Sustaining Equitable Child Welfare Policies in Foster Care: Perspectives from Non-profit Support Professional and their Role in Multidisciplinary Policy Collaboration

Shirley Dews
sd983944@wcupa.edu

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Sustaining Equitable Child Welfare Policies in Foster Care: Perspectives from Non-profit Support Professionals and their Role in Multidisciplinary Policy Collaborations

A Dissertation
Presented to the Faculty of the
Department of Public Policy and Administration
West Chester University
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the Degree of
Doctor of Public Administration

By
Shirley Dews
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Dedication

I dedicate this undertaking to my parents who chose me to be in their circle of love. As a precocious child, they encouraged me to experience all that life had to offer, and to go beyond what was imaginable.

To my father, who is in that heavenly place, you taught me what hard work and dedication entails. Thank you for understanding my dedication and eagerness for learning, and for being a constant force.

To my mother, strong, sharp-witted, and compassionate. Through you I also learned the demands of hard work and dedication. Your incessant ability to ensure that I pursued my full potential in any endeavor, has molded me into who I am today.

To my brother, my first friend. I remember the stories of how I would wait for you to come home from school to find out what you learned that day. Thank you for always encouraging, supporting, and loving me.

To my husband, my tower of strength. We chose this journey of life together, and you have tirelessly listened to my dreams, listened while I read every academic paper to you and pretended to understand my creative combination of words, supported me, and kept me laughing when I was stressed. You have earned this honor and beyond!

Lastly, to my son, my gift from God. Like a diamond, you shine bright with your unselfishness, compassion, dedication, and love of our family.
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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to analyze the sustainability of equitable child welfare policies in foster care. This research examines the unique perspectives from frontline workers and support professionals of two nonprofits agencies in New York. These agencies are charged with implementing effective child welfare workforce policies in collaboration with federal, state, and local agencies. This study used an interpretive phenomenology method of research and a qualitative research design to interpret the experiences of child welfare workers that work with foster care children, biological parents, and foster care parents. The participants were carefully selected from two reputable nonprofit child welfare agencies that have worked with children and families for over 50 years. The initial invitation to participate in the study was requested from the Executive Directors of each nonprofit via telephone with a follow-up request via e-mail. The directors formulated a team of employees that would be best suited for the undertaking of this research study. Each agency was provided with an informed consent form for each participant via email and the forms were signed and returned in-person prior to the first interview session. The survey questionnaire was disseminated to a sample of 22 participants: 11 from each agency consisting of multiple interviews. The data collected was analyzed using a thematic approach for the interpretation of data and summarized by the researcher. The limitations of the study were inclusive of time constraints, and participants unwillingness to contribute to the study.

In conclusion, this study established that frontlines workers and support professionals rely on policy administrators to effectively ensure that they are equipped with an in-depth knowledge of all aspects of child welfare, child welfare policies and children in foster care.

Keywords: Child welfare, Frontline Workers, Foster Care
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Chapter 1: Introduction to Study

Overview

Capturing the social injustices that perpetuate the imbalance of children who succumb to the child welfare system continues to be an unresolved phenomenon. In the mid-19th century, society altered their perception of a parent’s innate authority pertaining to children, and incorporated the mindset of religious and civic leaders with reference to what would be considered the reasoning for allowing children to remain in an improper home environment (Paddock et al., 2013). Early society based the needs of child welfare on public and private agencies and removed the responsibility from the federal government’s purview. Based on historical precedence, the Child Welfare System, initially under the auspices of each state, faced decades of misaligned mission statements and objectives. Today, policymakers use social science research to help inform them of current child welfare and foster care initiatives, as well as the cost to the public for child welfare programs (McCartney & Rosenthal, 2000). As Lewit (1993) noted, foster care is a social service provided to severely abused and neglected children who are unable to reside with their parents due to adverse circumstances such as abuse, neglect, or the demise of one or both parents to ensure not only the safety of children, but to also support families to adequately care for children. Frontline workers and support staff are individuals that have been trained in child welfare to mitigate the emotional, psychological, and educational limitations inherent to children in foster care. Day (et al., 2022) notes that the state level implementation of child welfare policies and practices dictate what one can consider as cases that should be categorized as child maltreatment.
The Department of Health (*Child Maltreatment 2021*) reported an increase in child neglect and abuse cases from 2015 through 2018. The federal government prompted the necessity for regulatory intervention. With increased appropriations from the federal government, states were required not only to match governmental funds, but to follow federal mandates and guidelines while overseeing the child welfare programs specific to each agency. Child welfare agencies following these mandates and guidelines rely on a commitment from frontline workers and support professionals to oversee the implementation of multidisciplinary collaborative policies to ensure the effectiveness of entitlements awarded to agencies that monitor children in the foster care system.

Based on governmental match requirements, the socioeconomic cost of the Child Welfare System weighs heavily on federal policymakers. Noticeably, the ability of policymakers to balance and sustain equitable child welfare policies in foster care has been challenging and costly. Policymakers undertaking this enormous responsibility hope to ensure that foster children exposed to the ills of poverty, abuse, and neglect are given proper financial and emotional support. Through the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act, the federal government was prompted and obligated to ensure that this legislation became a law. As a part of this legislation, the removal of major policy barriers that facilitated the inability to meet the psychological and emotional needs and inalienable rights of children and families who are at risk was implemented (Knitzer, 2009). The stronghold of the Social Security Act of 1935, now Subpart 1 of Title IV-B of the Social Security Act, also serves as an incentive for states to initiate and develop programs that implement child welfare services (O’Neill & Gesiriech, 2004).
The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (2021), reported an approximately 30 percent decrease to 391,000 children in foster care since 1998. While there is a substantial decrease in the number of children in care, it does not mitigate the abuse and neglect imposed on these children. As noted by Barbell (2001) a family’s inability to comply with federal regulations in cases of child abuse and neglect led the courts to place children into foster care under court mandate. The state’s position is to step in and offer alternative arrangements that can meet the child’s physical, mental, and emotional needs conclusively. Federal policies identify foster care homes in placement and consider them temporary. Alternative arrangements offered are the connection with kinship care for those willing to take on the responsibility and varied needs of the child. Notably, the inherent responsibilities were shifting from the government to the states extending further oversight to local-level governments and public and private agencies. These outcomes lead to societal disadvantages such as educational deficiencies, and behavioral calamities which are reflected in violence, drug abuse and mental health concerns.

In contradiction to this, Sander (2003) states that although Congress has been instrumental in legislative law, they are not equipped to facilitate the unknowns, and unanticipated harmful effects of foster care. Due to the conflict in foster care laws and welfare reform, it has taken considerable efforts to solidify the laws to protect children who are often viewed as disposable within society.

Unfortunately, detrimental outcomes are manifested in children, and thus there is a need for a continuum of structured multidisciplinary policy collaborations to minimize and resolve the unraveling of underserved outcomes of children in foster care. Prioritizing equitable child welfare policies and analyzing the perspectives from frontline workers and
support professionals are guiding this research with the applicable inquiry into the following research questions:

**Research Questions:**

1. Have institutionalized child-centered laws adequately address child welfare reform that reflect the needs of the 21st century?

2. Do child welfare frontline workers, support professionals and advocates feel suppressed due to policy changes that affect their implementation of strategic collaboration with other agencies?

3. Do limitations in compensation and increased caseloads determine high percentages rates in turnover and retention?

4. Are evidence-based practices effective based on reform policies?

This study focuses on identifying effective and sustainable child welfare policies that will enhance, and diligently coordinate, the multidisciplinary policy collaborations of lawyers, social workers, peer advocates, family service workers, program directors, medical professionals, and child welfare agencies. Studies show that placing children in an outside home care environment that has been associated with negative developmental consequences exposes children to further risk for academic adversities (Curtis, Dale, Kendall & Rockefeller, 1999). If severe maltreatment is prevalent, this becomes an expedient reason for removal of the child who is deemed at high risk for poor developmental outcome, overall functioning, and psychopathological issues (Egeland, 1997).

Additionally, this study provides perspectives from nonprofit frontline workers and support professionals who are responsible for implementing governmental policy requirements; paralleled with agency guidelines and evidence-based measures pertaining to
child welfare. In addition, it warrants the ability to gather unbiased perspectives from each collaborative effort and allows an equitable assessment of the critical components pertaining to effective child welfare policies. These critical components of collaboration consist of the conversations between judicial bodies of law, social workers, foster care providers, local street-level bureaucrats, community-based nonprofits, and community advocates.

The integrated system of collaboration aligns processes and procedures that are instrumental in advancing the sustainability of equitable child welfare. Thus, the historical framework of government, in their quest and broad attempt to mitigate the tendencies of neglect and abuse of foster care children, has led the effort to work in collaboration with state, local and street-level bureaucrats to sustain equitable child welfare policies in foster care.

Frontline workers and support professionals who work with children and families in the foster care system are challenged with the arduous task of assisting with not only the safety of children, but also guiding families and children in early childhood development, social integration, managing disruptive behaviors, and strategically navigating the child welfare system to provide advocacy services for successful outcomes and overall well-being. Past research focuses on socioeconomic disparities as a key factor in determining the need to place children in foster care.

**Background of the Study**

The landmark statues, that historically undergird child welfare, are an integral part of understanding the need for child welfare reform. With the implementation of the Social Security Act of 1935, the Child Welfare Act of 1980, and the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, there was a need for a pressed and heightened sense of governmental
responsibility pertaining to the Child Welfare Bureau. However, the inherent responsibilities were shifting from the government to the states extending further oversight to local-level oversight. Prior to the passage of the Child Welfare Act in 1980, 500,000 children were impacted by the failure of this act (Sander, 2003). The U.S. Children’s Bureau reported that at the end of 2001, approximately 632,000 children were in foster care; this total is a combination of children that were already in foster care and those that entered during the year.

In 2007, the United States Health and Human Services Department reported that there are over half a million children in foster care. Under the auspices of the Child Welfare Policy law in 1961, and federal funding, appropriations were allocated to support children who were placed in foster care due to severe maltreatment, abuse, and neglect.

Societal, economic, and cultural disadvantages are key identifiers as to the inevitable predisposition of a child’s susceptibility to be placed into foster care. As noted by Barbell (2001) a family’s inability to comply with federal regulations in cases of child abuse and neglect lead the courts to place children into foster care under court mandate. Federal policies identify foster care homes in placement and consider them temporary. The state’s position is to step in and offer alternative arrangements that can meet the child’s physical, mental, emotional, and educational needs conclusively. Alternative arrangements offered are the connection to kinship care for those willing to take on the responsibility and varied needs of the child. Federal policies identify foster care homes in placement and consider them temporary. In contradiction to this, Sanders (2003) states that although Congress has been instrumental in legislative law, they are not equipped to facilitate the unknowns, and unanticipated harmful effects of foster care homes. Key collaborations between
governmental authorities, state and local agencies play a pivotal role in assimilating children to an atmosphere conducive to proper growth and development. Due to the conflict in foster care laws and child welfare reform, it has taken a considerable effort to solidify the laws to protect children who are considered disposable within society.

Currently, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2021), there are approximately 400,000 children in foster care in the United States as of 2021; of that amount approximately 15,000 reside in New York. Based on the guidelines implemented by the federal government, children usually age out of foster care at age 18, however, there are several states that allow this age limit to increase to the age of 21. Based on this stipulation, 33 states, according to the Child Welfare 2022 report, indicate that youth who have reached the age of 21 can return to foster care but are under the supervision of the agency that implements transitional living services (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2021).

**Problem Statement**

The child welfare phenomenon addresses the government’s historical disregard to adequately supporting the Child Welfare Bureau since its inception. This is evident by their decision to delegate the responsibility to the individual states. Lindenmeyer (1997) stressed the inability of the bureau to consciously discern not only some of the needs of children, but the needs of the whole child. Thus, the main research question establishes the need to understand how the intervention of government mandates the sustainability of equitable child welfare policies in foster care. In addition, to view the individual perspectives from frontline workers and support professionals. Their insight is not only relevant but also invaluable in understanding the gaps in prior research and identifying factors in implementing multidisciplinary policy collaborations to ensure economic and social self-reliance.
**Purpose and Significance of the Study**

Specific to this study is to incorporate an understanding of the nine prominent policies that are the framework based on the Child Welfare Policy Manual (Children’s Bureau). The framework is comprised of the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), Independent Living, The Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA), Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS), Title IV-B of the Social Security Act which is specific to tribal families to identify preventative measures and early intervention of child welfare policies. The framework of Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) is critical to this research. Each policy has significance and is interwoven in child welfare. These policies have been successfully implemented to sustain equitable child welfare initiatives, and to support the perspective from nonprofit frontline workers and support professionals. Also significant to the study is to bridge the gap between policymakers and permeate cross-sector collaboration not only at the federal level, but also at the state level. Further research identifies the sustainability and effectiveness of collaborative efforts between varied groups of individuals such as researchers, policy makers, and practitioners (Schelbe, Willson, Fickler, Mбеге & Klika, 2020). It is imperative to understand each of their relevant contributions to child welfare policymaking and the overall implementation of their decisions to build a supportive framework that is used for the development of frontline workers and support staff. The effect of cross-collaboration has the possibility to end the abuse and neglect of children in foster care.

