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RELATIONAL CONNECTIONS FOR YOUTH

RELATIONAL CONNECTIONS FOR YOUTH AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE:

A POLICY CONTENT ANALYSIS

A Dissertation Presented to

the Faculty of The Doctor of Social Work Program of

Kutztown University/Millersville University of Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfilment

of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Social Work

By Heather Miller, MSW LSW

May 2, 2023

RELATIONAL CONNECTIONS FOR YOUTH

The Dissertation of the Doctor of Social Work Degree

By Heather Miller, MSW LSW

has been approved on behalf

of

Kutztown University/Millersville University

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### ABSTRACT

Social work professionals and policymakers are faced with the dilemma of older youth exiting foster care each year with poor outcomes, lacking resources and supports that make successful transitions a challenge. Research suggests that youth who have a supportive relationship with a consistent and trusted adult to help navigate the transition to adulthood supports a youth's successful transition from care. The Federal John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood, initially birthed from the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 and revised through the Family First Prevention Services Act of 2018, provides states with funding and guidance for programs for older youth in foster care. These programs provide this population with assistance with education, employment, financial literacy, housing, emotional support, access to medical care, and connections to caring adults. This study examined the congruence of policies and practice guidelines in Philadelphia County in the state of Pennsylvania to the Chafee Foster Care Program, with a focus on developing connections to caring adults as part of their transition plan from care.

This study utilized conceptual content analysis to examine 46 county-level child welfare policies that guide the implementation of the Federal Chafee Program and the work with older youth in foster care. The sample was drawn from policy documents from Philadelphia County developed since 1999, as this aligns with the inception of the Chafee Foster Care Program. The data was collected and analyzed using NVivo software, specifically looking at content on connections to caring adults, education, emotional support, employment, financial management, housing, independence, and medical care and access. The findings of this study showed that more than half of the policy documents received from Philadelphia County contained language and content about one or more of these areas. The most frequently occurring content area

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involved a focus on independence, with content involving connections to caring adults following closely behind. The themes that emerged from this study encompassed independence, interdependence, and transition planning for older youth preparing to exit foster care. Overall, the policies governing the work with older youth in foster care in Philadelphia County align with the priorities of the Federal Chafee Program and promotes opportunities for older youth in foster care to develop relational connections to caring adults. However, findings showed that there were some significant delays in the inclusion of language providing guidance around supporting the development of relational connections to caring adults in the county-level policies.

*Keywords:* older youth, aging out, social supports, social connections, foster care

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

According to the Department of Human Services (2022a), foster care is a temporary living arrangement for children and youth when their parent(s) are unable to take care of them and whose need has been brought to the attention of a child welfare/government agency and the courts. For this paper, the term foster care refers to any situation where a child or youth is placed in an out-of-home setting, including placement with a family not known to the child (foster care), placement with a family member or family known to the child or youth (kinship care), and placement in a congregate care setting. The federal government provides regulatory guidance and funding through the Title IV-E Foster Care program to states for the provision of safe and stable out-of-home care to children and youth until they can safely return, or other permanency can be reached (Administration for Children and Families, 2022). For older youth who will likely remain in foster care until the age of 18 or are between the ages of 18 and 21 and have aged out of the foster care system, additional programs and funding are supplied through the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood to assist youth aging out of foster care to achieve self-sufficiency. The Chafee Program was initially birthed from the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 and revised through the Family First Prevention Services Act of 2018. The activities and programs provided by the Chafee Program include assistance with education, employment, financial literacy, housing, emotional support, and connections to caring adults (Administration for Children and Families, 2021).

Even with the programs and services made available through the Chafee Program, youth are exiting foster care without the needed preparation, supports, and resources, leading to poor outcomes for this population. The Chafee Program provisions support the need recognized in the literature that youth aging out of foster care need concrete supports as well as social and

relational connections to support a successful transition from care (Administration for Children and Families, 2021). Thus, it is important that states, in their implementation, ensure that policies and program content encompass these critical areas. The application of the Chafee Program can vary among states, as each state is given flexibility in determining the criteria for eligibility and service provision (Stott, 2013). The state of Pennsylvania has a child welfare system that is state supervised, and county administered, with the county developing policies that govern the service provision. Thus, there may be greater variation in the application of the Chafee Program among the counties in Pennsylvania, including Philadelphia County, which will be the focus of this study. Further, the child welfare system in Philadelphia County is unique in its operation and model for service delivery compared to the other counties in the state. For Philadelphia County, the child welfare system operates under the Improving Outcomes for Children (IOC) model, which is a community-based approach to service provision. With this model, Community Umbrella Agencies (CUA) are tasked with providing services to children and families, including older youth in the foster care system. It is important the policies that govern the service provision and implementation of the Chafee Program in Philadelphia County include content providing for concrete supports as well as social and relational connections to support older youth and their successful transition from care. In order to explore this, this study will examine county-level policies and how these policies in Philadelphia County in the state of Pennsylvania align with the Chafee Foster Care Program to support older youth in foster care, including provisions to support youth developing connections to caring adults.

### **Outcomes for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care**

According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2021), there were almost 408,000 children in foster care in the United States in 2020. During that same year, PA Partnerships (2021) stated

that Pennsylvania had 21,689 children and youth in foster care, with 5.6% between the ages of 18 and 20 and preparing to age out of care. The same report stated that 9.5% of older youth in foster care in Pennsylvania emancipated, or aged out, of foster care in 2020. The aging out process for youth involved in the foster care system starts around the age of 16 and ends between the ages of 18 and 21.

Previous studies that gathered information from older youth in foster care or youth who have recently aged out of foster care confirm that older youth aging out of the foster care system entering this transition to emerging adulthood do so without adequate preparation, with limited safety and support networks, and with limited resources (Cunningham & Diversi, 2013; Lalayants et al., 2015; Leathers et al., 2019; Nesmith & Christophersen, 2014; Packard & Benuto, 2020). While in foster care, young people are provided with necessities such as food, clothing, housing, as well as education, medical care, health insurance, and mental health services. Youth also are afforded the opportunity to engage in services to develop life skills and independent living skills. Further, youth have access to service providers, social workers, foster parents or other caregivers to help ensure that their needs are being met. As youth exit care, many of these critical provisions and support networks are no longer available to the youth, leaving youth who are exiting care vulnerable and at risk for significant difficulties in important life domains (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006; Munson & Scott, 2007). Unfortunately, much of the research conducted has shown that the outcomes in early adulthood for youth transitioning from foster care are extremely poor (Courtney et al., 2009; Cushing et al., 2014; Munson & Scott, 2007). This is of considerable concern to social work professionals, as youth in foster care require greater supports, services, and safety nets than their peers who have not been involved in the child welfare system (Packard & Benuto, 2020). Courtney et al. (2009) conducted a



longitudinal study of 763 older youth transitioning from foster care across three Midwest states, where data was collected over the course of seven years. According to this study, 18% of youth that have aged out of foster care have experienced homelessness at least once, while more than 50% have experienced homelessness more than once. Of the youth surveyed, only half reported having adequate social supports, which would include someone that listens to them, someone to help with favors, someone to loan money, or someone to encourage them with their goals. A quarter of the youth surveyed did not receive a high school diploma or GED by the time they turned 21 and only 30% completed any college. The unemployment rate for the youth surveyed was almost 50% and only 37% received any job training. Only 50% of the youth reported to have medical insurance and 39% had dental insurance. Only 60% of the youth reported having a relationship with someone they considered to be a mentor. Further, less than 25% of the youth surveyed reported that they received independent living services (housing, education, employment, health education, financial education, and mentoring). It was noted that it was unclear why this number was so low, but it was suggested that it may be due to a lack of access to independent living services.

Further, looking at the state of Pennsylvania, a report from Annie E. Casey Foundation (2018), showed that of the youth in foster care in this state who are 18 years of age or older and are preparing for transition from care, very few youth participate in transition services, with only 41% participating in employment or vocational services, 20% participating in education financial assistance services, and 13% participating in housing assistance services. Further, in Pennsylvania, 44% of youth aging out of care are employed, 75% earned a high school diploma or GED, and 63% have stable housing. These outcomes are slightly worse than other youth aging out of foster care across the United States, where 49% of youth aging out of care are

employed, 76% earned a high school diploma or GED, and 70% have stable housing. However, for older youth in the general population of the United States that have not been in foster care 57% are employed and 92% earned a high school diploma or GED. In Philadelphia County in the state of Pennsylvania, according to Philadelphia DHS' Quarterly Indicator Report for Fiscal Year 2021 Quarter 2, there are 1348 youth between the ages of 14 and 22 that are dependent youth and currently in out-of-home placement. Of these youth, 49% are between the ages of 14-16, 42% between the ages of 17-19, and 9% age 20 or older. Further, the data from the fiscal year (FY20) showed that 293 youth aged out of the foster care system and of these youth, only 65% had an identified life connection, 51% had a source of income, and 56% had a permanent residence. Philadelphia County will be the geographical area of focus for this study.

While research shows that young adults who experienced foster care have worse outcomes than their peers in the general population across a variety of areas, including education, housing, and employment, what has been shown to mitigate the risks and poor outcomes for youth are social supports and relational connections (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2022; Packard & Benuto, 2020; Rosenberg, 2019). In fact, youth aging out of foster care who identified at least one adult who provided social support were less likely to have unmet needs and more likely to acquire and utilize social services (Katz & Courtney, 2015; Semanchin Jones & LaLiberte, 2013).

### **Social Supports and Connections**

Social work professionals and policymakers must contend with youth exiting foster care each year that have poor access to resources and supports that make successful transitions a challenge. Of the literature reviewed, many authors suggest that having a supportive relationship with a consistent and trusted adult to help navigate the transition to adulthood is critical for an

older youth's successful transition from care (Abrams et al., 2017; Avery, 2011; Zinn et al., 2017). Older youth that are aging out of care need the support of adults that they can trust to serve as supports and assist them in successfully manage real life situations and circumstances (Kelly & Simmel, 2019; Packard & Benuto, 2020). These supports can also provide a mechanism for offering information and support to the youth as well as influencing their self-worth and ability to build trust (Singer et al., 2013). Further, studies have shown that older youth that are preparing to exit the foster care are more likely to transition successfully when they are exposed to and have opportunity to develop life skills that serve as protective factors (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2018; Rosenberg, 2019). Protective factors, such as self-regulation skills, relational skills, and academic skills can help to mitigate the risk factors that may be present for the youth and increase the likelihood for future positive outcomes. For instance, self-regulation skills help youth manage and control their emotions and relational skills support youth in developing and maintaining positive relationships and bonds. Further, older youth that are aging out of care consider emotional supports, social supports, relationships, as well as permanent connections as necessary protective factors in their transition (Hokanson et al., 2020; Katz & Geiger, 2020; Trejos-Castillo et al., 2015).

Cunningham and Diversi (2013) noted that frequent moves, which are not uncommon for youth in foster care, hinder youth's ability to foster relationships and connections. As a result, youth may find it necessary to meet challenges on their own and rely on themselves, as they may hold a fear of being rejected when asking for help. Additionally, youth may also avoid personal and permanent connections to avoid additional losses. Therefore, it is important that programs serving this population provide opportunities for youth to develop supportive relationships. While services and traditional programs for older youth in foster care and aging out focus on

promoting independent living skills and self-sufficiency, this is not enough. Youth benefit from a gradual transition from care and support in achieving interdependence and having a safety net of people they can use for support (Cunningham & Diversi, 2013; Freundlich & Avery, 2006; Hokanson et al., 2020; Nesmith & Christophersen, 2014).

The need for social support and supportive relationships for older youth exiting from foster care has been discussed in the literature for almost 2 decades, from mostly studies where information was gathered through interviews, focus groups, and surveys of youth, caregivers, and child welfare professionals. Additionally, the provisions of the federal Chafee Program include supporting youth in developing connections with caring adults. Yet this remains as an unmet need. It appears that what has not been given much examination are the policies at the state or county level that govern the work with older youth aging out of foster care. It is important to work to improve the practices, programs and policies that help ensure youth aging out of foster care have the relationships, resources, and opportunities they need for well-being and success. At the federal level, the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program offers provisions to states to offer services and supports to youth preparing to age out of foster care. An analysis of the state and county level implementation of the Chafee Program and the work with this population may help identify what priority is placed on providing youth with opportunities to develop connections to supportive adults. For this study, an analysis will examine the policies that govern the implementation of the Chafee Program in Philadelphia County in the state of Pennsylvania and explore how county-level policies in Philadelphia County align with the Chafee Foster Care Program to support youth in foster care, including provisions to support youth developing connections to caring adults as part of their transition plan from care.

**Federal Laws/Policies Supporting Work with Older Youth**

Programs exist in child welfare agencies across the country to serve older youth in foster care and transitioning out of foster care. These programs and services are vital to promoting good outcomes for this population and are in place as a result of the federal laws and policies intended to support the child welfare system in creating policies, programs, and interventions to support older youth who are transitioning from care (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2018). The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 launched the John H. Chafee Independence Program for states to provide financial, housing, employment, and other supportive services to assist older youth exiting care and preparing for independence. The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 allows states to extend foster care for older youth to the age of 21, provided that the youth meet the school, work, or training requirements. Namely, for youth to remain in care beyond the age of 18, youth are required to be enrolled in an educational or vocational program, participating in a program that is designed to promote or remove barriers to employment, or working at least 80 hours per month. These requirements can be waived for youth with chronic medical conditions that hinder their ability to work or attend an educational or vocational program. This piece of legislation also promotes proper planning for transition from care. The Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014 requires child welfare agencies to begin planning for youth in care starting at age 14 and include the youth in the process of their transition plan planning. Further, this legislation requires that agencies ensure that youth in foster care have their birth certificate, social security card, health insurance information, medical records, and driver's license or state identification. Finally, the Family First Prevention Services Act of 2018 revised the John H. Chafee Program, including renaming it to the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, and allows for increased and

enhanced supports for a successful transition for each youth, with an emphasis on a gradual transition into adulthood with strong social supports (Lindell et al., 2020). The Chafee Program provides the states with funding and guidance for service provision to support older youth and their transition from foster care. The policies guiding the implementation of the Chafee Program in the state of Pennsylvania, specifically in Philadelphia County, will be the focus of a content analysis in this study in order to assess their alignment with priorities of the Chafee Foster Care Program, including supporting youth developing connections to caring adults.

### **Effectiveness of Federal Chafee Program**

Despite the provisions in place through the Chafee Program to promote successful transition for older youth in the foster care system, it is uncertain how effective the application of the provisions has been. The Chafee Program federal funding includes \$140 million to provide services for education and training, career exploration, financial management and budgeting, daily living skills, substance use prevention, housing, health care, and development of interpersonal skills (Okpych, 2015). States are given flexibility in defining criteria for service provision and eligibility, which leads to variation between states. Further, states are not required to serve their entire population of youth transitioning from foster care; rather, each state has discretion on which youth are served and to what degree (Stott, 2013). For instance, in the state of Pennsylvania, eligible youth are able to access funding for education or training programs up to age twenty-three (Department of Human Services, 2022). However, in the state of Delaware, eligible youth can access similar funding up to age twenty-six (Department of Services to Children, Youth, and Their Families, 2022).

Social workers working with older youth place a heavy emphasis on independent living skills and lack focus on supporting youth in developing relational skills (Tao et al., 2013). When

asked for feedback on service provision, social workers find it easy to offer suggestions for practices related to life skill development but offer little to no suggestions on achieving permanent relationships (Tao et al., 2013).

It is also unclear how prepared child welfare professionals are in supporting older youth transitioning from care (Packard & Benuto, 2020; Tao et al., 2013). What is clear is that there is growing awareness that in addition to life skill development and independent living skills, older youth that are transitioning from care need supportive, lifelong connections to caring adults, with at least one that serves in a parent-like capacity (Kelly & Simmel, 2019). Child welfare and government agencies must recognize the significance of policies guiding the Chafee Program to help ensure youth aging out of foster care have the supportive relationships, resources, and opportunities they need for well-being and success. It does not appear that much examination has been given to reviewing the content of the policies that govern the implementation of the Chafee Program at the county level. An analysis of the policies that govern the implementation of the Chafee Program at the county level may help identify gaps in supporting youth aging out of foster care in developing both life skills and supportive relationships with caring adults.

This study will examine the policies on the supports needed for older youth aging out of the foster care system, with a focus on the need for and impact of social supports and connections for this population. This study seeks to understand to what extent county-level policies and practice guidelines in Philadelphia County in the state of Pennsylvania align with the Chafee Foster Care Program goals, objectives, and guidelines to support the successful transition of youth from foster care. An analysis of existing county-level policies in Philadelphia County will help to identify if the county child welfare agency is implementing the federal Chafee Foster Care Program policies to support older youth's successful transition to adulthood

and including provisions to support youth developing connections to caring adults as part of their transition plan from care.

