

How Foster Children are Disadvantaged in the Education System

How Foster Children are Disadvantaged in the Education System and a Proposal to Help

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Three years ago, on a snowless Christmas day, two children were dropped off at my house. They never got picked back up. I could lie like most people and say it was the best Christmas present ever, but one year I got a Barbie castle, so nothing can really beat that. De'anna and Demetrius Jerome were three and five, respectively, when I got them for Christmas. My mother and stepfather had decided to get involved in a foster to adopt

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program. De'anna and Demetrius, also known as Dede and DJ when they're not in trouble, were assigned to our home. Before coming to my family, they had been in six other foster homes. Between the complications of being uprooted and displaced so often and their traumatic childhood experiences, Dede and DJ have developed behavioral and psychiatric disorders.

Over the past three years, my mother and I have found it difficult to raise Dede and DJ while staying aware of ulterior causes of their problematic behaviors without exacerbating the situation by punishing them in a way that could be triggering. It is easy to forget that a child can be acting a certain way because of their behavioral disorders when it comes across as a disruptive, uncontrollable child that never gets punished. DJ was three when he entered the foster care system. Around that age is when the brain is able to form memories. When DJ was three, the memories he started to form were ones of abuse and abandonment. Sometimes DJ will randomly open up and talk of how he remembers his father being physically abusive to his mother and his mother being gone for long periods of time, leaving DJ and Dede alone, both under the age of three. These experiences are what cause DJ to be overly sensitive to potentially harmful stimuli and emotional distance from others.

I see my little brother get mad and emotionally shut down while doing first grade-level homework because it is so hard for him to sit and accomplish a task where he has little comprehension. His learning struggles are not severe enough to be diagnosed as any disability or disorder, but they are enough to keep him from learning at the same level as his peers that were raised in static households. DJ does not struggle to learn because of a specific disorder that affects his cognition, but because of psychological disorders that prevent him from excelling in a typical classroom environment. It pains me to see him working so hard and growing so frustrated with himself when he is trying his best, and then finding out that his best is not enough because he is taught at the same pace and with the same tactics used with unafflicted children. He is not developed enough to learn at the same level as his peers, but he is also not on a level to be put into special education.

Dede struggles to interact with her peers and teachers in an appropriate manner because she has authority issues and is two years younger than her peers developmentally. For the first two and a half years of her life, De'Anna was nonverbal. Dede was sexually abused as a child and still has subconscious fears of abandonment. This is the root of her problems forming healthy relationships and trusting people. As much as she wants and tries to be good, her disorders and trauma are easily triggered, resulting in defiance and disobedience. Her behavior and the consequences of it prevent her from getting the education she could be receiving because teachers are not equipped to handle these situations correctly.

Repetitive cycles are such a prevalent occurrence in the foster care system that I am worried for the rest of children that have this same dilemma, but are not in the care of those that recognize the cause for their struggles, so they are labeled as stupid and lazy. This low-level of self worth can cause a child to genuinely believe that they are not good enough in school or at anything they do, which will cause them to fail in the rest of the

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aspects of their lives. My goal is to bring attention to these problems to school boards so that teachers may be better prepared to recognize and appropriately manage children with obscure behavioral and psychiatric disorders.

So why do I care? I have a little brother and sister that I originally didn't even consider part of my family that struggle in school. Why should you care? Shouldn't you care about the success of not just the future generation, but as other people as individuals? The foster care system is so corrupted because people *don't* care. There are children that not only have trauma, but also are being wrongfully punished and treated because of the behaviors that their trauma elicits. And this can happen in *good* foster homes with parents that are trying their hardest and raising these children with what they know. So let's add some more realism: not all foster parents have good intentions. Not all foster parents should even be foster parents. Children in the foster care system are there because their biological parents are unfit to parent them. When children enter the foster care system, it is likely that they have experienced emotional and physical abuse at the hands of parents that are on drugs and/or mentally unstable.

Hypothetically, people that aren't good people should not be able to become foster parents. Realistically, many foster homes are abusive and can worsen a child's preexisting psychiatric conditions. Now put these children in a public school environment where they have to deal with all of the normal problems of children their age while living with psychiatric disorders that teachers are ignorant of. This is detrimental to the success and individual growth of children. Without the proper education of teachers or specific programs, these disadvantaged children are overlooked and destined for failure. Through analyzing research and synthesizing it to this widespread problem, I hope to formulate a course of action to provide specialized learning opportunities to children with obscure learning disorders in the public school system.