In addition, this study is important in that it will continue the conversation surrounding the foster care system and policy reform. This study opened the pathway to
addressing the ability to analyze the support mechanisms that preserve sustainable and equitable child welfare as experienced by frontline workers and support professionals. Understanding the issues relating to children being placed into foster care highlights that foster care policies should continually undergo significant improvement (Leber et al., 2012). In addition, policymakers have not been held accountable for performance outcomes related to children in foster care (Bruskas, 2008).

The importance of this study begins by using qualitative data to provide an understanding of the policies that assist in sustaining equitable child welfare. It will also show the inevitable link between child abuse and neglect and foster care placement. The research gives detailed information not only regarding the overlap between the literature and practitioners’ perspectives, but, also how and why the phenomenon occurs, and what child welfare agencies are doing to address the issue (Chibnall, et al., 2003).

The criteria of nonprofit agencies selected, within the United States was determined by their mission statement with emphasis on child welfare policies and foster care. The individuals are important to the research in that they are the prime data source relevant to the study and provide a first-hand account of their experience within the foster care system. Their core existence is essential in understanding the phenomenon of foster care placement. The data gathered was a culmination of scholarly journal articles, books, and case studies. Within each writing, related themes emerged that were specific to child welfare, foster care policies, frontline workers, and the collaborative implementation of effective child welfare policies. The identified themes were selected and coded using an Excel format to reflect an organized flow of thematic information. This process of categorizing the information was critical to organizing and analyzing data for a comprehensive understanding of past research.
The historical research gave an account of the behavioral opinions from the perspective of frontline workers and support professionals. The data also analyzed the importance and usefulness of evidence-based practices and outcomes (EBP) as an essential component of child welfare policies in foster care. Analyze data for a comprehensive understanding of past research. The historical research gave an account of the behavioral opinions from the perspectives of frontline workers and support professionals. The use of data incorporates the use of coding the scholarly journal articles, books, and case studies to include the account of behavioral opinions of frontline workers and support professionals and the evidence-based practices (EBP) comparing each category to examine and condense the effectiveness of the organizational framework of child placement. This information is essential and specific to this population in that those who are not exposed to this environment will not be able to provide the information needed to analyze the data effectively.

The scope of the study incorporates understanding how policies are formulated and continually studied to show their effectiveness. Additional deficiencies are indicated with reference to the Children’s Bureau and their development of an evidence-based statewide review of child welfare system outcomes and implementation as noted in 2001 (U.S. DHHS, 2005). State mandates are a necessary component in meeting the needs of children, and the directive of sustaining and meeting the systemic requirements (Bruskas, 2008). In addition, there is a need to address the insurmountable caseloads and how they impact the outcome of the research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Literature Search Strategy

The justification of research is secured by scholarly journal articles which are specific to child welfare policy. One study based on policy context clearly states that although there have been child welfare and foster care policies in place for the last 40 years, there is a continual need for oversight into the reforms that facilitate the safety of families and children within the welfare system (Allen & Bissell, 2004).

The purpose of this study aims to further understand why there are 400,000 children in the foster care system. The Child Welfare policy, as it relates to the placement of children in foster care, has attempted to remedy the one-directional flow of children into the foster care system that resulted from the passage of the 1961 law through a provision which allows the appropriation of funding to states for children in foster care upon the condition that mandate agencies make reasonable efforts to avoid removal or to reunify families if removal was initially found to be necessary (Sanders, 2003).

Information was gathered from the U.S. Department of Health and Humans Services, 2007, Office of Children and Family Services, The Pew Commission of Children in Foster Care, 2003, Washington State’s Office of Children’s Administration Research, 2004, Casey Family Programs, 2005, Social Security Act, 1994, Child and Family Services Reviews, and the Administration for Children and Families, 2006. In addition, the selected journal articles critically analyzed research that was conducted within the United States with respect to nonprofit organizations; identifying their frontline workers and support professionals and the challenges they face when implementing cross-collaboration policies. An additional
component is to understand the impact of mental health and the separation phenomenon that affects the development of children.

This qualitative study will gather further insight into the primary focus of educational outcomes, behavioral challenges, the transitional phase of children aging out of foster care, the accountability and review of two child welfare agencies, and a greater understanding of the marginalization and powerlessness of children and families within the framework of child welfare. In addition, the legacy of cultural socioeconomical disparities is often identified with marginalized communities of color.

The sampling of participants in the study included two premier nonprofit agencies; one with a direct collaboration with the Department of Social Services, and one guided by federally funded mandates. Each agency is under the auspices of child welfare mandates, yet each had specific programs to assist with the needs while in foster care and those who have aged out. The participants were over the age of 18 and voluntarily contributed their personal insight into their engagement pertaining to foster care in general, and the children within the foster care system that are incorporated into their agency mission statement.

Additionally, this research will seek to assist in undertaking new studies to facilitate useful policies to connect supervisors with frontline workers and support professional and identify the daily challenges that are premier in working with children that are included into the program due to their individual qualifications. Areas of interest include performance-based outcomes from the policy collaboration with government, law, educational institutions, community and child advocates, and street-level bureaucrats.

Additionally, there is an opportunity to gain further insight into the political culture of evidence-based policy mandates that promote collaborative partnerships between social
agencies, social workers, case managers and supervisors. It will also address the limitations and barriers frontline workers and support staff encounter and the implementation of evidence-based policy mandates.

The purpose of this study further aims to understand why children are placed into foster care and how child welfare policies directly correlate to the placement of children in foster care. Although the child welfare policy seeks to address the placement of children in foster care, it must continually find methods to remedy the one-directional flow of children into the foster care system. With the assistance of governmental intervention, appropriation funding to states, states and local agencies make reasonable efforts to avoid removal or to reunify families if removal was initially found to be necessary (Sanders, 2003). While this population is broad in scope, this research will seek to identify specific and sustainable equitable child welfare policies. It also challenges the aspect of mental health and the separation phenomenon of children which are key components in normal child development.

Although there is compelling research which stresses that Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) is pivotal in measuring the environment of a child within the first eighteen years of development, ironically, this research is limited in scope which in turn has limited the understanding of the interpersonal relationship between ACEs and employment agencies (Steen et al., 2021). Sustaining equitable child welfare comes at an enormous economic cost but has the propensity to minimize child maltreatment and other unforeseen and detrimental Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

This study aims to address the gap in research to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of public administrators in having the innate ability and decision to enter the field of child welfare (Steen, et al., 2021), and their collaboration with their supervisors.
Concurrently, there is a need to undertake new studies to facilitate useful policies to connect supervisors with frontline workers and support professionals to understand the daily challenges that are premier in working with children that participate in the program due to their individual qualifications.

I sourced literature for this study from Google Scholar, ProQuest Dissertations, library searches, Connected Papers, peer-reviewed sources and published books on child welfare and policy. The key terms for research were inclusive of equitable child welfare, foster care, collaboration, frontline workers and support professionals in foster care, and nonprofit agencies. In addition, Erik Erikson’s Stages of Psychosocial Development and John Bowlby’s Attachment Theory were instrumental in understanding behavioral theories in child development.

**Theoretical Framework**

**Stages of Child Development: Theorists of child development**

This study focuses on theorists who have compiled extensive research on the emotional and educational trajectory of children during normal development. The collaborative policies and theories that can change the trajectory of the number of children placed in foster care are supported by the theoretical framework of child development theorists such as Erik Erikson, Sigmund Freud, G. Stanley Hall, John Bowlby. Each theorist developed specialized philosophies pertaining to nurturing and understanding child development.

Such theorist as Erik Erikson analyzed the eight stages of psychosocial theory of development of children, while John Bowlby considered the implications of Attachment Theory (Bowlby (1979)). Erikson’s theory studied the stages of child development to
understand the rudimentary psychosocial identity developmental changes in children (Sokol, 2009). He proposed that children must meet the five stages of development off-set by an equal yet compatible criteria (Sokol, 2009). Each is incumbent upon the other as a building block of emotional security and development of a child. He notes that each stage of development is not void of conflict, rather each stage parallels conflict with a conceivable successful outcome (Sokol, 2009).

Based on stage three, children become more independent, and parents become more involved with the child’s goals. This stage has two potential outcomes according to Erikson: (1) the parent fosters their development, and (2) the parent may neglect the child which precipitates feelings of guilt. According to Erikson, children must meet certain milestones to adequately adapt and develop into adulthood. Erikson’s theory recognizes that children who do not secure these needs in turn become adults who are unable to give their children what they need, which causes a cycle of abuse and neglect. He believed that children could be best understood in context and direct connection to their social environment. Most important is stage five which is the developmental stage of those entering adolescence. In this stage of development, the child conflicts with their identity and their respective role in the home and within society.

Similar to Erikson, Sigmund Freud paved the way of placing child development in steps of methodical development, however, in conflict with Erikson, Freud viewed child developmental stages as a natural occurrence that identified personality development. Such theorists as John Bowlby developed attachment theory that focuses on the concept that the longer children are not in contact with the initial caregiver, they become detached and feel a sense of loss. This is similar in thought to that of Erikson, in that both theories emphasize the
need of a child to form emotional and physical attachment for proper growth and development.

Bowlby emphasizes that if there is an opportunity for reassociation or reattachment, children often have a difficult time processing and connecting, and therefore, the sense of trust has been altered. Bretherton (1992), based on John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth, believe that it was not only important to have physical attachment as a child, but to garner an emotional component to child development that would ensure proper psychological growth. They believe that children learn to depend on their caregivers and as this trust develops, so does their outlook for a stable social environment and emotional development. Bowlby believed that childhood experiences, whether negative or positive, are associated with individual mental health attributes (Bowlby et al., 1952). As Bowlby (1979) indicates in an associated study, children who were separated from their caregivers for a period due to hospitalization, were void of distress. This study was concerning, in that the lack of distress during this seclusion from caregivers would exemplify later once they were among familiar surroundings; however, the once void distress would manifest in the form of hostility and depression that would show later in the development of the child.

Theorist G. Stanley Hall (1921) had a different view of child development that conflicted with that of Erikson’s theory of child development, whereby instead of stipulating the necessity of proper stage development, which was evident in Erikson’s theory of child development, his philosophy suggested that child development was a product of genetic predisposition. A child’s genetic composition is a combination of parental genes and environmental exposure (Hall, 1921). Hall engaged in the concept of being reflective in a child’s developmental readiness. Genetic predisposition is pivotal in understanding the
reasons explaining an individual’s behavioral propensities. An individual’s behavior can encompass mental frailties which can lead to psychological traits associated with both physical and substance abuse. These psychological impairments, in child development, can lead to children being placed into foster care.

Bruskas (2008) identifies children in the foster care system as a vulnerable population. These children concurrently have a stigma inherently attached to their being that relegates them as individuals who are subservient to the general population, and are to a certain extent, children of the governmental ward. Traumatic experiences of children while in foster care are the result of unstable environments and the uncertainty of emotional connections. Zetlin and Weinberg (2004) performed a study which indicated the circumstances that underscore the reason for placement, and how it often leads to poor educational outcomes based on the level of susceptibility to frequent movement within the foster care system. It was also noted that there was a high propensity for low attendance in school. Research has proven that socioeconomic status (SES), is directly linked with the brain’s gray matter which impairs the ability to maintain the building blocks for a successful life (Pecora, et al., 2018; Noble, et al., 2015).

Sustaining equitable child welfare comes at an enormous economic cost but has the propensity to minimize child maltreatment and other unforeseen and detrimental Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

**Performance Measure Implementation in Nonprofit Agencies**

**1.1 Effective Performance Based Criteria**

Child welfare caseloads have doubled between 1985 and 2000 (Swann et al., 2006). As of the latest report from the Children’s Bureau (September 2022), indicates that due to the
increased caseloads, it is not conceivable that caseworkers are effectively able to assist families and children in the child welfare system. Although governmental and administrative policy outcomes are based on the ability for frontline workers and support professional to adequality meet the needs and challenges of families faced with adverse circumstances, the varied complexities of each case, vacancies and funding limitations put a strain on the ability of child welfare agencies to function at optimal capacity.

In somewhat of a conflict with the option of effective performance measures, (Wells, 2006) notes the importance an agency’s role in effectuating proper compliance pertaining to child placement within the foster care system, is the ability to assist with trauma and investigate the home environment by following up on adverse situations.

To highlight only the internal responsibility of the agency overshadows the importance of a comprehensive agency management framework. Wells (2006) stresses the importance of understanding the factors that intrinsically and historically bring to light the complexity of the bureaucracy intervention when evaluating and managing child welfare agencies. In alignment with the research of Wells, is to stress that the organizational structure of agencies is as diverse as the population they serve. To this end, state-administered agencies are considered more efficient in their overall framework of administrative propagation relegated to agencies functions, while local county-administered agencies do not fair in comparison to their dictated structure. Still, the importance of understanding and obtaining the set performance measures is akin to the responsibility of nonprofit agency’s ability to ultimately return the child to their primary home as well as deciding on the parental rights of the parents. The importance of building an adequate institutional framework to support child welfare imbalance relies on the ability of the social
justice system to link the political component with street-level bureaucracy and nonprofit agencies (Wells, 2006; Tilbury & Thoburn, 2009).

Administrators and managers of nonprofit agencies have the arduous task of corroborating their strategies and engaging with frontline workers and support professionals, as well as understanding the limited empirical evidence that ties the management of agencies directly to the overall outcome of the child over time (Perez, Camargo, McBeath, Bunger & Chuang, 2017; Wells, 2006). The managerial component, as research indicates, highlights that there is an increased engagement between both groups which suggests that nonprofit managers are convinced that the workers have a proficient understanding of the performance measures implemented by the agency (Perez et al., 2017).