### **Reflexivity Statement**

The researcher has been working for the past 28 years in the child welfare system in Philadelphia County, which is the county of focus for this study. Additionally, the researcher is currently the Director in an agency that contracts with Philadelphia Department of Human Services to provide services to children and families, including older youth in foster care. Given the length of time working within this system and the executive leadership position the researcher currently holds, it seems apparent that the researcher holds a great deal of knowledge about this system. While this knowledge may be useful for this study, it will be important for the researcher to be aware of any bias held and to avoid forming any conclusions on information other than that which is collected as part of this study. This research will provide useful insight into the content of the policies that guide the work with older youth, including identifying areas of strength and areas needing further development. The outcome of this research could support the development of a framework for best practice that includes transitioning planning for older youth preparing to exit foster care that addresses their concrete and practical needs along with the needs for relational connections.

### **Research Question**

It is imperative that the policies that guide the work with this population include language and provision for concrete needs, independent living skills, and the development of social support and relational connections. Do Philadelphia County policies and practice guidelines align with goals of the Chafee Foster Care Program to support the successful transition of youth from foster care? An examination of existing county-level policies will help to identify how



Philadelphia County is implementing the federal Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood and including provisions to support youth developing connections to caring adults as part of their transition plan from care.

The outcome of this exploration could support the development of a framework for best practice for social support, both for policies and service provision. This could include policies and practice guidelines that support transitioning planning for older youth preparing to exit foster care that addresses their concrete and practical needs along with the needs for supports and relational connections. This could also include the development of training and education for social workers that serve this population to ensure that they possess the skill and knowledge to support older youth in this area. Avery (2011) suggests that social work professionals who have a clear understanding of how youth transitioning from the foster care system to adulthood perceive support, support providers, and resources offered to them, they will find that the youth will be more receptive to engage. This could result in more youth who accept and utilize valuable resources and will increase their ability to thrive as young adults and develop the needed social supports and connections with caring adults to support their transition.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The purpose of this review is to examine research pertaining to older youth in the foster care system and the supports needed for this population as they transition from care. To this end, qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods studies were reviewed, gathered through searches using Kutztown University library and EBSCO. The keywords used were older youth, aging out, social supports, social connections, and foster care. Information was also gathered through Google searches for reports and other data sources, using the same keywords. Additionally, this review describes theories that help guide this study; namely, Attachment Theory, Systems Theory, and Ecological Systems Theory.

### **Supports Needed for Older Youth Transitioning from Care**

Older youth transitioning from foster care need the proper resources and supports for a successful transition, including resources in the areas of housing, employment, education, health care, and mental health services (Turning Points for Children, 2019). Using a needs assessment tool, Turning Points for Children (2019) examined the needs of older youth between the ages of 16 and 21 in foster care and served by their agency. That study found that as they prepare to exit foster care, youth may need support in developing a realistic and sustainable housing plan, as well as developing financial literacy to develop a budget and pay their bills. Youth may also need support in planning for and in obtaining employment, which could include coaching and training on interview skills, resume development, and selecting appropriate attire. Additionally, youth may need support in planning for their education, which includes applying to educational programs and accessing financial aid. Further, youth may need support in maintaining health insurance after exiting care and in accessing healthcare and mental health services.

In addition to concrete and practical supports for older youth as they transition out of the foster care system, social supports and connections to caring and stable adults serve as protective factors and are crucial for the older youths' success (Kelly & Simmel, 2019). Social support involves relationships that lead an individual to feel cared for, valued, and connected to a community (Packard & Benuto, 2020; Rosenberg, 2019). Further, a study involving 88 youth who are preparing to exit foster care noted that social support is both the perception and feeling of being supported along with the actual exchange of resources (Nesmith & Christophersen, 2014). A high level of social support, which can include emotional support, advice or guidance, material aid, or spending time with the youth, is essential for youth transitioning out of the foster care system, as many youth find that their social support needs are unmet at the time of their transition from care. Supportive relationships are useful with youth transitioning from foster care to enhance resilience and decrease probability of poor outcomes (Collins et al., 2010).

There is a need for a safety net for foster care youth transitioning into independence, similar to the parental support system received by their peers. Group homes, where older youths are often placed, often hinder the development of relationships with members of the community and give youths fewer opportunities to develop adult mentors, high staff turnover prevent youth from developing lasting relationships with responsible adults (Atkinson, 2008). One of the most important factors leading to positive outcomes among youth with foster care experience is support from a caring adult (Avery, 2011; Katz & Geiger, 2020). Many older youth leave foster care without having established such relationships with an adult and often have little to no social scaffolding due to multiple relational disruptions. This type of social support is valuable in the transition to adulthood. Further, the nature of the relationships with these caring adults were described as trusting, unconditional, flexible, and enduring (Avery, 2011; Katz & Geiger, 2020).

Further, surveys of ninety-six youth who recently aged out of foster care found that the key characteristics of these relationships, from the perspective of the youth, included the acceptance of the youth, constant encouragement, and the ability to provide consistent assistance (Collins et al., 2010).

Social supports can exist in the form of formal networks that include child welfare professionals and informal networks that included family members and peers and can serve to provide informational support, instrumental support or spending time with the youth, emotional support, and appraisal support or providing feedback to the youth (Singer et al., 2013). The combination of both formal and informal supports can be useful, as formal supports can serve as bridge support to model and develop positive and permanent relationships with informal connections. Additionally, there is a need to develop supports and connections with youth in foster care early on and ongoing, and this should continue to be developed after the youth transitions from foster care (Zinn et al., 2017).

Social supports, emotional supports, a relationship with a trusted adult, and permanent connections have shown to improve protective factors in older youth transitioning from foster care, as well as contributing to their overall well-being (Rosenberg, 2019; Trejos-Castillo et al., 2015). For instance, a study involving two hundred and forty-two youth previously in foster care suggests that youth who have stable relationships with multiple caregiving adults were more likely to be employed and were better able to pay for their living expenses in adulthood than were youth who lacked these supports (Cushing et al., 2014). The youth were also less susceptible to risk behaviors. Surveys and interviews with more than one hundred young adults who were previously in foster care found that youth with supportive relationships with adults were more likely to pursue post-secondary education, were more likely to complete high school

or obtain their GED, were less likely to experience homelessness, less likely to be arrested, and more likely to be employed (Collins et al., 2010). Further, youth who have stable relationships with a trusted adult have the opportunity for enhanced social relationships, improved cognitive skills through instruction and conversation, and supported the development of positive view of themselves (Avery, 2011). Conversely, youth who age out of foster care without stable connections are vulnerable to poor outcomes; namely, they are less likely to graduate from high school, more likely to be unemployed, more likely to experience homelessness, and have less earning potential (Courtney et al., 2009).

### **Youth Perception of Support**

Not only are the presence of supports important for older youth as they transition from care, the youth's perception of those supports is also important. A qualitative study by Packard and Benuto (2020) involving 10 youth between the ages of 18 and 21 who recently aged out of foster care examined social supports for youth aging out of foster care along with the youth's perception of these supports. Their definition of social support included the feeling that one is cared about and valued by others. They suggest that this type of support can promote increased sense of self-worth, enhance coping skills, and decrease stress and other physical and mental health concerns. Packard and Benuto (2020) further suggest that social support varies for individuals in different developmental stages and for those who have experienced instability, such as youth that have been in foster care. The key factor in social support is the individual's belief that they have people who care about them and are willing to provide emotional and tangible support. Through a qualitative, case study design, they examined the perceptions of young adults transitioning from the foster care system and whether the supports offered matched their perceived needs. Their findings suggest that unconditional positive regard and

empowerment were important supports that youth transitioning from foster care need. While tangible supports are necessary and helpful, the young adults in this study indicated that they would only accept tangible supports if emotional supports in the form of unconditional positive regard and empowerment were given. The study suggests that social supports and relational connections are crucial to supporting youth in transitioning from the foster care system and having these supports in place were key to the youth's willingness to accept other more tangible supports, such as financial or housing assistance.

Lalayants et al. (2015) conducted a qualitative study with eight transition-aged youth and fourteen caregivers of transition-aged youth to examine older youth's perceptions of self-sufficiency as they transition from care, along with the perceptions of the youth and their caregivers of the supports needed to attain self-sufficiency. These authors note that research on youth transitioning from care experience limited social support while at the same time relying too much on others. For youth and their caregivers, a key indicator of self-sufficiency is the ability to not need to depend on others. Findings from this study note that both youth transitioning from care as well as their caregivers recognize that the caregivers play a vital role in teaching necessary life skills, providing a sense of safety and security, and assuring a sense of belonging. Further, it is important to note that both youth and their caregivers expressed a desire to promote an ongoing relationship for emotional and relational support beyond the youth's transition from care. This study supports the need for youth in foster care to be connected to caring adults, while in care and during the transition to adulthood. Thus, child welfare agencies must hold this as a value and priority as reflected in the policies and practice guidelines that govern the work with this population.

### **Caseworker Understanding of Needs of Youth Aging Out of Foster Care**

Studies also exist that examine the perceptions of caseworkers who work with older youth in foster care about the needs of this population as they are aging out of care and the supports and services that exist. Leathers et al. (2019) examined this area and suggest that early and ongoing transition planning is necessary to provide an opportunity for caseworkers, alongside the youth, to engage in the development of a plan to build the needed supports and services for the youth to have a successful transition. These efforts toward transition planning promote improved access to services and social supports and connections. Further, their findings noted the importance of the youth's participation in the planning process. An additional study conducted by Tao et al. (2013) examined child welfare caseworker's understanding of and approach to working with the older youth population as they prepared to exit care. Their findings support the need for early and ongoing planning by the youth and their social workers and discussion to prepare youth for a successful transition.

Lalayants et al. (2015) assert that caregivers of older youth need to be trained on how to build trusting and supportive relationships, as well as how to engage with youth who are not otherwise ready to engage. Avery (2011) suggests in a systemic review of relevant literature that social work professionals who have a clear understanding of how youth transitioning from the foster care system to adulthood perceive support, support providers, and resources offered to them, they will find that the youth will be more receptive to engage if they are shown unconditional positive regard. This may result in more youth who accept and utilize valuable resources and will increase their ability to thrive as young adults. Youth's perceptions are essential in developing services for youth that they will use and view as helpful.

The research reviewed points to the importance of both practical and social supports for older youth as they are transitioning out of foster care. As previously stated, older youth aging out of the foster care system are often faced with challenges including inadequate preparation, limited safety and support networks, and limited resources. Effective transition planning is needed to ensure that older youth transitioning out of the child welfare system have the necessary support networks and relationships, life skills, and resources to make a successful transition (Turning Points for Children, 2019). This includes planning for practical and concrete support for education, housing, employment, and access to health care, along with the development of strong connections and relationships with caring adults who are willing to be a support to the youth.

Social workers working with this population need to identify and support relationships for youth preparing to transition from care. In a study of twenty youth preparing to age out of foster care conducted by Singer et al. (2013), the youth identified formal networks that included child welfare professionals and informal networks that included family members and peers. Although youth identified connections in their lives, these individuals did not always provide the support needed. Further, the study noted four types of support identified: namely, informational support, instrumental support, emotional support, and appraisal support. Informational support involved providing guidance or advice. Instrumental support involved spending time with the youth or providing them with tangible goods or money. Emotional support included providing companionship and affection. Appraisal support involved providing feedback to the youth for purposes of improving their self-worth. The study found that informal supports provided emotional support but lacked instrumental and appraisal support. Further, the study noted importance of "bridge supports" that are necessary to model and develop positive and permanent



relationships with informal connections. Additionally, information collected from interviews with more than seven hundred youth across three states suggest that there is a need to develop supports and connections with youth in foster care early on and ongoing, and this should continue to be developed after the youth transitions from foster care (Zinn et al., 2017).

### **Interdependence Rather Than Independence**

Research studies that gathered information from interviews with former foster youth as well as professionals working with that population examined congregate programs that serve older youth in foster care and found that programs that focus primarily or only on life skills/independent living skills are not sufficient for a youth's successful transition from foster care (Freundlich & Avery, 2006; Munson & Scott, 2007). Traditional independent living skills are important but are not enough and do not provide what is needed to assist youth aging out of care in becoming self-sufficient (Nesmith & Christophersen, 2014). Instead, programs that support the development of basic living skills along with meaningful relationships are critical to youth that are aging out of care. Programs geared toward supporting older youth in their transition to adulthood are effective when there is a focus on life skill development and building connection and supportive relationships (Trejos-Castillo et al., 2015). It is suggested that programming that nurtures relationships should be included in the independent living skills training offered to youth in care. It is important that young adults that leave foster care know how to interview for a job, find housing, and manage their money. Equally important is that they have a safety net of people they can turn to for advice, emotional support, or even concrete support.

Older youth are expected to make some of the most important life transitions with compromised family support (Munson & Scott, 2007). Youth aging out of care require

supportive and permanent connections to help model positive behaviors and provide emotional support and guidance (Trejos-Castillo et al., 2015). Further, pro-social connections with caring adults can help to improve overall well-being for the youth and promote hope for the future. A critical component to these connections is that the youth feel cared for and connected.

There is growing body of research on interdependence, rather than independence, for youth aging out of care (Hokanson et al., 2020). Healthy connections to trusted adults may better help youth navigate the transition to adulthood; however, there is a tension between interdependence and a developmental need for independence. Youth aging out of foster care feel both an internal and external pressure to be completely independent, yet they have identified benefits to interdependence and building safety nets of interdependent relationships. Interdependence honors a need for, and supports engagement with, trusted adults, while independence pushes for less connectedness. This author's findings derived from interviews with 20 youth who are close to or have aged out of foster care suggest that youth are not likely to ask for help and there is an expectation to be independent. Singer et al. (2013) agrees with the notion of interdependence as a need for youth transitioning from care. Their study interviewed 20 youth between the ages of 18-21 that were still in foster care and examined social support of youth transitioning from foster care, their relationships and connects, and the quality of the relationships from the youth's perspective. The authors confirm the importance of at least one stable, caring adult in the life of youth transitioning from care. They also challenge the notion of independent living and self-sufficiency and replace with interdependent living to support youth developing and maintaining supportive relationships rather than relying solely on themselves. Programs and services that support interdependence for youth preparing to exit care should employ relationship-based strategies that help in the development of relationships with caring

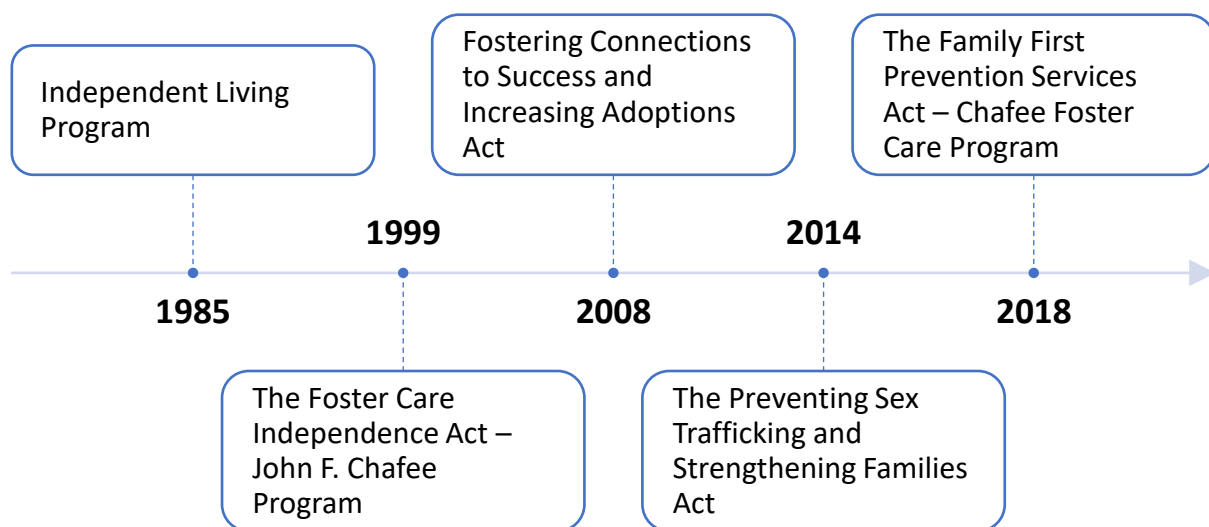
adults. This is supported by the provisions and guidance of the Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood. A major focus of research since the implementation of the Chafee Program has reinforced the critical importance of relationships for youth exiting foster care, as these relationships are viewed as good outcomes as well as catalyst for further good outcomes (Collins, 2019).

