Transition Planning Youth Out of the Foster Care System

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SOWK 697 – Winter 2015

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During the months of May to August I will be completing my final practicum with the Government of Saint Lucia, in the Division of Human Services. There, I will work in partnership with a charitable organization that provides temporary housing for children who are abandoned or abused. The ultimate goal of this organization is to transition the children to suitable long-term care; however, due to unfavourable circumstances many of the children remain in the organization's care for extended periods of time. In consequence, ten out of the fourteen children supported by the organization are teenagers, four of whom are "aging out" (reaching the age of majority) and will soon be forced to transitioned out of the home.

My role as a practicum student will be to assist in the youth's transition planning so that this process will be as seamless and prepared as possible. However, without any knowledge of the social and political climate of St. Lucia or any experience in transition planning I will require more information before I can adequately assist this process. This integrated literature review will address the best practices for youth transition planning out of foster care placements in Saint Lucia in addition to analyzing some of the challenges and opportunities that youth face on the island.

Method

Through the literature search, it became clear that there are no articles that specifically target youth transition planning in St. Lucia. Due to the limited size of the island, this is not surprising. St. Lucia has a land area of 620km (Pan American Health Organization, 2012) and a population of approximately 173,000 people

(United Nations, 2011.). In an effort to increase the search results, the search criteria was broadened to include the Caribbean and later the international community.

Additional articles were found through the University of Calgary's Unified Search Interface, commonly known as *Summon*. The search terminology included: transition planning, aging-out, foster care, independent living, and youth. To pare down the information, only journal articles that were written in the last ten years and were peer-reviewed are included in this analysis. *Google* was also utilized to identify relevant articles from the grey literature.

In order to grasp the unique challenge and opportunities facing youth in St Luica additional articles that pertain to this topic were included in the analysis. The majority of these articles were identified though the *Google* search engine and were part of the grey literature. This was due to the limited results in *Summon* and the insufficient amount of academic literature. The articles encompassed in this analysis are eclectic; their topics range from child rights, poverty determinants, social risk management, disaster risk reduction, and homelessness. Although the articles differ in focus, they are united by one common factor: all of the articles provide insight into the challenges and opportunities facing youth in St. Lucia.

Youth in Foster Care: Patterns & Trends

The literature (Fallis, 2012; Dewar & Goodman, 2014; Cunningham & Diversi, 2012; Berzin, Singer & Hokanson, 2014) acknowledges that the transition to adulthood is no longer a linear process. It cannot be defined by conventional goals, including the transition from school to work or from living with parents to living

independently. The recent trends demonstrate that this process is often fragmented and is characterized by the back and forth transitions between dependence and independence (Rogers, 2011). For example, with the loss of a job a young person might consider moving back in with their parents, thus sacrificing their independence for increased housing security. This is not uncommon as studies show (Fallis, 2012; Rogers 2014; Dwrosky, Napolitano & Courtney, 2013; Curry & Abrams, 2014) that there is an increase in number of young people between the ages 20-29 living with their parents. For example, in Canada roughly 44% of the above population lives with their parents (Fallis, 2012). The authors (Berzin et al., 2014;Fallis, 2012; Dewar & Goodman, 2014; Cunningham & Diversi, 2012) draw attention to these development trends to highlight the stark differences between the developmental trends and the development expectations set by the foster care system. The expectation that youth will quickly and abruptly transition into adulthood at the age of 18 demonstrates the systems inability to adapt to the new economic realities.

Youth unemployment is a global concern that significantly impacts the transition from adolescence to adulthood by reducing the opportunities to become financially secure (Fallis, 2012; Torrico, 2010). The limited employment opportunities result in increased competition and often call for enhanced skills and job training. Social networking also plays a role and in this sense children in the foster care system are at a distinct disadvantage. Within this reality, the extension of financial assistance and the provision of housing and emotional support have proven (Dewar & Goodman, 2014) to mitigate some of the challenges and risks

associated with the transition to adulthood. These supports are necessary given the vulnerability of youth in the foster care system.

