 335-3355
Pacifica Recovery/Claremont (intensive OP program).....	(909) 447-5081
Reasons Eating Disorder Center @ BHC Hospital (comprehensive tx, free assessments).....	(800) 235-5570
Susan B. Krevoy Eating Disorder Program for Adults & Adolescents (low fee OP).....	(310) 277-2682



## COMMUNITY RESOURCES AND REFERRALS

Inland EmpireAIDS

Bienestar Human Services /Pomona.....	(909) 397-7660
California HIV/AIDS H.....	(800) 367-2437
Foothill AIDS Project	
Riverside.....	(951) 742-7660
San Bernardino.....	(909) 884-2722

ALCOHOL/SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Aegis Medical Systems/Pomona.....	(909) 623-6391
Alcoholics Anonymous/Colton.....	(909) 825-4700
Canyon Ridge Hospital (free assessments, IP detox) .....	(909) 590-3700
National Council on Alcoholism/Pomona (substance abuse self-help grps, anger mgmt).....	(909) 629-4084
Inland Valley Recovery Services/Upland (detox, counseling).....	(909) 932-1069
Pacifica Recovery/Claremont (IP/OP program for chemical dependency).....	(909) 447-5081
Federal Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration (treatment, referral, routing service).....	(800) 662-4357

CHILD/ELDER ABUSE

Child Abuse Hotline	
Riverside County.....	(800) 442-4918
San Bernardino County .....	(800) 827-8724
National Child Abuse Hotline .....	(800) 422-4453
Elder/Dependent Adult Abuse	
Riverside County .....	(800) 491-7123
San Bernardino County.....	(877) 565-2020

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE/SEXUAL ASSAULT

House of Ruth/Claremont (24-hr hotline, counseling, emergency shelter).....	(909) 988-5559
Option House Shelter/San Bernardino (24-hr hotline, shelter, support groups).....	(909) 381-3471
Project Sister Family Services (rape crisis hotline, counseling, advocacy).....	(909) 626-4357
Riverside Area Rape Crisis Center (24-crisis hotline, advocacy).....	(951) 686-7273
Victim/Witness Assistance:	
San Bernardino .....	(909) 387-6540
Riverside.....	(951) 955-5450
National Domestic Violence Hotline.....	(800) 799-SAFE
National Sexual Assault Hotline.....	(800) 656-HOPE

EATING DISORDERS

Overeaters Anonymous IE Intergroup.....	(951) 715-2080
Loma Linda Behavioral Medicine Center.....	(800) 752-5999
Pacifica Recovery/Claremont (intensive OP program).....	(909) 447-5081

MENTAL HEALTH / COUNSELING

Aurora Charter Oak Hospital (free assessments, psychiatric holds).....	(800) 654-2673
Bilingual Family Counseling Services/Ontario (SB county residents only, ind & family, sliding scale).....	(909) 986-7111
Canyon Ridge Hospital (IP, OP, Medi-Medi).....	(909) 590-3700
Catholic Charities Counseling/San Bernardino-Riverside (sliding scale).....	(909) 763-4970
Chino Human Service (ind, family, couples counseling, sliding scale).....	(909) 591-9822
Loma Linda Behavioral Health Institute/Redlands .....	(909) 558-9500
(ind, family, couples, group tx, psychological & learning disability assessments, sliding scale)	
Family Service Agency of San Bernardino (counseling, support groups, sliding scale).....	(909) 886-6737
Samaritan Counseling Center/Upland (ind, fam, couples, groups tx, PPO insurance, reduced fees).....	(909) 985-0513
Upland Community Counseling (SB county residents, counseling, psychiatric, sliding scale).....	(909) 579-8100
Riverside County CARES (info, referral, and crisis line, 24/7).....	(800) 706-7500
San Bernardino County Access Unit (24-hr info, referral) .....	(888) 743-1478
Community Helpline (7am-10pm Mon-Sun, listening, crisis intervention, referral).....	(877) 541-2525
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (24 hrs.).....	(800) 273-TALK

Applying for Medi-Cal

Applying for Medi-Cal.....	San Bernardino (909) 388-0245 .....	Riverside (951) 358-3400
Medi-Cal phone support.....		(800) 541-5555
Healthy Families Medi-Cal for Children .....		(888) 747-1222

files: referrals.ie  
revised 4/13

## APPENDIX H

### Research Project Approval

#### MT. SAN ANTONIO COLLEGE RESEARCH PROJECT APPROVAL FORM

The following guidelines apply to all external research projects involving Mt. SAC. An external research project is defined as any research project or study which is outside the normal day-to-day operations of Mt. SAC. A typical example of an external research project is one conducted by a masters or doctoral student who wishes to ask Mt. SAC students or employees to participate in a study. Examples of normal day-to-day operations include program review (i.e., the new Planning for Institutional Effectiveness), Student Learning Outcomes/Administrative Unit Objectives and projects which are part of a Mt. SAC course (e.g., research course).