### **Analysis of Federal Legislation Providing Support to Older Youth in Foster Care**

The Federal Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood, originally established under the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, provides funding and resources to states to be able to create programs to support older youth in foster care and in their transition from care. Using Karger’s model for social policy analysis, the Chafee Program will be examined, including the historical background of the policy, a description of the problem that necessitated the policy, the policy description, and the policy analysis (Karger & Stoesz, 2018). Further, a timeline of the legislation that established and further revised the Federal Chafee Program is reflected in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1**

#### *Federal Legislation Supporting Older Youth in Foster Care*



## **Historical Background**

Congressional attention to older youth in foster care was prompted after reports of poor outcomes for this population and discovery that these youth were aging out of care without a plan to transition (Allen & Nixon, 2000). The earliest legislation to note that gave attention to the needs of this population was the Independent Living Program, which was established in 1985 when the United States government amended Title IV-E of the Social Security Act (Chor et al., 2018). This was established as a response to the needs of older youth in the foster care system who were more likely to remain in foster care and age out rather than reach permanency through reunification or adoption. The Independent Living Program authorized states to offer practical skill-building services, such as budgeting, nutrition, housing, and employment to youth in foster care between the ages of 16 and 18 to prepare them for self-sufficiency (Chor et al., 2018; Perez et al., 2019).

Congressional bills were drafted to further amend the Title IV-E of the Social Security Act and the Independent Living Program in response to the needs of older youth in the foster care system. In May 1988, the Foster Care Independent Living Amendment was introduced. This amendment proposed to offer federal assistance to states in establishing and carrying out independent living initiatives to assist youth in making the transition from foster care to independent living (GovTrack.us, 2022b). A vote was never taken on this bill, and it died in Congress. In October 1990, an amendment to the Title IV of the Social Security Act was introduced that requires states to provide assistance in circumstances where the placement of certain youth in foster care or transitional independent living may not be carried out immediately. Also, a vote was never taken on this bill.

Further revisions to Title IV-E of the Social Security Act brought about the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (Library of Congress, 1999). This legislation mandated states to serve youth who are likely to remain in foster care (older youth), are on the verge of aging out, or who have aged out. It allowed for provision of voluntary services to youth who are moving toward self-sufficiency and transitioning to adulthood. Further, it provided states with increased funding and greater flexibility in using funding to support programs for this population. This legislation also increased support to older youth transitioning out of foster care by broadening the eligibility requirements to obtain Medicaid. The John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood was birthed from this legislation and supports states in providing housing, employment, financial, healthcare, connections to caring adults, and other supportive services to older youth preparing to transition from care (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2018; Chor et al., 2018).

In July 2005, the Strengthening the Chafee Foster Care Independent Living Program bill was introduced to address some weaknesses in implementation of the Chafee Program identified by child welfare experts (GovTrack.us, 2022c). These weaknesses included gaps in the availability of mental health services, mentoring, and housing. An additional weakness noted was the variability among states in determining eligibility for youth to access services. This bill did not receive a vote and was not enacted into law.

Later, in 2008, the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act was passed (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019). This allowed states to extend foster care to youth up through age 21, as long as the youth met one of the eligibility requirements. These requirements included enrollment in an educational or vocational program, participation in a program to promote employment, or employed at least 80 hours per month. Youth could be

exempt from meeting these criteria and remain in foster care if they are diagnosed with a medical condition that hinders their ability to work or attend an educational program. This legislation also required that a transition plan be developed for youth at least ninety days prior to their emancipation. Prior to the passing of this legislation, youth were expected to make the transition from foster care at age 18. Interestingly, a little more than fifty percent of states extend foster care beyond the age of 18, despite the federal provisions that would allow this in each state (Congressional Research Services, 2019).

Next, in 2014, the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act was passed (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019). This legislation further enhanced the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program to ensure that youth who remain in foster care until age 18 have regular and ongoing opportunities for age and developmentally appropriate extracurricular activities, enrichment activities, cultural activities, and social activities. This also made provision for youth ages 14 or older to participate in the development of their case plans, including transition plans for when they are ready to exit foster care. Further, this legislation requires that all youth leaving foster care at age 18 or older be provided with a copy of their birth certificate, social security card, health insurance information, medical records, and a driver's license or state issued identification card.

More recently, the Family First Act of 2018, renamed the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program to the Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood and made some marked revisions to the program (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019). Specifically, the revisions included making the program available to youth who have been in foster care at age 14 or older. It also made education and training vouchers available to eligible youth between the ages of 14 and 26 but limited the participation in the

program to five years total. It allowed states to provide the Chafee program to youth up to age 23 when those states extended foster care to age 21, even for youth who have aged out of foster care and not yet reached age 23. Finally, it places a focus on a gradual transition from care, rather than a focus on independence (Lindell et al., 2020).

### **Problems that Necessitate the Policy**

Prior to the early 1980s, little attention was given to the needs or outcomes of older youth in foster care. However, when the requirement for case plan and periodic case reviews to be conducted for all children and youth in foster care, the fact that older youth were aging out of care without plans to support the transition was discovered (Congressional Research Services, 2019). Since that time, research has shown that youth aging out of foster care often do so without adequate preparation and with limited resources and experience poor outcomes (Berzin et al., 2014; Packard & Benuto, 2020). Youth exiting foster care are considered a high-risk group and face significant challenges (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006; Munson & Scott, 2007). These challenges include homelessness or housing instability, mental health concerns, substance use issues, unemployment, inadequate life skills, less likely to graduate from high school, and are more likely to come in contact with the criminal justice system (Child Welfare Gateway, 2018; Courtney et al., 2009). These poor outcomes can be attributed, in part, to the fact that youth exiting care do so with minimal skills and supports.

### **Policy Description**

The Federal Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (Chafee Program), originally established under the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 and revised under subsequent pieces of legislation, provides funding and guidance to states to provide services to youth preparing to age out of the foster care system with the intention of improving

outcomes for this population. Youth who are eligible for the Chafee Program include youth in foster care between ages of 14 and 21; youth who have aged out of foster care and are between the ages of 18 and 21 (or up to the age of 23 in states that extend foster care to age 21); youth who left foster care at age 16 or older due to permanency until they reach the age of 21 (or up to age 23 in states that extend foster care to 21); and youth likely to remain in care until the age of 18. The Chafee Program has three broad goals; namely, to help youth who are expected to be in foster care until the age of 18 receive education, training, support to obtain employment; to provide emotional support and connections to supportive adults; and to provide a range of services and supports for youth between the ages of 18 and 21 (Allen & Nixon, 2000). These services may consist of educational assistance, career exploration, mentoring, and health care. Also, states can utilize up to thirty percent of their program funding toward room or board for youth ages 18 to 21 (and up to age 23 in states that have extended foster care to age 21), which includes room or board for youth who attend institutions of higher education. Room or board is not defined in statute but typically includes food and shelter, and may include deposits, startup costs, rent, and utilities (Congressional Research Services, 2019). Further, the Chafee Program statute includes additional authorization and funding to states to provide Education and Training Vouchers (ETV) up to \$5,000 per year or cost of attendance (if less than \$5,000) for youth to attend an institute of higher education. Cost of attendance, as defined by the Higher Education Act (HEA) includes tuition, fees, books, supplies, and an allowance for transportation and childcare. HEA defines institution of higher education to include public or private nonprofit colleges and universities as well as other postsecondary institutions, such as technical training programs and vocational schools (Congressional Research Services, 2019).



As of fiscal year 2020, the statute provides \$143 million annually in mandatory funding for the Chafee program and discretionary funding for ETV funding of up to \$60 million annually. In order to receive funds, states must submit a five-year plan with annual updates to the Federal Department of Health and Human Services that describes how it intends to implement Chafee-funded program and affirms that it meets the law's requirements. Funds are allocated to states based on their relative share of youth in foster care; however, the Chafee statute includes a hold harmless clause that precludes any state from receiving less than the amount of funds it received in fiscal year 1998 under the program prior to Chafee or \$500,000, whichever is greater. Further, states must provide a twenty percent cash or in-kind match to receive their full federal Chafee and ETV allotments. States are required to request funding annually and funds are expected to be used within a two-year period, either the fiscal year it is received or in the following fiscal year (Congressional Research Services, 2019).

The oversight of the Chafee Program is the responsibility of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The Chafee Program statute requires HHS to reserve a portion of the program funding to conduct evaluations of Chafee-funded programs (Congressional Research Services, 2019). Additionally, states are required to submit data semi-annually to the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD), which collects information on youth who are receiving independent living services and the outcomes of youth who are in foster care or have aged out (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). The outcomes that NYTD gathers data on includes employment, housing, connections to an adult, health care, experience with incarceration, and parenting.

### **Policy Analysis**

The goals of the Federal Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (Chafee Program) include providing funding and guidance to states to provide services to youth preparing to age out of the foster care system and improving outcomes for this population. Specifically, the aim is to help youth who are expected to be in foster care until the age of 18 and youth who are preparing to exit foster care to receive education, training, support to obtain employment, emotional support and connections to supportive adults (Allen & Nixon, 2000).

The federal legislation outlined above offers states provisions and resources to support older youth in foster care and their transition from care. However, the states have some flexibility in implementation, resulting in differing levels of support and eligibility among states and programs and varied experiences among youth served (Chor et al., 2018; Stott, 2013). Further, the majority of the states focus on programming to provide youth with independent living skills and support to transition to independence, which may not be enough. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services website provides access to manuals and guidelines for services for youth transitioning out of foster care for the majority of the states in the U.S., which confirm this focus. Given the data outlined throughout this paper regarding youth outcomes, it seems clear that there is a missing piece to successful outcomes for this population. It is important that youth are provided with experiential opportunities for learning and feedback that allow youth to develop life skills and trusted relationships (Collins, 2019). The Chafee Program's purpose is to provide states with the ability to respond to the needs of youth aging out of foster care, which include housing, employment, education, health care, and supportive relationships. Thus, the federal policy reflects the importance of providing youth with

opportunities to form relationships with people who care about them and provide consistent support (Allen & Nixon, 2000). Examining the policies that govern the implementation of the Chafee Program may help identify gaps in supports for youth aging out of foster care.

Child welfare policies and practices need to address the needs of youth transitioning from foster care, with attention given to the development of relationships and social supports and to providing greater safety nets and resources to this population (Stott, 2013). The Federal Chafee Program offers provisions for these needs. This study, through an examination of county-level implementation of the Federal Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood in Philadelphia County within the state of Pennsylvania, will help to identify what guidance currently exists within the county's policies to support older youth in the foster care in developing social supports and connections, while also identifying areas needing improvement with these policies.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The literature reviewed for this study supports the need for youth aging out of foster care to have relational connections to caring adults to support their transition and for programs serving this population to focus on supporting interdependence rather than independence. Attachment theory provides a framework to understand the need for these connections. Additionally, systems theory, including ecological systems theory, provides a lens through which to examine the child welfare system in Philadelphia County and to view how youth aging out of foster care are impacted by multiple, interrelated systems.

### **Attachment Theory**

Attachment theory was introduced by John Bowlby, with an initial focus on the relationship between infants and their mothers but can be applied to individuals at any stage in

life (Bowlby, 1982). Bowlby (1980) asserts individuals look to attachment figures for support, soothing, and modulation. Attachment figures could include caregivers or other caring adults. Through experiences with caregivers, or attachment figures, children develop schemas, also known as internal working models, of themselves, others, and relationships. These schemas can influence future relationships and interactions. Further, attachment theory emphasizes the importance of individuals having a secure base from which to function and live independently (Payne, 2021; Zilberstein & Spencer, 2017).

For youth who have been separated from their caregiver of origin and placed in foster care, attachment theory helps explain the conflict that results from these broken attachments. An individual's reaction to broken attachments include fear, detachment, and despair (Bowlby, 1980). Sadly, many youth in foster care experience multiple broken attachments, making the development of secure attachments challenging as they may come to expect rejection and unpredictability in relationships (Zilberstein & Spencer, 2017). Without a secure attachment with at least one caring adult, critical protective factors are unlikely to develop in a child or youth (Atwool, 2006). For youth who have experienced broken attachments, secure attachments or relationships can be difficult to develop and maintain; however, it is not impossible and can be beneficial, particularly if the attachment figure, or caring adult, is willing to take the lead in diffusing fear and anxiety for the youth and promoting trust. Trust, respect, recognition, and close human relationships are vital for individuals to develop a secure attachment style (Miranda et al., 2019). This is accomplished when attachment figures are consistent, reliable, safe, predictable in their verbal and non-verbal behavior, and empathic (Bowlby, 1980). Adults who form secure attachments later in life can do well in these relationships and these relationships can help promote positive outcomes across life domains (Ahmann, 2017; Zilberstein & Spencer,

2017). Thus, for youth that are aging out of the foster care system, attachment theory would support the need to build connections and secure attachments with a caring adult, particularly as the youth are preparing to transition from care, as this would promote more positive outcomes.

### **General Systems Theory**

Although its original application was in the field of biology, systems theory has over time been applied to many other disciplines, including social sciences. General systems theory views the concept of a system as a set of elements that interact with each other and create a whole (Von Bertalanffy, 1969). A system is influenced by its environment and described by its boundaries, structure, and purpose. Systems can be open or closed, depending on how they interact with their environment. Open systems interact with the external environment, which is necessary for the system's survival, where closed systems do not (Von Bertalanffy, 1969). Open systems have permeable boundaries that allows for exchanges to and from the external environment. Elements of a system include the suprasystem, which is the environment external to the system and from which the system receives inputs. Internal to the system include subsystems, where inputs are received and used within the system. How the inputs are used to change or influence the system are considered throughputs, which are then processed into outputs. Feedback is received from outputs, which creates a feedback loop and further inputs into the system (Payne, 2021; Von Bertalanffy, 1969).

Systems theory understands organizations as open systems that convert inputs into outputs in an effort to maintain itself and achieve equilibrium. Organizations as systems are goal-oriented with sets of interrelated and interdependent parts that are working together and gathering feedback to achieve the organization's goal (Scott & Davis, 2007; Von Bertalanffy, 1969). Thus, systems theory offers a lens to examine the child welfare system in Philadelphia

County in Pennsylvania, also referred to as Philadelphia Department of Human Services (DHS), specifically as it relates to serving the older youth population in the foster care system. The child welfare system in Philadelphia operates under the Improving Outcomes for Children (IOC) model. According to the DHS IOC Practice Guidelines, this approach is based on the idea and belief that positive outcomes for children and families are achieved through services that are family-centered, community-based, culturally competent, integrated, timely, and accountable for results (City of Philadelphia, 2017). Improving Outcomes for Children (IOC) was designed to help DHS refocus its commitment to improving safety, permanency, and well-being of children through the creation of community-centered and family-centered systems and service provision. Casey Family Programs (2012) notes that the IOC model is designed to transform a system so that community providers and partners would be decision makers, alongside the families they serve. Prior to IOC, community providers would implement decisions made by DHS and did not have clear lines of authority. According to the DHS IOC Guidelines, the structural elements of the IOC case management and oversight framework includes shifting from dual case management (DHS and Providers) to single case management delivered by the Community Umbrella Agencies, maintaining the Philadelphia DHS safety model of practice as the core to service delivery, adopting an evidence-based approach to child and family well-being by building protective factors, increasing focus on family-centered services and decision-making, building community partnerships of formal and informal supports, defining geographic regions that serve as primary contact and service coordinator for families, and enhancing services around family and kin connections.

Under the IOC model, the city is divided into ten regions, based on city police districts (Evans & Lydic, 2013). A Community Umbrella Agency (CUA) is assigned to service families

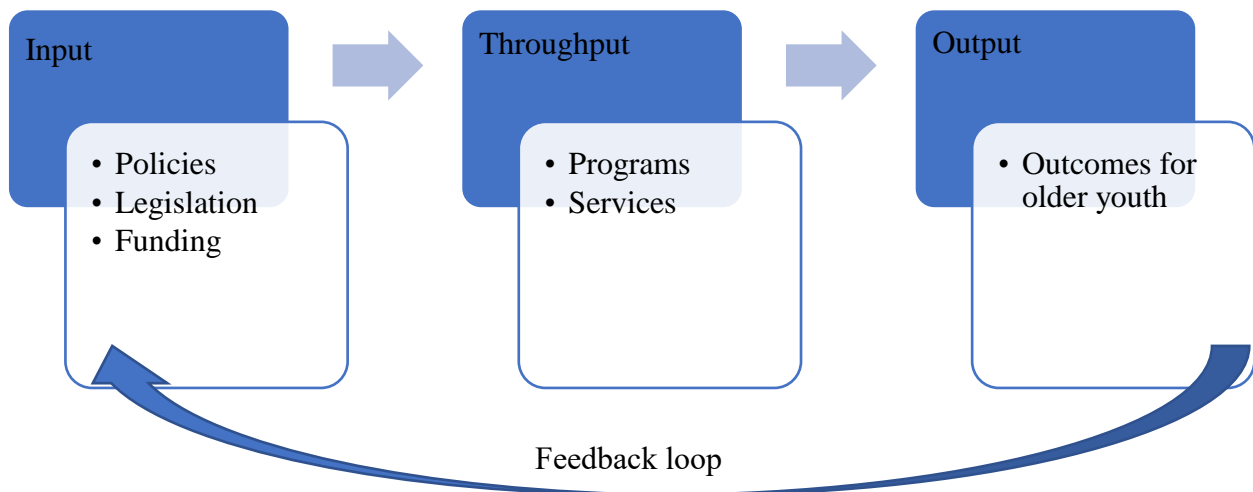
in each of those 10 regions, resulting in 10 CUAs overall. The CUA serves as the single lead provider of child welfare services for the assigned region. Philadelphia DHS retains responsibility for child investigations, intakes and referrals of families. DHS and the CUA work together in initially transitioning a family's case from DHS to the CUA as well as in participating in future family team meetings and in engaging the community. However, the CUA assumes full case management responsibility. Families have a single caseworker who intensively coordinates services and serves as the family's advocate (Casey Family Programs, 2012).

