

Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk

A professional journal for the social worker

w: <https://socialwork.journals.ac.za/pub> e: socialwork@sun.ac.za eISSN: 2312-7198 (online)



Vol. 60, No. 3, 2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15270/60-3-1347>

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS EXPERIENCED BY YOUTHS LEAVING THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM IN TSHWANE DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY, GAUTENG PROVINCE

Sandile Lucas Dhludhlu

University of South Africa, Department of Social Work, Pretoria, South Africa

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6251-7513>  dhludsl@unisa.ac.za

Article received: 09/01/2023; Article accepted: 24/11/2023; Article published: 10/09/2024

ABSTRACT

In the Republic of South Africa care-leavers are faced with numerous challenges after being discharged in terms of the provisions of the Children's Act 38 of 2005, Section 175 (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 2006). The aim of this study was to explore the challenges and barriers experienced by youths leaving the foster care system in South Africa. The researcher adopted a qualitative research approach to achieve the aim of this study. The findings revealed that youths leaving the foster care system are faced with social challenges, including a lack of communication with their foster parents or caregivers, little cooperation from parents or caregivers, few re-unification services, a lack of housing, and disconnection from other foster children. In addition, youths leaving care experience financial challenges such as unemployment and the abuse of the foster child grant by their foster parents. They also experience educational challenges, with many dropping out of school. Furthermore, youths leaving care face sexual challenges, including sexual abuse, prostitution and teenage pregnancy. For these reasons it is crucial for policymakers, social workers and all social service practitioners to work together to deliver a more expansive safety net for youths leaving care, and to address the fundamental challenges they face.

Keywords: barriers; challenges; foster care; foster care system; leaving care; youth

INTRODUCTION

Every human being on the planet goes through transitions during each phase of his or her existence. People move away from social experiences like networks and carers while they are children. Youths transition into and out of relationships, change their residential homes, hometowns, institutions of learning, professions, religious convictions, health conditions and party-political inclinations. Human experiences are universal in the sense that all of us experience emotions, have needs, and share essential aspects of life such as birth, growth,

relationships and death. Whereas the specific details and cultural contexts may differ, many central emotions and experiences are shared by people across the world. This universality permits us to empathise and connect with others, transcending cultural and geographical boundaries. These transitions are either prearranged or spontaneous, explicit or adverse, fluid or fraught, joyful or distressing. As highlighted by Hlungwani and van Breda (2022), several research studies have been conducted on care leaving which found that youths leaving care in general are deemed to be at risk of transitional challenges. Most transitions yield either positive or negative consequences.

Globally, the challenges which care-leavers experience have an impact on various significant life domains, including a lack of education, employment and accommodation, poor health, teenage pregnancy and involvement in criminal activities (Bond & van Breda, 2018). In Canada care-leaving legislation is the obligation of the provincial government (Sundly, Keating, Effiong & Saif, 2022). Yet little attention is paid to such programmes, regardless of evidence that youths leaving care experience social and economic difficulties. Interventions at the age of youth transition to young adulthood appear to indicate that continuing care is not prioritised by Canadian lawmakers and policymakers. Denell, McGhee and Porter (2022) note that youths leaving care in Scotland also experience challenges, with legislation and policy showing misalignment, and uncertainty prevailing when it comes to registration for necessities such as residential care and foster care locations. What is not clear either are the rules determining the suitability or circumstances related to continuing care, such as age or level of need of the youths involved. In a study conducted by Strahl, van Breda, Mann-Feder and Schröder (2021) in 36 countries across America, Europe, Asia, Africa and Australia, and analysed by a multinational team of care-leaving researchers, findings show that few countries have well-developed care-leaving legislation. In the light of the literature reviewed above, it seems that legislation and policies regarding youths leaving care are a global concern and that legislators and policy makers are not prioritising continuing care services for care-leavers.

In the United States Harty and Ethier (2022) found that youths in foster care, as well as those leaving care, experience challenges in terms of dealing with sexually risky behaviours, difficulties in communicating, and efficient monitoring of sexuality. McGhee and Deeley (2022) explain that the challenges experienced by youths leaving care, and the need for prolonged care, were intensified as the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic had a global impact, laying bare the fragmented nature of care and the organisational shortcomings which affect the care young people have access to. The effects of the pandemic have worsened the challenges faced by youths leaving care, leading to an increase in sexual risk behaviours and difficulties in effectively monitoring their sexual health. The challenge of a lack of continuing care has aggravated the weaknesses that had been identified within the child protection system prior to the pandemic.

On the African continent, youths leaving care are not immune from the challenges facing their global counterparts. They also experience challenges and barriers, such as a lack of preparation for independent living, limited financial support, a lack of housing/accommodation, and a lack of employment (Gwenzi & Ringson, 2023). For instance, a study conducted by Frimpong-Manso (2018) was found that in Ghana care leavers encountered challenges related to

employment, housing and social integration. A study by Frimpong-Manso *et al.* (2022) confirmed that all the care-leavers who took part in that study were employed in low-paying jobs, for instance, working as shop assistants. Some young mothers could not work since they had to remain at home to look after their children, as they lacked the resources to pay for daycare services or informal caregiving assistance. Most youths who leave care exit the foster care system without any prospective employment or shelter. Many are not prepared for independent living and have no financial support, since they no longer receive the foster child grant they had received while in care.

In Zimbabwe, it was reported that there is no aftercare policy to support care-leavers. As a consequence, this affects youths' experiences in society as well as their family experiences (Gwenzi, 2023). In the Zimbabwean context, since there are no clear provisions for youths leaving residential or institutional care, policy makers are encouraged to make provisions to prevent care-leavers from being marginalised, and to make available programmes which will counter injustices against this group. In a study conducted in Uganda and Ghana, youths leaving care in both countries were reported to struggle with independent living, finding it difficult to find employment and shelter, pursue their schooling, and experiencing stigma, as there are no statutory aftercare programmes and informal social support is lacking (Bukuluki, Kanya, Kasirye & Nabulya, 2019; Frimpong-Manso, 2018). These two countries share similar policies, and one of the residential care facilities they have in common is the SOS Children's Village, a non-profit organisation that assists children with no parental care.