1. Any individual, group or agency desiring to conduct research at Mt. SAC must obtain the written permission of the Director of Research and Institutional Effectiveness and at least one Vice President.
2. Before permission is granted, a written proposal must be submitted to the Director of Research and Institutional Effectiveness. The proposal will include brief summaries of the rationale for the study, the methodology to be used, and the expected outcomes (see below).
3. Normally, Mt. SAC cannot provide facilities of any type for external research projects.
4. Unless the College feels that participation in a particular project is both educationally valuable and a natural part of the course content, class time will not be used for any project. In any event, the faculty member's permission must be obtained before class time can be used.
5. Participation in any project must be voluntary and all participants should be informed as to the purpose of the project and the scope of their involvement.
6. As a condition of approval of the research study, it should be noted that Mt. SAC students or employees involved in any research project will not be identified when the findings are published. The name of the College will not be identified in any publications.
7. Approval of external research projects is based on many aspects including time involved and whether the project relates to the College's mission, vision, core values and goals.

This *Research Project Approval Form* is to be completed and approval received before research begins. The completed form should be sent to the Research Office. The Research Office will review the study, discuss changes/implications with the author and make final project recommendations to the appropriate Vice President. If the study is approved and the research conducted, a copy of the results must be sent to the Research Office.

PROJECT INFORMATION
Project Title: What are the program and service needs of foster youth attending a community college?
Principal Investigator: Chau Dao
Educational Institution: UCLA
Mailing Address: [REDACTED]
Phone Number: [REDACTED]
Email: [REDACTED]
Faculty Advisor Name: Dr. Linda Rose and Dr. Richard Wagoner
Faculty Advisor Mailing Address: UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies 2043 Moore Hall Los Angeles, CA 90095-1521



PROJECT INFORMATION	
Faculty Advisor Phone Number:	[REDACTED]
Faculty Advisor Email:	[REDACTED]

1. What is the rationale or purpose of the study?

The purpose of this research study is to find the service and programs needs of youth adults with foster care experience who attend community college. This study will gain insight to the kinds of services and information needed to guide foster youth through the administrative maze; what is it that the college must emphasize to this group of students to make sure that they can navigate the community college culture? Through the various studies on foster youth college success, all foster youth who completed college show great resilience (Blome, 1997; Courtney et al., 2011; Medinger, 2005); they take a proactive approach with their education. The secondary of a resource center for foster youth is finding methods to build upon the resilience that foster youth bring with them to make college completion a reality.

2. What are the main goals or objectives or outcomes or research hypotheses of the study?

To build a Foster Youth (FY) Resource Center on the Mt. SAC campus that includes the services and programs that FY say they need. It is my hope that this study can be used to encourage and mandate other community colleges to do the same in the next few years. I plan to share this study with the Chancellor's Office, to gain traction for funding allocation to assist community colleges with the mission of having a FY Resource Center at each community college. This will ensure that all college going foster youth will be able to seek the help they need to be successful with higher education attainment.

3. Who will be the subjects/participants? How many? Will they be compensated? If so, how?

I am seeking at least 20 current students who experienced foster care to interview individually. The more volunteers I interview, the richer and more in depth data I will be able to pull for my findings. I will offer \$20 Target gift cards to each participant for their 60-minutes of interview time, plus time they use for reviewing their interview transcript once it is transcribed (30 minutes estimate).

4. Describe in detail all procedures to be performed on the participants (i.e., recruitment, surveying, debriefing, etc.)?

I am seeking the assistance of EOPS, ACES, Upward Bound, Bridge and CalWORKS managers to help me find my research population on campus. To meet all ethical guidelines, I am seeking this assistance because with my position on campus, it is not advisable for me to use my own access to contact possible participants. An email and participation packet will be given to each manager. They will help me "spread the word" about my research study. Students who are interested will contact me directly. I will also ask for Student Life's help in posting a flyer about my research in the Student Life area. I hope to also gain attraction to my research with the snowballing effect.

Interested students will have a short survey to complete, mainly to ensure that they have foster care experience, and to collect their demographic data for statistical purposes only. This will help me trace back to their "code" with their demographic profile. (Attached)

Individual interviews will be conducted, the date, time, and place of the participant's choice will be accommodated by me. Each participant will have the opportunity to review their interview transcript to ensure accuracy; this will be another opportunity for the participant to tell me what is allowable to use or not use in my research findings.

