

THESIS SUMMARY

The Experiences of New Zealand University Students
Formerly in Foster Care

SLIPPING DOWN LADDERS
AND CLIMBING UP SNAKES

"As events are about to show, it is also possible to slither down a ladder and climb to triumph on the venom of a snake"
(Salman Rushdie).

STUDY'S OVERALL FINDINGS

1. Kiwi kids in foster care can and do go on to university; some also graduate.
2. Being in foster care helped some participants get to university, but hindered others.
3. Distinct patterns across experiences, but some similarities with others in foster care.
4. Life in foster care is complex; some events had unintended consequences for participants – both negative and positive.

MAIN FINDINGS ON PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

- Wanting a different kind of future, be it ordinary or extraordinary, helped.
- Having a sense of educational resilience, and secondary school feeling like a place of belonging and stability, helped.
- Serendipitous events, and acts of extraordinary generosity, helped.

MAIN FINDINGS ON FAMILY, FRIENDS, PARTNERS AND COMMUNITY

- Education being valued by, and ongoing support from, birth families helped.
- Having a good circle of friends at secondary school helped.
- Partners whilst at university being supportive of education helped.

EDUCATION FINDINGS

- Early establishment of recreational reading habits helped.
- Academic success by intermediate (junior high) school helped.
- Limited secondary school changes, and none in final years, helped.
- Significant periods without schooling for some hindered.
- A perception that their final secondary school was high quality helped.
- Supportive relationships with individual secondary school staff helped.
- Attending a local university helped; and all undertook professional degrees.
- Scholarships/awards for university helped, but limited to first year hindered.

FOSTERCARE AND AFTERCARE FINDINGS

- Foster care placements not matching child's needs hindered.
- Low quality temporary foster care placements, and breakdowns, as well as poor relationships with SWs and limited CYF education support, hindered.
- High quality, educationally rich and supportive final foster care placements helped.
- Being discharged from foster care placement by 17th birthday hindered.
- (Non-statutory) transitioning to independence services helped, if available.

ASSOCIATED PUBLICATIONS

Repository copies available at www.betteroutcomes.org.nz/resources

Matheson, I. (2019). 'Education success factors and barriers: Learning from the experiences of New Zealand care leavers who went to university'.

Matheson, I. (2016). 'State of indifference? An overview of residential and foster care in New Zealand'.

Matheson, I. (2016). 'The importance of individual personal factors: The experiences of care leavers who went to university'.

RESEARCH STUDY AUTHOR
Iain Matheson (2015)

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RESEARCH QUESTION
What are the educational experiences of degree students who were in foster care as teenagers?

GUIDING EDUCATION THEORIES

- Children's rights movement
- Ecological systems theory
- Resilience theory
- Cultural capital theory

METHODOLOGY

- Paradigm: Constructivism
- Methodology: Qualitative
- Data collection: In-depth (informal conversational) interview and follow-up telephone interview
- Data analysis: Thematic analysis

SUCCESSFUL PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT METHODS

- Approaching child welfare NGOs
- Indirectly approaching winners of tertiary awards for children in care
- Participant recruitment website
- Personal contacts

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

- All 7 were degree students (1 had graduated at time of interview)
- Aged 18 to 26 (at time of interview)
- 6 universities and 1 polytechnic
- 6 female and 1 male
- Mix of ethnicities

FURTHER INFORMATION
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