Not many people, especially those that are not familiar with or involved in the foster care system are aware that such issues that stem from unrecognized psychiatric disorders even exist. There are little to no advocates for this issue. Previous action to fix this topic has not been taken because it is not widely recognized or even realized, especially by those working in the foster care system and in the public school system. I want to change the lack of accommodations and accessibility for behavioral and learning disorders in the education system that prevents foster children or children in general that struggle with psychosocial disorders from receiving an effective education. I want to change this because I have seen firsthand how disadvantaged children with obscure disorders are in the school system because they fall behind due to their mental disorders as well as the symptoms that influence their behavior, resulting in punishment that also disrupts their education.

Personal Experiences

Many first-hand accounts of people's interactions with foster children are often heart wrenching because so many foster children are abused and suffer mentally and socially because of their pasts. These descriptions are one of the strongest assets for arguments for

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reform of the foster care system. The empathy that is elicited from stories about how damaged and traumatized these children are presents a strong appeal to audiences that only recognize financial and economic statistics. The foster care system is often ignored because people like to dismiss the fact that they are ignoring the needs of children, otherwise the blunt truth is too incriminating that these children are treated poorly. The publishing of personal accounts is exceedingly necessary to truly portray how foster children are suffering in the education system because of their specific situations.

In his blog post, “The classroom: A Place of Failure for Children in Foster Care”, John DeGarmo (2016) explains how he noticed children struggling in his classes as a result of an unhealthy home environment. This is what inspired DeGarmo and his wife to become foster parents. Even then, DeGarmo did not understand the full extent of how much foster children struggle in school until he had his first foster children, despite previously seeing it in his classroom. He states that foster children have various psychiatric disorders that require special attention when being taught, but there is a lack of funding for specific care and education for these disorders (DeGarmo, 2016, para. 4). DeGarmo explores other ways in which foster children struggle in school, past the typical cognitive issues. The pasts and environments that foster children experience affect the way that they interact with others, making it hard for them to listen and respect teachers normally as well as forming friendships and positive relationships with their peers. An understated idea that is necessary in the foster care system that DeGarmo touches on is the need for more communication between caseworkers, parents, and teachers for the benefit of the child.

Patricia E. Campie, a principal researcher for the American Institutes for Research, provides specific examples of foster children that aim to do well in school, but struggle due to a lack of accommodation and knowledge for how to effectively educate foster children in her blog post, “Growing Up in Foster Care: Elementary and Middle School” (2016). One student shared her difficulties and frustrations as a foster child in the education system. “Ollie Hernandez moved through nine schools during 10 years in foster care in Las Vegas. Though bright and capable, she struggled because her schools didn’t understand how to work with foster children. She said teachers and school administrators placed her in classes that were either too basic or too advanced” (Campie, 2016, para. 2). This is a common experience amongst foster children as they are constantly experiencing displacement that disrupts their education. Campie details why children struggle in school because of how they are moved from home to home, disrupting their educations and development. The article explores how to help foster care in school, as well as the root causes of their struggles and how to minimize the impact of their traumatic lifestyles in the educational atmosphere. This article is important because it is one of few that provide solutions to help foster children succeed in public school.

Upon hearing a story regarding a child from another foster mother during training, Anum Habicht (2015) decided that she wanted to love and care for a difficult child. This blog post details a foster mother’s experience with her first truly troubled foster child. Habicht details the horrible acts committed by the child, such as knocking down a birds nest, drowning ducklings, damaging property, and inappropriate behavior that was a result of

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previous sexual abuse (Habicht, 2015). Habicht conveys her love for the child even through the distrust and misbehavior exhibited by the girl because of her traumatic past. The specific incidents committed by a troubled foster child with blatant behavioral problems are a real life example that coincides with my own experience.