5. What assessment instrument(s) (e.g., survey, focus group) will be used?

Background Questionnaire (eligibility screening), Participation Consent Form, and Interview protocol (attached)

6. What are the potential risks to the participants?

The potential risk to foster youth volunteers is they may have a memory relapse of their foster care experience. This may cause emotional distress that is not intended. To address this possibility, clear communication is key. All communication to participants will clearly indicate the purpose of this study – to get their input about the services and programs they need on campus, in order to help them be successful with their higher education goal. Participants will be informed in writing as well as verbally, that they will not be asked about their foster care experience, and that at any time during the study, they have the choice of answering all, part, or none of the interview questions posed to them during the interview. They will also know that they can stop participation at any time they wish. In case participants volunteer their foster care experience, and this may cause emotional harm, I will have a Community Resource/Referral sheet available so that participants can seek counseling for their trauma. This sheet lists resource centers from the San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and Orange counties, covering Mt. SAC's territories. This Community Resource/Referral sheet was pulled together by Student Health Services.

7. Describe how you will deal with confidentiality and anonymity?

I will use the Background Questionnaire to code each participant. Only I will know the coding system; all data will be kept in a locked study room that only I have access to.

8. How will you obtain informed consent?

The consent form will be part of the interest packet. Participants will have the time to review the entire form and decide if participation is right for them. Managers will be available to assist students with questions, when needed. Participants will turn in a signed consent form at the beginning of the interview appointment.

9. What are the suggested date(s) for the study?

March 2014 to May 2014, depending on how many participants I can solicit.

10. How will the data be used?

The data and findings will inform not only Mt. SAC leadership, but other community college leadership about the needs of students with foster care experience. I hope to use this study to inform the Chancellor's Office of the California Community College system of this population's need and push for not only funding, but policy change in order for all campuses to make this a priority. Currently, the Foster Youth Success Initiative from the Chancellor's Office, only has recommendations for its campuses. The change needs to be for funding support and mandates in order for this population to receive the necessary services to be successful at any community college campus they attend.



11. If class or work time is needed, do you have an internal contact person who is already willing to comply? (Note: using class time is discouraged)

The Student Services managers have already agreed to assist me with sending out an email to the students they serve, to help me find possible participants. Many managers share that their program serves many students with foster care experience.

I already received approval for vacation days between February through June 2014 to conduct my research from my supervisor. This is to be transparent with my work hours and my research hours.

12. Which classes will be used in the study? Have the faculty given permission for the study to be done in class?

Not Applicable

Additional Question from Director of Research after initial review:

1. How you are going to mitigate coercion and why you feel okay with doing the study at Mt. SAC versus another community college given your position at the college?

As the Director, Financial Aid, Scholarships and Veterans, I ensure that the overall financial aid processes and procedures are in place, and meeting compliance. The daily processing of financial aid files are done by my staff. We have protocol in place where each file is looked at by more than one person. The majority of student cases and files are touched by staff members, and I am the last stop to unique cases. We have a protocol in place where a student is able to speak to the Financial Aid Specialist on call, then FA Supervisor, then the Assistant Director, and then to me, the Director. Most cases are resolved at the FA Specialist and/or Supervisor level. My staff do a great job of following protocol, and as an added bonus, we document each interaction we have with the student. This is a great method to be objective and track the student file.

In my position, I am responsible for the higher level administration of financial aid, such as policy and procedures, aggregate statistics, and personnel. I welcome the chance to speak to students, but it is fairly rare. I may see one to two students a month, when we process about 45,000 financial aid files a year.

To ensure that coercion will not be an issue, and transparency is met, I will refer student files to my Assistant Director's attention during the study, should the student be part of my study.

Also, I hope that in identifying myself as the Director, Financial Aid to the participants, the participants will garner more excitement and realization that there is attention on their college success; that support is out there, and there are plans to design a program to help this population. I realize the impact of my role, and this is why I am taking this issue on, recognizing Mt. SAC's need to provide "space" for students who come from foster care.

2. It appears that your Foster Youth (FY) participants could be current or past members of this group. Will some of them be less than 18 years of age? If so, how are you going to deal with guardian assent versus the participant's assent? If you will be screening for age to ensure they are 18 years of age or older, please note it in your response.

I aim to interview participants who are 18 years old or older for this study. My Background

Questionnaire will be my tool to weed out minors, and those who do not have foster care experience.

Also include a HARD copy of your full proposal if it has received approval from your local Institutional Review Board (IRB). This copy should include both the signature page of approval (or electronic equivalent) from your IRB and all material reviewed by your IRB.

When the project is completed, a summary of the key findings should be sent to the Research Office ([research@mtsac.edu](mailto:research@mtsac.edu)).