South African youths leaving care have reported having to deal with various challenges, including alcohol and drug dependency; the possession, sale or distribution of illegal substances; property-related crimes such as theft, burglary and vandalism (to fund their substance abuse); and generally getting into trouble with the law (Mmusi & van Breda, 2017). Other challenges are related to seeking accommodation, finding jobs, a lack of education, financial problems, health challenges, poor relationships with their families and friends, and not being in employment, education and training (NEET) (van Breda & Dickens, 2017; Hlungwani & van Breda, 2020). Furthermore, causal factors may include the absence of frameworks, guidelines and policies needed to support youths leaving care to ensure that they are in a position to live responsible and independent lives.

Children and youths in need of care and protection experience more challenges than their younger counterparts, because they no longer are entitled to the interventions available for vulnerable individuals (Ntuli, Mokgatle & Madiba, 2020). As these authors highlight, the foster child grant is withdrawn from adolescents once they reach the age of 18, regardless of their living conditions, for instance, being the head of the household. Moreover, the research of Ntuli *et al.* (2020) found that many children and youths who are in need of care and protection, are dropping out of school.

The study reported on here, explored the challenges and barriers experienced by youths leaving the foster care system in South Africa, with a view to preparing them to live independently once they have exited the system. It is just as critical that social workers understand the challenges facing youths leaving care, so that the necessary programmes can be developed to support them.

This article is structured as follows: it commences with outlining the purpose of foster care in South Africa, with particular reference to the different types of foster care placements in this country, as well as the outcomes of youths leaving care. This is followed by an account of the theoretical frameworks adopted in this study and of the research methodology. The next section reports on the results of the study, followed by a discussion and conclusion.

PURPOSE OF FOSTER CARE IN SOUTH AFRICA

The White Paper for Social Welfare (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1997) states that families must be reinforced and offer a supporting environment for their members. Foster care seeks to offer alternative care for families whose children are found to be in need of care and protection, as outlined in Section 150(1) and (2) of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (RSA, 2006). This is in line with Section 28(1)(b) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996 (RSA, 1996), which emphasises that children have the right to family or parental care, or to suitable alternative care, when they are separated from their family environment. Thus, the aim of foster care in South Africa is to encourage the protection of children when they are disconnected from their blood relatives (RSA, 1996; 1997; 2006). For this study, given the imperative to ensure that children and youths are provided with a safe and nurturing environment, it is critical to look at the types of foster care placements available.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF FOSTER CARE PLACEMENTS IN SOUTH AFRICA

In South Africa, the kinds of formal foster care placements include kinship, residential and cluster foster care. For the purposes of this study, the focus is on non-relative foster care placement, which consists of residential and cluster foster care.

Residential foster care

Residential foster care includes placing a child in a child and youth care centre (CYCC) that provides care and protection to the child (RSA, 2006). According to Rochat, Mokomane and Mitchell (2016), residential care placement is common in instances of child abuse, neglect, abandonment or orphaning. This class of care is mostly adopted up to the point where a child is reunified with his/her biological parents, or is legally adopted, or reaches the age of maturity (Rochat *et al.*, 2016). In South Africa, family-of-origin and kinship foster care are encouraged where possible, and residential care is always regarded as a last resort (RSA, 2006). This means that, in South Africa, a child is placed in residential care in the absence of any family member who is interested in providing kinship foster care.

Cluster foster care

The Department of Social Development (DSD) is tasked with the responsibility of providing a healthy and caring atmosphere for children in the course of their upbringing (RSA, 1996). Cluster foster care is defined as the placement of a child in a cluster foster care scheme that is documented by the provincial head of the DSD (RSA, 2006). This arrangement provides for the reception of the child placed under foster care in terms of a foster care programme managed by either a social, religious or non-profit organisation (NPO), or a group of people delegated as caregivers of the child by the provincial DSD or appointed child protection organisation (Matthias & Zaal, 2009). Thus, cluster foster care can include any scheme that is managed by

an NPO and registered with the provincial DSD. In cluster foster care schemes, community members within the communities protect and care for the children involved (du Toit, van der Westhuizen & Alpaslan, 2016). The next section focuses on the outcomes of youths leaving care in South Africa.

OUTCOMES OF YOUTHS LEAVING CARE IN SOUTH AFRICA

The outcomes of youth leaving care in this country can vary significantly and are influenced by a range of factors, including the quality of the care received while in the foster care system, as well as by broader social, economic and cultural factors (Mmusi & van Breda, 2017). Global research has found that leaving the foster care system places enormous pressure on care-leavers, who are vulnerable and, as a result, might experience outcomes such as school failure, low college attendance, and high school dropout rates (Geiger & Schelbe, 2014; Schmidt *et al.*, 2013). According to Stott (2012), youths leaving care graduate from secondary school at lower rates than their peers and are even less likely to graduate from college. As Dickens (2017) notes, the drop-out rate in higher education is significant, with the number of care leavers who attain a degree varying between 6 and 13 percent, which is very low compared to the 27 to 44 per cent of the general population.

In addition, youths leaving care are reported to often experience a problematic transition to adulthood, including accessing and maintaining affordable housing (Curry & Abrams, 2015). Research conducted in the USA and other Western countries confirm that the youths who leave care struggle to find housing and accommodation (Harty & Ethier, 2022). In Ireland, it is also reported that there is a drastic increase in youth homelessness, which has been linked to severe shortages in affordable accommodation, at a time when they are no longer able to access state care (Glynn, 2021). The lack of housing for youths who leave care is a critical issue that demands the attention of the state, since it falls within its ambit to address this problem by providing affordable, safe and supportive housing options to ensure that every young person leaving care can build a better future.

According to McGhee and Deeley (2022), many youths who leave care battle to find employment, and some turn to delinquency or crime, which leads to their incarceration. While youths leaving care run a high risk of experiencing adverse outcomes in adulthood, many grasp the opportunity to make positive changes and build stability (Lee & Berrick, 2014). The literature indicates that youths leaving care have a slim chance of finding stable jobs or to qualify for exceptional training; the education system tends to let down the poorest of the poor, because of insufficient resources, staff shortages and infrastructural issues. When these youths exit the education system, the low demand for unqualified workers means few secure permanent employment opportunities – and those who manage to find jobs are likely not to be well remunerated (South African Human Rights Commission, 2014).