The structure of the Community Umbrella Agency and its service provision is guided by standardized rules, processes, and requirements. The DHS IOC Guidelines that govern the Community Umbrella Agency provide the rules and regulations in order to achieve the four identified goals of IOC. The first goal is maintaining more children and youth safely in their own homes and communities, which is measured by more children and youth remaining safely in their own homes and communities, fewer children and youth experiencing repeated maltreatment, fewer children and youth entering out-of-home placement inappropriately, and fewer children and youth re-entering out-of-home care after reaching permanency. The second goal is achieving timely reunification or other permanence for more children and youth that are placed in out-of-home care, as well as a reduction in the amount of older youth achieving non-permanency outcomes. The third goal involves reducing the use of congregate care, which is measured by creating more opportunities for older youth to be placed in family settings. The final goal is improving overall child, youth, and family functioning, which is measured by increased placement stability, more children and youth placed in their own communities (when out-of-home placement is needed), more siblings placed together, increased parenting capacities and protective factors, and increased social emotional competence in children and youth.

In this system, federal legislation serves as the suprasystem that influences practice for youth in foster care by offering states provisions and resources to support older youth and their transition from care. Additionally, since the child welfare system in Pennsylvania is state supervised, and county administered, the state would also serve as a suprasystem to the child welfare system in Philadelphia County. The subsystems would include the youth-serving programs, service providers, youth, and their families. Inputs would include policies, legislation, and funding, and these would support implementation of programs and services to older youth. The outputs would include outcomes for this population. As outcomes are measured and evaluated, this provides feedback that influence policies and funding. This is further depicted in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

*DHS System for Older Youth as Open System*



### **Ecological Systems Theory**

Bronfenbrenner (1979), building on systems theory, developed the ecological systems theory, which states that the environment in which an individual grows up affects every aspect of their life. This perspective states that human development is influenced by multiple levels of



social environments. These levels include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. The microsystem is the most influential level, as it includes the most immediate environment such as family, friends, peers, school, church, household, etc. For youth in foster care, this could also include social workers, caregivers, attorneys, and service providers. The mesosystem is the relationships between microsystems. This could include how different microsystems work together to support youth in foster care or how different microsystems are misaligned and create barriers to the youth's success. The exosystem is the system in which an individual is not directly connected to but still has an impact on the individual's development. Youth in foster care typically do not have a direct connection with child welfare agencies, government agencies, or policy makers, yet these systems have an impact on their development and how they transition from foster care, as these systems influence services, supports, and funding made available to this population. The macrosystem involves the larger cultural and societal context of values and beliefs. For youth aging out of foster care, macrosystems could include federal, state, and local laws and policies, including the Federal Chafee Program, along with the structure and bureaucracy of the child welfare system in Philadelphia County. Additionally, youth aging out of foster care are also impacted by the seeming value and expectation of independence. The final level involves the chronosystem, which refers to the role of time and relates to when events occur in a person's life. For youth in foster care, the major life transition to exit foster care is determined by statute and not by an individual's readiness to make the transition.

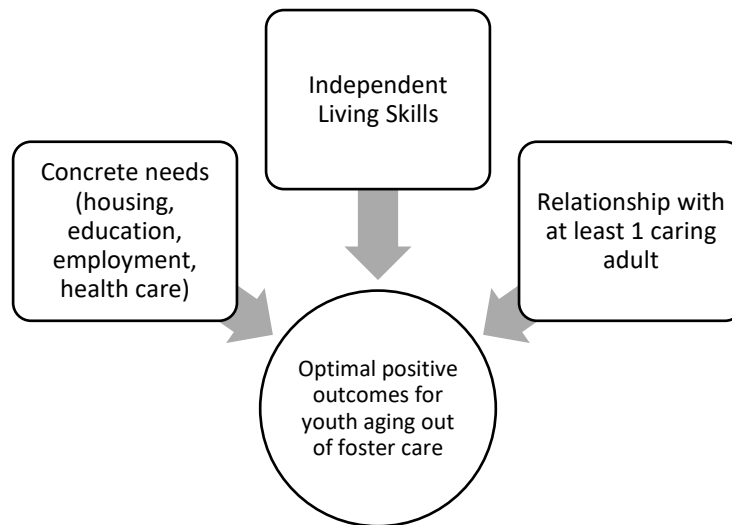
### **Conclusion and Implications**

Research has consistently shown that one of the most important factors leading to positive outcomes among youth in foster care is support from a caring adult (Katz & Geiger,

2020). In fact, the factors that contribute to optimal success for youth aging out of foster care include provision of concrete needs such as housing and employment, independent living skills, and a relationship with at least one caring adult. Figure 3 shown below provides a visual representation of these factors. Studies have also shown that many youth leave foster care without having established such relationships, as a result, often lack the social support from a caring adult that is instrumental in the transition to adulthood. Research continues to support the need for relational supports for older youth transitioning from care and the need for social workers to identify and support the development of these relationships for youth.

### Figure 3

*Factors to Support Positive Outcomes for Youth Aging out of Foster Care*



Singer et al. (2013) notes that many child welfare programs and policies have placed increased attention and resources to youth aging out of the foster care system, yet outcome studies show that these programs and policies fall short in meeting the needs of this population. One key ingredient that seems to be overlooked in policies and practice is the inclusion of support for the youth to establish a relationship with at least one caring adult to support them

during the transition from care. At the federal level, the Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood, which was established through the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 and enhanced through the Family First Act of 2018, includes social supports and connection to a caring adult as a component necessary for a youth's successful transition from care. However, at the state level in Pennsylvania, a review of the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services website (2022) describes the state's implementation of the Chafee Program with a focus on independent living services and programs and supporting youth transition to independence.

In the research and literature reviewed for this study, the focus seemed to be on examining the needs of this population through qualitative studies with a focus on the voice of the youth and their caregivers. While this perspective offers incredible useful information, an exploration of the policies that guide the programming and child welfare practices would provide some additional information that would serve to improve the work with this population. It is unclear how much work has been done to examine the county-level implementation of the Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood with respect to supporting youth's connections to caring adults as part of their transition plan from care.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology and Research Approach**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to gain understanding about how Philadelphia DHS is implementing the federal Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood and including provisions to support youth developing connections to caring adults as part of their transition plan from care. This chapter outlines the methodology of the current study, which involves a content analysis of county-level, child welfare policies that guide practice with youth in foster care. The content analysis serves as an effective approach to analyzing organizational policy documents to gain insight into the values and priorities at the macro level. This section also discusses sampling and data collection procedures, data analysis process, and study strengths and limitations.

#### **Variables**

The variables identified for this study are defined and operationalized as noted in the paragraphs below. These concepts can hold different meanings and value in different situations, so it is important that there is a clear understanding of these terms that are used throughout this study. The variables foster care, older youth, and aging out represent criteria of the population under study. The variables of social support and interdependence represent the concepts that are central to this study.

*Foster care:* For this study, foster care refers to a temporary living arrangement for a child or youth where they are placed with a family not known to the child (foster care), with a family member or family known to the child or youth (kinship care), or placed in a congregate care setting (Department of Human Services, 2022a).

*Older Youth:* Older youth are youth between the ages of 16 and 21 who are placed in foster care.

*Aging out:* Aging out refers to the process for older youth placed in foster care who are preparing to exit care. This process usually begins around the age of 16 and ends between the ages of 18 and 21.

*Social Support:* Social support refers to relationships that lead to an individual feeling cared for through perceived support and provision of resources (Rosenberg, 2019). Social support is viewed as a protective factor that is important during major life transitions.

*Interdependence:* For this study, the idea of interdependence refers to connections to trusted adults to help youth aging out of foster care to build a safety net as they navigate the transition (Hokanson et al., 2020).

### **Rationale for Research Design**

Much of the research reviewed for this study noted that outcomes for youth aging out of foster care are poor, despite the federal legislation in place to provide supports and services to this population (Atkinson, 2008; Freundlich & Avery, 2006; Leathers, et al., 2019; Okpych, 2015; Tao et al., 2013; Trejos-Castillo et al., 2015). Research also noted the importance of social supports and relational connection as a critical need for youth aging out of foster care (Collins et al., 2010; Munson & Scott, 2007; Rosenberg, 2019; Scannapieco et al., 2007; Semanchin Jones & LaLiberte, 2013; Singer et al., 2013; Zinn et al., 2017). The Federal Chafee Program includes provisions for states to provide supports to youth aging out of foster care with education, employment, financial management, housing, emotional support, and connections to caring adults and each of these areas are necessary to promote successful outcomes as youth exit care. Most of research reviewed for this study gathered data through interviews and focus groups and

provided insight from youth, caregiver, and social worker perspective (Abrams et al., 2017; Cunningham & Diversi, 2013; Freundlich & Avery, 2006; Hokanson et al., 2020; Katz & Geiger, 2020; Lalayants et al., 2015; Nesmith & Christophersen, 2014; Packard & Benuto, 2020; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016; Scannapieco et al., 2007; Singer et al., 2013; Tao et al., 2013; Trejos-Castillo et al., 2015; Zinn et al., 2017). However, it appears that how the Federal Chafee Program is implemented at the state and county level needs further exploration, as the policies that govern the implementation of this legislation governs the service provision and sets the priorities for the work.

Case study research using a conceptual content analysis will be conducted for this study. Case study research allows for the study of a case within a specific context or setting and can be used to illustrate a unique case (Creswell & Poth, 2017). A case can be defined as an individual, a group, an organization, a community, or project. For this study, the case identified is the county of Philadelphia in the state of Pennsylvania. This county was selected as the focus of this study due to the unique way child welfare services are implemented by the county child welfare agency, Philadelphia Department of Human Services (DHS), relative to other counties in the state. Content analysis is a technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts to the context of their use (Krippendorff, 2003). It can be used in studying forms of communication and consists primarily of coding and tabulating the occurrence of certain forms of content (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). For this study, a content analysis was conducted of county-level child welfare policies that guide the implementation of the Chafee Program with older youth in foster care. A conceptual content analysis was employed to examine the existence and frequency of concepts in the county-level policy documents. This methodology is advantageous due to the accessibility of these policy documents and limiting the need for obtrusive data collection (Bowen, 2009).

Further, Cardno (2018) notes that content analysis is the most appropriate approach to analyzing organizational policy documents. For this study, Philadelphia DHS child welfare policies that guide the implementation of the Chafee Program are documents that can be accessed by the public without special permission. Further, this analytic strategy provides insight into the values, priorities, and perspectives that are favored at the macro level (Hodge et al., 2021). A review of the county-level policies concerning the implementation of the Chafee Program with older youth in foster care provides insight on what priority the county places on the development of these needed supports.

Systems theory supports this approach to analysis. Within the child welfare system in Philadelphia County, federal legislation serves as a suprasystem that influences county-level policies that guide practice with youth in foster care. These county-level policies influence the service delivery and social work practice with older youth in foster care and works to produce outcomes for this population. An examination of the county-level policies will provide insight on the guidance provided by this macrosystem on older youth in foster care and how they transition from foster care.

### **Research Setting and Context**

The research setting for this study was Philadelphia County within the State of Pennsylvania. As previously discussed, the Federal Chafee Program offers states provisions and resources to support older youth in foster care and their transition from care. States are given flexibility in defining criteria for service provision and eligibility, which leads to variation between states (Stott, 2013). In the State of Pennsylvania, the child welfare system is state supervised, and county administered, with each county operating a children and youth services agency that organizes and manages the child welfare services that are available in that county

(PA Families Inc, n.d.). For Philadelphia County, the Philadelphia Department of Human Services (DHS) serves as the county child welfare agency. The model for child welfare services in Philadelphia County, which is the Improving Outcomes for Children (IOC) model referenced in the previous section, differs from any of the other 66 counties in Pennsylvania. Thus, Philadelphia County has its own policies that guide practice for older youth in foster care, including those that guide the implementation of the Chafee Program.

### **Research Sample and Data Sources**

The use of content analysis requires the defining of units of analysis, which includes sampling units, recording or coding units, and context units (Krippendorff, 2003). The sampling units for this study were drawn from Philadelphia Department of Human Services (DHS), which is the county children and youth agency within Philadelphia County in the state of Pennsylvania. Philadelphia DHS serves youth in foster care and has written policies to guide the service provision for older youth in care and preparing to transition from care. The sampling units included policies that guide the work with older youth in foster care and that outline the county's implementation of the Chafee Program. All written policies developed since 1999 were requested from DHS to be included in the sample. This timeframe was selected as this aligns with the implementation of Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood, which was initially established through the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999. Forty-six policy documents were provided by DHS. Some of these policies included *Initiating the Resumption of Jurisdiction (Act 91) Process for Youth Aged-Out of Care*, issued September 14, 2021; *Older Youth Review Referral Protocol*, issued October 19, 2020; *Credit Checks for Youth and Young Adults*, issued February 6, 2017; *Extended Medical Benefits for Youth and Young Adults Protocol*, issued November 10, 2014; *Re-entry into Care for Youth 18-21 Protocol*, issued



January 17, 2013; *New Laws to Promote Permanency and Support Older Youth*, issued August 24, 2012; *National Youth in Transition Database*, issued October 7, 2010; *Notification Regarding Benefits under the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) and the Education and Training Grant (ETG) Program*, issued March 17, 2010; *Transition Planning for Older Youth 16 through 21 Years Old*, issued October 21, 2009; *Board Extension Policy and Procedure Guide*, issued August 1, 2005; and “Adolescent Initiative,” *CYD Policy Manual*, Sequence 5710. A complete list of the policies included in the sample is included in Appendix A.

A submission was made to Kutztown University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). Since this study will involve a review of policy documents and not involve human subjects, this study was not considered human subject research by the IRB and did not require IRB approval. Verification of this is included in Appendix B.

### **Data Collection Methods**

Written outreach via email to access policy documents was made to Philadelphia DHS’s Operations Director for Policy and Planning to request all policies that have been developed and implemented since 1999 containing guidance for services to older youth in foster care. Forty-six policy documents were received and are listed in Appendix A. The documents received included 11 policies specifically about older youth in general; 20 policies that pertain more to or partially about older youth; 10 policies related to connections and continuity and not specifically older youth; and 5 documents were excerpts from larger policy documents or guidelines and related to older youth. Three weeks after the above referenced policies were provided to the researcher, new legislation was issued related to older youth in foster care and that policy document was sent at that time and was included in the data collection. Each document was sent in either a Word

document or PDF version of the document. Further, the agency's website was explored for any policies that may be available online. No additional policy documents were found during the online search of Philadelphia DHS's website.

Policy documents were collected and reviewed by a single researcher. Upon receipt, the policy documents were read thoroughly by the researcher. After reading each document one time, the policy documents were uploaded into Nvivo for a second review and for coding.

### **Data Analysis Methods**

Recording/coding units are contained within the sampling unit and are the specific content that are categorized (Krippendorff, 2003). The recording/coding units for this study included the language in the policy documents that guides the implementation of federal Chafee Program. The analysis of the data from this content analysis of policy documents included the use of pre-selected codes that have been drawn from the activities directly identified in the Chafee Program description and included education, employment, emotional support, financial management, housing, independence, medical care and access, and connections to caring adults. No additional codes were added after a review of the documents, as no new codes emerged that were directly connected to the activities identified in the Chafee Program description. NVivo software was utilized to code and analyze the data. Memo writing was utilized to explore themes and meaning from the data. A codebook has been developed to capture the codes identified above and how each code has been defined and is included in Appendix D. Within each policy document reviewed, explicit and implicit terms were identified and coded based on the definitions of the pre-selected codes. Connections to caring adults is defined as any content involving older youth in foster care and their connections or relationships to caring adults. Education is defined as content involving educational supports or educational related items for

older youth in foster care. Emotional support is defined as content involving emotional supports for older youth in foster care. Employment is defined as content involving supports for employment for older youth in foster care. Financial management is defined as content involving supports for older youth in foster care to promote financial literacy, money management, and fiscal responsibility. Housing is defined as content involving supports for housing for older youth in foster care as they preparing to exit care. Independence is defined as content focused on independence and independent living skills. Medical care and access is defined as content involving access to medical care for older youth in foster care and preparing to exit.

