Career Experiences of Foster Care Alumni

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WORKS CITED AND CONSULTED


Adolescents (pp. 48–65). Columbia University Press.


RESEARCH QUESTION
What challenges do foster care alumni face in their careers?

METHODOLOGY

Recruiting Participants: Recruited 14 participants using snowball sampling

Narrative Interviews:
• Led 30-minute introductory call.
• Conducted 30 to 90-minute semi-structured interviews, co-guided by participants, about their career experiences.

Data Analysis:
• Identified themes within interviews and used card sorting to identify themes across interviews.
• Themes were not correlated with foster care outcome or time spent in care.

14 PARTICIPANTS

Gender:
5 - Men
9 - Women

Race/Ethnicity:
2 - African American participants
2 - Hispanic participants
2 - Multiracial participants
8 - White participants

Time in Care Varied:
Minimum: 1 year
Average: 7 years
Maximum: 18 years

Outcome:
7 - adopted; 7 - aged out

Work in a variety of industries:
1 - Service industry
2 - Health care
1 - Finance
3 - College student
1 - Communications
1 - Business
3 - Social services
1 - Business
1 - Service industry
4 - Social services

Participants were given the option to use a pseudonym; some chose to use their real name.

FINDINGS

While each participant’s story was unique, themes emerged across the interviews. Participants expressed:
• The value of helping others
• The value of independence, and how it influenced participants’ relationships with authority and asking for help
• The importance of relationships at work, including supervisors
• The importance of security, including financial security
• Challenges with mental health

Likewise, while each participant brings their own strengths, there were similarities in the strengths they described. The alumni that I spoke with said:
• Wanted to give back, encouraged others, and were sought for their advice
• Were self-aware and had developed helpful coping skills
• Understood their values, positive, responsible, and adaptable
• Were loyal and wanted to stay with organizations long-term

IMPACT

“We all bring ourselves and our histories to our work. If I better understand the emotions and experiences that have shaped [my colleagues], I can connect with them on a personal level, which helps drive outcomes.” – Victor

THANK YOU

Participating foster care alumni for trusting me with your stories and your time. My husband for supporting my ambitions and taking on most of our household responsibilities. My son for helping celebrate every small win with Dessert! Hannah Fenves and Zachary Webb for their support in the next stage of this project. My second reader, Dr. Amy Lane, for championing my research and remaining an advisor after taking on a new role. Dr. Toni Watt and other university foster care liaisons from across the state for sharing my call for research. Josh Batten for selecting me for the Batten-Savoie Scholarship.

LEARN MORE

FosterCareerExperience.com
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