In South Africa, many youths transit out of the foster care system at 18, as directed by the Children's Act (RSA, 2006); these youngsters are legally regarded as adults and therefore capable of looking after themselves (Tanur, 2012; RSA, 2006). Consequently, they lose most of the monetary, social and emotional assistance provided by their foster care parents and social workers when they were in foster care (Tanur, 2012; RSA, 2006). More than 11 million South

African children live in income poverty and are in danger of being trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty (Patel, 2015; Report to the South African Human Rights Commission, 2014). According to a Quarterly Labour Force Survey conducted by Statistics South Africa (StatsSA, 2016) from January to March of that year (i.e. Q1 of 2016), since 2010 the first quarter of each year consistently recorded increases in unemployment levels. The number of unemployed persons between the ages of 15 and 64 increased by more than half a million in both the first quarters of 2015 and 2016, by 526 000 and 521 000 respectively – the most substantial rise in unemployment since 2010 (StatsSA, 2016). Youths leaving the foster care system are not invulnerable to job insecurity and unemployment, and are regarded as amongst the most vulnerable members of the community.

For most youths leaving foster care in South Africa, the outcomes appear to be negative. The few studies conducted in South Africa on independent living programmes focus only on children and youths before they leave the foster care system. For that reason, the researcher identified an opportunity to focus on those who have been out of the foster care system, or are care-leavers. Any new knowledge will serve to prepare youths leaving the foster care system and to render after-care services to those already outside of the system to advance their chances of living independently. The next section discusses one of the theories the researcher adopted for this study.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THIS STUDY

Early researchers of resilience research, including Norman Garmezy, Lois Murphy, Michael Rutter, and Emmy Werner, aimed to inform practice by comprehending the factors that enable some individuals to adapt successfully to adversity while others struggle (Masten, 2013). During the 1970s and 1980s developmental psychologists in North America first explored the implications of the term “resilience theory” (RT) and in the 1990s it was incorporated into related disciplines, including social work (Winkler, 2014). Most of the social work literature on resilience focuses on the possibility of constructing an individual’s resilience rather than testing accepted practices and identifying structural problems (Winkler, 2014). “Resilience” stems from the Latin *resilire*, which means “to recoil” (Taormina, 2015) or rebound. Resilience theory is what helps researchers and practitioners to believe in individuals’ capability to deal with any hostile condition affecting their lives – such as in the case of youths leaving care.

Van Breda (2017) describes RT as a theory which describes the factors that enable some individuals to rise above hardship, while others succumb. It describes a person’s ability to bounce back, rise up, show strength or recover, or to remain standing and/or recover after having faced a difficult situation (Greene, 2014; Taormina, 2015). From an ecological systems perspective, Masten (2016) refers to resilience as the competence to successfully adjust to conflicts that endanger a system’s function, feasibility, or advancement. Masten (2016) emphasises that the likely threats to human durability, growth and advancement include neediness, unemployment, inequality, family conflict, calamity, disease, epidemics, climate change, domestic violence and political conflict.

In this study, resilience is taken to refer to a person’s ability to explore their unique assets, and the system’s capacity to accommodate those assets in ways that are meaningful and rewarding

(also monetarily) and that will positively affect the lives, families or communities of those persons (Liborio & Ungar, 2010). In the current context, a resilient youth has the ability and capacity to rebound, or to rise above the adversities brought about by the challenges they experienced prior to and during their foster care placement, and after leaving care.

Many youths who leave care have had to deal with great misfortune in their lives, including maltreatment, neglect or abandonment, the death of their parents, expulsion from their home, and uncertainty while in foster care (Jones, 2014). Part of leaving care involves re-unifying youths with their families or foster carers, some of whom may be considered ill-suited or unfit to care for them. Displaying resilience after leaving care becomes evident when an individual finds a job, lives independently, is enrolled in higher education, engages in relationship building, makes use of support networks, shows responsible parenting and child-rearing, and becomes a productive member of the broader community (Jones, 2014). Resilience theory focuses on the contextual factors that shape the youths leaving care by helping them to develop into mature adults, despite the risks and adversity they went through as infants or children (Strolin-Goltzman, Woodhouse, Suter & Werrbach, 2016).

Taormina (2015) states that level of resilience depends on an individual's ability and determination to endure, adjust and salvage hope from misfortune. Four dimensions can be identified, as clarified below:

- **Determination**, which is categorised as the self-discipline and stability an individual manifests, and the drive to forge ahead or accomplish something;
- **Endurance**, which refers to the perseverance and bravery of an individual in having to endure disturbing or worrying conditions, without surrendering to them;
- **Adaptability**, which is the capacity to be adaptable and creative, and to acclimatise to challenging circumstances and make modifications in order to deal with evolving conditions;
- **Recuperability**, which is the competence to recover, truly and intelligently, from numerous types of mishaps or troubles in order to re-establish one's typical condition.

Many youths leaving the foster care system have the fortitude, endurance, adaptability and recuperability to recover from adverse situations. Greene (2014) highlights several key themes in the literature on resilience and the resilience ecological stress model (RESM). These themes emphasise the interaction between individuals and their environments. The following points provide an overview:

- Resilience is understood as a complex interaction between individual characteristics and broader environmental factors;
- It is composed of stress management and coping strategies;
- Risk factors resulting from various stressful life events and protective factors, which mitigate these risks play a crucial role in developing resilience.
- The fluid nature of resilience is influenced by one's sense of purpose.
- Adaptive development is essential for fostering resilience.
- Success enhances an individual's resilience capacity.

- Resilience is vital in times of life transitions.

Adopting resilience theory helped the researcher to recognise that people, communities and systems can blossom in the face of hardship, can adapt to handle strain and ambiguity, and continue to develop and improve (or be developed and improved) over time.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study the researcher employed a qualitative research approach, as well as a phenomenological research design to deepen his understanding of the challenges and barriers experienced by youths leaving the foster care system in South Africa from the point of view of the research participants (Carey, 2013; Creswell, 2013). Purposive sampling, based on non-probability sampling (Whittaker, 2012), was used to hand-pick 18 participants who were care-leavers and had been placed by the DSD and CYCCs in Gauteng province (Tshwane District Municipality). Data were gathered using semi-structured or in-depth interviews.

The provincial DSD granted approval to conduct the study and the participants were required to give informed consent. In addition, the researcher received ethical clearance for this study from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (reference number: HSS/1919/018D). additional ethical considerations that the researcher adhered to included avoidance of harm, safeguarding of participants' privacy, protecting the confidentiality of the data and anonymity of those participating, and beneficence.