Habicht discusses her own mistakes that were rooted in ignorance of the child's history, worsened by the child's behavior. "I was tearful. The day I discovered the rage that followed being told to sit in a chair for time-out was caused by having a history of being tied to chairs for hours. I didn't know. I hadn't known" (Habicht, 2015, para. 13). This excerpt highlights the fact that little information about a foster child's past follows them from home to home, as well as the lack of preparation of foster parents. Despite all of the training foster and adoptive parents go through, these guardians are still vastly uneducated concerning how to correctly punish or react to specific behaviors or disorders that foster children have as a result of traumatic pasts. This blog post is important to me because it accurately portrays how behavioral disorders affect a child's outward behavior and prevents them from forming relationships with other people.

Laura McClure utilizes her own experience in her article "What Every Teacher Needs to Know About Students With Learning Disabilities" (2016) in order to inform other teachers and individuals that deal with foster children in an educational setting about what goes on with foster children to explain why they act certain ways and also how to treat them in order to help them. McClure's manifesto is about focusing on what they children can do, rather than only specifying the disabilities. "As a teacher of kids with learning disabilities, sometimes I find myself only focusing upon the child's disability and not their ability. Every child can learn, and often it is because of its other abilities that learning takes place. My wish for every teacher of students with learning disabilities is that we enable children to access and use their learning abilities" (McClure, 2016, para. 4). This positive way of thinking has the potential to not only cultivate educational success, but emotional uplifting as well for the children whose teachers teach them according to their strengths. McClure specialized four different lessons specifying through the scopes of anxiety, executive functions, educating in the midst of neurodiversity, and accommodations and differentiation in order to maximize the information provided to her readers.

I held a focus group with the sister of two adopted children, a girl whose cousins were adopted by her mother, and a student that was in the foster care system from ages 8-18 at which point she aged out. These new and varying perspectives allowed me to broaden the scope of application that I was applying to my topic of how foster children struggle in the school system. The personal anecdotes provided specific examples and shocking real-life experiences that will add to the pathos of my research paper.

The previous foster child talked of her home life during high school and how she provided for herself by working three jobs and going to school. "I never really stayed in my foster home, I stayed in my car... I would go straight to work after school then to my other job until sometimes 2 am all in the same day. I would skip my vocational school on Friday to go to work." The personal sacrifices that this girl had to make as a teen are

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astonishing and heart wrenching to hear about the lengths she had to go to take care of herself because she felt uncomfortable in her foster home. She managed to balance all of this while still keeping up in school and being accepted into college. This is rare as only 10% of foster children go to college and only 3% graduate (Promises2Kids, 2016, para. 3). This is a stark contrast to the now social norm that college is common to attend after high school graduation. This is mentioned by the sister with adopted siblings who discussed her own life in comparison to that of her siblings' half brother, who was placed in different group homes until he eventually aged out of the system: "I graduated and went to college and he aged out of the system, dropped out of high school, and became homeless." We discussed the difference that circumstance can make on the life of a child simply because of how much support or attention they receive during their educational careers.

Having a focus group with a previous foster child that worked hard enough to graduate high school and seek a higher education impacted my own perspective that was more cynical and pessimistic regarding the possible success of foster children in education because of my experience with foster children. Although I do acknowledge that situations vary along with the foster children themselves, so there are different outcomes and personalities that must be considered because one case does not apply to the many. However, it was refreshing and educational to hear from a successful student that beat the odds and worked hard enough to overcome the obstacles that stem from not living in a cohesive, loving home. I will use this information to expand my research and consideration of new perspectives and personal experiences about foster children in education.

Topic Insight

In order to understand how foster children are disadvantaged in the education system, it is important to first clarify the foundation of their struggles. The abuse and unhealthy environments that foster children experience impacts their mental health. An unstable childhood and insecure relationships prevents these children from making meaningful social connections, which can impact how well they learn. If a child cannot participate as a student because their brain is wired to push people away or misbehave, they miss out on valuable education.

The online article published by the Children Services Practice Notes for North Carolina's Child Welfare Social Workers focuses on the broad range of struggles that foster children face educationally. The scope that this information is applied to reveals the many disadvantages that result in poor grades, inadequate accommodation for behavioral and learning disorders, suspensions, expulsions, inability to graduate to the next grade level, and lack of success in postsecondary education and careers (N.C. Division of Social Services and the Family and Children's Resource Program, 2006). In this blog post, the statistics of specific foster children groups are compared to equal control groups from stable homes to contrast how foster children perform more poorly than the controls in each aspect of schooling.