Keeping in line with governmental regulations pertaining to the child welfare system, nonprofits agencies must be compliant with federal, state, and local county street-level statues. With the implementation of systematic performance measures, this perceptive technique willfully fortifies the agencies responsibility to coordinate and stay informed regarding legislative policies and public engagement and progress in the realm of human service atmosphere (McBeath & Meezan, 2009; Wells & Johnson, 2001). In contrast to this perspective, (McBeath et al., 2009) states that with the inclusion of New Public Management the efficiencies that should be an inclusive device of understanding the performance measures, often do not meet the criteria and are flagged as being unproductive; which coincides with earlier insight related to performance measures (McBeath & Meezan, 2009; Tilbury, 2004). With calculated inefficiencies, the government currently prioritizes the importance of the reorganization of the child welfare performance measurements to compel compliance. With reference to the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (PL 105-89), a
shift in state and local county regulations have changed to offer the privatization of agencies so that children can progress out of the purview of state custody and into an atmosphere more conducive to their well-being (McBeath et al., 2009). In addition, service provisions are institutional recommendations that assist in moving foster care children into a properly managed care environment. This shift weaves the expectation of efficiency, that represents and constitutes the ability to properly evaluate the development of the necessary objectives related to child placement, into one of permanency outcomes (McBeath et al., 2009).

**Evidence-Based Practices: Disparity Among Children in Foster Care**

**1.1 Children Entangled in the Child Welfare System**

The Child Welfare System evokes thoughts of children who are a part of society’s vulnerable population. It is implied that this vulnerable population is disproportionately and egregiously categorized as a burden to society. Secured research notes that those that are a part of this population are disproportionately children from culturally disadvantaged environments. As of September 30, 2021, based on the AFCARS Report there were 391,098 children in foster care. During that period, there were 206,812 that entered foster care, 214,971 children that exited foster care during this period. More importantly, and the need for child welfare reform, the AFCARS report states that in 2021 there were 606,031 children served in the foster care system. The disproportionate reference from AFCARS indicates that 21% of the children were under one year old, and 43% were white, 22% black, 22% Hispanic. The largest identifier for placement is due to neglect which accounts for 63% of the children, followed by 36% from parents who were drug abusers.

These factors place an initially strong emphasis on the need for and importance of parenting models (Aarons & Palinkas, 2007; Chamberlain, 2017). Palinkas (et al., 2007)
states that it is incumbent on child welfare services to ensure that children are the primary focus. Engaging parents in caring for and ensuring the safety and welfare of the child should be the primary focus of the care provider. This focus is crucial in assisting with their well-being and enables the child welfare service to continually engage those responsible for securing their care. Although this is representative of a necessary service, it is not always accepted by parents and care providers.

Similarly, Chamberlain (2017) has imparted the fact that by enhancing parenting skills, this will in-turn better assist the caseworkers that serve the child who has been exposed to trauma. She also suggests that by implementing prevention science, there is a greater likelihood that as children develop, the psychological trauma, as well as the inherent and detrimental biological effects, can be somewhat limited and secure a possibly lessened and less risky behavioral outcome in children. With this method of scientific intervention, there is a possibility of a positive impact which can lead to enhanced confidence, focus, self-reliance, and mitigated mental health problems. It is also important to stress (Chamberlain, 2017) that although this systematic approach can be beneficial, it is also noted that the implementation of this evidence-based parental approach waivers within the U.S. Child Welfare System; the system has not been able to parallel this progress with consistent expedience.

While Chamberlain (2017) is forthright with implementing the parenting model of evidence-based practice, Aarons & Palinkas (2007) note that there are several factors that are necessary as a continuum of implementation. These factors are key in engaging the evidence-based practice that is not only resourceful for parents but is pivotal to the perseverance of case managers and frontline workers. The following are indicated as procedural and core actions that are effective steps in engagement: (1) the evidence-based
practice has to be understood by both the agency and the parent, (2) it should be amenable to meet the individual needs of the family, (3) the support professional should have a vested interest in working with the family and ensure the progressive collaboration, (4) they should be versed in all aspects of evidence-based practice, (5) the organization under the auspices of the funding source should have the well-being of the child at the forefront of their mission statement, and (6) the ability to evaluate the overall impact of the EBP and provide solutions to areas that were not efficient is their dissemination of information and overall process.

Another key factor in child welfare disparities points directly at children from disproportionate and impoverished backgrounds. Tibury & Thoburn (2009) effectively communicate the importance of evidence-based outcomes pertaining to this population.

Evidence-based outcomes are comprised of stringent and specific parameters that accurately measure the effectiveness of child welfare programs in a collective conception. It was anticipated that specific to this form of measurement is the ability to understand how and why the disparity exists and how it is understood and interpreted by governmental, state, and local agencies. Based on Tibury & Thorburn (2009) performance measuring consists of an understanding and monitoring of the program and ensure that the program is administered by the individual agencies overall as well as to oversee the costs associated with program implementation. In the realm of efficiency, there is also the propensity of a diminished ability to ensure proper oversight. When this is prevalent, there must be a re-evaluation of the performance measures and to silo the areas of decline and non-effect patterns of programming. Tibury & Thorburn (2009) note three primary indicators that are beneficial in augmenting client outcomes. The indicators are selectively referred to as: (1) prescriptive indicators, (2) descriptive indicators, and (3) proscriptive or negative indicators. Specific to
each of these indicators, the dominant factors should be included in the mission statement of agencies working with children in the child welfare system. When prescriptive indicators are the selected choice, it is necessary to format how the objectives, benchmarks and targets within the agency align with set performance measures. The descriptive indicators can alternate the method of how performance measures are being implemented. Concurrently, the proscriptive or negative indicators identify the performance measures that are unacceptable in the pursuit of proper performance measures.

Although these performance indicators are of great importance to Tibury and Thorburn (2009) they are intertwined with evidence-based measures specific to the implementation by frontline workers and support professionals. Effective implementation and understanding what works are also relative to conversing with frontline workers that provide the organizational and structural foundation of effective policy mapping (Tilbury & Thoburn, 2009; Akin, Brook Byers & Lloyd, 2016). Although this structure is critical in the child welfare setting for children in foster care, it is also important to provide considerable intervention to help reduce the number of children affected by societal and normative disparities.

Glisson (et al., 2011) examined the relationship between the organizational atmosphere between caseworkers and the outcome of youth in child welfare. He noted that children who were abused, but in an organizational climate that was conducive to learning, had a great propensity for a better outcome. Chamberlain (2017) suggests that the parenting component is essential in the development of children. Chamberlain’s research compelled the fact of increasing parenting instruction as it relates to children to minimize the child behavioral and emotional issues which will in-turn increase the betterment of parent and
child behavior. Glisson (et al., 2011) states that he intervened with Keeping Foster Parents Supported and Trained (KEEP), which is used as a training mechanism to help support the intervention process with input from not only the parent, but also the foster parent. The goal was to enable the parent to (1) gain proper parenting skills to assist in the development of the child, (2) mitigate the number of foster care placements, (3) enable the stability of the emotional and behavioral issues of the child, (4) effective placement of children. KEEP, as Glisson notes, has been shown to be an asset in promoting the improvement in a child’s behavior which is offset by a more stable initiative for positive placement outcomes. In a study, Glisson (et al., 2011) also notes that the Organizational Social Context (OSC) of child welfare measures the psychometric properties of the child welfare system nationwide, and puts together a norm-based culture that captures the culture and climate that the child is in. The results indicate that if the caseworker is able to put the child in a better cultural environment, then there is a chance for a more positive outcome for the child. McBeath (et al., 2009) research examined the possible link between the services provided and the child welfare outcomes based on their contracts. As Tilbury (2004) mentioned, with the implementation of New Public Management, the look back with respect to child welfare agencies has been less than favorable. Tilbury (2004) indicates that the agencies have not been productive in terms of efficiency, effectiveness, and responsiveness to the needs of the client. Tilbury states policymakers have the innate responsibility to reorganize the child welfare system to correlate effective child welfare programs that can show and increase positive outcomes. The administration of foster care system is dependent on the professional capabilities of frontline workers and support professionals. The performance-based
outcomes as set by historical theoretical approaches of child development, set the criteria for effective and equitable child welfare policies.

**Frontline Workers and Support Professional in Foster Care**

**1.1 Challenges of Frontline Workers and Support Professionals**

Historically, child welfare has been a societal blemish which pulls at every fiber of our national existence. Children who became wards of the state were not afforded the political parity afforded to those who were not considered a ward of the state. The foundation of childhood does not prevail itself to equitable policies specific to children who have been exposed to an environment of abuse and neglect. These children were recipients of a scattered political blueprint of governmental neglect. Governmental intervention and political consciousness eventually moved toward understanding the plight of foster care children, and the implementation of policies at the federal level began to ameliorate the existence of children within this environment. Statistically, foster care caseloads have increased significantly since 1985. Since the federal government relinquished control of child welfare to the state-level agencies, the financial cost has risen to compensate to match the level of care needed. The reported reason for the increase is due to children being subjected to undue emotional, behavioral, developmental, and physical health issues (Fine, 1985; Halfon and English, 1994). In addition, children were subjected to an increase in parental substance abuse and socioeconomical disparities. This increase strained the average number of cases assigned to a caseworker and resulted in a high turnover rate of child welfare workers; that shift the conflicts with the initial continuity of effective retention (Swann & Sylvester, 2006; Clark, Smith & Uota, 2013). The inability to retain essential caseworkers, made it extremely difficult to implement new and effective programs. Not only
are the caseworkers charged with understanding and implementing the goals within the child welfare system, but they are also tasked with investigating and reporting child abuse and neglect. This level of accountability for frontline child welfare workers is demanding and often leads to extended hours of work, low salaries, and burnout (Schelbe, Radey, Panisch, 2017; Radey & Stanley, 2018). Statistically, 20 to 50% of frontline workers abandon the field within a few years after being hired.

Another study indicates a turnover rate between 30% to 40% nationally (Radey & Stanley, 2018; Boyas, Wind, & Ruiz, 2013). Based on this, it is important to understand the perspectives and experiences of the frontline workers as to their reasons for departure. Understanding this can inevitably lead to worker retention, and improved workforce environment, and most importantly the self-efficacy of workers (Schelbe et al., 2017). Supervisors can be the emotional catalyst to support child welfare workers in assisting in maintaining an environment of organization satisfaction, which in-turn can alleviate feelings of isolation and diminished growth capacity. In addition, it is important to examine the intentions for this action in determining if there is a significant relationship between leaving and maintaining employment (Rady & Stanley, 2018; Boyas, Wind & Ruiz, 2013).

The determination of the value of social capital pertaining to frontline workers and support professionals indicates that there is a negative effect or relationship between collective support and job stress (Boyas et al., 2013). Child welfare workers chose this field of work due to their concerns for children in foster care. As of a November 2022 report, the child welfare workforce includes 30,883 caseworkers across 43 states within the United States. Clinicians working in the childcare system are responsible for understanding and addressing the negative effect of childcare workers and their resilience to deflect the negative challenges
that are placed in the environment as a normative structure (Orsi-Hunt, Harrison, Rockwell & Barbee, 2023).

As this phenomenon began to increase in scope, nonprofit agencies were tasked with creating programmatic endeavors which began in the form of recruitment of qualified persons to assist with effective public child welfare initiatives. It was important that qualified individuals committed to this area of the workforce and had the fortitude to understand their responsibilities. Their responsibilities would encompass evaluating children from the foster care system and providing emotional support in their ability to assimilate the children to an environment that they had not been previously exposed to.

To this end, supervisors, frontline workers, and support professionals were tasked with building a relationship with the family and the children. Not only was this burdensome and challenging, but the ability to retain competent staff was difficult. It is often seen as a laborious task that diminished the engagement of support professionals in public service agencies due to high caseloads (Daining et al., 2007). This warranted the intervention of implementing a framework of efficient delivery of services to challenge and incentivize social workers, teachers, parents, and peer advocates as well as administrative personnel. Landsman (2007) states that to pursue qualified and dedicated individuals, there is a necessity for the support of federally funded appropriations.

Transitional leadership is a commonality within nonprofit organizations that have been effective in retaining frontline workers and support staff which is a prominent factor in adjusting from a high turnover of qualified staff to one of retention (Landsman, 2007; Eberly, Bluhm, Guarana, Avolio and Hannah, 2017). Although there is substantial evidence
pertaining to the effectiveness of transitional leadership, there is little information correlating this form of leadership to turnover statistics (Eberly et al., 2017).