The data were analysed following Tesch's eight steps of data analysis (Creswell, 2009).

- The researcher began by transcribing the interviews, read through them to make sense of the gathered information. During this process, the researcher wrote down ideas that sprang to mind.
- The researcher then chose one conversation to focus on. While reading the interview, the researcher asked "What is it all about"? "What is the meaning of what was shared"? Through this process, ideas were generated and noted on the margins.
- A list of topics or themes were grouped according to their similarities. The major topics were formulated as themes, followed by sub-themes.
- Each theme identified was given an abbreviated code and matched with other codes that emerged.
- The researcher grouped themes that were similar to each other in order to reduce them to a list of categories.
- The researcher then made a final decision on the abbreviations for each theme and assigned corresponding letters to them.
- The researcher then continued with data analysis by combining the data material belonging to each theme in one place and conducted the preliminary analysis.
- Where necessary, the data has been recorded; hereafter, the researcher commenced the process of reporting the research findings.

The above form of data analysis employed is called thematic analysis.

FINDINGS

Of the 18 participants who took part in this research study, eight were males; nine were females, and one of the participants chose not to disclose their gender. The age of the participants ranged between 19 and 30 years; nine were between the ages of 19 and 21; seven were between the ages of 22 and 25; and two were between the ages of 26 and 30. The findings indicate that the majority of youths leave the foster care system between the ages of 19 and 21 years.

Of the 18 participants, six had been placed in foster care before the age of 7, another six between the ages of 8 and 12, and the remaining six after the age of 13. The findings indicate that most of the youths leaving care were placed in foster care between the ages of one month and 18 years, which means the majority were able to develop an attachment to both their biological parents and their caregivers.

The findings show that most of the participants were in foster care for more than five years, which means they could share their lived experiences of being in the system.

Four themes, with associated sub-themes, emerged from the thematic analysis. The findings are substantiated with the verbatim comments of the participants and, where pertinent, integrated with the literature.

Theme 1: Social challenges

The transition from foster care to independent living presents numerous social challenges for youths leaving the foster care system. In Tshwane District Municipality, these care-leavers face a complex set of barriers that can significantly hinder their ability to integrate successfully into society. The absence of stable relationships, inadequate communication, and exposure to potential abuse contribute to a challenging social environment. These issues, coupled with the lack of essential resources such as secure housing, exacerbate the difficulties experienced by care leavers. The following sub-themes explore the critical social challenges encountered by these youths as they navigate the uncertainties of life outside the foster care system:

Sub-theme 1.1: Lack of communication with foster parents or caregiver

The findings revealed that there seemed to be a communication barrier between foster parents and foster children. One participant stated:

Sometimes it is not easy to stay with people you do not know, people that are not your biological parents, because they will only love you when it suits them. Therefore, we stayed there, and everything was nice until I went to high school. Therefore, the problem began when social workers brought three more children in that household and then we ended up being five foster children. [...] Therefore, I had to be a father to all the foster children that were placed in that household. (Care-leaver, DSD, 26 years old).

A similar concern was shared by this participant:

I will say that I liked to be in foster care. However, with the foster parent in [redacted], I really did not enjoy my stay there, because she was not treating me well. I stayed in [-----], then move[d] to [-----] and later moved to a CYCC in [----]. I was removed because the foster parent that I stayed with at [-----] was reported that she is abusing other children under her foster care placement. The previous foster parent from [----] was not communicating in a good way with me. (Care-leaver, DSD, 21 years old).

As the comments show, these participants could not communicate well or reported a lack of communication with their foster parents. This might be because of a lack of thorough preparation for prospective foster parents on how to look after, and communicate with, foster children.

Sub-theme 1.2: Abuse by the foster parents or caregivers

Some participants were concerned about incidents of abuse they were subjected to by their foster parents or caregivers. They reported the use of vulgar language or derogatory terms. One participant indicated:

The foster parent used to talk vulgar language to the other foster children and me. I had to rise in the early hours of the morning to prepare breakfast for everyone, including the foster parent. However, I did not care about it because I was not doing it for them, but I was just doing it for myself and the other children. (Care-leaver, DSD, 26 years old).

Another participant supported this view, detailing a foster parent's abuse:

In foster care, we were taught about the importance of going to school, but for us, it was not that important because we were abused emotionally in the foster care placement by the foster parent. For example, you find that we will be woken up early in the morning; you know to be able to do the house chores before we go to school. [...] Therefore, this thing was happening for too long until one of the social workers from [-----] came to investigate, and they found out that the foster parent is abusing us. [...] Their intervention only benefited those foster children who were below the age of 18 when they concluded their investigation. (Care-leaver, DSD, 23 years old).

This observation indicates that the youths leaving care who participated in this study were victims of abuse by their foster parents or caregivers, whom they trusted to provide care and protection for them.

Sub-theme 1.3: Disconnection from foster children

The findings revealed that most foster children moved from one foster care home to another, and as a result felt a sense of disconnect. This is by all accounts the case for both children and youths placed in the DSD or CYCCs. As one participant stated:

In the beginning, we were placed with one of the foster parents and later removed to another foster parent. The social worker indicated that there is a foster parent who

needs more children. I was placed in foster care since December 2010, and my brother followed me in that year. My other siblings were then placed in August the following year. (Care-leaver, CYCC, 21 years old).

The following care-leaver also complained about moving from one foster care home to another:

Then at the age of 17, I was removed to another foster parent in Bronkhorstspuit. However, I could not stay with that foster parent for too long. I was then removed before the end of the year to [----] CYCC. At the CYCC in [----], they decided to discharge me at the age of 18. Therefore, I can say that I have been in foster care for five years. (Care-leaver, DSD, 21 years old).

According to the above comments from the participants, many of the youths leaving the foster system had not remained in only one foster care home, or their foster care homes were not stable and this resulted in disconnecting with some of the foster children.

Sub-theme 1.4: Lack of housing

Some participants indicated that they lacked housing or shelter after leaving the foster care system. Some managed to secure accommodation, but those dwellings were not registered in their names. As one of the participants explained:

The place we are staying at, I am the owner of it, since I got it when I was discharged from the foster care system. Therefore, this place was given to me when I completed my Grade 12. In addition, the foster parent did not want to look after me; hence, she donated this place to me. However, the sad part of it is that this place is not registered in my name, and it is registered under the name of the foster parent's child who is deceased. [...] I applied for an RDP house, but I am still on the waiting list. The Ward Counsellor told me that this year they would make sure that they build us an RDP house. (Care-leaver, DSD, 23 years old).