Many of the children in foster care have experienced poverty, abuse and/or maltreatment, which has led to their entry into the foster care system (Curry & Abrams, 2014; Rogers, 2011; Fallis, 2012). Research (Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2012; Berzin et al., 2014) has shown that youth who exit foster care are more likely to be involved in the criminal justice system, have disproportionately high rates of physical and mental health problems, and are at risk of being homeless and drug addicted. With the odds staked against them and the unfavourable economic climate, it is increasingly important that social workers pay close attention to the specific needs of youth in foster care in order to best prepare them for the challenges ahead.

Best Practices: Youth Transition Planning

Client-Centered Approach

The literature (Fallis, 2012; Walters, Zanghi, Ansell, Armstrong & Stutter, 2011; Cambell River Joint Transition Committee, 2013) supports a client-centered approach to youth transition planning by stressing the importance of involving the child in the decision-making process. According to Fallis (2012) a transition plan should reflect the youth's ambitions and/or goals. By including youth in the planning process, they are taught how to "set goals, solve problems, make decisions, advocate for themselves, and manage their own wellbeing" (Walters et al, 2011, p. 1). The literature (Walters et al, 2011) also demonstrates that when young people

are involved in the planning process they will take ownership and feel more responsible for the plan.

Supportive Relationships

One of themes that was uncovered in the research analysis was the importance of fostering strong, supportive, permanent, adult relationships with youth who are transitioning out of the foster care system (Fallis, 2012; Dewar & Goodman, 2014; Centre on the Family & Hawaii Kids Count, 2012; Walters et al, 2011; Geenen & Powers, 2007; Rogers, 2011; Avery, 2011; Berzin, Singer & Hokanson, 2014). In a qualitative study Rogers (2011) interviewed five youth who were exiting care and five social workers who were responsible for transitioning the youth out of care. Through open-ended questions, Rogers (2011) discovered that the youth exiting the care system placed high value on unconditional care, support, and contact. For example, one care leaver stated:

> "I think [you need] more help with the emotional, psychological stuff when you're fist living on your own. Just someone checking up on you, or giving you a call. I didn't get *any* of that." (Rogers, 2011, p. 418).

Concern regarding the perceived lack of social support was a common theme among the care leavers. The youth conveyed that they needed an adult whom they could rely upon, and call on when they were in trouble: an asset that would be invaluable to them (Rogers, 2011).

A similar theme, which was noted by Rogers (2011), was that the youth sincerely felt that the social workers did not care about them. One respondent

described the need for a more personal connection with his/her social worker, explaining:

> "That was the thing that I always hated about care… that [social workers] don't really *care* about me at *all*, that is just [their] job" (Rogers, 2011, p. 42).

When Rogers (2011) interviewed the social workers they admitted that their ability to provide quality care was limited due to being short staffed and overworked. Although the children judged them harshly, the reality is that the problem was rooted in funding as opposed to personal intent.

Funding problems are common across nations and are not unique to this case study. For instance, in St. Lucia the Division of Human Services and Family Affairs is grossly underfunded and has "only eight family caseworkers to provide services to the entire island" (Francis-Nathaniel, 2009, p.13). Likewise, the youths' longing for a more permanent, supportive adult relationship is common across care systems and is noted in the literature (Avery, 2011; Rogers, 2011).

Studies (Centre on the Family & Hawaii Kids Count, 2012; Fallis, 2012; Rogers, 2011; Avery, 2011; Greenen & Powers, 2007) have shown that a "permanent connection with at least one committed adult" (Dewar & Goodman, 2014, p.3) will positively support a successful transition into adulthood for youth who have exited the foster care system. This should not be surprising, as Fallis (2012) states that "supportive relationships are important for everyone to grow and develop successfully… youth in care are no different" (p. 13). Fallis (2012) also highlights that the children who are resilient are often supported by at least one non-parental

adult in their lives. This indicates to social work professionals the importance of providing a long-term, positive mentor for children in care.