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The facts used in this article are implemented to conclude that the failure of foster children in school sets them up to fail in future aspects of their lives. “It seems reasonable to assume that the kind of educational difficulties described above contribute in some way to these negative long-term outcomes” (N.C. Division of Social Services and the Family and Children’s Resource Program, 2006, para. 12). The statistics stated in the article describe how foster children struggle without proper adaptation for their specific needs because of their lifestyle in order to support the idea that this also prevents them from succeeding later in life. The difficulties and cognitive delay that foster children face without assistance or accommodation results in the suffering of their educational careers. “In another study, youth in foster care who had completed the 10th or 11th grades were reading, on average, at only a seventh grade level (Courtney, et al., 2004)” (N.C. Division of Social Services and the Family and Children’s Resource Program, 2006, para. 2).

There are other groups that recognize and have found direct information supporting the idea that foster children either do not receive enough or correct special education because they cannot always be efficiently implemented into special education programs because of their obscure disorders. “Some who need special education services are overlooked. Others, because of temporary behavioral problems caused by placement disruptions or entry into care, receive special education services even though they don’t really need them (McNaught, 2005; Courtney et al., 2004). At least 30% to 41% of children and youth in care receive special education services (Yu, 2003)... One study found that only 2% of children in out-of-home care in special education classes ever return to the regular classroom, compared to 10% of children not in foster care (Carter, 2002)” (N.C. Division of Social Services and the Family and Children’s Resource Program, 2006, para. 3-4). The lack of proper resources and programs for behavioral and learning disabilities that are not properly addressed in special education programs prevent foster children from getting an appropriate education according to their needs. The lifestyles and traumas experienced by foster children are the cause for the obstacles that cause such outcomes for foster children in school.

Jessica Lahey (2014) published an article for *The Atlantic* that utilizes specific stories of an individual in the foster care system and provides their story while also giving statistics on the foster care system and how children that move homes struggle to absorb information in school. Policies passed to ease the transition between schools, such as the Uninterrupted Scholars Act, are explained as well as an attorney’s hypothetical ideas to improve the education of foster children. All discussed possibilities share main concepts: greater communication regarding children individually between case workers and schools, increased accommodations for foster children’s locations and learning, and more accurate data about foster children’s educational success throughout their time at school and in the system. “Children are estimated to lose four to six months of academic progress per move, which puts most foster care children years behind their peers” (Lahey, 2014, para. 4). The comparison of the disadvantaged foster children because of their lifestyle to their peers conveys urgency. The acknowledgment and publishing of the cognitive and developmental setbacks that foster children are subjected to every time they are displaced is vital to finding a solution.

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I held duo ethnography with a woman who has been a teacher for over twenty years. I chose this particular teacher because I know for a fact that she has taught foster children with behavioral disorders while being aware that they were from the foster system. The prior knowledge of the background of foster children is critical for a teacher so that they can adjust their view and treatment of the children. I have known this woman personally for eight years and I know that she is intelligent and wise from life experience and experience through teaching. The hindsight and perspective that she brought to our conversation was valuable to me because I experience my foster children in a much different environment at home than she does at school. Even though they respect her more and accept her authority, they still challenge her and misbehave.

With the prior knowledge that this teacher has of my siblings, she still admits that at times it can be difficult to treat and punish them appropriately without triggering more bad behavior. “I almost feel bad because I know that she [my adoptive sister] needs to be punished or else her behavior won’t change, but it just feels like sometimes she’s constantly in trouble instead of being able to engage.” Foster children are often misunderstood and because of that they do not receive the education that they need because they are punished or dealt with inaccurately. The previous quote from my discussion with the teacher proves that even with the knowledge of the foster child’s life and disorders, it is difficult to know how to correctly deal with them. This is a prime, real-life example of how teachers are not educated or prepared to accommodate the behaviors that result from obscure disorders and the direct correlation of that to the failure of children in school. If a knowledgeable individual struggles to appropriately handle difficult behaviors from disorders, an ignorant/uneducated teacher’s mistreatment could have detrimental, long-term effects on the child.