Many of the other participants confirmed that a lack of housing post-foster care is one of the challenges confronting young people upon leaving the foster care system in South Africa.

Theme 2: Financial challenges

Several participants indicated that they experienced financial challenges, including unemployment and the abuse of the foster child grant by their foster parents or caregivers. This theme can be broken down into two sub-themes: unemployment and abuse of the foster child grant.

Sub-theme 2.1: Unemployment

Many participants admitted to being unemployed, not having anyone looking after them. One participant, who had previously been employed on a temporary basis, had this to say:

After I turned 21, I was discharged [...] and I had to search for a job. Fortunately, I found a job in a retail store in 2014, and my contract was terminated in 2015. I was working there on a part-time basis. In 2015 after my contract ended, they never said anything except to inform me that my contract is terminated. [...] After [that] I got a

job at a local Early Childhood Development Centre. [...] I only worked in the ECD for few months. Currently, I do not have any means of income. I only depend on the foster parent. (Care-leaver, DSD, 26 years old).

Another care-leaver shared that he was still reliant on his foster father, despite no longer qualifying for such assistance:

I try every day to look for a job, but there is nothing that I get. Therefore, I always depend on my foster father to survive. Sometimes when I am lucky, I do find tempor[ary] jobs. Last month, I got a tempor[ary] job at a nearby tavern, since there was a big function organised by the owner. [...] Sometimes if my foster father realises that I do not have money, he gives me pocket money as well as buying food in the house. (Care-leaver, DSD, 22 years old).

The findings show that unemployment is a significant challenge for youths leaving the care system in this country, compelling them to rely on alliances forged while in the system.

Sub-theme 2.2: Abuse of foster child grant by the foster parents

Several participants were anxious that the foster child grant was not utilised for the intended purposes. Their concern for others who are still in the system was expressed as follows:

What I have realised is that foster parents only want to receive the foster child grant, and they do not care about foster children. Moreover, to me, the protection and care of foster children should always be important. What is important for both social workers and foster parents is that the foster children receive the foster child grant and remain in the foster care system. When social workers conduct their supervision sessions, their intention is to renew the court order and the foster child grant. They do not ask the foster children if they are taken good care of or still happy in the foster care family. (Care-leaver, DSD, 22 years old).

Another 21-year-old participant concurred:

I think most of the foster parents are only keen in getting the foster child grant of the children in question, rather than taking care of foster children. I am saying this because I do not remember getting money from my foster parents. The only time I benefited from my foster child grant was through food and when the foster parent bought clothes for Christmas holidays. Most of my foster child grant was utilised to buy the grocer[ies] in the foster home. (Care-leaver, DSD, 21 years old).

Clearly, as these statements show, some foster parents are motivated by greed, which prompts them to apply to become foster carers. The foster child grant is not always used to benefit foster children. Furthermore, as the findings reveal, some social workers are only concerned with processing foster care applications, foster child grants and the extension of the court orders. Social workers therefore need to ensure that they do thorough monitoring of the way that the foster child grant is utilised by foster parents.

Theme 3: Educational challenges

The participants shared that many experienced educational challenges and, as a result, ended up dropping out of school. Some care-leavers admitted to falling pregnant while still at school and found it difficult to balance their schooling with parenting. The views of the participants are captured in the sub-theme addressed below.

Sub-theme 3.1: School dropouts

One care-leaver shared that she had dropped out at Grade 11 to look after her children from different relationships. According to this participant, after dropping out of school, the foster parent chased her away. She explained:

After dropping out of Grade 11, the foster parent told me that now I am on my own and have to raise my child. I told her that my boyfriend's family is volunteering to assist me in looking after the child, and again she did not allow that. As a result, I decided to move out of the foster family and stayed at my boyfriend's place. Unfortunately, I separated with my boyfriend and decided to go back to my foster parent. I was then involved with the new boyfriend. With that new boyfriend, we also engaged in unprotected sex, and as a result, I got pregnant again. Therefore, the foster parent chased me out of her house again, and I moved in with my second boyfriend. My second boyfriend was staying at a place called [----]. Life was also difficult with my second boyfriend since he was unemployed. He used to work on a temporary basis. In the end, I separated with him. (Care-leaver, DSD, 21 years old).

This finding is but one example of how single mothers struggle to juggle their educational aspirations with the reality of raising a child. For some, the foster parent is a refuge in times of difficulty, but there is also a limit to what those caregivers will tolerate. For this young female participant, there was no opportunity to complete her studies after exiting the foster care system.

Theme 4: Sexual challenges

Several participants lamented having been victims of sexual abuse, or having had teenage pregnancies. Some resorted to prostitution to meet their financial needs. The sexual challenges shared by the participants are captured in the three sub-themes below.

Sub-theme 4.1: Sexual abuse

According to the participants, some were victims of sexual abuse, as were their siblings. The perpetrators tended to be relatives, or a child of the foster parent. The following comment captures the essence of the care-leavers' concerns:

What I also did not like with foster care is that the foster parent's son used to abuse me sexually. He would always attempt to try to have sex with my younger sister or me. This started when I was 15 years old. You will find him coming to my room, and I would miss or lose my underwear. [...] We could not report this case to the social worker because we were afraid that, once we report it, we might be removed from the

foster care system or family, or they might do something bad to us. So hence, we never shared anything with the social workers. (Care-leaver, DSD, 21 years old).

The findings shows that care leavers are victims of sexual abuse and the sexual abuse sometimes takes place within the foster care homes.

Sub-theme 4.2: Prostitution

One of the participants shared that she was involved in prostitution to make ends meet. The comment below attests to this:

After leaving the foster care system, I used to communicate with people through social media like WhatsApp and Facebook. In addition, I used to communicate with males. After communicating with them, I would arrange to meet with them and I would engage in sexual activities with them in exchange for cash. Briefly, I would say that I was involved in prostitution to make ends meet. I used to have regular customers who will always contact me if they need my services. (Care-leaver, CYCC, 23 years old)

This statement suggests that some youths who leave the foster care system have to resort to selling themselves to meet their financial needs. Social media platforms are used to facilitate these activities.