Research (Avery, 2011 & Fallis, 2012) has demonstrated that mentorship programs positively affect social, behavioral and academic outcomes for at-risk youth. Due to the financial and time constraints placed on social workers, the articles (Avery, 2011; Fallis, 2012) suggest mentorship programs as a cost-effective means of providing long-term social support for children in the foster care system. According to Avery, mentorship programs that include "ongoing training for mentors; structured activities for mentors and youth; and clear expectations for frequency of contact … and monitoring of the overall program implementation" (2011, p. 14-15) yield greater benefits than programs which do not have these elements. Similarly, mentorship programs that work in conjunction with other services tend to show improved results (Avery, 2011).

Studies (Dewar & Goodman, 2014; Curry& Abrams, 2014) have found that peer relationships are an additional source of emotional and informational support for youth in foster care. According to the Collaborative Community Health Research Centre, peer relationships can "reduce the sense of isolation and stigma of being out-of-home care" (2002, p. 35) by uniting two individuals of similar life circumstances. Dewar & Goodman (2014) found that by establishing a positive peer-mentoring relationship within care, youth could maintain this relationship and rely on these individuals post-care. This mechanism proved to be a successful means of establishing a support network for youth out of care.

Likewise, Curry & Abrams (2014) discussed how peer relationships enhance the youths' knowledge with regards to housing, food, and employment supports. This phenomenon is accomplished through the sharing of information in informal conversations between peers. An additional benefit of a peer relationship is that it can also serve as a potential buffer to the youth's "engagement in risky behavior and/or victimization" (Curry & Abrams, 2014, p. 147).

Affordable Housing

The literature (Curry & Abrams, 2014; Centre on the Family & Hawaii Kids Count, 2012; Torrico, 2010; Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2010; Dewar & Goodman, 2014; Fallis, 2012; Walters et al., 2011; Daining & DePanfilis, 2007; Geenen & Powers, 2007; Jones, 2011; Dworsky, Napolitano & Courtney, 2012; Dewar & Goodman, 2014; Cunningham & Diversi, 2012; Berzin et al., 2014) states that youth who exit the foster care system are disproportionally represented in the homeless population. In Dworsky et al. study, which focused on the event of homelessness during the transition from foster care to adulthood, "36% of 624 respondents… [disclosed that they had] been homeless at least once by the age of 26 years" (2012, p. 319). Torrico implies that this is because "young people exiting foster care are forced to prematurely tackle the harsh reality of the gap between their earnings and the cost of housing" (2010, p. 2). According to Torrico, safe, stable and affordable housing is the foundation for a successful transition into adulthood since it enables the youth to "maintain steady employment, pursue higher education, access health care benefits, [and] maintain a support network" (2010, p. 2). In order to ensure a smooth transition from the foster care system, social workers ought to arrange and/or assist youth in securing housing placements or supports prior to leaving

care (Torrico, 2010; Dewar & Goodman, 2014; Fallis, 2012).

Independent Living Services

The literature (Dewar & Goodman, 2014; Torrico, 2010; Fallis, 2012; Geenen & Powers, 2007; Daining & DePanfilis, 2007) suggests that independent living services can effectively support youth who are transitioning out of care and into adulthood. Independent living services address the transitional needs of youth by offering them increased independence with the additional supports that allow for interdependence. The independent living services may include: housing subsidies, skills training, group support, financial assistance for further education, and case management (Dewar & Goodman, 2007). Fallis (2012) encourages the use of these supports by emphasizing how the immediate goal of independence has led youth to unfavourable outcomes, including homelessness. Fallis states that living independently without any assistance "is a myth at best, unhealthy at worst" (2012, p. 32). Relying on supports should be considered a healthy, responsible action of an emerging adult and the youth should not feel ashamed for reaching out. Although this sounds like common knowledge, it is worth mentioning when the majority of youth in Berzin et al.'s study defined adulthood as "not asking for help" (2014, p. 629).