In addition to behavioral disorders, we discussed how other developmental and learning disorders affect a child’s success in their education. Regarding my adoptive brother who had fetal alcohol syndrome, dyslexia, and ADHD, the teacher noticed how he struggles and his inadequate self-view affects his typically high-spirited, sweet disposition: “You can see him struggling just to keep up and you can tell that he knows it’s not good enough.” My younger brother is a very kind, caring, sensitive child but he struggles so much in school that he blames himself and thinks that he is stupid when in reality he is learning in an environment that cannot provide for him the education that he needs. This highlights how important it is that either a specific program or accommodations be made because he does not belong in special education, but at the same time he cannot thrive in a classroom with his neuro-normative peers.

Jill M. Waterman, Erum Nadeem, Emilie Paczkowski, Jared Cory Foster, Justin A. Lavner, Thomas Belin, and Jeanne Miranda published “Pre-Placement Risk and Longitudinal Cognitive Development for Children Adopted from Foster Care” (2013) to measure cognitive progress of a child after being adopted out of the foster care system. Because so many children in the foster care system are born with or develop behavioral and psychiatric disorders, they suffer mentally. This is especially prevalent in their educational careers in contrast to their peers from stable households. In this study, the

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specific pasts of children in the foster care system are considered when exploring the roots of the children's cognitive and behavioral struggles.

The methodology implemented for this study was a comparative study between drug-exposed adopted children and adopted children that were exposed to drugs. The lifestyles of foster care children with physical exposure to drugs/have biological or foster parents that are on drugs differ greatly from those that have no such exposure. The exposure to drugs and guardians that are on drugs can cause different behavioral, mental, and psychological disorders than children that were abused and had no exposure to drugs (Waterman, Nadeem, Paczkowski, Foster, Lavner, Belin, and Miranda, 2013, p. 26). The test scores of these two demographics were compared, as well as the success of children adopted out of the foster care system at different age levels. The Department of Children and Family Services reviewed the files of children adopted from foster care and had the adoptive parents return after 2, 12, 24, 36, 48, and 60 months after the initial adoption to have the children take cognitive assessments and at months 36 and 60, standardized tests.

All of the information listed in this study yielded results that reveal environmental factors as the greatest impact on cognitive development rather than genetic or prenatal factors. When combined, prenatal substance exposure and negative environmental factors have more serious effects than just one specific source of trauma or defects (Waterman, Nadeem, Paczkowski, Foster, Lavner, Belin, and Miranda, 2013, p. 17). "Histories of abuse, neglect, and adverse environmental and economic conditions experienced by many children adopted from foster care have also been found to be associated with lower performance on standardized intelligence tests (Bucker et al., 2012; Fishbein et al., 2009; Sameroff, 1998)" (28). The experiences and environments of children in foster care are proven to hinder their success in education. The rate of improvement occurred most rapidly within the first year of adoption. During the first five years after adoption, the cognitive improvement steadily increased and ended with the children testing into an average intelligence range. Children adopted from foster care do better in school than children that remain in the volatile foster system. This concurs with what I have experienced with my own adopted brother and sister. Their ability to interact and perform in school has increased greatly, although the rate has stabilized over time.

Eileen Mayers Pasztor, David Swanson Hollinger, Moira Inkelas, and Neal Halfon published "Health and Mental Health Services for Children in Foster Care: The Central Role of Foster Parents" to identify mental, demographical, and personal needs of foster children that foster parents are unable to accommodate because of a lack of education. This important aspect of raising a foster child is missing from many relationships and all over the foster care system, as parents are not adequately trained. Together, my mother and step father have raised four children before they fostered and adopted DJ and Dede. Despite having over 20 years experience each of parenting, my parents still struggled to parent DJ and Dede accurately in spite of their disorders.

The Center for Healthier Children, Families, and Communities at UCLA sent mail surveys to relevant individuals in the medical care field that must deal with foster parents and children in order to find out how their interactions are. Parents were also surveyed to

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determine the accessibility of health care for foster children. The surveys implemented local policy to find out if there was a correlation between inadequate medical care and local legislature. Parents, social work, and medical professionals were divided randomly into focus groups to discuss their experiences with health care. With easily accessible health care, parents are more likely to learn how to correctly treat their children with mental, physical, or psychiatric disorders. An inability to access such information creates a gap and fails foster children.