**Frontline Workers and Support Professionals Retention and Turnover**

A study performed by Ellett (et al., 2007) examined the organizational structure of a child welfare agency to ascertain the factors of employee retention. The task of staff is to ensure the safety of the children regardless of the circumstances that embroil a child in the welfare system. The poignant perspective is the realization that the frontline worker and support profession are legally mandated to ensure the safety of the child. Ellett indicates that the staff are embracing children that have experienced mental illness, violence, homelessness, poverty, and incarceration within their family unit. The additional component is that staff are required to perform home visits in neighborhoods that are unsafe. The tenuous atmosphere coupled with an already overburden number of cases takes a great toll on the child welfare worker. This study also indicates that due to these circumstances, qualified frontline workers and support professionals choose to leave and pursue more advantageous and less challenging forms of employment. Challenging the thought of Ellett, Zeitlin (et al., 2023) states that not only is there a need to understand the concept of mental health issues in marginalized children and families, but there is a disparity in the benefits of a racially diverse staff that can relate to not only the cultural background of a child. Understanding the cultural background can promote a positive emotional and social outcome. If there is no representation of a diverse staff, the organizational framework is under-represented in management positions with no reason for inequality. Zeitlin (et al., 2023) states that matching shared race and ethnicity between child welfare workers and staff
often promotes favorable results when building trust when working with the families and children.

Workforce turnover is also linked to the incompetence of staff, the needs of the community, the unfortunate circumstances of workers that retire or pass, leaving to attain a higher education, individual reasons, the inability to connect with supervisors, the organizational atmosphere, or they are replaced by those who are progressively more qualified (Wilke et al., 2018; Strolin et al., 2006). Other factors that affect employee retention is associated with workers who identify as non-white are often challenged with the rejection of being promoted coupled with encountering prejudice from coworkers and supervisors, burnout due to being stressed, feeling undervalued as a worker, and the need for support in the work atmosphere (Zeitlin et al., 2023). In addition, if employees perceive the inability for growth within the organization, there is a heightened possibility of the intention to leave; this was also a direct response to the pandemic (Parker & Horowitz, 2022).

Frontline Workers and Support Professional Assisting with Youth Aging Out of Foster Care

1.1 Aging Out of Foster Care

Governmental regulations stipulate that children in foster care are eligible to remain in the child system until the age of eighteen. However, there are several states that allow youth to remain in foster care with the availability of transitional services to assist in adapting within the normal and often unpredictable societal norms until the age of 21.

A study by Scannapieco (et al., 2007) addresses the need for collaboration based on communicating and understanding the necessity and ability to connect with others on a more substantial scale as well as their personal needs and case planning. The study further states that while 96% of all children residing in the United States live with their parents, 1.4 million
children don’t live with family members. Based on that data, the research indicates that forty percent of that amount are foster care children. Added to that, research indicates that at least one-third of those accounted for in the research are teenagers (Scannapieco et al., 2007).

It is astounding to underscore that it was just twenty years ago that the U.S. Congress acknowledged the challenges of youth in the foster care system. This spurned the civil obligation to intercede on behalf of youth in this transitional phase of foster care. Thus, the enactment of Title IV-E, part of the Social Security Act, provided federal funds to assist with the child welfare policy known as the Independent Living Initiative (Collins et al., 2007; Scannapieco, Carrick, & Painter, 2007; Samuels & Pryce, 2008). This funding supported education, housing, life skills and that are meant to be a strategic plan to assist with the ability for foster care youth to gain a sense of self-efficacy and promote a guideway to transitioning into adulthood and being a productive member of society. The conceptualized ideas of collaboration are also instrumental in humanistic compassion, and lifts child welfare polices to a level of accommodation that posits the meandering of governmental responsibilities to this vulnerable population of youth.

A study by Samuels (2008) realized that although youth are vulnerable during this transitional phase, foster youth reflect on their personal feelings of being treated dissimilar to youth that were not affect by the foster care system, and often in conversation, did not mention that they had been exposed to the foster care system, Scannapieco (2007) expressed that youth in foster wanted to be considered a part of all decisions being made on their behalf.

A beneficial attribute, implemented by the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, issues educational training vouchers that allow youth to pursue post-secondary education
until the age of 23. Additionally, it provides an opportunity for youth who are longer a part of the foster care system that were adopted after the age of 16. This allows youth to stay in the foster care program if they are enrolled in the educational system. Although this program is available to transitioning youth, Collins (et al., 2007) states that there are potential equity barriers that conflict with the eligibility requirements and the allocation of funds to states in which funding is made available. This criterion varies from state to state but is clearly contingent upon the reason for the child being placed into foster care. Through no fault of their own, child welfare parameters a decisive in understanding the reason for placement as well the type of maltreatment the youth was exposed to. Since their exposure to the child welfare systems puts youth at a disadvantage, this is often taken into consideration when applying for secondary education, due to the possible educational deficiencies during their developmental stages.

Samuels (2008) notes the post-traumatic stress that is associated with youth and that psychological support is necessary to build emotional independence. Youth development, Collins (et al., 2007) is incumbent upon social strategies that incorporate both the ability for service providers to assemble and implement substantiated policies. Youth that are susceptible to the foster care system understand the need for emotional support that is provided as a source of positive preparation for independent living.

**Public Policies and their Impact on Foster Care**

**1.1 The Impact of Policy and Policy Changes**

The impact of policy and children in foster care is effective when initiatives assessments are administered with the consciousness that all children deserve to be the recipients of equitable social policies. The initial concern is the ability to (1) protect the
health and secure environment of children which is molded by the understanding that foster care is not only representative of the individual child but encompasses the entire family, (2) implement programs that are child-centered whereby proper case planning is essential, (3) programmatic service delivery should incorporate community-based interactions, (4) care is based on the age and developmental stage of the child and (5) respect the cultural values of the family (Barbell & Freundlich, 2001).

Trained staff and the necessary resources not only reflect the decrease in the amount of out-of-home care, but also the implementation of appropriate remedies to meet the needs of children (Pecora & Jackson, 2006; Allen & Bissell, 2004). To ensure these initiative and assessments are effective, Allen and Bissell note that there needs to be a significant shift in funding patterns that will adversely affect the policy reforms that warrant the safety and permanence for children. Policy changes demonstrate equitability when the number of children in child welfare decrease and there is there is an equitable provision encompassing an in-depth overview of child welfare services and reference that indicate that due to the policy changes, the number of children in out-of-home care has decreased significantly (U.S. DHHS, 2013b, 2013c). The change is specific to the reduction in children that are exposed to maltreatment. However, in contrast, a study was performed in order to investigate and support the issue of child maltreatment and significant findings indicated that although there was a decrease in maltreatment, using negative binomial models over a thirteen-year period, as well as additional support professionals, the maltreatment report were estimated at 32% higher than they would be been reported for this population of children if states were to provide additional policy changes at the state-level (Allen & Bissell, 2004; Day, Tach, Adkins, 2022).
1.2 Changes in Public Policy

Change in public policy economically isolate disadvantaged women and children. The conflict between equitable distribution of child welfare policies verses the well-being of children and the political unrest of policymakers, has caused a bureaucratic entanglement which makes sustaining equitable policy and implementing strategic planning a moving pendulum. Sustaining equitable child welfare with respect to the given socioeconomical disparities in foster care identified three governing principles of child welfare policy. They indicate the mandatory principles of child saving. These policies state (1) there must be reasonable effort to prevent children from being placed into foster care, (2) the ability to find permanent placement of children to mitigate the trauma associated with out-of-home care, and (3) the ability of a child to be placed in an environment where harm is virtually obscure (McGowan & Walsh, 2000; Bartholet, 2000). Bartholet (2000) states that although these policies are a necessity, there were cases in which there was minimal to relatively low risk of harm. Reportedly, there were no increases in child abuse cases, and there was minimal risk for children whose parents were working in conjunction with the agency.

Bartholet notes that the risk of out-of-home placement is not necessarily due to the living conditions of the home, rather the personal philosophy of the prosecutor. The report also notes that the request to remove children was not based on valid substantiated reasons, rather that the mother was the receiver of the abuse, and not the child. In many cases such as this, children were removed for their safety.

Although McGowan & Walsh (2000) suggest the resource initiatives are viable, it requires a substantial amount of federal investment. With objection, Bartholet (2000) notes that one must abandon family preservation efforts. She believes that it is a futile effort and a
waste of time, money, and the well-being of children. Bartholet contradicts her own beliefs indicating that based on the obligation of society, one must be responsible to assist families in need. Allen & Bissell (2004) note, like Bartholet, but perhaps not to the same extent, that federal funding for children incentivized the placing of children in foster care and thereby ensuring that they remained in the bureaucratic environment. In addition, Allen & Bissell (2004) indicate that the welfare reform policy has had a quasi-effect on the policy framework pertaining to foster care. The implementation of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) allows for the funds to be used for support if the need arises so that the children can stay with appointed kinship family members.

**Policy Collaboration in Child Welfare**

Although there is sufficient information pertaining to sustaining equitability in child welfare, this is not the only supportive analysis that secures the foundation of child welfare and reform. The absences of lived experiences and expertise of individuals that have been a part of or affected by child welfare should immediately be included in the overall collaborative efforts to ensure adequate representation. The limitations in research foster a new and vibrant initiative to link research-policy to practice partnerships. These lies within, however, the challenge of numerous shortfalls pertaining to this collaboration (Schelbe & Geiger, 2022; Herrenkohl et al., 2021). This is identified as the lack of persistence in early intervention of services which protect not only the well-being of the child, but the ability to sustain equitable child welfare.

Even with coexisting child welfare policies, the current environment has changed the method of analyzing the pressures of individuals living in disadvantaged environments. The stress of adjusting to COVID-19 left an indelible impact on children already at risk. The
intense innate opportunity to change the disparity, lies within understanding the opportunities and shifts the policy from that of reactive to proactive with the ability to restructure the methods of collaboration (Herrenkohl, School, Higgins, Blika & Lonne, 2021; Schelbe & Geiger, 2022). The predicament arises as to the method of addressing the deterioration of the child welfare workforce. Herrenkohl (et al., 2021) notes that the child welfare system lacks the clinical and policy experience and foresight to change the current system. In such a crisis, ideal consideration should be given to parents, as Ward and Lee (2020) mention, there is a need to address why negative parenting is on the rise (Herrenkohl et al., 2021).

One study on welfare policy notes that based on reform legislation passed in 1996, there was an impact on the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) use of federal funds. The policy ensures the use of the governmental appropriated funds would assist in keeping children out of foster care (Allen & Bissell, 2004). Of concern was the impact the policy would have on immigrant children. These policies were directed at health care which could influence and diminish the effects of the foster care system. The research noted that of particular concern was that the funding would alter the eligibility requirements for those already using the benefits. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996, reduced the number of immigrant families that would have access to the federal public benefits (Allen & Bissell, 2004). Currently, with the influx of migrants, specifically children separated from their parents, this Act is challenging not only for the noted language barriers, but also the assimilation of the cultural diaspora. Allen & Bissell (2004) also note the inability for foster care children to retain Medicare after they age-out of the foster care system. Lathrop (1912) article is impactful even today, with the moral obligation noting that there is an intrinsic need for one to ensure that the federal
government has a responsibility to help safe life in any country and to make certain that one ensures that they received an adequate of amount of heath care, education, and recreation.

Although there are several areas of policy reforms promoting the safety and stability of foster children, Allen & Bissell (2004) express concern that there is a direct link between insufficient housing and children in the welfare system. They point out that due to lack of sufficient housing policies and availability, children are in direct line of being moved into foster care homes. The government, under the Family Unification Program, requests that these families secure adequate housing and to work in collaboration with local agencies to obtain proper housing using Section 8 vouchers.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This qualitative study has four goals. The first goal of the study is to determine whether policies pertaining to child welfare are equitable as it relates to foster care. The second goal was to understand the perspective of nonprofit frontline workers and support professionals respective to their individual roles in implementing policy collaborations. The third goal was to determine the appropriate measures to mitigate the reduction in caseworker turnover and to identify the attributes to successful retention. The fourth goal was to gain insight into assisting foster care children that have aged out of the child welfare system and transition into society.

In this chapter, I will first explain the historical, social, and cultural experience that shaped the interpretations made in the study. The second explains the data collected and analyzed, which are incorporated into the overall research and design and provides the rational for the necessity of the research. Third, it details the methodology that will be used which includes the selected population, the criteria for participation within the study, and the ethical considerations.

I will explain the various methods used to collect and analyze data for the study. At the onset of research, I began using primary data and non-probability sampling to identify and select the criteria for research and design for the sections of rationale.

First, I chose agencies that were recognized as nonprofit and that identify with servicing children in foster care. Second, the criteria for participant selection were that of frontline workers and support professionals that were established in their profession and had individual responsibilities pertaining to working with children that come from a foster care
environment. Third, they were selected based on their educational qualifications, which facilitated in-depth discussions that gave substantial insight into their responsibilities respective of servicing children in foster care. Lastly, each of the frontline workers and support professionals are employed with the respective nonprofits for a minimum of ten years; working with foster care children for an even greater number of years. The selection included Executive Directors, Family Support Directors, Program Directors, Teachers, Master Social Workers, Licensed Master Social Workers, Foster Parents, Community Volunteers and Advocates.

I then categorized their individual responses based on recurring themes and patterns. The spectrum of participants was reflective of licensed social workers, teachers, supervisors, directors, and foster care parents. Interviews were held on a one-to-one basis and in group settings. I categorized each thematic answer into Excel which made the interpretation of the data manageable.

Although most of the participants were willing to assist with the research, I encountered a small number of individuals who chose not to participate due to prior commitments who felt that their contribution to the research would not be of interest. The limitations in collecting the data were presented in the form of the time allotted for the interviews with the participants. It appeared that additional time would have yielded even more critical information and cases specific to children that were in foster care. Although these were deterring factors, the research was enhanced by the eagerness in which the participants were willing to share their individual experiences working with children in foster care alongside of the tragedies and horrifically sad encounters with children and families.