Education & Skills Training

Educational achievement positively correlates with increased employment stability and improved wages (Fallis, 2012; Dewar & Goodman, 2014). Studies (Centre on the Family & Hawaii Kids Count, 2012; Torrico, 2010; Jones, 2011) have shown that youth in care exhibit lower levels of educational achievement than their peers. For example, Jones (2011) highlights that the majority of youth exiting the foster care system

are leaving without a high school diploma. The Centre of the Family & Hawaii Kids Count (2012) suggest that this trend is likely the result of a number of closely inter-related factors, including multiple care placements that result in delayed school enrollment and school changes.

The prevalence of mental health disorders in youth in care (Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2012) also contributes to their low levels of academic advancement. For example, trauma - which is common among youth in care - is known to influence memory retention and can impair the child's ability to concentrate (Downey, 2007). These challenges often result in lower levels of academic achievement, which in time can lead to school avoidance. Social workers can and *should* arrange educational supports for children with mental health and learning disorders in order to assist with some of the school related challenges. The Minnesota Department of Human Services (2012) suggests that social workers ought to communicate with schools on a regular basis in order to keep up to date with the child's progress and respective needs. Furthermore, the Minnesota Department of Human Services (2012) implies that with increased academic and emotional supports, more youth in foster care will graduate with a high school diploma.

Similar to their peers, youth in foster care desire a higher level of education. Surveys indicate that 75% to 80% of children in care have aspirations for achieving a college degree (Jones, 2011). However, the financial barriers to education significantly reduce the youth's opportunities to pursue their goals. Research (Jones, 2011; Dewar & Goodman, 2014; Fallis, 2012) has demonstrated that youth who achieve higher education are more successful in their adulthood. Consequently, social workers ought to assist

youth, which are exiting care, in securing financial assistance for further education and/or job specific training programs.

Life Skills Programs

The literature (Collaborative Community Health Research Centre, 2002; Dewar & Goodman, 2014; Fallis, 2012; Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2012) indicates that life skills training strongly support a successful transition into adulthood. The life skills curriculum includes daily living skills such as "home management; money management; utilization of community services; utilization of leisure time; personal care; hygiene; and safety" (Collaborative Community Health Research Centre, 2002, p. 34). In preparation for a youth's transition out of care, the Minnesota Department of Human Services (2012) proposes that youth are given a chance to practice their life skills. For instance, care providers can begin to share some of the household responsibilities including grocery shopping, housekeeping or meal preparation. The youth can also demonstrate their problem-solving skills by settling their disputes in a more independent manner (Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2012). Lastly, the youth can work with socials workers to find an affordable housing solution that will work for them once they leave care.

Summary of Recommendations: Youth Transition Planning

The literature (Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2012; Dewar & Goodman, 2014; Torrico, 2010; Centre on the Family & Hawaii Kids Count, 2012; Fallis, 2012; Walters et al., 2011; Cambell River Joint Transition Committee, 2013) provides a number of concrete recommendations with regards to youth transition planning. Dewar & Goodman (2014) recognize that there are four elements, which are critical to a successful

transition plan. These include: [the provision of] strong relationships… ongoing educational supports… access to quality housing and financial assistance… [and] readiness planning, including life skills, job skills, and financial management training" (Dewar & Goodman, 2014, p. 7). The Minnesota Department of Human Services (2012) also provides a detailed step-by-step plan, which addresses the above concerns and can easily be applied outside of the United States and in places like St. Lucia. Lastly, the literature (Torrico, 2010; Walters et al., 2011) emphasizes that a successful transition plan must be developed early in order to adequately address the youth's specific needs and goals.

As stated above, transition plans must address housing, education, employment, health, and support networks. To tackle some of these concerns, Torrico (2010) suggests that social workers work in partnership with other service providers that are working on likeminded initiatives, including affordable housing. Social workers can also work with landlords to negotiate housing prices (Torrico, 2010). In essence, the social workers' role is to connect the youth to services and advocate for them on their behalf. To be successful in their endeavors, Walters et al. (2011) and Torrico (2010) are right to assume that planning needs to start early.