Sub-theme 4.3: Teenage pregnancy

Some of the female participants shared that they got pregnant during their adolescence and as a result they left school before finishing matric. One of the participants shared her concerns through the following comment:

In 2013, I got pregnant while staying at the CYCC. One of the boys who was also staying in the centre impregnated me. After I got pregnant, I was chased out of the CYCC. I then went back to my previous family out of the centre. However, I did not tell them that I was pregnant until they found out themselves. I told them that I was afraid to tell them about my pregnancy; however, after the confrontation, I had to tell them everything. (Care-leaver, CYCC, 23 years old).

According to the above strong view of the participant, it can be reported that some of the female youths leaving care get pregnant during adolescence. Adolescent pregnancy represents a significant challenge for female youths within the foster care system, often leading to disruptive life changes, particularly in their educational trajectories. The narrative shared by one of the participants underscores the harsh realities experienced by many young women in care who become pregnant during their adolescence. In this instance, the participant recounts how becoming pregnant while residing at a CYCC led to her expulsion from the centre, forcing her to return to her biological family under strained circumstances.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings from the interviews with the participants show that youths leaving the foster care system in South Africa are confronted with numerous difficulties and barriers, ranging from a lack of communication with the foster parents or caregivers, abuse by the foster parents or

caregivers, disconnection from foster children, lack of housing, unemployment, abuse of foster child grant, school dropout, sexual abuse, prostitution and teenage pregnancy. As claimed by some of the participants, many youths leaving the foster care system are unemployed, and those who are employed are in unstable jobs. South Africa has the most elevated rate of youth unemployment globally (Bond & van Breda, 2018; Shaw, Steyn & Simeon, 2020). In his address to the nation (2020), the South African President, Cyril Ramaphosa, stated that in South Africa youths unemployment is a crisis (RSA, 2020).

Youths leaving the foster care system are also amongst those affected by unemployment. According to the Quarterly Labour Force Survey results released by StatsSA in the first quarter of 2019, there was a decline in the employment rate (down by 237 000) and a rise in the unemployment rate (up by 62 000), compared to the fourth quarter of 2018 (StatsSA, 2019). Thus, the rate of joblessness in South Africa increased by 0,5%, bringing the overall unemployment rate above 27% (StatsSA, 2019). Many of the unemployed population in this country are youths aged 15–34 (StatsSA, 2019). Many did not finish their secondary education, while those who find employment are in a low-skilled jobs (Bond & Van Breda, 2018; StatsSA, 2017; Sulimani-Aidan, 2017). The unemployment rate amongst youths leaving the foster care system with lower levels of secondary education is reported to be significantly higher than those of care leavers with higher levels of secondary education (Cassarino-Perez *et al.*, 2018; Shaw *et al.*, 2020).

In addition to the challenges of youth unemployment, the findings confirm that many who leave the foster care system find themselves without housing or shelter. Those who find accommodation rent a room or stay in houses that are not registered under their names. Homelessness amongst the youth is a global challenge. Studies conducted on the outcomes for foster care leavers warn that these youths are at risk of being without homes (Shaw *et al.*, 2020). Van Breda (2018) notes that a third of the youths leaving care lived in informal accommodation between one and seven years after exiting the system. As noted, having a place to stay is one of the goals for successfully transitioning to young adulthood (Van Breda, 2018).

Some participants indicated that they left the foster care system after falling pregnant as teens, which prevented them from completing their secondary education (they had to leave school to look after their children). Teenage pregnancy is amongst the well documented poor outcomes of care-leavers globally (Bond & Van Breda, 2018). However, this is not the only reason why many youths drop out of school (Van Breda, 2018); some leave school because of financial struggles (Shaw *et al.*, 2020) and go looking for jobs. Some later realise the importance of completing their secondary education and return to school without the support of the foster child grant (Shaw *et al.*, 2020).

The findings reveal that some of the youths leaving care turned out to be the victims of maltreatment by the caregivers, sexual abuse by the members of the foster care family, as well as abuse of their foster child grants. According to Cassarino-Perez *et al.* (2018), approximately 2.7 million children and youths who experience abuse and neglect are placed into care worldwide, although the total number of abuse victims is likely much higher. Although youths placed in the foster care system have positive experiences such as meeting of their basic needs, they are also faced with negative experiences, which include staff incompetence, bullying,

sexual abuse and lack of after-care services (Nurcombe-Thorne, Nadesan & Van Breda, 2018). Therefore, it is essential to always make sure that children are placed in foster care with the caregiver who is fit to provide a stable and caring environment that promotes effective mentoring (Cassarino-Perez *et al.*, 2018). Exposure to a dependable, caring and professional caregiver is believed to develop possible positive selves which in turn contributes to the development of resilience (Bond & Van Breda, 2018). Foster parents are also urged to always manage the foster child grant to the benefit of the child or youth, since it serves a pivotal function in the lives of the foster children or youths (Shaw *et al.*, 2020). Additionally, attention must be given to the youth's circumstances once they are discharged from the provisions of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (Shaw *et al.*, 2020).

CONCLUSION

It is clear from the research results that youths leaving the foster care system are faced with various challenges and obstacles. In a study conducted by Chambers, Crutchfield, Willis, Cuza, Stephanie, Goddu and Heather (2018), many of the participants used the term "abuse" to describe how foster parents, caregivers and residential care staff members treated them. Haggman-Laitila, Salokekkila and Karki (2018) also confirmed that youths leaving the foster care system are faced with challenges including lack of educational qualifications, housing challenges, unemployment and financial instability, difficulty in forming relationships and adapting to cultural norms, and denial of access to universal health care. It can, therefore, be deduced that youths leaving the foster care system have been faced with various challenges even before foster care placement as well as during foster care placement and after leaving foster care.

The findings indicate that youths leaving the foster care system are not treated well by the foster parents or caregivers. To cope with the challenges that they face while in the foster care system, some of them resort to unprotected sex and prostitution that, in some instances, results in teenage pregnancy. In a study conducted in the USA, it was found that youths leaving care are at a higher risk of early and unwanted pregnancies and most of these pregnancies are unintended (Albertson *et al.*, 2018). About 50% of young girls placed in foster care reported that they had at least one pregnancy by the age of 19 and the young boys made the same point concerning their paternity (Albertson *et al.*, 2018). Coler (2018) shared that females are most likely to be first-time parents (7%) as compared to males (2, 5%).