Further, Krippendorff (2003) identifies four essential areas provide instructions for coding, which includes coder qualifications, process for training coders, syntax and semantics, and nature and administration of records.

### ***Coder Qualifications and Training***

For this study, a single coder was utilized, thus eliminating the need for coder training. However, Krippendorff (2003) suggests that the coder must have the cognitive ability to understand the rules of the coding process and have familiarity with the phenomenon under consideration for study. For this study, the single coder has extensive knowledge of the child welfare system of the Department of Human Services (DHS) in Philadelphia County and how this system functions. Additionally, the single coder has many years of social work experience working with older youth in the foster care system and has a strong understanding of the needs and challenges for this population.

### *Syntax and Semantics*

Krippendorff (2003) offers a few cognitive devices that assist in the coding process and delineating meaning within texts. For this study, verbal designations, or naming categories that are commonly and widely understood, have been utilized. The categories included the activities directly identified in the Chafee Program description; namely, connection to caring adults, education, employment, financial management, housing, emotional support, independence, and medical care and access.

### *Records*

NVivo software has been utilized to code and analyze the data from the policy documents. Each policy document was saved in PDF format and uploaded to NVivo for coding and analysis. A codebook was developed to capture the codes identified and how each code has been defined. These codes include education, employment, financial management, housing emotional support, and connections to caring adults.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Issues of trustworthiness depend on the reliability and validity of the findings of the study. There are three types of the reliability involved with content analysis and the way the data is obtained, which includes stability, reproducibility, and accuracy (Krippendorff, 2003). Stability refers to the ability for the data to be coded the same way over a period of time. Reproducibility refers to the degree to which the process can be replicated. Accuracy refers to the degree to which the classification of text corresponds to a standard. Reliability for this study is likely high, given that the data being analyzed comes from existing documents that will remain constant throughout the measuring process (Krippendorff, 2003). The data for this study has been collected, reviewed multiple times, coded, and analyzed by a single researcher. Further, a

codebook was developed as a standard to classify the data being analyzed using codes derived directly from the activities identified in the Chafee Program.

Conversely, since the data for this study is being collected from one county in the state of Pennsylvania and the model for service provision is unique to this county relative to other counties in the state, it is probable that this study will have low external validity and findings cannot be generalized beyond the study conditions, as is true for all qualitative studies (Rubin & Babbie, 2017).

### **Limitations**

Since this study involves case study research involving one specific county in the state of Pennsylvania, the results of this study will not be generalizable to other counties in the same state. A review of all 67 counties in the state of Pennsylvania may be beneficial, but not feasible due to time and need for access to policy documents. Thus, the researcher implemented a delimitation to examine solely Philadelphia County, as the researcher could readily gain access to policy documents for this county.

Additionally, this study was conducted by a single coder, mostly due to time constraints and lack of access to additional coders. Perhaps reliability through reproducibility could have been strengthened using an additional coder to code and analyze the data. For this to be implemented, a plan for inter-coder reliability would need to have been established (Krippendorff, 2003). Further, the single coder for this study has extensive knowledge of the child welfare system of the Department of Human Services (DHS) in Philadelphia County and had some level of familiarity with the policies outlined in the policy documents provided for this analysis. Thus, the possibility of researcher bias exists.

**Summary**

A conceptual content analysis has been conducted to examine the county-level child welfare policies that guide the implementation of the Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood, established through the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, for older youth in foster care. The population studied involves Philadelphia Department of Human Services (DHS), which is the children and youth agency in the county of Philadelphia. The sample has been drawn from policy documents developed since 1999, as this aligns with the inception of the Chafee Foster Care Program. The data has been collected and analyzed by a single researcher using priori or pre-selected codes. NVivo software has been used to code and analyze the data.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

### **Introduction**

This study has focused on the importance of relational connections for older youth in foster care and preparing to transition from care. The literature clearly points to these connections as an invaluable need for older youth both while in care and during the transition to adulthood. Federal legislation recognizes this need as evidenced through the Federal Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (Chafee Program), which goals include making provision for states to provide services to youth who are expected to be in foster care until the age of 18 and youth who are preparing to exit foster care to receive education, training, support to obtain employment, emotional support, and connections to supportive adults. The aim of this study is to gain understanding about how Philadelphia DHS is implementing the federal Chafee Foster Care Program and including provisions to support youth in developing connections to caring adults. Using a content analysis approach, policies that guide the work with older youth in foster care and that outline the county's implementation of the Chafee Program were reviewed and analyzed.

This chapter outlines the findings of the content analysis of Philadelphia DHS' policies that guide the work with older youth in foster care. The chapter will include an overview of the policy documents received, policy content summary, and conceptual content analysis of those policy documents with respect to the frequency of occurrences of content on connections to caring adults, education, emotional support, employment, financial management, housing, independence, and medical care and access.

## Overview of Policy Documents

The Philadelphia Department of Human Services (DHS) provided a total of 46 policy documents that are connected to the work with older youth in foster care. There are 11 policy documents that are specifically about older youth in general. The *Initiating the Resumption of Jurisdiction (Act 91) Process for Youth Aged-Out of Care* policy, issued September 14, 2021, outlines the protocols and eligibility for youth who age out of care and are seeking re-entry into foster care. The *Older Youth Review Referral Protocol*, issued October 19, 2020, describes the protocol and use of older youth reviews for older youth in foster care preparing to transition from care. The *Credit Checks for Youth and Young Adults* policy, issued February 6, 2017, establishes guidelines for obtaining credit history information for youth in foster care between the ages of 14 and 21 for the purpose of discovering and resolving credit inaccuracies, incidents of identity theft, and to assist youth in transitioning to adulthood. The *Extended Medical Benefits for Youth and Young Adults Protocol*, issued November 10, 2014, was drafted to inform social workers working with older youth of the extended Medical Assistance benefits that are available to youth between the ages of 18 and 26 years old. The *Re-entry into Care for Youth 18-21 Protocol*, issued January 17, 2013, provides guidance to social workers for the process when older youth request to re-enter care between the ages of 18-21 under Act 91, which allows youth who meet eligibility requirements to re-enter foster care before turning 21 years of age if they were discharged from care three months before their 18th birthday or anytime thereafter. The *New Laws to Promote Permanency and Support Older Youth* policy, issued August 24, 2012, provided social workers information on legislation that impacts work with older youth. Specifically, this policy outlines ACT 91, which expands the board extension criteria for youth who request to remain in care past the age of 18 and allows youth to re-enter foster care before



turning 21 if they were discharged from care three months before their 18th birthday or anytime thereafter if they meet the criteria for a board extension. This policy also outlines ACT 80, which extends adoption and PLC subsidies to age 21 for youth who were adopted and youth for whom the Court granted an order of Permanent Legal Custodianship (PLC) at age 13 or older. The *National Youth in Transition Database* policy, issued October 7, 2010, outlines for social workers the data collection system to track the independent living services provided to youth under the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) and need to develop outcomes that measure States' success in preparing youth for their transition from foster care to adult living. The *Notification Regarding Benefits under the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) and the Education and Training Grant (ETG) Program* policy, issued March 17, 2010, provides guidance to social workers regarding the eligibility for benefits under the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) and the Education and Training Grant (ETG) Program for youth currently in foster care and youth previously in foster care who were in DHS custody at age 16 years or older. The *Transition Planning for Older Youth 16 through 21 Years Old* policy, issued October 21, 2009, provides guidance to social workers on the implementation of personalized transition plans for youth in foster care, starting when a youth turns 16 and providing transition services to youth who will be discharged from care to independence at ages 18 through 21. The *Board Extension Policy and Procedure Guide* policy, issued August 1, 2005, outlines for social workers the criteria and protocol for youth who are in foster care and cannot obtain permanency through reunification, adoption, or permanent legal custodianship to remain in foster care until age 21 if they want continued services and financial support from DHS. The Adolescent Initiative policy, per of the *CYD Policy Manual*, Sequence

5710, outlines for social workers the independent living services and supports available to older youth in foster care.

In addition to the policy documents specifically about older youth in general, there were 20 policies provided that pertain more to or partially about older youth. The *Revised Youth Consent to COVID-19 Vaccination (ages 14 years and older) and Parental Consent for COVID-19 Vaccination (ages 5-13)* policy, issued December 16, 2021, provides guidance to social workers on the consents needed for youth ages 14 years and older in DHS custody to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. The *Supporting Foster Youth and Families Through the Pandemic Act* policy, issued April 27, 2021, outlined the provisions for temporary, emergency relief available for youth in foster care or discharged from foster care during the pandemic. The *Serving Child Victims of Human Trafficking* policy, issued July 23, 2021, provides social worker an overview of the human trafficking of children, which involves commercial sexual exploitation and child victims of labor trafficking, and identifies risk factors, triggers for identification, and approaches for meeting the needs of victims as well as some treatment and service provision. The *New Rights in Care and Grievance Procedure Guides for Youth in Congregate Care Facilities and Their Families* policy, issued February 10, 2021, outlines the rights of youth who are placed in congregate care settings and expectations to address concerns that arise before, during, and after placement. The *Revised Consent to Medical, Dental, Psychological Care and Treatment and Educational Consent Guidelines* policy, issued January 7, 2021, provides an overview of the areas that DHS Social Work Services Managers or CUA Case Managers can consent to, on behalf of a child or youth who is in the legal custody of DHS. The *Juvenile Justice Services (JJS) Detention Review Procedure*, issued February 25, 2016, provides guidance to social workers regarding the procedure to move youth detained at the JJS to an appropriate setting. The

*Court-Ordered Home Evaluations for Arrested Youth*, policy, issued February 4, 2016, provides guidance to social workers when the Court orders a forthwith home evaluation prior to discharging an arrested youth home to parents or other caregivers pending adjudication. The *New Legislation Regarding Goal Selection and Planning Participation* policy, issued December 28, 2015, provides guidance regarding the use of the permanency goal of APPLA for older youth in foster care and outlines the expectation for social workers to diligently work toward achieving the most appropriate permanency outcome for all children and youth in care. The *New Laws to Protect Children and Youth from Sex Trafficking and Promote Permanency* policy, issued December 15, 2015, informs social workers of the major provisions of The Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act, including the provision of protections for children and youth at risk of sex trafficking and supports improvements in permanency, normalcy for children and youth in care, and youth participation in decision making. The *Family Advocacy and Support Assessment Tool (FAST) and the Well-Being Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Assessments* policy, issued September 3, 2013, outlines the expectations for social workers to complete these assessment tools for children and youth and their families. The *Shared Case Responsibility Reminder*, issued August 20, 2013, and The *REVISED Joint Policy and Procedure Guide for Shared Case Responsibility*, issued December 12, 2011, provide guidance to social workers about Shared Case Responsibility (SCR) between dependent and delinquent systems and the need for collaboration and planning to ensure the best services and outcomes for involved youth. The *Frequency of Ongoing Contacts with Children and Youth Accepted for Service*, policy, issued March 1, 2013, informs social workers about the frequency in which children and youth opened for services must be visited and assessed for safety. The *Requirements for Goal Changes to Permanent Legal Custodianship (PLC) or Another Planned*

*Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA), and PLC Subsidies* policy, issued November 10, 2011, informed social workers of changes in rights, duties, and responsibilities for permanent legal custodians of children and youth in foster care and established additional requirements for pursuing PLC and APPLA for a child's permanency goal, especially for children ages 12 and younger. The *New Juvenile Court Procedural Rules Regarding Changes in Placement, Education and Health Needs, and Termination of Court Supervision for Older Youth* policy, issued September 28, 2011, informs social workers of the procedural changes in placement, education and health needs, and termination of court supervision for older youth. The *Family Planning Options for Pregnant Youth in DHS Custody* policy, issued August 18, 2011, details the responsibilities of social workers regarding addressing the family planning options for pregnant youth in foster care. The *Non-Discrimination and Non-Harassment of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ) Clients* policy, issued January 22, 2010, establishes guidelines for social workers to provide fair, equal, and non-discriminatory treatment for children, youth, parents and/or guardians who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or queer/questioning (LGBTQ) and provides the highest quality of services to all children, youth and families regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

Further, 10 policy documents were provided that related to connections and continuity but not specifically older youth. The *Revised Educational Stability and Continuity for Children and Youth in Care* policy, issued October 21, 2021, details expectations to support educational stability and continuity for children and youth in foster care at the time of initial out-of-home placement or any placement change, as well as on-going case management to support positive educational outcomes. The *Special Child Welfare Requirements for Indian Children and Youth* policy, issued August 26, 2021, outlines the protections and preservation of Indian Children and

Youth through the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). The *Family Engagement Initiative (FEI) – Crisis / Rapid Response Family Meetings (CRRFM) Protocol*, issued May 11, 2021, provides guidance regarding the protocol and rationale for holding a Crisis/Rapid Response Family Meeting (CRRFM). The *Revised Family Team Decision Making Conferences (FTC) – 2020* policy, issued August 11, 2020, provides guidance on the use of Family Team Conferences and to improve and strengthen engagement by increasing focus on involving families with creating and supporting success with the family’s case plan. The *Philadelphia Department of Human Services and School District of Philadelphia Joint Protocol to Coordinate the Educational Stability and Continuity of Children and Youth in Out of Home Placement*, issued May 10, 2017 and *New Court Rule Regarding Educational Stability* policy, issued September 6, 2019, and the *Educational Stability and Continuity for Children in Substitute Care* policy, issued February 18, 2010, all provide detailed expectations for social workers to support educational stability and continuity for children and youth entering foster care or changing placement settings, including informing who has the ability and authority to change a school placement for a child or youth in foster care. The *Identifying Relatives and Kin when Children and Youth are Placed. The Use of Family Finding and Family Group Decision Making in Practice* policy, issued July 8, 2013, informs social workers of the requirement to use due diligence to identify and engage all adult relatives when a child or youth enters foster care. The *Notification of the Potential for Voluntary Post Adoption Agreements* policy, issued June 6, 2011, informs social workers of their responsibility for and involvement in activities regarding voluntary post adoption agreements. The *Sibling Placement and Visitation Requirements* policy, issued February 8, 2011, provides guidance to social workers regarding the efforts to place siblings together when foster care is necessary and to provide consistent, frequent visitation between siblings in foster care who are

not placed together. The *Revised Policy for Referring Children and Families for Services through the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN)* policy, issued March 9, 2010, describes the procedures for obtaining SWAN services for children who are in foster care or other placements.

Additionally, excerpts from 5 larger policy documents or guidelines related to older youth were provided. These documents included *The City of Philadelphia Professional Services Contract General Provisions for Department of Human Services Contracts*, revised in July 2021, *The City of Philadelphia Professional Services Contract General Provisions for Department of Human Services Improving Outcomes for Children Community Umbrella Agency*, revised in July 2021, *IOC Fiscal Guidelines for Community Umbrella Agencies*, effective on July 1, 2020, *IOC Community Umbrella Agency Practice Guidelines*, effective in August 2017, and *Philadelphia DHS Support Services for DHS Workers and CUA Case Managers*, issued on March 27, 2017.

Shortly after the above referenced policies were provided to the researcher, new legislation was issued related to older youth in foster care and that policy document was sent at that time and was included in the data collection. The *New Law Regarding Older Youth: APPLA Minimum Age and Transition Plan Changes* policy, issued on January 10, 2023, outlines changes to work with older youth in foster care that came from Act 118 of 2022 (HB 1866), entitled “Helping Older Youth Find Permanency.” This legislation is designed to build on the strengths of family finding and other services for youth to successfully transition to adulthood. The notable changes that apply to the Philadelphia DHS includes a change in the minimum age for youth with a goal of Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) from 16 to 18 years old and a requirement for social workers working with this population to help to identify at

least two significant relational connections for the youth. A complete list of the policy documents discussed in this section is included in Appendix A.

### **Policy Document Content Summary**

Forty-six policy documents were reviewed and analyzed. The content of each document was assessed to explore the frequency of language about connections to caring adults, education, emotional support, employment, financial management, housing, independence, and medical care and access. The presence and frequency of language in each of these areas was examined in order to explore the importance of, attention to, or emphasis on these areas in each of the policy documents (Krippendorff, 2003).

Of the 46 documents, 29 documents contained language about one of more of these areas. More specifically, 17 documents contained language about connections to caring adults; 17 documents contained language about education; 13 documents contained language about emotional support; 15 documents contained language about employment, 8 documents contained language about financial management; 13 documents contained language about housing; 20 documents contained language about independence; and 14 documents contained language about medical care and access. Overall, content about independence occurred most frequently both in the number of documents and the number of references to this content. The next most frequently occurring content area was connections to caring adults, with 17 documents containing 101 references to this content. Education closely followed, with the 17 documents containing 95 references to this content. The least frequently occurring content area was housing with 13 policy documents containing 24 references to the content. An overview of this information is also included in Table 1 below. Further, 17 documents did not contain language in any of these

areas and these policy documents were part of the group of policy documents that pertain more to or partially about older youth and not specific to older youth or to connections.