St. Lucia: Challenges & Opportunities

Brief Introduction

St. Lucia is a small island located in the Eastern Caribbean in the Windward Island Chain. As mentioned previously, its population is limited and is comprised of 173, 000 people (United Nations, 2011). The island has a resource-based economy, which is predominantly focused on tourism and agriculture (Thornburg, 2011). The United

Nations (2011) described St. Lucia's ecosystem as "fragile" and noted that the island is highly susceptible to natural disasters, including hurricanes. Thornburg (2011) also stated that the island's economy is vulnerable to fluctuations in the international market since a number of its goods are imported as well as sold abroad. For example, the agricultural industry primarily sells its products in the international market. Likewise, the tourism industry heavily relies on the international market for food imports due to the limited diversity of St. Lucia's agricultural outputs (Thornburg, 2011).

The 2005/2006 Poverty Assessment Report states that 28.8% of the population is poor (Kairi Consultants Limited, 2006). Loudon reports that "over half of the children in St. Lucia… are 'at risk'" (2006, p. 2) and he conveys that food insecurity and/or poverty is the primary contributing factor(s). Based on the above information, it is clear that St. Lucia faces significant development challenges; however, it is not facing these challenges alone. The literature (OECS, 2014; Caribsave, 2012; Hornick & Matheson, 2007a) demonstrates that the international community and the Organization of the Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) are playing a key role in the development of disaster risk reduction initiatives and community development programs that target vulnerable communities and/or youth.

Challenges

St. Lucia's economy is fragile. As mentioned above, the economy is resource-based and is highly susceptible to natural disasters (Caribsave, 2012; World Bank, n.d.; Thornburg, 2011). The two primary forces of the economy - tourism and agriculture - are also seasonal in nature, which often results in periods of unemployment for the workers (Thornburg, 2011). These factors, combined with the limited employment opportunities

for youth, have contributed to the increase in drug tracking and prostitution in St. Lucia (Henry-Lee, Watson, Osei & Trezelle, 2010). According to Henry-Lee et al. (2010), 49.95 percent of the people who are unemployed in St. Lucia are between the ages of 15-24 years old. With limited employment opportunities, an increasing number of youth are viewing drug trafficking as a viable, profitable employment option (Loudon, 2006; Henry-Lee et al., 2010).

"When caregivers where asked about their primary concern for their children… [they] expressed that [they were] concerned that their children might be drawn to crime" Loudon, 2006, p. 20). With the growing market in drug trafficking and the limited employment opportunities in St. Lucia this is a legitimate concern, one that is compounded by the country's legal practices. For instance, in St. Lucia, a 16 or 17 year-old offender can be sentenced with life imprisonment (Loudon, 2006). Behavioural concerns, such as truancy and vagrancy, are also criminalized (Loudon, 2006). Loudon's (2006) report gave the impression that the police in St. Lucia abuse their authority. This can impact punishment practices, which may or may not consider the developmental age of the offender.

The prevalence of sexual abuse on the island is also a growing concern for St. Lucians (Loudon, 2006; Hornick & Matheson, 2007a; Hornick & Matheson, 2007b; Henry-Lee et al., 2010). Similar to Canada, the issue of sexual abuse is underreported in St. Lucia. The shame and control associated with this form of abuse creates significant barriers for successful prosecution. For instance, "parents will refuse to testify, or prevent their children from doing so" (Loudon, 2006, p. 5) inhibiting the police from prosecuting the offender. Compounding this problem is the inadequate reporting and referral system

with regards to cases of neglect or abuse. Loudon's (2006) study also suggests, "many mothers turn a blind eye to the sexual abuse of their children in fear of loosing the financial support of their partners" (2006, p. 9). According to the study, sexual abuse is the most "reported form of abuse in St. Lucia" (Loudon, 2006, p.6) and children living in poverty are thought to be more vulnerable to this form of abuse.

The literature (Loudon, 2006; Hornick & Matheson, 2007a; Hornick & Matheson, 2007b; Henry-Lee et al., 2010) uncovered that HIV/AIDS is a major concern for St. Lucians. Loudon reports that "when young people were asked what was the worst thing that could happen to them… they mentioned HIV/AIDS (as well as rape and/or early pregnancy)" (2006, p. 11). According to Hornick & Matheson (2007a) HIV-related infections were the second leading cause of death in children who are five years old or younger. Henry-Lee et al. also refer to the Prime Minister's budget speech of 2004, which "revealed that there were 417 cases of confirmed HIV/AIDS infection" (2010, p. 77) on the island.