Parents reported developmental, health, and behavioral problems and that they found it difficult to get access to reasonable health care professionals that could actually help them within their financial limits. There were also findings of a lack of communication between caseworkers and foster parents as the parents claimed they were ignored by caseworkers. The parents claimed that they were uneducated and unprepared for the implications of the health issues of foster children (Pasztor, Hollinger, Inkelas, Halfon, 2012). This is a direct need for education coming straight from the source that proves that people are not education on the obscure and more difficult side of fostering.

Behavioral Ramifications

The traumatic experiences that foster children are subject to manifest as many different behaviors. The recognition and acknowledgement of such behaviors and their causes is vital to facilitating the success of foster children in school. If teachers can notice when a child is acting out because of their disorders and react appropriately without dismissing and punishing the child, exempting them from their education, the ease with which foster children go through school would greatly increase.

Vicky Kelly starts out her Ted Talk by defining trauma-informed care. This approach focuses on finding out what originated the trauma and how it affects everyday life so that they can be treated psychologically and through psychiatry appropriately. This technique is important because it applies trauma to everyday behavior and can help explain certain behaviors and provide insight into how to treat and deal with such behavior without triggering the trauma. The “sensitive approach and deepening of understanding” (Kelly, 2014) Because of the critical period that childhood trauma occurs in, the developmental deficits incurred by such trauma will affect the rest of the traumatized individual’s life if not correctly treated. Establishing an individual identity and forming secure relationships is more difficult for individuals that have experienced childhood trauma, which prevents them from succeeding in aspects of life that require such constructs, such as school. The paradox that Kelly revolves her argument around is centered around the idea that childhood trauma prevents the brain from performing and engaging normally which results in difficulty during either drug or therapeutic treatment.

Despite the fact that Kelly’s presentation does not specify childhood trauma and its presence in foster children, it lays a basic foundation and provides crucial information regarding how trauma specifically affects the brain and behavior from an individual that has experienced it. Kelly goes in-depth to support the personal experiences from my other sources that describe how difficult it is to interact and appropriately engage with foster

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children by providing scientific and psychological evidence that connects outward behavior with inward problems. If this were widely utilized throughout the foster care system and communicated to teachers, foster children would be treated appropriately and hypothetically struggle less in school. Kelly brings up a difficult question that can accurately be applied to one of the most difficult aspects of dealing with foster children: “Do people with traumatized brains have to get better before we can help them?” (Kelly, 2014). The exploration and discussion of this question amongst individuals with experience in interacting with foster children could result in successful solutions to helping foster children succeed in school and other aspects of life, such as forming relationships.

In “Science for Students with Disabilities: Behavioral Disorders” the National Science Teachers Association explains common behavioral disorders, their affects, how they appear in real-life situations, how to properly address them, and adjust for better treatment through communication and experience. The article is purely informational as it specifies symptoms of emotional and behavior disorders, emotional conflict, and serious emotional disturbance. “The appearance of behavioral disorders is increasing dramatically in our K–12 classrooms. As a result, their presence severely constrains the ability of the school systems to educate students effectively”(National Science Teachers Association, para. 1). The article acknowledges how prevalent behavioral disorders have become and how much they can affect an individual’s education at such early developmental stages. The symptoms are listed as well as potential remedies or accommodating engaging behaviors. This article prompts for the discussion and experimentation of how best to deal with such disorders.

The purpose of Cassandra Simmel’s study, “Risk and Protective Factors Contributing to the Longitudinal Psychosocial Well-Being of Adopted Foster Children”, is to measure the impact of experiences endured by foster children before and after their adoptions. Simmel evaluates the effects of pre-adoption stressors and post-adoption environments on a foster child’s psychosocial functionality. The trauma that fosters children experience while in the foster care system impacts their ability to form relationships and live relatively normal lives because of the fundamental experiences they are deprived of. This study analyzes the short and long term impacts of these risks in the first eight years of adoption. This information is important in pushing for the reform of the foster care system to prove that pre-adoption risk factors can hinder a child’s developmental and social growth.