**Table 1**

*Code Summary*

| Code Name                    | Number of documents | Number of references |
|------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Connections to caring adults | 17                  | 101                  |
| Education                    | 17                  | 95                   |
| Emotional support            | 13                  | 29                   |
| Employment                   | 15                  | 26                   |
| Financial management         | 8                   | 38                   |
| Housing                      | 13                  | 24                   |
| Independence                 | 20                  | 111                  |
| Medical care and access      | 14                  | 47                   |

**Policies with Connections to Caring Adults Content**

Overall, there were 17 policy documents containing content regarding connections to caring adults. Within these 17 policy documents, there are 101 references to connections to caring adults. The specific documents that contained content on connections to caring adults included *Serving Child Victims of Human Trafficking; Transition Planning for Older Youth 16 through 21 Years Old; Revised Policy for Referring Children and Families for Services through the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN); Notification of the Potential for Voluntary Post-Adoption Agreements; National Youth in Transition Database; Sibling Placement Visitation; New Juvenile Court Procedural Rules Regarding Changes in Placement, Education and Health Needs, and Termination of Court Supervision for Older Youth; New Legislation Regarding Goal Selection and Planning Participation; Identifying Relatives and Kin when Children and Youth are Placed; The Use of Family Finding and Family Group Decision Making in Practice; DHS Support Services; IOC Community Umbrella Agency Guidelines;*



*Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic; General Provisions; Family Engagement Initiative- Crisis/Rapid Response Meeting Protocol; New Law for Older Youth; and New Laws to Promote Permanency and Support Older Youth.*

The majority of the policy documents (n=13) included less than 5 references to connections to caring adults. The three policy documents that included the most references to this content included the *IOC Community Umbrella Agency Guidelines* with 19 references, *Family Engagement Initiative- Crisis/Rapid Response Meeting Protocol* with 20 references, and *The Use of Family Finding and Family Group Decision Making in Practice* with 26 references. The specific language contained within these documents connected to this content area focused on identifying and engaging adult relatives, maintaining family connections, establishing extended family supports, supporting permanency, and supporting and promoting kin connections, including placement with kinship caregivers. This language is not specific to older youth in foster care, rather this was applicable to all children and youth in foster care and inclusive of the older youth population. In addition, the language contained within these documents specific to older youth in foster care and preparing to age out of care focused on identifying adult life connections and lifelong supports that can be sustained into adulthood. The most recently issued policy document, *New Law for Older Youth*, contained the highest number of references to content concerning connections to caring adults of all the policy documents reviewed that were specific to older youth in foster care and preparing to exit care. Among these references included language about supporting permanency for older youth, identifying at least two significant connections with supportive adults, and including positive adult connections as part of the youth's transition plan. Table 2 below provides a summary of the policy documents

with content related to connections to caring adults, including the policy title, date issued, and number of references to the identified content that is included in policy document.

**Table 2***Policies with Connections to Caring Adults Content*

| <b>Policy Title</b>   | <b>Date issued</b> | <b>References</b> |
|---|--------------------|-------------------|
| Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Memo  | 7/23/2001          | 3                 |
| Transition Planning For Older Youth 16 through 21 with Attachment   | 10/21/2009         | 2                 |
| Revised SWAN Policy 3-9-10  | 3/9/2010           | 4                 |
| National Youth in Transition Database   | 10/7/2010          | 2                 |
| Sibling Placement Visitation 2-8-11   | 2/8/2011           | 1                 |
| Policy Notification of the Potential for Voluntary Post Adoption Agreements (2)   | 6/6/2011           | 3                 |
| New Juvenile Court Procedural Rules re Changes in Placement, Education and Health Needs, and Termination of Court Supervision for Older Youth | 9/28/2011          | 2                 |
| New Laws to Promote Permanency and Support Older Youth  | 8/24/2012          | 3                 |
| Combined ID of Adult Relatives FF and FGDM  | 7/8/2013           | 26                |
| New Legislation Regarding Goal Selection and Planning 12 2015   | 12/28/2015         | 4                 |
| DHS and CUA Support Services - Updated 03-27-17 - Connections for Older Youth in Care   | 3/27/2017          | 2                 |
| IOC CUA Practice Guidelines Aug 2017 - Connections for Older Youth in Care  | 8/1/2017           | 19                |
| Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic Act – Extended  | 4/27/2021          | 1                 |
| Family Engagement Initiative - Crisis Rapid Response Family Meetings Protocol   | 5/11/2021          | 20                |
| General Provisions DHS - non- CUA July 2021 - FINAL - Connections for Older Youth in Care   | 7/1/2021           | 1                 |
| General Provisions DHS CUA - July 2021 - FINAL - Connections for Older Youth in Care  | 7/1/2021           | 2                 |
| Memo - New Older Youth Law Effective 1.2.2023   | 1/2/2023           | 6                 |

### **Policies with Education Content**

There were 17 policy documents in total containing content regarding education, with a total of 95 references to this content area. The specific documents that contained content on connections to caring adults included *Serving Child Victims of Human Trafficking; Board Extension Policy and Procedure Guide; Educational Stability and Continuity for Children in Substitute Care; Notification Regarding Benefits under Chafee Policy; National Youth in Transition Database; New Juvenile Court Procedural Rules Regarding Changes in Placement, Education and Health Needs, and Termination of Court Supervision for Older Youth; New Laws to Promote Permanency and Support Older Youth; Protocol Re-Entry in Care; DHS Support Services; IOC Community Umbrella Agency Guidelines; New Court Rule Regarding Educational Stability; Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic; General Provisions; Transitioning Planning for Older Youth 16 through 21; and Adolescent Initiative.*

More than half of the policy documents with content on education (n=11) have less than 5 references to this content area. The policy document that included the most references to this content is the *Educational Stability and Continuity for Children in Substitute Care* with 37 references, followed by *New Court Rule Regarding Educational Stability* with 8 references. The specific language contained within these two documents focused on all children and youth in foster care and supported educational stability and continuity. Ten of the policy documents reviewed focused solely or primarily on older youth in foster care. These included *Board Extension Policy and Procedure Guide; Notification Regarding Benefits under Chafee Policy; National Youth in Transition Database; New Juvenile Court Procedural Rules Regarding Changes in Placement, Education and Health Needs, and Termination of Court Supervision for Older Youth; New Laws to Promote Permanency and Support Older Youth; Protocol Re-Entry in*

*Care; Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic; Transitioning Planning for Older Youth 16 through 21; and Adolescent Initiative.* The language contained within these documents specific to older youth in foster care focused on youth's enrollment in an educational or vocational program, planning secondary education or vocational training as part of the youth's plan to transition from care, financial aid, and the youth's access to educational records in preparation for discharge from foster care. Table 3 below provides a summary of the policy documents with content related to education, including the policy title, date issued, and number of references to the identified content that is included in policy document.

**Table 3***Policies with Education Content*

| <b>Policy Title</b>   | <b>Date issued</b> | <b>References</b> |
|---|--------------------|-------------------|
| Serving Child Victims of Human Trafficking  | 7/23/2001          | 1                 |
| Board Extension Policy and Procedure Guide with Attachments   | 8/1/2005           | 4                 |
| Educational Stability and Continuity for Children in Substitute Care 02-18-10   | 2/18/2010          | 37                |
| Notification Regarding Benefits under Chafee Policy 3-17-10   | 3/17/2010          | 2                 |
| National Youth in Transition Database   | 10/7/2010          | 2                 |
| New Juvenile Court Procedural Rules re Changes in Placement, Education and Health Needs, and Termination of Court Supervision for Older Youth | 9/28/2011          | 8                 |
| New Laws to Promote Permanency and Support Older Youth  | 8/24/2012          | 1                 |
| Protocol Re-entry into Care Final 1-17-13   | 1/17/2013          | 4                 |
| DHS and CUA Support Services - Updated 03-27-17 - Connections for Older Youth in Care   | 3/27/2017          | 5                 |
| IOC CUA Practice Guidelines Aug 2017 - Connections for Older Youth in Care  | 8/1/2017           | 5                 |
| New Court Rule Regarding Educational Stability  | 9/6/2019           | 8                 |
| IOC Fiscal Guidelines_FY21 final 9 28 - Connections for Older Youth in Care   | 7/1/2020           | 5                 |
| Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic Act - Extended  | 4/27/2021          | 3                 |
| General Provisions DHS - non- CUA July 2021 - FINAL - Connections for Older Youth in Care   | 7/1/2021           | 2                 |
| General Provisions DHS CUA - July 20 21 - FINAL - Connections for Older Youth in Care   | 7/1/2021           | 1                 |
| Transition Planning For Older Youth 16 through 21 with Attachment   | 10/21/2009         | 6                 |
| 5710 Case Supporting Services - Adolescent Initiative   | n.d.               | 1                 |

### **Policies with Emotional Support Content**

There were 13 policy documents in total containing content regarding emotional support, with a total of 29 references to this content area. The specific documents that contained content on emotional support included *Serving Child Victims of Human Trafficking; Board Extension Policy and Procedure Guide; Transition Planning for Older Youth 16 through 21; Notification of Benefits Under Chafee; Youth in Transition Database; Sibling Placement Visitation; Family Planning Options for Youth; New Juvenile Court Procedural Rules Regarding Changes in Placement, Education and Health Needs, and Termination of Court Supervision for Older Youth; Affordable Care Act Extended Medical for Older Youth Protocol; IOC Community Umbrella Agency Guidelines; Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic; General Provisions; and Adolescent Initiative.*

All but one of the policy documents reviewed with content on emotional support (n=12) have between one and three references to this content area. The policy document that included the most references to this content is the *IOC Community Umbrella Agency Guidelines*, which had 9 references. This document was a notably larger document than the others, which could explain the difference in references from the other policy documents. Nine of the policy documents reviewed focused solely or primarily on older youth in foster care. These included *Board Extension Policy and Procedure Guide; Transition Planning for Older Youth 16 through 21; Notification of Benefits Under Chafee; Youth in Transition Database; Family Planning Options for Youth; New Juvenile Court Procedural Rules Regarding Changes in Placement, Education and Health Needs, and Termination of Court Supervision for Older Youth; Affordable Care Act Extended Medical for Older Youth Protocol; Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic; and Adolescent Initiative.* The language contained within these

documents specific to older youth in foster care focused on supporting the youth's emotional well-being, access to community and supportive services, sibling relationships, and peer support as part of the youth's plan to transition from care. There was also language around supporting teen parents in their role as parents. Table 4 below provides a summary of the policy documents with content related to emotional support, including the policy title, date issued, and number of references to the identified content that is included in policy document.

**Table 4***Policies with Emotional Support Content*

| <b>Policy Title</b>   | <b>Date issued</b> | <b>References</b> |
|---|--------------------|-------------------|
| Serving Child Victims of Human Trafficking  | 7/23/2001          | 1                 |
| Board Extension Policy and Procedure Guide with Attachments   | 8/1/2005           | 3                 |
| Transition Planning For Older Youth 16 through 21 with Attachment   | 10/21/2009         | 3                 |
| Notification Regarding Benefits under Chafee Policy 3-17-10   | 3/17/2010          | 1                 |
| National Youth in Transition Database   | 10/7/2010          | 1                 |
| Sibling Placement Visitation 2-8-11   | 2/8/2011           | 2                 |
| Fam Plan Ops for Preg in DHS Custody  | 8/18/2011          | 2                 |
| New Juvenile Court Procedural Rules re Changes in Placement, Education and Health Needs, and Termination of Court Supervision for Older Youth | 9/28/2011          | 1                 |
| Affordable Care Act Extended Medical for Older Youth Protocol 10-2014   | 11/10/2014         | 1                 |
| IOC CUA Practice Guidelines Aug 2017 - Connections for Older Youth in Care  | 8/1/2017           | 9                 |
| Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic Act - Extended  | 4/27/2021          | 1                 |
| General Provisions DHS - non- CUA July 2021 - FINAL - Connections for Older Youth in Care   | 7/1/2021           | 2                 |
| 5710 Case Supporting Services - Adolescent Initiative   | n.d.               | 2                 |

### **Policies with Employment Content**

There were 15 policy documents in total containing content regarding employment, with a total of 26 references to this content area. The specific documents that contained content on employment included *Serving Child Victims of Human Trafficking; Board Extension Policy and Procedure Guide; Transition Planning for Older Youth 16 through 21; Notification of Benefits Under Chafee; Youth in Transition Database; New Juvenile Court Procedural Rules Regarding Changes in Placement, Education and Health Needs, and Termination of Court Supervision for Older Youth; New Laws to Promote Permanency and Support Older Youth; Protocol Re-Entry into Care; DHS and CUA Support Services; IOC Community Umbrella Agency Guidelines; IOC Fiscal Guidelines; Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic; General Provisions; New Older Youth Law; and Adolescent Initiative.*

All of the policy documents reviewed with content on employment (n=15) have between one and three references to this content area. Further, all 15 of the policy documents reviewed contained content on employment focused solely or primarily on older youth in foster care. The language contained within these documents centered on older youth maintaining employment to remain in foster care between the ages of 18 and 21 and on supporting the youth in identifying employment/career goals and maintaining stable employment as part as part of the youth's plan to transition from care. Table 5 below provides a summary of the policy documents with content related to employment, including the policy title, date issued, and number of references to the identified content that is included in policy document.



**Table 5***Policies with Employment Content*

| <b>Policy Title</b>   | <b>Date issued</b> | <b>References</b> |
|---|--------------------|-------------------|
| Serving Child Victims of Human Trafficking  | 7/23/2001          | 1                 |
| Board Extension Policy and Procedure Guide with Attachments   | 8/1/2005           | 1                 |
| Transition Planning For Older Youth 16 through 21 with Attachment   | 10/21/2009         | 3                 |
| Notification Regarding Benefits under Chafee Policy 3-17-10   | 3/17/2010          | 2                 |
| National Youth in Transition Database   | 10/7/2010          | 1                 |
| New Juvenile Court Procedural Rules re Changes in Placement, Education and Health Needs, and Termination of Court Supervision for Older Youth | 9/28/2011          | 2                 |
| New Laws to Promote Permanency and Support Older Youth  | 8/24/2012          | 1                 |
| Protocol Re-entry into Care Final 1-17-13   | 1/17/2013          | 2                 |
| DHS and CUA Support Services - Updated 03-27-17 - Connections for Older Youth in Care   | 3/27/2017          | 3                 |
| IOC CUA Practice Guidelines Aug 2017 - Connections for Older Youth in Care  | 8/1/2017           | 3                 |
| IOC Fiscal Guidelines_FY21 final 9 28 - Connections for Older Youth in Care   | 7/1/2020           | 1                 |
| Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic Act - Extended  | 4/27/2021          | 2                 |
| General Provisions DHS - non- CUA July 2021 - FINAL - Connections for Older Youth in Care   | 7/1/2021           | 2                 |
| Memo - New Older Youth Law Effective 1.2.2023   | 1/2/2023           | 1                 |
| 5710 Case Supporting Services - Adolescent Initiative   | n.d.               | 1                 |

**Policies with Financial Management Content**

There were 8 policy documents in total containing content regarding financial management, with a total of 38 references to this content area. The specific documents that contained content on financial management included *Board Extension Policy and Procedure*

*Guide; Transition Planning for Older Youth 16 through 21; Youth in Transition Database; Family Planning Options for Youth; Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Memo; IOC Community Umbrella Agency Guidelines; Adolescent Initiative; and Credit Checks for Youth and Young Adults.*

Similar to policy documents with employment content, the policy documents with financial management content are solely focused on older youth in foster care and preparing to transition from care. The policy document that included the most references to this content area is *Credit Checks for Youth and Young Adults*, with 30 references. This was followed by the *IOC Community Umbrella Agency Guidelines*, with 9 references. The content within these two policy documents focused on obtaining credit history and credit reports for youth in foster care and in preparation for the youth to transition to adulthood. The remaining references within the policy documents reviewed focused on budgeting, home management, financial plans, and money management through opening a bank account as part of the youth's transition plan. One policy document, *Family Planning Options for Youth*, referenced language about the cost to raise a child. Table 6 below provides a summary of the policy documents with content related to financial management, including the policy title, date issued, and number of references to the identified content that is included in policy document.