Youths who are leaving care are at high risk of experiencing teenage pregnancy, dropping out of school, or finding themselves without a stable job. The literature indicates that care-leavers drop out of school at an earlier age than youths from the population at large (Chambers *et al.*, 2018; Gypen *et al.*, 2017). Since most of the youth leaving care do not have a stable job, they also end up without any form of shelter or housing that is registered in their names. The above challenges and barriers facing youths leaving the foster care system in South Africa seem to be affecting both children and youths who had been placed within the DSD as well as within the CYCCs.

According to Van Breda (2018), internationally, the challenges of youths leaving care are well documented across a number of important life realms, namely employment, education,

housing, pregnancy and involvement with the criminal justice system. South Africa has the highest youth unemployment rate globally, and the majority of the unemployed youths have either not completed secondary education or lack the skills needed for available job opportunities. (StatsSA, 2017; Bond & Van Breda, 2018). It is worth noting that young people regard school as an anchor in their lives when they face life challenges because of changes in foster care placement or serious family breakdown (Rutman & Hubberstey, 2018). Furthermore, school personnel are also regarded as people to whom youths can turn for solace when they experience a difficult situation. Several studies indicate that the challenge of unemployment amongst youth leaving the foster care system with lower levels of education is higher than amongst care-leavers with secondary or higher education (Cassarino-Perez *et al.*, 2018). The above challenges and barriers are believed to be caused by a lack of programmes or guidelines for preparing youths who are leaving the foster care system in South Africa (Shaw *et al.*, 2020).

REFERENCES

- Albertson, K., Crouch, J. M., Udel, W., Schimmel-Bristow, A., Serrano, J. & Ahrens, K. R. 2018. Caregiver perceived barriers to preventing unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections among youth in foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 94(2018): 82–87.
- Bond, S. & van Breda, A. 2018. Interaction between possible selves and the resilience of care-leavers in South Africa. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 94: 88–95.
- Bukuluki, P., Kanya, S., Kasirye, R. & Nabulya, A. 2019. Facilitating the transition of adolescents and emerging adults from care into employment in Kampala, Uganda: A case study of Uganda Youth Development Link. *Emerging Adulthood*, 8(1): 35–44.
- Carey, M. 2013. *The social work dissertation: Using small-scale qualitative methodology*. United Kingdom: Open University Press.
- Cassarino-Perez, L., Crous, G., Goemans, A., Montserrat, C. & Sarriera, J. C. 2018. From care to education and employment: A meta-analysis. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 95(C): 407–416.
- Chambers, R. M., Crutchfield, T. Y., Willis, H. A., Cuza, A. O, Stephanie, G., Goddu, H. & Heather, C. 2018. “It’s just not right to move a kid that many times:” A qualitative study of how foster care alumni perceive placement moves. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 86(C): 76–83.
- Coler, L. 2018. “I need my children to know that I will always be here for them”: Young care leavers’ experiences with their own motherhood in Buenos Aires, Argentina. *Sage Open*, October-December 2018: 1–8.
- Creswell, J. W. 2009. *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches*. 3rd ed. California: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. 2013. *Qualitative inquiry & research design, choosing among five approaches*, 2nd ed. London: Sage.

- Curry, S. R. & Abrams, L. S. 2015. Housing and social support for youth aging out of foster care: State of the research literature and directions for future inquiry. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 32(2): 143-153.
- Denell, B. L. L., McGhee, K. & Porter, R. 2022. *Continuing care: An exploration of implementation*. Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection. [Online] Available: https://www.celcis.org/application/files/5816/4751/7713/continuing_care_an_exploration_of_implementation.pdf [Accessed: 24/05/2023].
- Dickens, L. F. 2017. One-year outcomes of youth exiting a residential care facility in South Africa. *Child and Family Social Work*, 23(4): 558–565.
- Du Toit, W., van der Westhuizen, M. & Alpaslan, N. 2016. Operationalising cluster foster care schemes as an alternative form of care. *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk*, 52(3): 391–413.
- Frimpong-Manso, K. 2018. Building and utilising resilience: The challenges and coping mechanisms of care leavers in Ghana. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 87(2018): 52–59.
- Frimpong-Manso, K., Bukuluki, P., Addy, T. N. A., Obeng, J. K. & Kato, F. 2022. Pregnancy and parenting experiences of care-experienced youth in Ghana and Uganda. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 39(6): 683–692.
- Geiger, J. M. & Schelbe, L. A. 2014. Stopping the cycle of child abuse and neglect: A call to action to focus on pregnant and parenting youth in and aging out of the foster care system. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 8(1): 25–50.
- Glynn, N. 2021. Understanding care leavers as youth in society: A theoretical framework for studying transition out of care. *Children and Youth Services*, 121: 1–18.
- Greene, R. R. 2014. Resilience as effective functional capacity: An ecological-stress model. *Journal of Human Behaviour in the Social Environment*, 24(8): 937–950.
- Gwenzi, G. D. 2023. Care leavers' notions of the 'ideal' family in Zimbabwe. *Journal of Family Studies*, 29(3): 1428–1446.
- Gwenzi, G. D. & Ringson, J. 2023. "Why would they call me an orphan when I have parents?" Care leavers' experiences of labelling and stereotyping whilst living in residential care facilities in Zimbabwe. *New Ideas in Psychology*, 68: 1–8.
- Gypen, L., Vanderfaellie, J., Maeyer, S. D., Belenger, L. & Van Holen, F. 2017. Outcomes of children who grew up in foster care: Systematic-review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 76(C): 74–83.
- Haggman-Laitila, A., Salohekkila, P. & Karki, S. 2018. Transition to adult life of young people leaving foster care: A qualitative systematic review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 95(2018):134–143.