The study received its information by having foster parents answer surveys two, four, and eight years after an adoption. The survey required information such as whether or not children were adopted from the foster care system and what kind of adoption was made. In order to get quantitative data, this information was processed with the Behavior Problems Index, provided with information from case workers, birth parents, and birth records to determine what issues the adopted children had as pre-adoptive factors. The total BPI was used to form a correlation between pre-adoptive stressors and the behavioral scales of symptomatology, anxiety-depression, oppositional, and antisocial. The pre-adoptive risk factors were physical/ sexual abuse or neglect and prenatal drug, alcohol, and nicotine exposure. The continuous variables were the number of foster care

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placements and age of adoption. These factors were analyzed together to be compared to post-adoption status based on the quality and frequency of cognitive stimulation, discipline styles, and emotional support in the adoptive home. The comparison of pre-adoptive factors and the post-adoption environment is important in order to accurately depict the effect an adoption has on a child.

Throughout the three waves of surveying, the most prominent factor on a foster child's development was placement in multiple homes before adoption. This proved to be detrimental to a child's healing and social development. In general, a child's behavioral problems would stabilize over time, despite the pre-adoption stressors. The second biggest factor that hindered a child's adjustment and personal growth was parental readiness. Parents that judged themselves to be unfit or unprepared for their placements had negative effects on the development of their adopted children (Simmel, 2007). This proves that there is a lack of necessary education for important figures such as parents and teachers in the foster care system. Parents, teachers, and other authority figures need to be educated on how to deal with children from the foster care system that exhibit different behavior because of their disorders. Without preparedness, the guardians for foster children fail them and prevent them from spiritual growth as an individual that is vital to their success.

Approaches

Although the struggles of foster children in school are not widely accepted as a pressing issue, different organizations have worked to alleviate some of the difficulties children in foster care face in the education system. Assigning specific people that have experience with dealing with behavior disorders, interventions, and special accommodations have been attempted approaches to help foster children. These assets can help foster children improve mentally and emotionally at home, which shows in improvement in school.

The U.S. Department of Education published a report to provide information and resources on how to help foster children succeed in the education system. By including links and discussing why and how foster children struggle in school, the U.S. Department of Education presents a holistic approach to provide advantages for foster children through case workers, educational workers, and policy. Instead of focusing mainly on why and how foster children struggle, this report gives solutions and focuses on positive results of the correct assessment and treatment of foster children in school. "A positive PK-12 education experience has the potential to be a powerful counterweight to the abuse, neglect, separation, impermanence and other barriers these vulnerable students experience" (U.S Department of Education, 2016, para. 1). This new approach sheds light on one of the most important and overlooked aspects of the issue of how foster children struggle in school in which it provides alternatives and solutions that could contribute to the success of foster children in school and afterwards. The government is aware of some of the struggles that foster children undergo in the educational system while attempting to help remedy them in order to sow success and hope amongst individuals in the foster community.

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In the article “How to Help a Traumatized Child in the Classroom”, Joyce Dorado and Vicki Zakrzewski explore the rare perspective of how to correctly interact and view foster children. The authors do an incredible job of explaining typical trauma and disorders that foster children suffer from, such as abuse and toxic stress, and how it affects other aspects of their lives, such as forming relationships and learning in school. “While educators sometimes see a misbehaving child as a bad kid or a mean or oppositional kid, Joyce helps them to see that this is a *scared* kid. In other words, the child’s behavior is the result of chronic exposure to traumatic events beyond his or her control” (Dorado, Zakrzewski, 2013, para. 2). This is an accurate way to understand a foster child and their behavior. The article provides specific examples and solutions such as how to recognize and react to a child reverting to defensive behavior because of triggers or sensory overload, as well as adapting teaching styles and classroom environments to accommodate students with trauma or behavioral disorders. The mass communication and education of the information to teachers could assist in the reformation of how the education system fails foster children.

Leslie D. Leve, Gordon T. Harold, Patricia Chamberlain, John A. Landsverk, Philip A. Fisher, and Panos Vostanis conducted the “Practitioner Review: Children in foster care - vulnerabilities and evidence-based interventions that promote resilience processes” to evaluate how efficient standard parenting intervention programs are for foster parents. Due to the myriad of social, psychiatric, behavioral, and health disorders that foster children come to foster parents with, foster parents often require extra assistance or education in how to deal with these children. This study explores the success of parenting interventions and their effect on the quality of life for foster children after having experienced trauma and while coping with their disorders.