Henry- Lee et al. (2010) focus on the economic consequences of HIV/AIDS, namely the high cost of treatment and the reduction of labour performance. By contrast, Loudon (2006) looks at the impacts that this disease have on the individual. The respondents in Loudon's (2006) study mention that individuals with HIV/AIDS face institutional racism from employers and schools in St. Lucia. Similarly, the respondents imply that people suffering from HIV/AIDS are harshly judged by the church and are susceptible to "depression, rejection, isolation, and [the] destruction of [their] self-esteem" (Loudon, 2006, p. 11). In terms of prevention and intervention, Loudon's (2006) study brought attention to the lack of programs and/or supports targeting HIV/AIDS in

St. Lucia.

Hornick & Matheson (2007a) draws attention to the prevalence of substance abuse among youth on the island. According to the authors, "over 64% of students drink alcohol" (Hornick & Matheson, 2007a, p. 13). Data (Hornick & Matheson, 2007a) demonstrates that the majority of youth first try alcohol at the age of 11. Although the term "student" is not defined by Hornick and Matheson (2007a), it is assumed that the authors were referring to teenagers since their report was focused on youth. In this report, children did not view substance abuse as a problem; however, it was an issue that was raised by the adults. According to the adults in Hornick & Matheson's (2007a) study, there are virtually no substance abuse programs that target children on the island. This is a problem since the research (Hornick & Matheson, 2007a) demonstrates that an increasing number of youth are using alcohol.

The literature (Loudon, 2006) suggests that there is a lack of understanding with regards to learning disabilities in St. Lucia. For example, very few respondents (96.8%) in Loudon's (2006) study acknowledged that their children had a learning disability. Loudon noted that this was unusual, since "4-7% of children in almost all societies have a disability of some kind, and that the prevalence of disabilities tends to increase with poverty" (2006, p. 13). This statistic suggests that a number of children living in St. Lucia may have a disability, which is not acknowledged by their care providers or teachers.

As a former teacher, I am concerned. Without a proper diagnosis, students are often not provided with the educational support that they require. Similarly, the above statistics represent the teacher's inability to recognize and/or name a child's learning disability. With regards to learning facilities, there are five special education centers on

the island (Hornick & Matheson, 2007a). Hornick & Matheson (2007a) convey that overall 60% of the teachers in these centers are formally trained. However, the center in Soufriere is at a distinct disadvantage, since only 20% of their staff are certified teachers (Hornick & Matheson, 2007a).

Education is a topic of concern for most parents on the island (Loudon, 2006). For instance, parents in Loudon's (2006) study repeatedly mentioned that their child's education is sub-par. The parents imply that the quality of teaching and the school facilities are currently insufficient. For example, Loudon's (2006) respondents disclosed that a number of adolescents are not attending high school due to the limited availability of schools. Moreover, Hornick & Matheson (2007b) support the parents' assertion that the quality of teaching is low by revealing that only 40% of secondary school teachers and 20% of primary teachers in St. Lucia are formally trained. Lastly, poverty and pride were identified as an additional barrier to education since "some parents refus[ed] to take advantage of the book-loan schemes" (Loudon, 2006, p. 16) and/or would not buy their children used uniforms. To overcome this financial barrier, Loudon's (2006) study suggests increased government subsidies; however, it neglected to touch on how parents would overcome the stigma that is also attached to this form of intervention.

The literature (Loudon, 2006; Hornick & Matheson, 2007a) identified significant gaps in St. Lucia's social welfare services. To start, "there is no specific legislation in St. Lucia to regulate the care of orphans [and/or] children in [the] foster care" system (Loudon, 2006, p. 18). The social protection system is also criticized for being poorly developed and is limited in its coordination (Loudon, 2006). Francis-Nathaniel (2009) emphasizes that the Division of Human Services is understaffed. Loudon (2006)

disapproves of the Division of Human Services because of it fails to attract an adequate number of foster parents when compared to the needs of foster care children.