**Table 6***Policies with Financial Management Content*

| <b>Policy Title</b>  | <b>Date issued</b> | <b>References</b> |
|--|--------------------|-------------------|
| Board Extension Policy and Procedure Guide with Attachments                | 8/1/2005           | 1                 |
| Transition Planning For Older Youth 16 through 21 with Attachment          | 10/21/2009         | 2                 |
| National Youth in Transition Database                                      | 10/7/2010          | 2                 |
| Fam Plan Ops for Preg in DHS Custody                                       | 8/18/2011          | 1                 |
| Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Memo                 | 12/15/2015         | 1                 |
| IOC CUA Practice Guidelines Aug 2017 - Connections for Older Youth in Care | 8/1/2017           | 9                 |
| 5710 Case Supporting Services - Adolescent Initiative                      | n.d.               | 2                 |
| Credit Checks for Youth and Young Adults                                   | n.d.               | 20                |

**Policies with Housing Content**

There were 13 policy documents in total containing content regarding housing, with a total of 24 references to this content area. The specific documents that contained content on housing included *Serving Child Victims of Human Trafficking; Transition Planning for Older Youth 16 through 21; Youth in Transition Database; Family Planning Options for Youth; New Juvenile Court Procedural Rules Regarding Changes in Placement, Education and Health Needs, and Termination of Court Supervision for Older Youth; Protocol Re-Entry into Care; DHS and CUA Support Services; IOC Community Umbrella Agency Guidelines; Older Youth Review Referral Protocol; Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic; General Provisions; New Older Youth Law; and Adolescent Initiative.*

Similar to the last two content areas described, the policy documents with housing content are solely focused on older youth in foster care and preparing to transition from care.

Each of the policy documents that contained content on housing focused on the housing plan for older youth as part of the youth's transition from foster care. Interestingly, the policy document *Supporting Foster Youth and Families Through the Pandemic* included the most references to this content area with 5 references but is no longer applicable to the work, as it was only a temporary provision that ended in September 2022. Table 7 below provides a summary of the policy documents with content related to housing, including the policy title, date issued, and number of references to the identified content that is included in policy document.

**Table 7***Policies with Housing Content*

| <b>Policy Title</b>   | <b>Date issued</b> | <b>References</b> |
|---|--------------------|-------------------|
| Serving Child Victims of Human Trafficking  | 7/23/2001          | 1                 |
| Transition Planning For Older Youth 16 through 21 with Attachment   | 10/21/2009         | 4                 |
| National Youth in Transition Database   | 10/7/2010          | 2                 |
| Fam Plan Ops for Preg in DHS Custody  | 8/8/2011           | 1                 |
| New Juvenile Court Procedural Rules re Changes in Placement, Education and Health Needs, and Termination of Court Supervision for Older Youth | 9/28/2011          | 2                 |
| Protocol Re-entry into Care Final 1-17-13   | 1/17/2013          | 1                 |
| DHS and CUA Support Services - Updated 03-27-17 - Connections for Older Youth in Care   | 3/27/2017          | 1                 |
| IOC CUA Practice Guidelines Aug 2017 - Connections for Older Youth in Care  | 8/1/2017           | 2                 |
| Older Youth Review Referral Protocol  | 10/19/2020         | 1                 |
| Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic Act - Extended  | 4/27/2021          | 5                 |
| General Provisions DHS - non- CUA July 2021 - FINAL - Connections for Older Youth in Care   | 7/1/2021           | 2                 |
| Memo - New Older Youth Law Effective 1.2.2023   | 1/2/2023           | 1                 |
| 5710 Case Supporting Services - Adolescent Initiative   | n.d.               | 1                 |

**Policies with Independence Content**

The most frequently occurring content area was the area of independence. Overall, there were 20 policy documents containing content regarding independence, which is the highest number among all the content areas. Within these 20 policy documents, there are 111 references to independence. The specific documents that contained content on independence included *Serving Child Victims of Human Trafficking; Board Extension Policy and Procedure Guide; Transition Planning for Older Youth 16 through 21; Educational Stability and Continuity for Children in Substitute Care; Notification Regarding Benefits under the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program; National Youth in Transition Database; New Laws to Promote Permanency and Support Older Youth; Identifying Relatives and Kin when Children and Youth are Placed. The Use of Family Finding and Family Group Decision Making in Practice; Affordable Care Act Extended Medical for Older Youth Protocol; Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Memo; DHS Support Services; IOC Community Umbrella Agency Guidelines; Older Youth Review Referral Protocol; Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic; General Provisions; New Law for Older Youth; New Juvenile Court Procedural Rules Regarding Changes in Placement, Education and Health Needs, and Termination of Court Supervision for Older Youth; Adolescent Initiative; and Credit Checks for Youth and Young Adults.*

The references to independence contained within the policy documents noted above were focused specifically on older youth in foster care and preparing to transition from care, even though not all of the policies were solely for that population. The *IOC Community Umbrella Agency Guidelines* contained 20 references to independence, which is the highest number of all the policy documents containing references to this content area. This is followed by *Transition*

*Planning for Older Youth 16 through 21*, containing 12 references and the *Older Youth Review Referral Protocol* with 11 references. The specific language contained within these documents connected to this content area focused on independent living skills, life skills training, transition planning, emancipation, and successfully transitioning to independence and/or adulthood. Each reference points to life skills training and independent living skills as a necessary ingredient for a successful plan for youth as they are preparing to exit care. Further, the language in the policy documents also place focus on older youth having vital and other documents prior to discharge, including their birth certificate, social security card, driver's license, school transcripts, medical records, and high school diploma. Table 8 below provides a summary of the policy documents with content related to independence, including the policy title, date issued, and number of references to this content that is included in policy document.

**Table 8***Policies with Independence Content*

| <b>Policy Title</b>   | <b>Date issued</b> | <b>References</b> |
|---|--------------------|-------------------|
| Serving Child Victims of Human Trafficking  | 7/23/2001          | 2                 |
| Board Extension Policy and Procedure Guide with Attachments   | 8/1/2005           | 8                 |
| Transition Planning For Older Youth 16 through 21 with Attachment   | 10/21/2009         | 12                |
| Educational Stability and Continuity for Children in Substitute Care 02-18-10   | 2/18/2010          | 2                 |
| Notification Regarding Benefits under Chafee Policy 3-17-10   | 3/17/2010          | 4                 |
| National Youth in Transition Database   | 10/7/2010          | 7                 |
| New Juvenile Court Procedural Rules re Changes in Placement, Education and Health Needs, and Termination of Court Supervision for Older Youth | 9/28/2011          | 6                 |
| New Laws to Promote Permanency and Support Older Youth  | 8/24/2012          | 4                 |
| Combined ID of Adult Relatives FF and FGDM  | 7/8/2013           | 1                 |
| Affordable Care Act Extended Medical for Older Youth Protocol 10-2014   | 11/10/2014         | 4                 |
| Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Memo  | 12/15/2015         | 3                 |
| DHS and CUA Support Services - Updated 03-27-17 - Connections for Older Youth in Care   | 3/27/2017          | 4                 |
| IOC CUA Practice Guidelines Aug 2017 - Connections for Older Youth in Care  | 8/1/2017           | 20                |
| Older Youth Review Referral Protocol  | 10/19/2020         | 11                |
| Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic Act – Extended  | 4/27/2021          | 4                 |
| General Provisions DHS - non- CUA July 2021 - FINAL - Connections for Older Youth in Care   | 7/1/2021           | 2                 |
| General Provisions DHS CUA - July 2021 - FINAL - Connections for Older Youth in Care  | 7/1/2021           | 3                 |
| Memo - New Older Youth Law Effective 1.2.2023   | 1/2/2023           | 7                 |
| Credit Checks for Youth and Young Adults  | n.d.               | 2                 |
| 5710 Case Supporting Services - Adolescent Initiative   | n.d.               | 5                 |

**Policies with Medical Care and Access Content**

There were 14 policy documents in total containing content regarding medical care and access, with a total of 47 references to this content area. The specific documents that contained content on housing included *Serving Child Victims of Human Trafficking; Board Extension Policy and Procedure Guide; Transition Planning for Older Youth 16 through 21; Youth in Transition Database; Family Planning Options for Youth; New Juvenile Court Procedural Rules Regarding Changes in Placement, Education and Health Needs, and Termination of Court Supervision for Older Youth; Protocol Re-Entry into Care; DHS and CUA Support Services; Affordable Care Act Extended Medical for Older Youth; IOC Community Umbrella Agency Guidelines; IOC Fiscal Guidelines; Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic; General Provisions; and Adolescent Initiative.*

Similar to the content on independence, the references to medical access and care contained within the policy documents noted above were focused specifically on older youth in foster care and preparing to transition from care, even though not all of the policies were solely for that population. The *Affordable Care Act Extended Medical for Older Youth* contained 10 references to this medical access and care, which is the higher number of references of this content area of all the policy documents reviewed. This is followed by the *IOC Community Umbrella Agency Guidelines*, which contained 9 references to this content area. The specific language contained within these documents connected to this content area focused on access to medical care and access to medical insurance as part of discharge planning for youth preparing to exit care. One policy document, *Family Planning Options*, included references to family planning and prenatal care. Table 9 below provides a summary of the policy documents with



content related to medical care and access, including the policy title, date issued, and number of references to this content that is included in policy document.

**Table 9**

*Policies with Medical Care and Access Content*

| <b>Policy Title</b>   | <b>Date issued</b> | <b>References</b> |
|---|--------------------|-------------------|
| Serving Child Victims of Human Trafficking  | 7/23/2001          | 1                 |
| Board Extension Policy and Procedure Guide with Attachments   | 8/1/2005           | 1                 |
| Transition Planning For Older Youth 16 through 21 with Attachment   | 10/21/2009         | 5                 |
| National Youth in Transition Database   | 10/7/2010          | 2                 |
| Fam Plan Ops for Preg in DHS Custody  | 8/18/2011          | 4                 |
| New Juvenile Court Procedural Rules re Changes in Placement, Education and Health Needs, and Termination of Court Supervision for Older Youth | 9/28/2011          | 4                 |
| Protocol Re-entry into Care Final 1-17-13   | 1/17/2013          | 1                 |
| Affordable Care Act Extended Medical for Older Youth Protocol 10-2014   | 11/10/2014         | 10                |
| DHS and CUA Support Services - Updated 03-27-17 - Connections for Older Youth in Care   | 3/27/2017          | 5                 |
| IOC CUA Practice Guidelines Aug 2017 - Connections for Older Youth in Care  | 8/1/2017           | 9                 |
| IOC Fiscal Guidelines_FY21 final 9 28 - Connections for Older Youth in Care   | 9/28/2017          | 2                 |
| Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic Act – Extended  | 4/27/2021          | 1                 |
| General Provisions DHS - non- CUA July 2021 - FINAL - Connections for Older Youth in Care   | 7/1/2021           | 1                 |
| 5710 Case Supporting Services - Adolescent Initiative   | n.d.               | 1                 |

**Summary**

This study sought to answer the question whether Philadelphia County policies and practice guidelines align with goals and objectives of the Chafee Foster Care Program to support

the successful transition of youth from foster care, including provisions to support youth developing connections to caring adults as part of their transition plan. This chapter outlined the findings of the conceptual content analysis of Philadelphia DHS' policies that guide the work with older youth in foster care to answer that question. Policy documents were examined as to content on the priorities of the Chafee Foster Care Program, which are connections to caring adults, education, emotional support, employment, financial management, housing, independence, and medical care and access. This study found that the Philadelphia DHS policies do align with the priorities of the Chafee Foster Care Program and include guidance for each of the areas noted above. Further, three main themes emerged through this analysis: independence, transition planning, and interdependence. These themes will serve as focal points for subsequent analysis in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 5: Analysis and Synthesis**

### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter, a conceptual content analysis approach was used to examine policies that guide the work with older youth in foster care in order to gain understanding about how Philadelphia DHS is implementing the Federal Chafee Foster Care Program and including provisions to support youth in developing connections to caring adults. This chapter provides an analysis of the study's findings, including themes and patterns that emerged from the analysis of the data.

### **Discussion**

The conceptual content analysis conducted on the policies that guide the work with older youth in foster care in Philadelphia County sought to answer the question whether Philadelphia County policies and practice guidelines align with priorities of the Chafee Foster Care Program to support the successful transition of youth from foster care, including provisions to support youth developing connections to caring adults as part of their transition plan. Overall, the findings concluded that Philadelphia DHS is implementing the Federal Chafee Foster Care Program and including provisions to support youth in the areas identified within the Chafee Program. As previously discussed, the goals of the Chafee Program include providing funding and guidance to provide services to youth who are expected to be in foster care until the age of 18 and youth who are preparing to exit foster care to receive education, training, support to obtain employment, emotional support, housing resources, access to medical care, and connections to supportive adults. The majority of the policy documents reviewed (n=29) included content on one or more of these areas, with several policy documents containing content on multiple areas. The presence of language referring to these content areas

demonstrates that Philadelphia County leadership and policymakers place value on each of these areas and see them as a valuable focus for older youth in foster care (Hodge et al., 2021). Since content on independence was present more frequently across the policy documents than another other content area, one may conclude that the highest priority for Philadelphia County leadership is to promote independence and the development of independent living skills in older youth in foster and preparing to transition to adulthood.

There were three major themes identified through this content analysis: independence, interdependence, and transition planning. These themes are not mutually exclusive; in fact, there is much overlap between them.

### **Independence**

Of the eight content areas that were examined as part of this content analysis, the most frequently occurring content area was independence. This is reflected in the hierarchy chart in Appendix D. The language contained in the 111 references across 20 policy documents provides guidance to social workers working with older youth in foster care around what is needed to prepare the youth to live independently. The concept of independence was introduced in the earliest policy document issued involving older youth in foster care, “Adolescent Initiative,” *CYD Policy Manual*. The issuance of this policy aligned with the advent of the Independent Living Program, which was established when the United States government amended Title IV-E of the Social Security Act in response to the needs of youth between the ages of 16 and 18 in foster care who were more likely to remain in foster care and age out rather than reach permanency through reunification or adoption and prepare them for self-sufficiency. As previously referenced, in 1999 the Federal Chafee Program was issued, providing states with funding and guidance to support services for older youth in foster care to successfully transition

to adulthood. This was a significant piece of legislation to support the older youth population in foster care. Interestingly, Philadelphia County did not issue any policies or guidance around this piece of legislation until more than 10 years later, with the *Notification of Benefits under Chafee Policy* issued on 3/17/2010. However, Philadelphia County did issue four policies prior to 3/17/2010 that included content to support older youth in their transition to independence, with one of these policies, *Transition Planning for Older Youth 16 through 21* issued on 10/21/2009, containing the second highest number of references to independence of all policies reviewed. Further, as subsequent legislation was issued with revisions to the Chafee Federal Program, Philadelphia County issued appropriate policies that align with these revisions in a timely manner. For instance, in 2014 when the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act was issued, Philadelphia County issued the *Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Memo*. This county-level policy included guidance based on the provisions of the corresponding legislation.

It is evident that leadership and policymakers within Philadelphia County see value in promoting the development of life skills, preparing older youth in foster care with independent living skills, and promoting the achieving of self-sufficiency as older youth transition to adulthood. This is evidenced by the policies previously identified that include language and guidance to support life skill development for youth to achieve independence.

### **Interdependence**

As defined in Chapter 3, the concept of interdependence refers to connections to trusted adults to help youth aging out of foster care to build a safety net as they navigate the transition (Hokanson et al., 2020). The language used to define interdependence mirrors the language used within the policy documents to refer to connections to caring adults. Thus, both concepts

involve relational connections to supportive and caring adults and lifelong relational supports with family, kin, and stable adults. While the term interdependence was not specifically mentioned in any of the policy documents, the concept was present in the references coded under the content area of connections to caring adults. These two terms will be used interchangeably for this discussion.

Earlier literature cites an overemphasis on independence and independent living for older youth transitioning from foster care (Freundlich & Avery, 2006; Munson & Scott, 2007; Tao et al., 2013). However, the findings from this study did not show an overemphasis on independence. While the concept of independence was the most frequently occurring content area, the concept of connections to caring adults, or interdependence, closely followed with 101 references across 17 documents. This is reflected in the hierarchy chart in Appendix D.

While the Federal Chafee Program, which was established through the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, includes connections to a caring adult as a component necessary for a youth's successful transition from care, Philadelphia County did not establish policies to incorporate this into practice until ten years later, starting with the *Transition Planning for Older Youth 16 through 21 Years Old* policy issued in 2009. The references to connections to caring adults, or interdependence, in this policy document promote the inclusion of mentoring relationships and connections to stable adults for older youth in foster care and preparing to transition to adulthood. In 2010, DHS issued a policy entitled *Notification Regarding Benefits under the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP)*, however, this policy document did not include any content on connections with caring adults, despite this concept being identified as a priority within the federal legislation. Subsequent policy documents were issued that included language to promote the development of mentoring relationships and connections

to stable adults for older youth in foster care. However, the Family First Act of 2018 included enhancements to the Federal Chafee Program established through the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999. The Family First Act recognized that an overemphasis on independence for youth preparing to transition from the foster care system is not a useful approach and promoted a gradual transition for this population, with support of stable adults (Lindell et al., 2020).

Philadelphia County did not issue any additional policies or policy revisions in response to this piece of legislation. In fact, no additional significant policy changes were issued in Philadelphia County regarding older youth to promote interdependence until recently when the policy *New Law for Older Youth* was issued in 2023. This policy includes guidance around prioritizing and finding permanency through reunification, adoption, or permanent legal custodianship for older youth in foster care; identifying and engaging family members to serve as a support to youth; and identifying at least two significant connections with supportive, caring adults to support youth while in foster care and during the transition to adulthood and beyond.