**Research Design and Rationale**

Based on the research questions, the qualitative phenomenological study research method is appropriate. The first question helps to identify the specific reasons for the need for child placement. Historical reference pertaining to the unknown and unanticipated harmful effects of foster care are the areas of governmental law that require additional research. The impetus is that society has become a product of a clash between social class, political conflict, and ineffective public administration, thus affecting the improper treatment of children being placed into care. It was determined that the possibility of children exhibiting preplacement abuse and neglect might be exacerbated without proper diagnosis. Thus, when children are placed, they are already at a diagnostic disadvantage. The assumption is that the psychosocial variables are present after placement.

I distributed questionnaires prior to meeting with the participants to give enough time to process the questions; giving a comprehensive answer that would provide further insight into the study. The formatted questions were detailed with respect to their experiences with foster care children. I found that as the questions were asked and responses given, there were additional questions that were spawned from the general interview. This provided additional insight and the participants felt comfortable with sharing their experiences working with foster care children.

This section of the research consists of five subsections which are inclusive of the process of identifying participants for this research. First, I will discuss my reasons for selecting the participants of the study and why their contribution to the study is important. Second, I show the necessity and relevance for selecting research material such as scholarly journal articles and books as a historical reference guide. Next, I identify the reliability,
validity, and structure of the research. The next subsection is based on the analyzing the data, and lastly, I identify any threats to the validity or limitations of the study.

**Population and Data Collection and Analysis Plan**

The data gathered from the nonprofits was interpreted and analyzed to ensure the validity of the information being researched. All data obtained complied with IRB regulations. The data analysis will also detail the findings from the research questions and the respective hypothesis.

The target population for this study are two nonprofits that support children in foster care as well as those that have aged-out of foster care. The twenty-five participants ranged in age from 25 to 70. Both agencies were within the same county in New York State. These agencies provided information regarding their view on federal mandates pertaining to child welfare. These nonprofits also gave their first-hand perspective as frontline workers and support professionals who work with children in foster care. The participants were administrators, licensed social workers, teachers, foster parents, teacher aids, and community advocates. Many of the participants have received a bachelor’s degree as well as a master’s degree and have been working in the field of child welfare for at least ten years. In addition, this identified population has been selected to ascertain the interventions of frontline workers and support professionals and their responsibilities in implementing federal policies and incorporating collaborations between agencies. This study also gained a lens into the environment of the agency in which the children were placed, as well as interacting with foster care parents given their parental authority.
I first contacted the Executive Directors of each social service agency by telephone. I informed them of my intended research. They requested that I submit a formal letter for research and that they would be willing to assist with my research.

I then coordinated with the nonprofit agencies that are guided by their mission statement inclusive of caring for children that come from a foster care environment. Once I received their consent for participation, they connected me with the supervisors of the foster care department. The initial contact allowed me to coordinate the participants, and I was advised that they would be willing to meet and answer my survey questions. I submitted the questionnaires to each agency and allowed enough time for them to respond. I followed up with each agency to answer any additional questions. They advised that they gather their key employees that oversee the foster care program as well as the teachers, social workers, parents, and volunteers. The coordinated efforts led to individual interviews that were approximately an hour and a half and were held at their respective nonprofit agencies. The meetings were held in semi-private rooms with only the participants in the research.

The first agency was Family and Children’s Association, Inc., a nonprofit social service agency which emphasizes the responsibility to protect Long Islands’ most vulnerable children, families, seniors, and communities. They provide community-based programs that are strength-based and culturally competent. The Project Independence program is designed to help young people between the ages of 14-21 who are in foster care or discharged from foster care, to live and work independently in the community when they are no longer eligible for foster care.

The second agency that was selected is the Economic Opportunity Commission of Nassau County, Inc., a nonprofit Community Action Agency born out of the Economic
Opportunity Act of 1964. A signature legislation of Lyndon B. Johnson’s Act against the war on poverty, it provides community action programs inclusive of eight Head Start Program. For over 50 years, the EOC of Nassau County, Inc., has provided educational, social, and health related activities for more than 600 low-income families. The EOC of Nassau County is a direct support agency for residents who live at or below the federal poverty level and is the designated anti-poverty agency of Nassau County. Through catchment provided by their Head Start Programs, they provide educational services for children inclusive of those in foster care.

Both agencies agreed to participate in the research, and I provided letters of intent for participation.

**Operationalization**

Scholarly journal articles were used as supportive and historical points of reference to prior research as well as identifiable areas of additional research necessary to fill potential gaps in prior research. It will highlight the criteria for placement and psychosocial variables that stem from a direct aversion to placement and prior placement analysis.

**Triangulation**

Based on the historical data and the current methodology pertaining to the research questions and reviewed case studies, I determined and formulated interview questions that garnered significant and related connections between child welfare and the equitable sustainability of policies between the selected nonprofits. Each question was specific to historical journal articles, and yielded a considerable number of responses that were analyzed for accuracy, reliability, and allowed for the validity of relative responses.
Limitations

With any research, there is the optimal change that the results can be skewed, and thus yield the data collected invalid. Every effort has been made to ensure that this possibility was minimal. However, an example might present itself in the number of participants selected for the research in which the number of participants may vary from the onset of research until the conclusion of research. At this point, the research participants were inclusive of male and females.

Ethical Procedures

This study conformed to the ethical principles regarding research involving human subjects. In addition, participants were given individual informed consent forms to sign that complied with IRB guidelines. The forms were signed and dated accordingly. The participants were also informed verbally informed of the IRB guidelines and were given the option of non-participation without prejudice. I also informed the participants that if they initially declined to participate and later decided to participate, there would be no judgement or retribution. In addition, they were informed that if they felt uncomfortable with any of the research questions they were not obligated to answer; this was strictly voluntary. They were also informed as to the overall research process via face-to-face conversation and an initial request for participation letter that was sent to the Executive Directors of each nonprofit. In addition, I informed the participants of the confidentiality and anonymity of the study. The participants were also informed of the risks involved. The interviews were held in a semi-secure room. Questions were given to each participant in which no identifying information was recorded.
A number was assigned to each participant instead of name verification. The researcher was the only individual who had access to the data collected, and the audio recordings and transcripts were collected and secured in a password-protected computer. Per IRB regulations, the participants were informed that the data gathered would be destroyed three years from the date of collection.

Summary and Conclusions

The qualitative research designed was used to gain the perspectives of frontline workers and support professionals who work with children in the foster care system. The research also gave insight into equitable child welfare policies in foster care using collaborative polices emanating from governmental regulations.

This chapter reviewed scholarly literature to secure relevant information in child welfare specific to frontline workers and support professionals. It also gave credence and insight into the collaboration between federal, state, local agencies and community advocates and the framework of governmental regulations. Additionally, the literature review gave insightful information pertaining to the necessity to sustain equitable child welfare policies in foster care. The theoretical foundation was based on theorists Erik Erikson’s Developmental Theory, and John Bowlby’s Attachment theory. These theorists lay the groundwork for understanding the conceptual framework that is imperative to the normal growth of children.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

Introduction

This research examined the sustainability of child welfare policies pertaining to foster care children and the perspectives of frontline workers and support professionals in two nonprofit agencies. The interpretivist point of view allowed for a greater insight into the phenomenology study of understanding the interactions between frontline workers, support professionals and children that are subjected to the foster care system and are guided by federal, state, and local child welfare policies.

Data Collection

Qualitative data was gathered from nonprofit agencies working with children from the foster care system that are placed in their early childcare program. Substantive research questions were used as a basis to obtain a broader understanding of foster care policies, the foster care system, the responsibilities of frontline workers, support professionals, lawyers, and law enforcement. The questions are listed in Appendix A. The interviews were approximately one- and one-half hours and were recorded using Zoom and transcribed using Microsoft Word. The researcher coded the information by category based on using a thematic approach to keep in line with the research question and objectives. This siloed approach allowed the themes to shape the research and helped to identify the reasons why children are placed into foster care, as well as gaining further insight into the challenges the frontline workers and support professionals face when encountering and working with foster care children. The themes were identified as child welfare policies, the behaviors that precipitate child placement in foster care, frontline workers and support professionals, retention, performance-based measurements, and collaborative initiatives between federal,
state, and local agencies. The line of questioning surrounding the federal, state, and local agencies required a better understanding of the policies of the past and whether they are still relevant in today’s societal environment. In addition, it was imperative to gain a greater insight into foster care and understanding whether child welfare advocates, frontline workers and support professionals engage in collaborative efforts to change the child welfare policies based on their interaction with foster care children. The following thematic framework of questions guided the research of qualitative analysis. Prior to the interview, interview protocol questions were sent to each participant via email. They were given a sufficient amount of time to review and prepare the answers for an in-depth discussion. Each question was thorough in description to support a critical analysis and interpretation and then categorized into the appropriate themes. The first set of interviews were held with the Executive Directors and the Administrative Staff. The following is a thematic system of responses based on the research question:

**Theme #1: What constitutes child welfare policies in New York State that pertain to children in foster care?**

Individual states have an obligation to provide proper support to ensure families have the resources necessary for the proper development of their children prior to the child or children being placed into the foster care system. This preplacement initiative is essential to mitigate the onset of abuse and neglect and emotional and educational maladies. The subgroup of political leaders, lobbyists, child advocates are central figures in interpreting and implementing child welfare policies. Their influence continues to build the framework in which child welfare agencies operate. Child welfare reform is also paramount in altering the trajectory of children who succumb to the foster care system. Governmental
policymakers also decide on the appropriations for the Children’s Bureau and the necessity of programs to assist with the societal responsibilities pertaining to the welfare of children.

The numerous conflicts surrounding the implementation of policies are manifested in personal ideologies and subjective opinions (McCall, Green, Strauss, & Groark, 1998). An additional concern is that although one conducts in-depth qualitative studies, they are not incorporated into the policymaking process of those who ultimate solidify child welfare policies (McCartney & Rosenthal, 2000). Holden (2002) indicates that children in the child welfare or mental health system should not be excluded from obtaining an adequate education during early childhood. Since the implementation of universal day care, children in foster care, and those facing homelessness, are included in the daycare programs that are often equipped to assist children during their early developmental stages in order to maintain a consistent continuum of educational growth.

During the initial interview, the administrators advised that they did not review the extensive list of questions prior to our meeting. They were, however, determined at this juncture, focused on obtaining the inform consent forms from their selection of participants. The interview progressed, and although there were no written responses, the participants were well-equipped to answer each question in detail. The researchers’ understanding was that they were tenaciously embedded and compassionate about their responsibilities as administrators. The first question was specific to the agency’s mission statement and policy guidelines which the participants answered as follows:

Participant #1: Guided by the Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment and Attendance (ERSEA) Plan, foster care children, and children that are homeless are accepted into the head start program based on need. Eligibility points are assigned
according to specific categories. The participant provided the following chart of eligibility points that are used as an indicator based on the noted eligibility factors.

They are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eligibility Factors</th>
<th>Eligibility Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>75% Above Poverty</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50% Above Poverty</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25% Above Poverty</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just Above Poverty</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just Below Poverty Level/Eligible</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25% Below Poverty Level</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50% Below Poverty Level</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75% Below Poverty Level</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disabled Parent</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Parent</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster Parent</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certified IEP</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspected IEP</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incarcerated Parent</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Violence</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undocumented Parents</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent with substance abuse</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 or more kids under the age of 8</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No childcare service available</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than one family in household</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given these strict eligibility and policy guidelines, based on the ERSA Plan, children are selected on a prioritized basis. Noting the eligibility requirements, it was stressed that foster care children are not required to be selected from catchment areas, due to their constant movement within the foster care system. It is incumbent that each Head Start program make room for children in foster care, and for those that are homeless. The intake process of foster care children also includes the ability to make internal transfers without proof of residency. It is important to keep in mind that HeadStart programs are commonly placed in communities that have been identified with residents that are in the low-moderate income bracket. Child welfare agencies identify and seek to intervene in early childhood education of children in most need of interventive services. With this criterion for selection in place, the administration anonymously decides who is eligible to participate in the program; the neediest families and children are a priority. Once accepted into the program, the agency policy dictates that children are placed into a classroom that is best suited for the child’s individual needs. On a corporate level, pertaining to the foster care agencies, they have partnered with foster care agencies in and out of the catchment area due to their ability to prioritize the children; they don’t have to live in any of the catchment areas. The participant indicated this is an administrative dictate, not a programmatic responsibility. (Participant 1, personal communication, August 8, 2023).
Participant #3: I noticed that as frontline workers and support professionals, parents are not specifically selected from or affiliated with foster care agencies in Nassau County; it can be extended to Queens and Brooklyn as well. Understanding the selection criteria, the researcher asked about the methods and success of the recruitment process. The response was as follows:

Participant #6: The quasi response from the participant stipulated that the success of the recruitment depends on the concerted effort put forth by those participating in the recruitment process. Admittedly so, the recruitment efforts are successful when there is a collaboration between school districts and the child welfare agency pertaining to children in foster care. The participant emphasized that the agency’s program offered a full day program, whereby the local school district is restricted by offering half-day pre-k. If the local school district reaches full capacity, they collaborate and admit children into their program. Understanding the basic process for intake, the researcher continued with inquiring into the organizational structure of the agency.