SIGNATURE & DATE	APPROVAL/NOT
<i>[Signature]</i> Feb 24/14	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Approved <input type="checkbox"/> Not Approved
Director Research & Institutional Effectiveness	
Reason:	
<i>[Signature]</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Approved <input type="checkbox"/> Not Approved
Vice President	
Reason:	
Principal Investigator(s) Signature & Date	
<i>[Signature]</i> 2.3.14	
Campus Volunteer Enrollment Form(s) signed? Yes No <i>N/A</i>	
Mt. SAC Emergency Response Quick Reference Guide given? Yes No <i>N/A</i>	
Other Notes: <i>Principal Investigator and participants are Mt. SAC employee / students.</i>	

The principal investigator and all other persons coming onto campus for the purposes of this project **MUST** also complete a *Campus Volunteer Enrollment Form* as well as become familiar with and carry and copy of the *Mt. SAC Emergency Response Quick Reference Guide*. The aforementioned documents are available from the Research Office.

Source: Sections of this form were adapted from Piedmont Virginia Community College's form.

## APPENDIX I

### Interview Protocol for Foster Youth Resource Center Coordinator

Mt. SAC is seeking develop a support program for its foster students in the next few years. To do this, I am gathering pertinent information to form a comprehensive written proposal. We are exploring different resource center models to identify best practices that will best fit with the foster student population at Mt. SAC as well as the Mt. SAC community as a whole. I would like to thank you for your time and for your support in our effort to make this happen.

1. Let's start with some historical background. Can you tell me why your campus created a FY resource center/program at your campus? What data or information was used in this effort?
2. It's important to discuss the proposal process. What was the proposal process like? What approach did you take? How many staff members were involved? How long did the whole process take? What were the challenges?
3. Would you share a copy of your proposal with me?
4. Who were your stakeholders? How did you identify your stakeholders and their roles?
5. What method/s did you use to recruit each stakeholder? How did you work with each of the stakeholder groups?
6. Were there any challenges in working with these stakeholders? If yes, what were they?
7. What method did you use to recruit foster students to your program?
8. What types of services were provided to these FY participants initially? Did you start with a comprehensive program, or did you add on different services as your program grew?
9. How do you manage your Resource Center? What is the reporting line?
10. Do you have an independent operating budget for this center? How are your center's staff and activities funded?
11. What are the staffing needs for this center? Have you had to make any adjustments to staffing due to budget issues, overtime or program participation reduction? How was this handled?
12. Does any part of your operating budget depend on a grant? What grant is this and how did you qualify for it?
13. If you have a mentorship program for your participants, please describe to me how this works from the training of mentors to the selection process to the matching of foster student and mentor.
14. Please describe the events you have for your participants during the academic year.
15. What relationship do you have with local IEP contacts/directors? Do you have an established business protocol that you can share with me? What were the steps you took to establish the business protocol?
16. What relationship do you have with 4-year college campuses such as (CSU, Fullerton, CSU, Long Beach, UC, Irvine, UCLA) to assist FY transfer to these campuses for their Bachelor's degree?

17. What do you do to understand the impact of the services you provide on foster students. What are your assessment methods? What is the frequency, and how do you use what you learn?
18. I thank you so much for your time. This has been so helpful. I have one more important question. Do you have an alumni-base and if you do, how have you cultivated this group to assist with your program?

## APPENDIX J

### Interview Protocol for Non-Profit Agency Representative

Mt. SAC is seeking to expand its program to support foster students in the next few years. To do this, we are gathering pertinent information to form a comprehensive written proposal for a resource center. We are also seeking advice from representatives from non-profit agencies who work with youth daily, to understand the needs of foster students who intend to enter a community college campus. Your identity will remain confidential. Your input is much appreciated.

1. Let's start with some background information. What services does your agency provide to foster youth? How many youths are receiving services at your agency? What outreach do you do to recruit participation from foster youth? How was your agency established?
2. Can you share copies of data reports for the last 3 years that describe what your agency has been doing for foster youth?
3. What information or service does your agency provide to foster youth who express an interest in going to college? Mentorship? College visits? Assistance with test taking and admission/financial aid applications? Housing information? Other?
4. As a foster youth expert, how can community colleges best serve this population when they come to our campuses?
5. What are the key elements that a resource center on the college campus must have to help foster youth succeed in college?
6. What do foster youth tell you about going to college? Their fears? Their concerns?
7. Do you have partnerships with local colleges? If yes, what type of relationships do you have with these colleges? What offices do you work with at the colleges? What are some of the reasons why you would seek out assistance from these contacts on behalf of foster youth?
8. I thank you so much for your time. This has been so helpful. I have one more important question. Do you have an alumni-base and if you do, have you worked with this group to assist the FY in your program?
9. Is there other information that would be helpful to me?

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