- Harty, J. S. & Ethier, K. L. 2022. Fatherhood in foster care: A scoping review spanning 30 years of research on expectant and parenting fathers in state care. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 39(6): 693-710.
- Hlungwani, J. & van Breda, A. D. 2020. Female care leavers' journey to young adulthood from residential care in South Africa: Gender-specific psychosocial processes of resilience. *Child & Family Social Work*, 25(4): 915–923.
- Hlungwani, J. & van Breda, A.D. 2022. Affording managed opportunities for independence to build looked-after young people's resilience: Perceptions and experiences of care workers. *Journal of Children's Services*, 17(2): 137–151.
- Jones, L. P. 2014. The role of social support in the transition from foster care to emerging adulthood. *Journal of Family Social Work*, 17(1): 81–96.
- Lee, C. & Berrick, J. D. 2014. Experiences of youth who transition to adulthood out of care: Developing a theoretical framework. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 46(C): 78–84.
- Liborio, R. M. C. & Ungar, M. 2010. Children's labour as a risky pathway to resilience: Children's growth in contexts of poor resources. *Psicologia: Reflexão e Crítica*, 23(2): 232–242.
- Masten, A. S. 2013. Risk and resilience in development. In: Zelazo, P. D. (Ed.). *Oxford Handbook of developmental psychology. Vol. 2.* (pp. 579-607). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Masten, A. S. 2016. Resilience in developing systems: The promise of integrated approaches. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 13(3): 297–312.
- Matthias, C. R. & Zaal, F. N. 2009. Supporting familial and community care for children: Legislative reform and implementation challenges in South Africa. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 18(3): 291–298.
- McGhee, K. & Deeley, S. 2022. Emerging adulthood: Exploring the implications for care experienced by young people and those who care for them. *Scottish Journal of Residential Care: An International Journal of Group and Family Care Experience*, 21(1): 1–18.
- Mmusi, F. I. & van Breda, A. 2017. Male care-leavers' transfer of social skills from care into independent living in South Africa. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 81: 350–357.
- Ntuli, B., Mokgatle, M. & Madiba, S. 2020. The psychosocial wellbeing of orphans: The case of early school leavers in socially depressed environment in Mpumalanga province, South Africa. *PLoS ONE*, 15(2): 1–18.
- Nurcombe-Thorne, A., Nadesan, V. & van Breda, A. 2018. Experiences of “I” and “we” among former looked-after children in South Africa. *Child and Family Social Work*, 23: 640–648.
- Patel, L. 2015. *Social welfare and social development*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.

- Republic of South Africa (RSA). 1996. *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996*. Government Gazette, Vol. 378, No. 17678 (8 May 1996). Pretoria: Government Printers.
- Republic of South Africa (RSA). 1997. Ministry for Welfare and Population Development. *White Paper for Social Welfare*. Notice 1108 of 1997. Government Gazette, Vol. 368, No. 18166. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Republic of South Africa (RSA). 2006. *Children's Act 38 of 2005*. Government Gazette, Vol. 492, No. 28944. (19 June 2006). Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Republic of South Africa (RSA). 2020. *State of the Nation Address, 2020*. [Online] Available: <https://www.gov.za/news/speeches/president-cyril-ramaphosa-2020-state-nation-address-13-feb-2020>.
- Rochat, T. J., Mokomane, Z. & Mitchell, J. 2016. Public perceptions, beliefs and experiences of fostering and adoption: A national qualitative study in South Africa. *Children & Society*, 30(2): 120–131.
- Rutman, D. & Hubberstey, C. 2018. Fostering educational success of children and youth in care: Perspectives of youth with experience living in care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 94(C): 257–264.
- Schmidt, J., Cunningham, M., Dalton, L. D., Powers, L. E., Green, S. & Orozco, C.G. 2013. Assessing restrictiveness: A closer look at the foster care placements and perceptions of youth with and without disabilities aging out of care. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 7(5): 586–609.
- Shaw, M., Steyn, M. & Simeon, E. 2020. The need for preparing youth aging out of foster care for independent living in South Africa. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 109(C): 1–5.
- South African Human Rights Commission. 2014. *Poverty traps and social exclusion among children in South Africa*. Pretoria: SAHRC/UNICEF.
- Statistics South Africa (StatsSA). 2016. *Quarterly Labour Force Survey Quarter 1, 2016*. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa.
- Statistics South Africa (StatsSA). 2017. *Quarterly Labour Force Survey Quarter 4, 2016*. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa.
- Statistics South Africa (StatsSA). 2019. *Quarterly Labour Force Survey Quarter 1, 2019*. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa.
- Strahl, B., van Breda, A. D. P., Mann-Feder, V. & Schröer, W. 2021. A multinational comparison of care-leaving policy and legislation. *Journal of International and Comparative Social Policy*, 37(1): 34-49. <https://doi.org/10.1017/ics.2020.26>
- Stott, T. 2012. Placement instability and risky behaviors of youth aging out of foster care. *Child Adolesc Soc Work J*, 29(1): 61–83.

- Strolin-Goltzman, J., Woodhouse, V., Suter, J. & Werrbach, M. 2016. A mixed method study on educational well-being and resilience among youth in foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 70(C): 30–36.
- Sulimani-Aidan, Y. 2017. To dream the impossible dream: Care leaver's challenges and barriers in pursuing their future expectations and goals. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 81(C): 332-339.
- Sundly, A., Keating, M., Effiong, A. & Saif, A.O. 2022. Neuroscience evidence and care leaving: A multidisciplinary critical commentary. *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies*, 14(1): 30–46.
- Tanur, C. 2012. Project Lungisela: Supporting young people leaving state care in South Africa. *Child Care in Practice*, 18(4): 325–340.
- Taormina, R. J. 2015. Adult personal resilience: A new theory, new measure, and practical implications. *Psychological Thought*, 8(1): 35–46.
- Van Breda, A. D. 2017. *Grounded theory methods for insights into resilience processes: The case of a young person transitioning out of residential care*. Pathways to Resilience IV Conference, Cape Town, RSA.
- Van Breda, A. D. 2018. The first two years out of residential care in South Africa: A critical period for care-leaving services. *Child Welfare*, 95(6): 63–82.
- Van Breda, A. & Dickens, L. 2017. The contribution of resilience to one-year independent living outcomes of care-leavers in South Africa. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 83(C): 264–273.
- Whittaker, A. 2012. *Research skills for social work*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Winkler, A. 2014. Resilience as reflexivity: A new understanding for work with looked-after children. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 28(4): 461–478.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Sandile Lucas Dhludhlu was a PhD student at the University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa and is currently employed as a senior lecturer at the University of South Africa. His field of specialisation is children's rights, youth leaving care, social development, policy as well as statutory social work. The article resulted from his PhD, conducted from January 2018 to December 2020, and he wrote the initial draft article.