**Theme #2: What is the framework of organizational health and productivity of Frontline Workers, and Support Professionals working with foster care children?**

As a segway into this question, the participants began to describe how they perceive the organizational environment that is conducive to a child entering their program that is a part of the foster care system. The frontline workers and support professional understood that although the classroom environment was organizationally sound, from the perspective of a child that does not identify as a foster care child, the environment might be disruptive to the daily pattern of assimilation to a foster care child entering this environment. The concern was that children in attendance from foster care homes might feel uncomfortable in the classroom setting. The participant reflected on the following:
Participant #2: The environment can be challenging if the child has sustained trauma. Their trauma is often displayed in the form of communication and behavioral maladies. We are implementing a new approach whereby social work interns, technical assistance for support teaching, strategic teaching for teachers for transition. Often, the teachers are overwhelmed and to offset this, they are given training on how to cope with and manage social and emotional problems with conscious discipline. Workshops are given to parents and foster parents to understand how trauma affects our brain health so that one understands that when the children don’t have the tools to say they are scared or frightened understanding how to incorporate this training helps to minimize the effects of trauma.  (Participant, 2, personal communication, August 16, 2023). To counter an additional response to this question the next participant stated the following:

Participant #3: At certain points-in-time, administrators will assist in supporting foster care children with challenging behavioral problems. If the issue is not able to be resolved, the frontline workers and support professionals engage the parent for consent to have the child evaluated. Understanding that the child has been through trauma, we collaborate with the primary parent and foster care parent to instill a comprehensive understanding of the types of traumas the child is experiencing, and how the child exhibits the manifestation of the trauma. It is important for the teachers to understand this dynamic to efficiently help the child. In addition to this, we are incorporating the Brain State Modeling Discipline as an evidence-based neuroscientific social and emotional program. This program has several tiers. It is based on how our brain state affects our behavior. For instance, the bottom of the
brain is considered the survivor brain stage. In this stage, the translation underscores the safety of the child. The middle part of the brain translates that they are loved. The self-regulatory state is the ability to problem solve with the assistance of the teacher. If the child still demonstrates issues of uncertainty, the teacher chooses a safe instructional space to help them identify their feelings. A teacher can perform a certain exercise with the child; something as simple as taking a deep breath to help the child self-regulate. (Participant #3, personal communication, August 17, 2023).

The next participant, the administrator, who has extensive supervisory experience with foster care children, offered the following comment:

Participant #4: Additional organizational health comes from the interaction between the parent and teacher. This extensive conversation usually happens during drop-off and pick-up of the child. The parents may be faced with situations that they might not know how to handle, and they lean on the teachers for a better understanding and guidance. They look at teachers as experts in their field that have strategic applications which the parent can implement. However, the coordination of parental involvement can be hindered due to the frequent change in their living environment. (Participant 4, personal communication, August 16, 2023).

The next participant was assured that the classroom setting should be designed to ensure that the foster care child is in a calm environment conducive for learning. Participant #8: Organizational health is critical to ensure that the classrooms are appropriate for children from diverse foster care environments. If the child displays behavioral trauma, it might be necessary to move the child to another classroom that is more conducive to their ability to learn. Foster children have more often faced
abuse and neglect and are incapable of expressing their experience at such a young age. Instead, their unruly behavior is evidence that they need psychological evaluation to assist in essential and productive intervention. As teachers, we keep behavioral logs and reach out to the foster parent for assistance. In addition, we document their response so that we can better assist the child. Often, when the child becomes too difficult, the administrator will assist in helping to control their emotions. (Participant 8, personal communication, August 18, 2023).

Understanding the challenges that teachers face prompted the response:

Participant #5: Teachers are often faced with an understanding that when working with foster children, there is a notable and intrinsic psychological, emotional, and traumatic dynamic of separation from their loved ones and family members. Frontline workers and support professionals are challenged with implementing procedures as to the best way to assist the child. It is important not to separate the fact that they are coming from a foster care environment. How we react to them and respect them as a person, irrespective of their foster care environment; this builds a framework of trust. In addition to understanding children in foster care, frontline workers and support professionals are also required to participate in seminars on topics such as socioemotional status, trauma, and behavioral issues. If a teacher is able to understand the environment of a foster care child, it opens the pathway for the essential collaboration between all involved in the educational advancement of the child. (Participant 5, personal communication, August 16, 2023).

With continued conversation, the participants noted how they can use collaborative efforts to mitigate stress:
Participant # 6: It is often difficult at first, however, I can meet with other teachers and get their input as to understanding the emotional challenges of foster care children. As a result, teachers are beginning to understand what trauma is and how to deal with the trauma that foster care children have experienced and are exposed to. A child that faces trauma needs to be moved to an environment of calm. At this point, we can obtain insight into what is happening in the life of the child. We document the notable and observable behavior and put together a performance-based measurement plan that can be effectively implemented. In additional we, as frontline workers, and support professionals, understand that children are coping with a sense of loss when removed from their primary families. We note also that not only having experienced separation from their families, but foster care children are not privy as to why they are being removed; there limited understanding is that they are no longer with their immediate family. (Participant 6, personal communication, August 16, 2023).

At this point, the research emphasized the concern to implement a plan of action to help with the transition of the child from the foster care home to the classroom:

Participant #1: Part of the strategic plan is to meet the needs of the children in foster care as well as the staff that are responsible for implementing the policies and procedures. The administration provides the staff with individual support when they need it. Realistically if they have a challenge in the classroom, and the frontline worker or support professional is unable to leave the classroom, they request
assistance from other support professionals. Family service workers can step into assist in that moment; managers are also equipped to help in the classroom.

As it pertains to assisting the staff that face the daily challenges pertaining to children in foster care, inclusive of all children, the administration implements mental health days to assist with diverse situations; especially traumatic experiences that they face pertaining to foster care children being removed from their home due to abuse and neglect. Additionally, and especially effective, is the open communication policy whereby staff can reach out for additional support. As a conduit for emotional assistance and collaboration, the administration provides a licensed social worker who is available to staff on a confidential basis. In addition, the agency has provided an internal help line for frontline workers and support professionals, families, and staff; should the need arise. If there is intensive care needed, the administration offers additional external referrals. Additionally, organizational health is seen as the application of validating the workers for the job that they do. At times, this can be in the form of a listening ear which can promote good support for the frontline workers and support professionals. (Participant 1, personal communication, August 16, 2023).

Lastly, the researcher noticed that there was a consistent request for additional support for foster care children.

Theme #3: Worker Retention – How to Retain Qualified Staff for Foster Care Children

The quality of leadership is often a determining factor in retaining staff. Eberly (et al., 2017) acknowledge that in order to retain staff, it is imperative to understand their daily interaction not only with foster care children, but with staff. The perspectives from frontline workers and support professionals put this into context:
Participant # 4: Working with children from the foster care system requires an inordinate amount of patience. Within this environment, the child is learning to regulate their behavior and thoughts. The younger foster care children don’t have the advanced language skills to express the trauma they have experienced or understand the lasting effects of each incidence of trauma. As a result, they often become introverted and disconnected. As it relates to the teachers, we are not told why the child is being placed into foster care, however having conversations with the foster mother often helps in working out a plan to assist the child. (Participant 4, personal communication, August 16, 2023).

Participant # 12: To help frontline workers and support professionals, I believe the agency should increase the methods of communication to include direct interaction with the foster parent to gain an increased understanding of pertinent issues that may arise between the child and the foster parent. To my understanding, this is not implemented to a standard that benefits the child in most circumstances and can lead to burnout and a high turnover rate within the agency among frontline workers and support professionals. (Participant 12, personal communication, August 21, 2023).

Understanding that the combination of working with parents, the encountering of the social climate of the foster care child and working within the dynamics of various communities, it became apparent that there is an enormous amount of stress placed on frontline workers and support staff. The concern was to address their need for internal and external emotional support and how they determine their need for self-care. The response from the participant was emotional and she stated that:
Participant # 9: I do personal timeouts when I feel overwhelmed. Especially when dealing with foster care teenagers. I often prefer to perform a self-care moment and emotionally find an opportune time to address the event. I choose not to go back-and-forth with the emotional circumstance that has been presented. I try to avoid confrontation with either the parent, child, or foster parent. At that age, they can understand why they are in foster care. My interaction must be one of professionalism and my explanation must be received in a manner that is age appropriate. I often have a keen sense of understanding each child’s personality which allows me to have a glimpse into understanding how they perceive and implement their coping mechanisms as they pertain to their surroundings and environment. It is important to me to find out who they are as individuals. My responsibility is to ensure that they attend counseling sessions in order to assist with any anxieties that may encounter. In addition, it is important for me to have open communication with the primary parents as well as the foster care parents. There is a need to establish a good relationship with the parents so that we can coordinate, collaborate, and implement an effective action plan that is best suited for the child. The primary goal is to reunite the child with the parent. (Participant 9, personal communication, August 18, 2023).

Participant #10: I often feel overwhelmed, however it is not in part by my interaction with the children, but rather with the staff. When there is a perceived sense of burnout withing the staff, I implement a coping plan of external assistance. This can be in the form of emotional support through consultation with psychologists or
personal mental health days. (Participant 10, personal communication, August 21, 2023).

Theme #4: Collaboration with foster parents and governmental agencies

Collaboration between governmental, state, and local government is essential in promoting the welfare of foster care children. In order to gain further insight into the methods of collaboration the following response was noted:

Participant #7: Good caseworkers are essential in prioritizing children eligible for the program. Shared experience of parent who were in foster care are also foster care providers who enroll their children in the program. Family adversities place children in the foster care system. Frontline workers are faced with embracing the family and assisting in the transition into the childcare programs. Working with families and gaining their trust is essential. Working with the family becomes much easier and the family is willing to open up to you regarding their situation and what they have been exposed to. (Participant 7, personal communication, August 9, 2023).

Participant #6: I was the director of the agency at four different sites, and I experienced a situation of a foster care child living in kinship care with the grandparents as a foster child. People that are requesting children from agencies are the ones who are most stressed and under pressure based on the possibility of an incident that took place. They are more likely to make an incident report or take a picture to show that they were not responsible for any injury to the child under their care. The frontline worker documents the reports and completes a health check to ensure they do not come in with any bruises. If an incident happened at school, the foster parent would request documentation indicating that it happened at school and
not under their care. There are children who are in foster care and participating in the program that have been adopted within two to three years of being with the foster parent. This is due to the birth mother relinquishing her rights. (Participant 6, personal communication, August 9, 2023). The last statement prompts the participant to reflect on another recently disturbing case of abuse. The participant noted that a family with five children came under scrutiny when reports of abuse filtered to the child welfare bureau. It had been reported that the children were being removed from the house due to abuse. One of the most disturbing findings was that one of the abusers was one of the five children who in turn abused a ten-month old sibling. The participant stated that when this incident was relayed to the frontline worker, it left her emotionally distraught, and she and other staff requested to leave the work environment to be able to process what had taken place. (Participant 6, personal communication, August 9, 2023)

Theme #5: Barriers and Restrictions

Child welfare policies are implemented to prevent child abuse, however, neglect to understand the dynamic between economic and financial barriers. This led to the researcher questioning the overall intake process and recruitment that address foster care children with special needs:

Participant #5: The intake process is hindered by IEP’s which tend to take longer. The IEP must be reviewed by the family service office, the social service department, the agency management, the fiscal department and then the IEP is reviewed by the teacher to ascertain if they have the proper staff in place as well as classroom setting; ensuring that is it conducive to the need of the child. If it is not, I cannot accept the
child into my classroom because it is not equipped, and I don’t have the proper teacher/child ratio to comply. The demands might be too extensive. For example, the child might not be sitting up, able to walk, feed themselves or have a loss of balance. If the demand is going to be too heavy on the program or beyond the teacher’s capabilities, we would keep the application on the wait list. IEP is a major consideration when placing children in the respective classrooms. The child can stay on the wait list until they age out. Also, part of the performance standards is that they have to maintain 50% of their enrollment. (Participant 5, personal communication, August 8, 2023).

Participant #2: I have observed that the recruitment efforts are sometime difficult if the parent is not affiliated with the foster care agencies within the county. They are affiliated with foster care agencies in Queens and Brooklyn. (Participant 2, personal communication, August 9, 2023).

Participant #1: I believe recruitment efforts depend on the individuals that participate in this process. We often receive foster care referrals from the Department of Social Services. Through the recruitment process, I have been fortunate to collaborate with several school districts and include numerous children in our program. (Participant 1, personal communication, August 8, 2023).

Participant #1: The student to teacher ratio is not sufficient. There are not enough staff to meet the needs of the foster care children with our agency. To that end, teachers are leaving due to low wages and well as the demands that are placed on them that are outside of their individual job descriptions. Unfortunately, according to the administration, the agency budget lacks adequate wage increases to warrant the
retention of qualified staff. (Participant 1, personal communication, August 18, 2023). Understanding the barriers faced by frontline workers and supporting professionals, retention of qualified staff is of utmost concern. To sustain equitable child welfare policies, with a concentration on foster care children, there must be qualified staff to continue the implementation of policies and procedures to ensure the effectiveness of the program. As a researcher, giving credence to and acknowledging the importance of their individual roles with foster care children, the following answers were key factors in putting their thoughts of staff retention into perspective: Participant #8: Yes, the willingness to stay has to do with the direct leadership that people work under. Frontline workers and support professionals might alternate between agency programs based on the ability to interact with the leadership team. Leadership is different in each program. It is essential to be paired with the proper leadership; this is key in staff retention. The concern, from the perspective of the researcher, was the opportunity of the support professional or frontline worker being enticed to move to another internal program working with foster care children. The ultimate decision rests with the participant with the notion that if their environment is not affording them the opportunity to be effective, they would opt to move to another agency for optimal effectiveness. It is important to understand that our responsibilities are varied, and we are required to maintain a structured environment for foster care children. (Participant 8, personal communication, August 18, 2023).