In addition to promoting the skills needed for independence for older youth in foster care, leadership and policymakers within Philadelphia County also see value in supporting the development of relationships and interdependence for this population. This is evidenced by the policies previously identified that include language and guidance to assist older youth in foster care in the development of connections to stable and caring adults.

### **Transition Planning**

In addition to the concepts of independence and interdependence, transition planning emerged as a theme throughout the policy documents and was prevalent among the policies that directly related to older youth in foster care. Among these policy documents, transition planning was seen as a vital component to ensure a youth's successful transition out of foster care and into

adulthood. The guidance provided within these policy documents prioritizes the need for transition planning prior to a youth's exit from care to establish a plan for the youth's housing, education, employment, income, and access to medical care and behavioral health supports as well as including identified supportive adults in the transition planning process. Further, transition planning also included planning for the youth to obtain their birth certificate and social security card, obtain a state identification or driver's license, secure their medical records, secure school transcripts and high school diploma, develop a resume, and access a copy of their credit report.

Transitioning planning that includes the youth and professionals promotes independence, as the youth will be responsible to carry out the plan on their own upon exiting care. However, transition planning that includes the youth, professionals, and supportive adults promotes interdependence, as the youth will have additional support from a caring, stable adult once the professionals are no longer involved. The focus on and prioritizing interdependence aligns with the current values of the Federal Chafee Program in allowing for a youth's gradual transition from care to a safe, nurturing environment and with support of stable adults (Lindell et al., 2020).

### **Summary**

This chapter provided an analysis of the study's findings, including themes and patterns that emerged from the analysis of the data. The conceptual content analysis conducted found that Philadelphia County is currently implementing the Federal Chafee Foster Care Program and including provisions to support youth in the areas identified within the Chafee Program, including provisions for connections with caring adults. However, the priorities of the Federal Chafee Program were not fully implemented immediately. Rather, it appears that it took at least ten years for policies to incorporate the need for and value of connections to caring adults to be



recognized and woven into the policies in Philadelphia County. Additionally, the three major themes identified through this analysis; independence, interdependence, and transition planning, were examined within this chapter.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations**

The purpose of this study was to conduct an examination of existing county-level policies to evaluate how these policies in Philadelphia County align with the priorities of Chafee Foster Care Program. The Chafee Program's purpose is to provide states with the ability to respond to the needs of youth aging out of foster care. These needs include housing, employment, education, financial literacy, independent living skills, health care, and connection to supportive adults. This federal policy reflects the importance of providing youth with opportunities to form relationships with people who care about them, provide consistent support, and provide experiential opportunities for learning and feedback that allow youth to develop life skills and trusted relationships (Collins, 2019). Overall, the findings of this study have demonstrated that the county-level policies that guide the work with older youth in foster care in Philadelphia County align with the purpose of the Federal Chafee Program. The policies include guidance to provide opportunities for older youth in foster care with necessary life skills to support self-sufficiency. There is also guidance to support older youth preparing to transition out of foster care to participate in transition planning that includes a plan for housing, education, employment, financial management, medical care, and connections to supportive adults. In fact, the guidance encourages those identified as supportive adults to engage in the transition planning process alongside the youth.

It does not appear that the priorities within the Chafee Program were fully implemented immediately within the county-level policies in Philadelphia County. As previously discussed, there was a 10-year gap between the initial issuance of the legislation that outlined the Federal Chafee Program and the incorporation of language from that legislation in Philadelphia County policies. Further, it also took at least ten years for the need for and value of connections to

caring adults to be incorporated in any policies in Philadelphia County related to older youth in foster care. While the inclusion of language that prioritizes and guides social workers to assist youth in foster care in developing connections with caring adults seemed to be delayed based on the guidance of the Federal Chafee Program, there is a somewhat of a parallel to the attention to this concept in the literature. Of the literature reviewed for this study, the earliest study that examined the need for relational connections for youth aging out of foster care was conducted in 2007. Since that time through 2020, there have been multiple studies conducted with focus on the need for relational connections and safety nets for youth aging out of foster care, as this continues to be an unmet need.

The literature reviewed for this study offered information on the needs of this population through qualitative studies with a focus on the voice of the youth and their caregivers. This study has focused on examining the policies that govern the work with this population, giving a glimpse at the priorities of county-level leadership and policymakers for older youth aging out of foster care. While this was helpful information to examine, it does not tell the whole story. This study confirmed that the county-level policies that guide the work with older youth in foster care in Philadelphia County does provide guidance to social workers and child welfare workers to support interdependence with this population and the development of connections with caring adults. Research supports the need for lasting relationships with adults along with supportive services as a factor leading to positive outcomes for older youth in foster care (Katz & Geiger, 2020; Kelly & Simmel, 2019). Yet, studies continue to show that many youth leave foster care without having established such relationships with a caring adult (Katz & Geiger, 2020). Thus, several questions remain.

It is important that the policies that guide the work with this population at the state and county level include language and provision for concrete needs, independent living skills, and the development of relational connections. Further, policies should focus more on interdependence rather than independence for youth preparing to exit care, as youth may not be able to be helped to develop relationship and interpersonal skills in a system where the goal is independence (Avery, 2011). While the findings of this study have demonstrated that the county-level policies that guide the work with older youth in foster care in Philadelphia County, it is unclear if agency policies within provider agencies that contract with Philadelphia County and provide services directly to this population mirror what is included in the county-level policies. A recommendation for future research could include an analysis of provider agency policies for alignment with county-level policies and focus on interdependence.

Additionally, programs are needed that provide opportunities for youth in foster care and preparing to age out that support their transition to adulthood by offering life skill development as well as support in building connections and supportive relationships. Young people preparing to exit foster care will need a safety net of people they can turn to for advice, emotional support, or even concrete support. As previously discussed, programs that focus primarily or only on life skills/independent living skills are not sufficient for a youth's successful transition from foster care (Freundlich & Avery, 2006; Leathers et al., 2019; Munson & Scott, 2007). Traditional independent living skills programs are not enough and do not provide what is needed to assist youth aging out of care in becoming self-sufficient. Programs need to focus on promoting interdependence. This includes providing opportunities for youth to make connections to caring adults where they feel cared for and connections and in assisting the youth in gaining the skills to develop and maintain positive relationships. These connections to stable, caring adults can

provide support for youth in all aspects of the transition to adulthood and be part of the transition planning process. The inclusion of caring, supportive adults as part of the youth's transition planning process may provide the youth a stronger sense that they have reliable connections during their transition from care and into adulthood (Leathers et al., 2019). Unlike professional relationships with social workers and others within the child welfare system that end at the time a youth exits foster care, the relationships with identified caring adults will extend beyond a youth's time in foster care. Future research could include an evaluation of the programs within Philadelphia County serving the older youth population to examine how these programs promote interdependence, including youth making connections to caring adults along with assisting the youth in gaining the skills to develop and maintain positive relationships.

Given that the county-level policies do support interdependence for older youth in foster care and preparing to transition to adulthood, perhaps a gap exists among the professionals implementing the services governed by these policies. It is unclear how knowledgeable the social workers and child welfare workers that serve the older youth population in Philadelphia County are on these policies and the guidance provided. It is also unclear how these same social workers and child welfare workers are trained to engage with the older youth population. An examination of training materials and curriculum for the training provided by Philadelphia County to social workers and child welfare workers that work with this population would offer useful information to support the work and identified gaps. It may also be beneficial to evaluate the skill sets that exist within the child welfare workforce that works with the older youth population. This could provide insight on how equipped social workers and other child welfare workers are able to implement policies and provide services.

Lastly, the most recently issued policy document for Philadelphia County, *New Law for Older Youth*, includes significant guidance to social workers in supporting interdependence for older youth in foster care and preparing to exit care. Future research may be considered that examines the impact of this policy implementation on the outcomes of older youth in Philadelphia County.

### **Implications for Social Work Leadership and Teaching**

Overall, this study confirmed that the county-level policies in Philadelphia County supported the development of best practice measures based on the literature for service provision to older youth in foster care. This is important to policymakers and organizational leadership that serve older youth in the foster care system. However, there was a notable delay between academic advances and practice advances. Organizational leadership must ensure that current social work practice and the policies that govern practice reflect current research in a timely manner. It would benefit organizational leadership to examine how policies are implemented to ensure that priority is given to what has been shown to work based on research and literature. Further, organizational leadership have a duty to also evaluate policies on an ongoing basis to ensure that practice continues to reflect current research and best practices.

In this study, independence had a slightly greater focus than connections to caring adults and interdependence. Research suggests that the greater emphasis should be placed on interdependence rather than independence (Hokanson et al., 2020; Leathers et al., 2019; Rosenberg, 2019). This would include policies that have a greater focus on interdependence and contain language to equally support life skill development and building connections to caring adults to help older youth navigate the transition from care to adulthood. In fact, one could say that a stronger emphasis should be placed on prioritizing the building of connections to caring

adults, as it is through these relationships that youth transitioning to adulthood build a safety net to further develop life skills well beyond their time in foster care. One strategy that may prove beneficial includes policies that emphasize and prioritize placement of older youth in family settings, such as foster homes or kinship homes, rather than congregate care settings, as these family settings provide greater opportunities to support interdependent relationships.

Organizational leadership need to support a shift in ideology from self-sufficiency to self-efficacy in order to remove the expectation for youth to become independent and provide opportunities for youth to build safety nets of interdependent relationships (Hokanson et al., 2020). Systems theory supports this assertion. In the same way that systems are interdependent on each other to function at their best, individuals rely on interdependent relationships to also function at their best. With respect to the population of this study, older youth who are preparing to transition from foster care rely on interdependent relationships to support a successful transition from care and successful functioning as an adult. As policies and programs incorporate a stronger emphasis on interdependent relationships for older youth in foster care, it is likely that outcomes will improve for this population.

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## Appendix A: Philadelphia Department of Human Services (DHS) Policies

### Policies and Related Documents Specifically about Older Youth

*In reverse chronological order.*

- *Initiating the Resumption of Jurisdiction (Act 91) Process for Youth Aged-Out of Care*, issued September 14, 2021.
- *Older Youth Review Referral Protocol*, issued October 19, 2020.
- *Credit Checks for Youth and Young Adults*, issued February 6, 2017.
- *Extended Medical Benefits for Youth and Young Adults Protocol*, issued November 10, 2014.
- *Re-entry into Care for Youth 18-21 Protocol*, issued January 17, 2013.
- *New Laws to Promote Permanency and Support Older Youth*, issued August 24, 2012.
- *National Youth in Transition Database*, issued October 7, 2010.
- *Notification Regarding Benefits under the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) and the Education and Training Grant (ETG) Program*, issued March 17, 2010.
- *Transition Planning for Older Youth 16 through 21 Years Old*, issued October 21, 2009.
- *Board Extension Policy and Procedure Guide*, issued August 1, 2005.
- “Adolescent Initiative,” *CYD Policy Manual*, Sequence 5710.

### Policies and Related Documents Likely to Pertain More to Older Youth or only Partially about Older Youth

*In reverse chronological order.*

- *Revised Youth Consent to COVID-19 Vaccination (ages 14 years and older) and Parental Consent for COVID-19 Vaccination (ages 5-13)*, issued December 16, 2021.
- *Supporting Foster Youth and Families Through the Pandemic Act*, issued April 27, 2021.
- *Serving Child Victims of Human Trafficking*, issued July 23, 2021.
- *New Rights in Care and Grievance Procedure Guides for Youth in Congregate Care Facilities and Their Families*, issued February 10, 2021.
- *Revised Consent to Medical, Dental, Psychological Care and Treatment and Educational Consent Guidelines*, issued January 7, 2021.
- *Juvenile Justice Services (JJS) Detention Review Procedure*, issued February 25, 2016.
- *Court-Ordered Home Evaluations for Arrested Youth*, issued February 4, 2016.
- *New Legislation Regarding Goal Selection and Planning Participation*, issued December 28, 2015.
- *New Laws to Protect Children and Youth from Sex Trafficking and Promote Permanency*, issued December 15, 2015.
- *Protocol for Truancy Investigations Section*, issued June 10, 2014. (Note that there is no longer a Truancy Section but the protocol itself continues to apply to truancy investigations).
- *The Family Advocacy and Support Assessment Tool (FAST) and the Well-Being Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Assessments*, issued September 3, 2013.
- *Shared Case Responsibility Reminder*, issued August 20, 2013.

- *Frequency of Ongoing Contacts with Children and Youth Accepted for Service*, issued March 1, 2013.
- *REVISED Joint Policy and Procedure Guide for Shared Case Responsibility*, issued December 12, 2011.
- *Requirements for Goal Changes to Permanent Legal Custodianship (PLC) or Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA), and PLC Subsidies*, issued November 10, 2011.
- *New Juvenile Court Procedural Rules Regarding Changes in Placement, Education and Health Needs, and Termination of Court Supervision for Older Youth*, issued September 28, 2011.
- *Family Planning Options for Pregnant Youth in DHS Custody*, issued August 18, 2011.
- *Non-Discrimination and Non-Harassment of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ) Clients*, issued January 22, 2010.

**Policies and Related Documents Primarily about Connections and Continuity, not Specifically Older Youth**

*In reverse chronological order.*

- *Revised Educational Stability and Continuity for Children and Youth in Care*, issued October 21, 2021.
- *Special Child Welfare Requirements for Indian Children and Youth*, issued August 26, 2021.
- *Family Engagement Initiative (FEI) – Crisis / Rapid Response Family Meetings (CRRFM) Protocol*, issued May 11, 2021.
- *Revised Family Team Decision Making Conferences (FTC) – 2020*, issued August 11, 2020.
- *New Court Rule Regarding Educational Stability*, issued September 6, 2019.
- *Philadelphia Department of Human Services and School District of Philadelphia Joint Protocol to Coordinate the Educational Stability and Continuity of Children and Youth in Out of Home Placement*, issued May 10, 2017.
- *Identifying Relatives and Kin when Children and Youth are Placed. The Use of Family Finding and Family Group Decision Making in Practice*, issued July 8, 2013.
- *Notification of the Potential for Voluntary Post Adoption Agreements*, issued June 6, 2011.
- *Sibling Placement and Visitation Requirements*, issued February 8, 2011.
- *Revised Policy for Referring Children and Families for Services through the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN)*, issued March 9, 2010.
- *Educational Stability and Continuity for Children in Substitute Care*, issued February 18, 2010.

**Excerpts from:**

*In reverse chronological order.*

- *The City of Philadelphia Professional Services Contract General Provisions for Department of Human Services Contracts*, rev. July 2021.

- *The City of Philadelphia Professional Services Contract General Provisions for Department of Human Services Improving Outcomes for Children Community Umbrella Agency*, rev. July 2021.
- *IOC Fiscal Guidelines for Community Umbrella Agencies*, effective July 1, 2020.
- *IOC Community Umbrella Agency Practice Guidelines*, effective August 2017.
- *Philadelphia DHS Support Services for DHS Workers and CUA Case Managers*, issued March 27, 2017.

**Appendix B: IRB Documentation****IRB application**

Werner, Jeffrey <werner@kutztown.edu>

Mon 1/23/2023 2:56 PM

To: Miller, Heather <hmill225@live.kutztown.edu>

Cc: Sharma, Yasoda <sharma@kutztown.edu>

Hi Heather,

The IRB reviewed your application “Social Supports and Relational Connections for Youth Aging out of Foster Care: A policy Content Analysis.” Since you are only reviewing policies and are not reviewing any document, data, etc. regarding human subjects or interviewing anyone from the agencies, this is not considered to be human subject research.

**Jeffrey Werner** | Assistant Provost for Research & Grants  
Office of Grants & Sponsored Projects  
**Kutztown University of Pennsylvania**  
110 Old Main | P.O. Box 730 | Kutztown, PA 19530  
Phone: 484-646-4168 | Fax: 484-646-4217 | [www.kutztown.edu](http://www.kutztown.edu)

**Appendix C: Codebook***Policy Content Analysis*

| Name                         | Description   |
|------------------------------|---|
| Connections to caring adults | Content involving connections, relationships to caring adults, lifelong supports, family and kin relationships, stable adults, supportive adults, mentoring relationships |
| Education                    | Content involving educational supports, access to education, college, vocational training, educational stability  |
| Emotional support            | Content involving emotional supports, peer support, sibling relationships, therapeutic supports   |
| Employment                   | Content involving employment, employment training, career decision-making, career training  |
| Financial management         | Content involving financial literacy, money management, budgeting, household management   |
| Housing                      | Content involving housing, housing stability, and access to affordable housing  |
| Independence                 | Content involving independence, independent living, life skills, self-sufficiency, transition plan, transition to adulthood, transition to independence                   |
| Medical care and access      | Content involving access to medical, dental, or specialty care, health insurance, access to medical records   |

**Appendix D: Hierarchy Chart**