Research (Loudon, 2006) identified that social workers are often inaccessible to St. Lucians due to the perceived stigma associated with their work. Similarly, the lack of public knowledge regarding the availability of social supports has hindered their usage (Loudon, 2006). Hornick and Matheson (2007a; 2007b) studies imply that counselors in the school system lack both clinical and/or social work training. Finally, these studies (Loudon, 2006; Hornick & Matheson, 2007a) reflect the need for social workers to be trained in parenting skills in order to provide training to the general populace, which appears to be lacking these skills.

The literature (Loudon, 2006; Hornick & Matheson, 2007a; 2007b) is concerned with the state of parenting in St. Lucia. The prominent use of physical punishment indicates the need for parenting programs (Hornick & Matheson, 2007a). According to Hornick and Matheson (2007a), approximately 30% of parents in St. Lucia, who have children under the age of 12, favour corporal punishment. The authors state that corporal punishment often includes "spanking with an object (stick, belt, or shoe)" (Hornick & Matheson, 2007a, p. 11). The increasing rates of neglect and abandonment also indicates that more parenting programs are required (Hornick & Matheson, 2007a). Similarly, "child shifting" has been identified as an additional indicator. Child shifting is understood as an informal type of foster care, when a close relative like a grandmother or aunt, is charged with looking after the children due the parents perceived inability (Hornick & Matheson, 2007a).

Opportunities

While the literature (Loudon, 2006; Hornick & Matheson, 2007a; 2007b; Henry-Lee et al., 2010; Thornburg, 2011; Francis-Nathaniel, 2009; Caribsave, 2012) tends to be problem saturated, there are some studies (OECS, 2014; Childs Rights Research & Advocacy Team, 2011) that focus on the positive development initiatives occurring in St. Lucia. For example, the Childs Rights Research and Advocacy Team (2011) notes how NGOs have been training primary teachers and school counselors in positive disciplinary methods. Similarly, the United Nations draws attention to how the government of St. Lucia has recently constructed "a transition home and therapeutic center for children who are victims of abuse" (2011, p. 8). Moreover, the government is working in partnership with the Organization of the Eastern Caribbean states (OECS) to draft and create policy that specific targets child development (United Nations, 2011, p. 8).

One initiative, which is supported by OECS, is the Youth Skills Development Program that provides free jobs skills training to youth in St. Lucia (OECS, 2014). The International Youth Foundation (2015) provides a list of likeminded support programs, including: Youth Work, Planning for Life, Obra, Passport to Success, and the Caribbean Youth Empowerment Program. The Caribbean Youth Empowerment Program is similar to the Youth Skills Development Program, as both programs focus on vocational skills. In order to qualify for the Caribbean Youth Empowerment Program, the youth has to be between the ages of 17-25, and particular attention is given to unemployed young males (International Youth Foundation, 2015). Descriptions of the other programs mentioned above are provided on the International Youth Foundation (2015) website.

Conclusion

The literature (Loudon, 2006; Hornick & Matheson, 2007a; 2007b, Henry-Lee et

al, 2010) uncovered a number of challenges facing youth in St. Lucia. These include: the failure to recognize or report children's learning disabilities; inadequate school facilities; the prevalence of physical and sexual abuse among children; youth unemployment and limited social services. These challenges clearly impact the child's wellbeing and will influence their transition into adulthood. As a social worker who will be assisting with transition planning for youth who are exiting foster care placements in St. Lucia, it is important that I am aware of these trends. By completing this literature review I am aware of some of the challenges in St. Lucia and the best practices with regards to youth transition planning. In the near future, I will apply this knowledge to my practicum when I work with the service providers to develop and evaluate youth transition plans.

This is a detailed, comprehensive review that is well-written, organized and will enhance your work in St. Lucia. A number of APA and sentence structure errors are present. Also since this is a three-part assignment further details regarding how this report will be used in your would be helpful. 84/100

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