Theme #6: Gaps

Within child welfare system, there are notable gaps that need to be addressed which not only requires a diverse staff to understand the socioeconomic background of the foster
care child, but to also collaborate with community advocates, local, state, and federal government regarding policy reform. To address this question, the researcher inquired into the needs of the agency in terms of the implications for social work practice specific to their profession:

Participant # 5: Our agency includes children from the foster care system but does not have adequate staff to provide sufficient services for the children. We feel that there is a greater need to collaborate with the federal government and local agencies to ascertain the necessary funding to increase our ability to serve the increased demand for foster care services.

Participant # 6: There is a need to understand the needs of the community and the demographics of the ever-changing community dynamics. I noticed that although the services were provided mainly for people of Jamaican and Caribbean decent, currently, there is an increase in multicultural ethnicities requiring services for children in foster care. It is important to understand how one can adapt to the changes within their respective communities. The decrease in one ethnicity is offset by an increase in other ethnicities. (Participant 6, personal communication, August 18, 2023).

Participant #2: There is an additional need for frontline workers and support professionals who are committed and willing to adhere to their chosen profession. The challenges of entering a foster care home for wellness checks are often fraught with apprehension. At times, this is a deterrent for workers and can lead to the departure from their profession, however, there are incidences whereby those same employees return to their profession out of the sheer dedication to make a difference
in the life of foster care children. However, with respect to the departure, the return of employees is closely monitored to ensure the sincerity and continued commitment of the staff. To that end, these individuals are supervised on a closer scale due to the need for continuity in the classroom. This is an essential component for foster care children who have already experienced the trauma of separation anxiety. (Participant 2, personal communication, August 8, 2023).

Child welfare policies have been susceptible to historical ideologies. The prevalence of policy decisions is incumbent on policymakers relying on the research and critical analysis of social scientists, as well as the evaluation and implementation of suggested child welfare polices pertaining to foster care.
Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter will discuss the summary of findings, implications for practice, implications for research, and the conclusion. The aim of this research was to examine the sustainability of child welfare policies in foster care from the perspective of nonprofit frontline workers and support professionals and their role in implementing multidisciplinary policy collaborations. This study examined the experiences of frontline workers and support professions who work with foster children to understand how they coordinated welfare policies, structured their interactions and collaborations with foster care children and parents to support them through emotional and traumatic experiences of separation from their primary homes. To achieve this objective, a qualitative research method was used, and questionnaires were provided to the participants to gather their individual and collective experiences.

Summary of Findings

In Chapter 4, the results of data analysis were presented and organized by theme. Questionnaires and face-to-face interviews were conducted to gather insight into the organizational structure of how the participants interacted with foster care children. In addition, the research examined the educational qualifications of the frontline professionals and support staff in collaboration with the foster care parent as well as the biological parent. The results showed that the administrative branch of the nonprofit was responsible for maintaining the governmental policy requirements to ensure continued funding for foster care children. The significance of policy implementation ensured that child welfare policies were not specific to one ethnicity but were applicable to foster care children. In addition, the results showed a considerably high percentage of children in foster care that identify as
white and Afro-American. The needs of each child varied based on the trauma they experienced while in their primary home. The child welfare policy standard, regardless of the trauma experienced, is to return the child to the home. The analysis was conducted to obtain their individual answers to the following questions:

**Supervisors**

- Which child welfare policies, pertaining to foster care, do you implement? Which do you find most productive?
- Have you noticed a shift in child welfare policies and your individual responsibilities within the past ten years?
- With salaries non-reflective of the responsibilities of a frontline worker and support professionals, how do you encourage the continuity of staff?
- What would you do to ensure that there is a sufficient understanding of a supervisor’s responsibilities that include retention of frontline workers and support professionals to ensure the stability of the organization pertaining to foster care.

**Frontline Workers and Support Professionals**

- Which child welfare policies in foster care do you implement? Which do you find most productive?
- How do child welfare policies in foster align with the mission statement of the agency?
- Have you noticed a shift in child welfare policies and your individual responsibilities within the past ten years?
- How do you engage with foster care children? What methods do you find most impactful?
• When collaborating with the Department of Social Services, please advise your methods of collaboration.

• Based on federal appropriation and the reduction in funding to support child welfare, what methods would you incorporate to ensure adequate support for critical programs?

Implications for Practice

Strategic Management

The purpose of this research was to determine and understand what qualifies as a sustainable and equitable child welfare policy. Additionally, this research demonstrated how nonprofit frontline workers and support professionals use their training, within their respective roles, to implement collaborative policies that benefit children in foster care that encountered sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, physical neglect, and abandonment (Leslie et al., 2003).

The strategic policy implementation secured and formulated procedures to understand the effects of children in foster care that were subjected to maltreatment.

Day (2022) notes that the differential response (DR) process is a determinant in identifying families of compromised socioeconomic backgrounds who live below the national poverty level and need services to protect children exposed to the child welfare system. Based on the findings from the state, the differential response (DR) process has been shown to reduce the number of maltreatment reports, and thus reduces the number of substantiated findings.

Leslie (et al., 2003) notes that although there have been reports pertaining to the urgent need for treatment, there have been no studies specific to data related to mental health
services used by children in foster care until 2008. This critical analysis is essential in understanding the relationship between not only the need for the services, but also the ability of foster parents to document the child’s use of the services (Leslie et al., 2003). Leslie (2003) also noted that children from racially diverse backgrounds are more likely to receive fewer services than those that are not part of this ethnic diaspora.

In addition, the strategic framework incorporated the collaboration between the early childhood education system, social workers, teachers, directors, and administrators and interacted with foster parents and biological parents to build a framework of emotional and educational support for proper development.

Notable, the environment of foster children is concerning to Bartholet (2000) where the expressed concerned focused on the necessity for societal undertakings to change the environment in which children of marginalized communities are exposed. Day (et al., 2022) noted that in 2018 approximately 678,000 children were inflicted with some form of maltreatment, and that child welfare agencies have the arduous responsibility to address the reports of maltreatment that have been reported by child welfare agencies.

Inequalities in System Regulatory Policies for children in the child welfare system focus on children that are from socioeconomically disadvantaged home settings, whereby neglect is prevalent, are removed by court order and placed in foster care. The state regulatory policies decide the fate of children it deems at risk for further abuse. However, Mnookin (1973) noted that decisions are made based on the verbal merit of the judge. He further suggests that personal bias and subjectivity are intertwined in the decision making, and although this might be the corrective action, opposes the sole decision of removal be relegated to the judge. Mnookin (1973) suggested that a new policy be implemented that
would diminish the authority of the judge when selectively deciding whether the child should be removed from the home. If the child is in immediate danger, then proper protocol for removal should be conducted.

The organizational structure and the implications of strategic management include the challenge of including the following:

- **The need for staff to have a greater understanding of child welfare**: Policies implemented for the welfare of children in foster care are challenged by the disconnect between successive research and the actual practice of policy. Cross-sector collaboration between policy makers, practitioners and those who are charged with conducting research are compelled to understand each significant quality innate to ensuring the best interest of the child (Schelbe, Wilson, Fickler, Williams-Mbengue & Klika, 2020).

- **The role of supervisors and their interaction with frontline workers and support professionals**: The perspectives were not only inclusive of their experiences with children in foster care, but also sought to understand how they interpret their roles in implementing policies that not only affect the agency, but the foster child. Day (2022) notes that the differential response (DR) process is a determinant in identifying families of compromised socioeconomic backgrounds who live below the national poverty level and need services to protect children exposed to the child welfare system. Based on the findings from the state, the differential response (DR) process has been shown to reduce the number of maltreatment reports, and thus reduces the number of substantiated findings.
• **Strategic Leadership and Planning in Child Welfare Agencies**: Administrators undergo a continually process of engaging in structured and effective performance of nonprofits inclusive of child welfare regulations. Hager (2020) states that nonprofits and their board of directors and frontline staff and community volunteers focus on the strong attributes of effect leadership qualifying the organizational development of implementing policies that affect the well-being of foster children. Associated with this understanding is that of the political climate and the bureaucracy involved in securing the proper programs that effectively collaborate with federal, state and local agencies. Although the importance of child welfare supervision is focused on the administrative section of child welfare, studies show that there is a need to understand why child welfare supervisors are inadequately trained and lack the necessary experience when providing clinical reviews (Lietz, 2018).

An additional gap in research is specific to the exorbitant number of children of color in the child welfare system. Just as important is to understand the inequitable treatment and outcomes of children from impoverished backgrounds compared to those that are not included in this population (Jones et al., 2018). Jones (et al., 2018) notes that children from a socioeconomic disadvantaged background are more likely to remain in foster care for longer periods of time. Child welfare policies should be inclusive of mitigating the disparate outcomes of children that are grouped in this sector of foster care. It is incumbent to understand and mandate policy implementation as to the reasons why this disparity has not been reduced and is a continual impediment in the child welfare system. Although child protective services (CPS) are responsible for evaluating the necessity for a child’s removal, they also have the responsibility to report and investigate if there are other options available.
prior to removal to ensure the continuity of a balanced psychological development. In addition, Jones (et al., 2018) underscores the necessity to understand the full extent of kinship care as well as performing continual analysis on the disproportionate divide among racial ethnic groups in foster care. A gap in research should continually address the well-being of children in foster care (Wallander & Koot, 2015).

Implications for Research

Qualitative Methods

One of the most obvious challenges and pivotal gaps in research extend to understanding the organizational context of increased caseloads, the significant turn-over in frontline workers and support professionals, and the access to conclusive data that gives a true representation of cultural diversification in foster care. In addition, there is a need to gain further insight into child welfare and placement of children and the experiences of foster care parents and the demographic profile of children (Chipungu, et al., 2004).

This study also sought to help fill the gaps in research to identify the repetitive concern expressed by the frontline workers and support professionals that children in foster care do not have the capacity to self-identify their needs verbally, especially at a young age. Their trauma is displayed in the presence of behavioral issues.

While gathering the research, the researcher noted that although the frontline workers and support professionals were stringent in following mandated policies, it was not clear whether there were clinical supervisory reviews that were a part of their policy reporting requirements for children in foster care. Studies show that foster care providers that interact with children exposed to trauma, are in need of an extensive understanding of trauma-informed care. A study noted that although
efforts to become adequately trained in the understanding of how trauma impacts a child’s brain, the sustainability of analyzing and measuring over time will result in an infusion of child development theories with the implement of solidified practices in the future (Walsh, Conradi & Pauter, 2018). However, an insufficient amount of training of child welfare supervisors increases the chances for multiple stressors that increase the disproportionate allocation of necessary psychological and behavioral intervention.

Day (et al., 2022) stressed that the implementation of policies, whereby maltreatment of foster care children, that are known by the public, be reported to the child welfare agency. This study demonstrates the need for a constant reform of child welfare policies to sufficiently address the need for professionals to have a thorough understanding of the needs of children in foster care. Equitable policies continue to challenge the administrative qualifications for frontline workers and support professionals in recognizing the psychological, educational, behavioral, and socio-economic barriers that are manifest in foster care children as well as the policies that are warranted and implemented when foster care children aga-out of this population (Ramsay-Irving, 2015)). Ramsay-Irving (2015) notes that the foster care system is not adequately prepared for evidence-based results and is thus defaulting on the basic needs for children that have faced trauma in the form of abuse and neglect.

Conclusions

In conclusion, based on the responses from the administrators, frontline workers, support staff and foster care parents was critical in understanding of abuse and neglect, the intervention of the court system and federal regulations that are imposed on child welfare agencies that are constantly changing the dynamics of having the characteristics of being
sustainable or equitable based on the socioeconomic disparities. Unfortunately, abuse and neglect are far too common occurrence in child welfare. The perspectives from frontline workers and support professionals demonstrate the ills of abuse inflicted on foster care children as well as the physical, emotional, and educational deficiencies.

The historical viewpoints from theorists Erik Erikson stress the continued need for children to move through the stages of normal development. Concurrently, federal policies should provide a range of strategic guidelines that will benefit nonprofit boards, executive management, frontline workers, and support professionals to focus on effective attributes to accomplish this goal (Golensky & Hager, 2020).

Although no specifics were at the disposal of the researcher, the experiences of the participants indicated a vivid understanding of the challenges they face when understanding child development and how they apply it to children that are inclusive in their program. Insight was detailed, which further explained the theories of child development and the conscious pattern of the brain to defend the child from internalizing trauma. Another interesting finding is that the educational level of the administrators, frontline workers and support professionals was admirable. However, the participants were, at times, to go beyond the basic job description to collaborate and ensure the continuum of the organizational framework. What continued to be an interesting pattern of responses indicated that although the participants were educated in child welfare and foster care children, they felt that they would benefit from additional seminars that would help them adjust to the changing dynamic with specific reference to the additional challenges being faced by the enormous influx of migrant children. Specific to that concern was they felt
there was no adequate training in curriculum, staffing, and translators to effectively support their individual responsibilities.

