

Jaemie Cañas Abstract

Despite the substantial number of foster youth with a disability diagnosis—estimated at fifty to eighty percent of all children residing in foster care—little is known about their experience in the child welfare system and prospects for the future, once they “age out” of the system. The American child welfare system faces serious systemic challenges. This project details the current state of care provided by agencies within the foster care system that specialize in treating current and ex-foster youth with psychiatric disabilities and analyzes regulatory requirements that limit individual agency and the capacity to advocate for oneself. I incorporate research studies and reports by the Children’s Bureau, the United States Department of Health and Human Services, and California’s Department of Children and Family Services and conduct a literary analysis of three articles by the following Disability Studies scholars: Inger Marie Lid, Lennard Davis, and Stacy Clifford. I explore current national, state, and Los Angeles County foster care statistics (2014) and the concept of institutionalization. Despite the historic gains made by the disability rights movement, the ongoing institutionalization of foster youth with mental disabilities once they “age-out” of the system is an overlooked area of disability scholarship and activism. With my research I hope to contribute a constructive critique of our current system and provide the opportunity for critical reflection on a current crisis.