

BACKGROUND

- Few studies have examined outcomes of youth in foster care by centering their voices and the voices of the professionals working with them day-to-day.
- **Primary Research Question:** How can child welfare and related professionals support young people in foster care toward positive experiences and outcomes?

METHODS

- Data was collected via *poetic inquiry*.⁴
- 8 poetry focus groups were held with 41 participants; 13 youth and 28 professionals (1 former foster parent and 1 parent with experience with the child welfare system)
- Participants created poetic responses to the research question and then co-constructed *relational poems*.⁵
- **Thematic analysis** was used to analyze individual and relational poems.

FINDINGS

- Two **global themes** were identified.

The *intention* of workers and systems do *not always align* with their *impact*.

“We all want what’s best for the child... who determines what best is?”

“Can you support me if we don’t talk about the biggest part of me? My family connections.”

“They want to know all of my secrets. My knowledge...my experiences...my LIFE! But they already know more than they should. Boxes of binders and papers meant to help, but only making me feel like a lab rat. The guinea pig they poke and prod until it has nothing left to give.”

“Trauma ripples out and touches everything.”

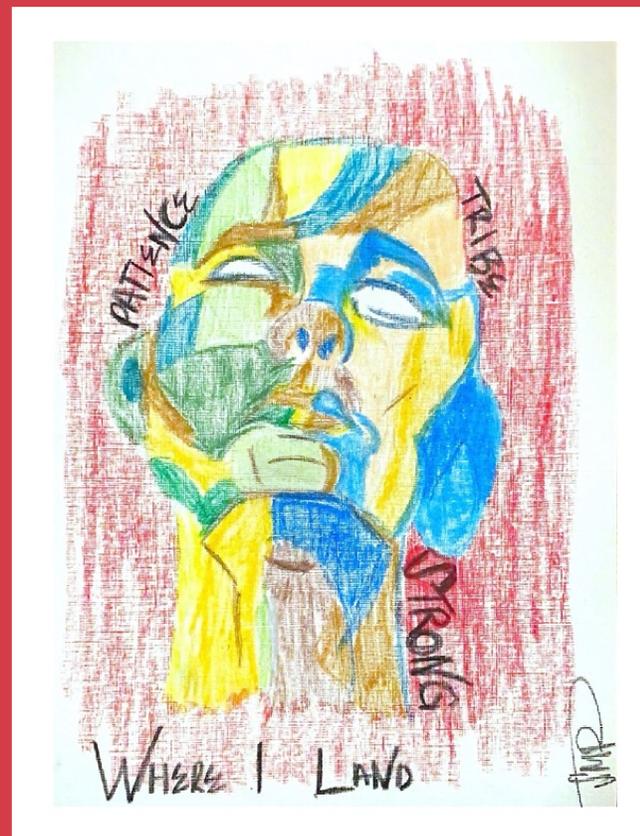
“Always treat children and families with respect and dignity.”

“Pause, Listen, Act”:

Reimagining Supports and Systems Impacting Youth in Foster Care

Youths’ and professionals’ poems:

- Called attention to the dissonance between the intent of child welfare systems and professionals and the impact on youths’ wellbeing
- Identified strong emotions among both youth & professionals



Drawing entitled “Where I Land” developed by a youth participant with foster care experience.

QR Code leads to example relational poems created by participants.



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IMPLICATIONS

- **Transform systems** to activate accountability and action steps that create a family-centered, well-being system
- Identify and **disrupt barriers** to providing care that is youth-centered, relationship oriented, and healing.

Youth need workers and systems to act by centering their well-being while simultaneously eradicating the harm they experience.

“Again placement disrupts
Disrupts, another way of saying I'm not wanted
I'm not good enough, they can't handle me, they give up on me”

“We can give you an umbrella if it’s raining
That’s nothing if we
Never
Let you say how it feels to be
Already drenched”

“Look within
Listen deeply
Listen with your heart
Deliver on your promises
Listen from your toes”

“See me.”

“Be there when it matters.”