In order to find successful interventions and their methods, a PsycINFO search was conducted to find programs that improved the outcomes of foster children. The study was randomized with individual foster children. A sample group had at least 15 people so that the study was fair and had even results. The chosen interventions had to meet specific criteria involving the production of one positive outcome of the intervention. Only eight interventions met these criteria and were applied to specifically identifying and reducing stressors and behavioral problems in the foster children.

Children that had been involved in an intervention typically were able to form secure caregiver attachments, a healthy step to forming positive relationships with others (Leve, Harold, Chamberlain, Landsverk, Fisher, Vostanis, 2012). This is very important in interactions with foster children, as the issue that will plague them for a lot of their lives without proper attention is the inability to form successful relationships. Interventions improved cognitive ability and decreased internalized and externalized symptoms of disorders. Later in a foster child’s life, towards adolescence, there would be less involvement in deviant activity, such as violence and sexual misbehavior. The effects of interventions have proven to be instrumental in the healthy development and overcoming of the risk factors in a foster child’s life (Leve, Harold, Chamberlain, Landsverk, Fisher, Vostanis, 2012). The statistics of interventions indicate a positive trend in foster children’s behaviors and success, which will prevent their involvement in recidivism and

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the vicious cycle in which they are biologically predisposed to follow in their parents' lifestyles.

“The *Special Youth Carer Program*: An Innovative Program for At-Risk Adolescents in Foster Care” was conducted by Robyn Gilbertson, David Richardson, and James Barbero to find the effect that specially trained foster parents have on the success and improvement of foster children. The ignorance and lack of knowledge amongst foster parents is what causes a struggle in both sides of the relationship between children and parents. This program was initiated to reduce instability for foster children so that they have a static guardian. The authority aspect of a foster child's life is a large deciding factor in how well they develop, so a stable guardian provided by this program is being explored to determine how large of an impact it will have.

The data for this study was obtained from Anglicare records to find out the number of carers and placements a child had before being added to the Special Youth Carer program. Qualitative data was retrieved by questionnaires filled out by Family and Youth Services social workers, Anglicare staff, and Anglicare placement summaries. This methodology is important in finding realistic, accurate data from people that have first hand experienced and interacted with children that were part of the Special Youth Carer program.

This study showed that even with carers, there were still negative effects in a child's behavior caused from changes of carers. Eventually, most children were able to leave the program because they had successfully developed enough to find other healthy, suitable living placements. There were no reported deteriorations of behavior and many children showed an improvement in forming relationships and commitment to attendance at school and jobs (Gilbertson, Richardson, Barber, 2005). The stable assignment of one individual to a foster child improves their chances of succeeding as an individual because they have avoided the tumultuous instability from constantly changing custody, which typically results in added behavioral and psychiatric problems.

All of the previous blog posts, articles, case studies, and Ted Talks emphasize the multi-faceted effects that behavioral and psychological disorders impose on children in the education system. When these different perspectives and experiences are synthesized, the need for a solution becomes clear. While not all psychosocial disorders can be cured or, realistically, even addressed, the most efficient and practical solution would be the creation of an “Individualized Special Education Program” as a result of communication between foster parents, case workers, and teachers of foster children. The individualized special education program, or ISEP, report would be created when a child enters the foster system. The document would be a required addition to the child's case file as well as their file in the school system.

Diagnoses of psychosocial disorders would be prevalent on the report, as well as the amount of homes the child has been through, past experiences, and general notes from the child's case worker, psychiatrist, and previous teachers following each completed year of school. Important thoughts regarding the child's struggles socially, mentally,

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emotionally, and educationally would be required by each of the previously listed guardians so that adults in charge of that child can read about their past and their specific coping/symptomatic behaviors in order to properly lead or teach the child. This document would follow the child throughout their school career as well as to each of their foster homes. An academic history, learned strategies that are successful in looking after the child, cognitive and emotional strengths and weaknesses, special considerations, and concerns would be included in the document as listed by foster parents, psychologists and/or psychiatrists, and teachers.

Although an individualized special education program will not completely solve the inner struggles of a foster child that has behavioral or psychological disorders, the increased communication regarding the child that follows him throughout his educational career will increase his success as an individual educationally because keys to his success are provided to relevant individuals. One of the many follies of the foster care system is the lack of communication and information that follows a child. With the creation of an ISEP, I hope that foster children are able to achieve a greater success rate in school while adding ease to their experience in the education system.

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