The policy guidelines that are mandated by the state are thought to be time-consuming and the participants agreed that an inordinate amount of time is being spent on ensuring the compliance of the agency, then regulating the atmosphere of the foster care child. It was interesting to hear the viewpoints of the participants that stressed that they requested a in-house psychologist to assist with behavioral issues displayed by children in foster care. The participants were eager to implement the processes to effectively monitor the behavior of the child and to transfer this information to the foster parent or biological parent so that they were all in collaboration with ensuring the child felt a sense of safety. They also pointed out that children that come from a foster care environment often display behavioral patterns of disruption. It was important to the participant to comply with an environment of calm. This was productive in realigning the mindset of the child for a more constructive interaction with the frontline workers and support staff.

Both nonprofits emphasized the need to fully understand the foster care child. They structured and adjusted curriculum to work with and around the traumatic psychological and emotional stressors that were prevalent in the child. In addition, it was of great concern that to follow governmental policies and to assist the special needs of the child, additional funding would be appropriate.

There continues to be a need for further research to understand the relationship between children in foster care with one or both parents incarcerated. The impact is substantial with the relatively unknown relationship between the foster care child and their parent. Additional research is needed to continue the study on the relationship between the
frontline worker, support professionals and their supervisors. Based on the research conducted, there was an indication that although frontline workers and support professionals were engaged in the day-to-day interactions with the foster care children, the administrative department had the sole responsibility for hiring additional staff based on their educational qualification. Although the educational qualifications were notable, it had the propensity to overlook the human component of the proper fit within the classroom.

Lastly, Glisson (et al., 2007) assesses the overall component of the organizational social context of mental health services. Based on his study of the organizational social context, he states that mental health services are essential to effectively monitor the evidence-based practices of social injustices. Cross-collaborative efforts are necessary to understand the continued reasons for abuse and neglect in foster care children along with monitoring the organizational atmosphere, culture and climate of an organization and the expectations provides a climate that is conducive to individual accountability and organization commitment (Glisson, et al., 2007). Statistically, children from marginalized communities need the intervention of committed frontline workers and support professionals and continued policy research that will be incorporated into the federal government’s response to the continued reduction of children in foster care.

Allen and Bissell (2004) put in perspective the importance of ensuring and monitoring the proper welfare of children in foster care. Policy reform facilitates the criteria by which policies are implemented and builds a framework in which to operate. The importance of sustaining equitable child welfare policies in foster care should require the first-hand perspectives from those that are frontline workers and support professionals. It
also entails understanding the necessity for collaborative efforts with local government, community, and child advocates.

The overall concern for children in the foster care system is to remove the politically stringent barriers that have been put in place by policymakers, making way for the creative implementation of increased engagement of frontline workers and support staff. As represented by this participatory research, the agencies that are tasked with social reform are reliant on the federal government to provide services for foster care children that are the appropriate and support the communities that avail themselves to establish a criterion to improve the lives of children faced with the trauma sustained by abuse and neglect.

McCartney & Rosenthal (2000) stress the importance of translating and using the data that has been analyzed by social policy advocates. Without prompt and proper use of gathered data, it is virtually impossible for policymakers to implement effective, equitable and sustainable child welfare policies in the foster care system.
Appendix A

Interview Protocol

This dissertation protocol is specific to understanding experiences of front-line workers (supervisors) and support professionals within a non-profit. In addition, sustaining equitable child welfare policies in foster care are essential to ensure continuity, longevity, and collaborative efforts in conjunction with federal, state, and local governments as well as multiple nonprofit agencies.

Please answer the following questions:

Supervisors

1. Understanding that supervisors are a key component within the workplace, please describe your methods of ensuring workplace productivity and organizational health as it pertains to children in foster care.

2. With organizational health being at the forefront to ensure viability, as a supervisor, how do you ensure the growth and organizational longevity of your staff? How do you ensure your personal growth?

3. How would you describe your management style as a supervisor? Is it effective? If so, please describe the attributes (such as personal and job qualities) that you feel are most effective as a supervisor.

4. Most studies performed are directed at the experiences supervisors grouped with caseworkers. Limited studies have been prepared solely on supervisors. What would you do to ensure that there is a sufficient understanding of a supervisor’s responsibilities that include retention of frontline workers and support professional to ensure the stability of the organization?
5. With salaries non-reflective of the responsibilities of a frontline worker and support professionals, how do you encourage the continuity of staff?

6. As a supervisor, when you meet with frontline workers and support professionals, can you provide information on how they describe the importance of their responsibilities related to child welfare? Based on their responsibilities, have they expressed their intent to leave? Please explain.

**Frontline Workers/Support Professionals**

7. Which child welfare policies in foster care do you implement? Which do you find most productive? Are there any that you would deem in need of reform?

8. How do child welfare policies in foster care align with the mission statement of the agency?

9. Have you noticed a shift in child welfare policies and your individual responsibilities within the past ten years? If so, please describe.

10. How have the recipients been affected by governmental regulations pertaining to child welfare? If so, please explain.

11. Are there strategic policies that you feel would work in collaboration with federal guidelines to enhance the program? If so, please explain.

12. Have there been opportunities for conferences which engage in collaboration with other agencies for services not available within your agency? If so, please explain.

13. When collaborating with the Department of Social Services, please answer the following questions:
   
   a. How often do you meet?
   b. What information are they allowed to share with you pertaining to child welfare?
   c. Do you incorporate any of the information into your program? Please describe it as it pertains to child welfare policies in foster care.
14. Based on federal appropriations and the reduction in funding to support child welfare, what methods would you incorporate to ensure adequate support for critical programs?
Date 8-5-2023

IRB #: IRB-FY2023-376

Title: Sustaining Equitable Child Welfare Policies in Foster Care: Perspectives from Non-profit Frontline Workers and Support Professionals and their Role in Multidisciplinary Policy Collaborations

Creation Date: 6-22-2023

End Date:

Status: Approved

Shirley Dews Principal Investigator:

West Chester University Institutional Review Board Review Board:

Sponsor:

Study History

Initial Submission Type Expedited Review Type Decision Approved

Key Study Contacts

Shirley Dews Member Principal Investigator Role SD983944@wcupa.eduContact

Shirley Dews Member Primary Contact Role SD983944@wcupa.eduContact

Angela Kline Member Co-Principal Investigator
June 20, 2023

Family and Children’s Association
377 Oak Street, 5th Floor
Garden City, NY 11530
Attn: Dr. Jeffrey L. Reynolds, President/Chief Executive Officer

Re: Dissertation Collaboration

Dear Dr. Reynolds,

It is with pleasure speaking with you today. I truly appreciate your willingness to assist me in this process. This journey continues to be challenging, yet exciting!

As I move toward the final stages of the dissertation process, I am requesting your support in completing my research.

My dissertation topic of choice is: *Sustaining Equitable Child Welfare Policies in Foster Care: Perspectives from Non-profit Support Professionals and their Role in Multidisciplinary Policy Collaborations.*

The research process will require participants that are front-line support professionals who have first-hand knowledge of the policies and procedures specific to foster care.

I must assure you that I am guided by the IRB rules and regulations, as set forth by West Chester University, and all information shared is confidential.

In addition, the process also requires a letter from your organization approving my research request. The letter should be addressed to: West Chester University, 700 South High Street, West Chester, PA 19383, Attention: IRB Committee. This letter of approval letter will be submitted as an attachment to the IRB Committee portal. This study has been approved by the West Chester University Institutional Review Board, protocol IRB-FY23-24.

I have attached a brief abstract for your review.

Again, thank you for your time. I look forward to working with you and your staff.

Sincerely,

*Shirley Dews*
DPA Candidate, Public Policy and Administration
June 20, 2023

Economic Opportunity Commission of Nassau County, Inc.
134 Jackson Street
Hempstead, NY 11550
Attn: Mr. Eric Poulson, Executive Director

Dear Mr. Poulson,

It is with pleasure that I write to you requesting the opportunity to meet with you as a doctoral candidate at West Chester University, Pennsylvania. This journey continues to be challenging, yet exciting!

As I move toward the final stages of the dissertation process, I am requesting your support in completing my research.

My dissertation topic of choice is: *Sustaining Equitable Child Welfare Policies in Foster Care: Perspectives from Non-profit Support Professionals and their Role in Multidisciplinary Policy Collaborations.*

The research process will require participants that are front-line support professionals who have first-hand knowledge of the policies and procedures specific to child welfare.

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This study has been approved by the West Chester University Institutional Review Board, protocol IRB-FY23-24.

I look forward to working with you and your staff.

Sincerely,

*Shirley Dew*

DPA Candidate, Public Policy and Administration
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Project Title: Sustaining Equitable Child Welfare Policies in Foster Care: Perspective from Non-profit Support Professionals and their Role in Multidisciplinary Policy Collaborations

Investigator(s): Shirley Dews; Angela Kline

Project Overview:

Participation in this research project is voluntary and is being done by Shirley Dews as part of their Doctoral Dissertation to:

The purpose of this study is to build on the Progressive Era Reform period whereby sustaining current equitable child welfare policies in foster care. It will incorporate first-hand perspectives and insight from three to five non-profits gathering qualitative information from front-line workers and support professionals. It will further identify gaps within child welfare reforms based on policy changes and how it affects non-profit agencies.

Your participation will take about 45 minutes to an hour for each participant. Interview questions have been incorporated to reflect the first-hand experiences of front-line workers in child welfare. There is a minimal risk of meeting with participants in a non-secure area which will increase the possibility of risk. There is an additional risk associated with the identification of participants due to the audio recording of interviews.

The information gathered from the study will be discarded based on the IRB require standard timeframe. The researcher will encrypt information from participants by means of using algorithms to secure the conversation, and audio. Additional ways of mitigating the risk of identification of participants are by taking measures that secure the location of unauthorized personnel. The information will be stored away from the public and secured in a locked file cabinet. There are no direct benefits to the participant, as the participant. The research is
important and well-justified to allow for the Child Welfare laws to implement changes that protect children that are affected by the shift in child welfare policies.

The research project is being done by Shirley Dews as part of their Doctoral Dissertation. The purpose of this study is to build on sustaining current equitable child welfare policies in foster care. It will incorporate first-hand perspectives and insight from three to five non-profits gathering qualitative information from front-line workers and support professionals. It will further identify gaps within child welfare reforms based on policy changes and how it affects non-profit agencies. If you would like to take part, West Chester University requires that you agree and sign this consent form.

You may ask Shirley Dews any questions to help you understand this study. If you don’t want to be a part of this study, it won’t affect any services from West Chester University. If you choose to be a part of this study, you have the right to change your mind and stop being a part of the study at any time.

**What is the purpose of this study?**

The purpose of this study is to build on sustaining current equitable child welfare policies in foster care. It will incorporate first-hand perspectives and insight from three to five non-profits gathering qualitative information from front-line workers and support professionals. It will further identify gaps within child welfare reforms based on policy changes and how it affects non-profit agencies.

1. **If you decide to be a part of this study, you will be asked to do the following:**

   Interview questions have been incorporated to reflect the first-hand experiences of front-line workers in child welfare.

   This study will take about 45 minutes to an hour for each participant of your time.
2. Are there any experimental medical treatments?

   No

3. Is there any risk to me?

   Possible risks or sources of discomfort include: Meeting with participants in a non-secure area will increase the possibility of risk. There is an additional risk associated with the identification of participants due to the audio recording of interviews. The information gathered from the study will be discarded based on the IRB required standard timeframe. The researcher will encrypt information from participants by means of using algorithms to secure the conversation and audio. Additional ways of mitigating the risk of identification of participants are by taking measures that secure the location of unauthorized personnel. The information will be stored away from the public and secured in a locked file cabinet.

   If you experience discomfort, you have the right to withdraw at any time.

4. Is there any benefit to me?

   Benefits to you may include: There are no direct benefits to the participant.

   Other benefits may include: The research is important and well-justified to allow for the Child Welfare laws to implement changes that protect children that are affected by the shift in child welfare policies.

5. How will you protect my privacy?

   The session will be recorded.

   The recording is a necessary component of the interview process. When transcribing notes, there is a commitment to ensure detailed accuracy for reporting purposes.
Your records will be private. Only Shirley Dews, Angela Kline, and the IRB will have access to your name and responses.

Your name will not be used in any reports.

Records will be stored:

- in a locked cabinet in Home Room 1, which will also be kept locked.
  
The file cabinet will be fireproof.

Records will be destroyed three years after study completion.

6. **Do I get paid to take part in this study?**

   There is no compensation for participation.

7. **Who do I contact in case of research related injury?**

   For any questions with this study, contact:

   - **Primary Investigator:** Shirley Dews at sd983944@wcupa.edu
   - **Faculty Sponsor:** Angela Kline at 610-436-2650 or akline@wcupa.edu

8. **What will you do with my Identifiable Information/Biospecimens?**

   Not applicable.

For any questions about your rights in this research study, contact the ORSP at 610-436-3557.

I, _________________________________ (your name), have read this form and I understand the statements in this form. I know that if I am uncomfortable with this study, I can stop at any time. I know that it is not possible to know all possible risks in a study, and I think that reasonable safety measures have been taken to decrease any risk.

_________________________________
Subject/Participant Signature Date:________________

_________________________________
Witness Signature Date:________________
References


