A background image showing two hands shaking, symbolizing support or agreement. The hands are positioned diagonally across the frame, with one hand reaching from the top left and the other from the bottom right. The background is a light green gradient.

Whose life is it? Supporting the
self-determination and transition of
youth with disabilities aging-out of
the child welfare system

Laurie E. Powers, Ph.D

Sarah Geenen, Ph.D.

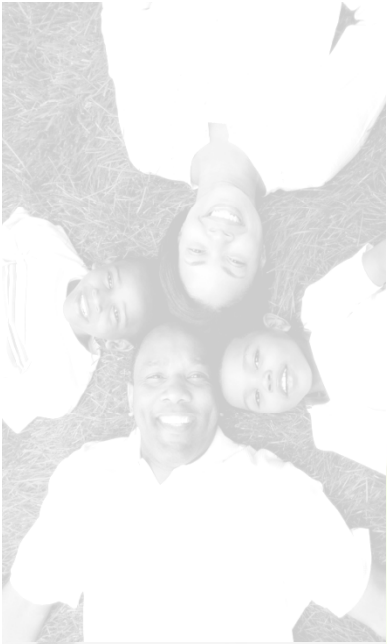
Regional Research Institute for Human Services

School of Social Work

Portland State University

Foster Care Statistics

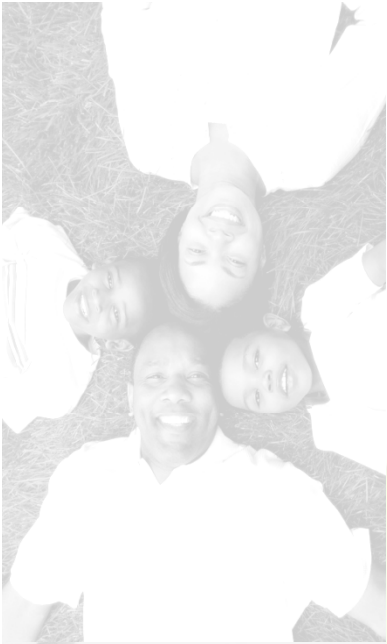
- In the U.S., 800,000 youth are in foster care each year. (Children's Bureau, 2008)
- 20,000 youth are emancipated from foster care each year when they reach the age of majority (typically 18)
- About 40% of foster youth are in special education (emotional/behavioral disabilities are most common)
- 70 – 80% of foster youth have an DSM diagnosis



Outcomes

■ Midwest Evaluation Study

- Foster youth more likely to experience early parenthood and have child outside of marriage
- Foster youth had substantially lower levels of education and employment than peers in the general population
- Study excluded youth with developmental disabilities or severe mental illness





Outcomes

■ Northwest Alumni Study

- Household income levels of foster youth were 35% lower than general population
- 20% of foster care alumni experienced at least one night of homelessness
- 54% of former foster youth had diagnosed mental health problems, with twenty percent diagnosed with three or more conditions (25% PTSD; 20% major depression)
 - Those with mental health conditions had poorer physical health and lower self-esteem than other alumni



Outcomes

- National Evaluation of Title IV-E ILPs
 - Foster youth with disabilities were less likely to:
 - Be employed
 - Graduate from high school
 - Have social support
 - Be self-sufficient



Other Findings

- Only 16% of foster youth in special education with a primary disability of emotional disturbance graduated from high school; even more worrisome, 18% left school because they were incarcerated (Smithgall, Gladden, Yang, & Goerge, 2005).



Policies/Legislation

The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (FCIA; aka the Chafee Act) provides resources to help foster youth plan and get ready for adulthood.

Assistance is often given to youth through state Independent Living Programs (ILPs).

Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendments

Educational Training Vouchers: adds funding for post-secondary education to the Chafee program



Policies/Legislation

Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act. Requirements around:

- Reducing school instability
- Coordination between LEA and child welfare agencies
- Immediate enrollment
- Transferring records
- Transition planning

ABA Legal Center on Foster Care and Education



Barriers/Challenges around Transition

- Youth are often transitioning from foster care, school, supporting adults, etc.. all at the same time
- Emphasis on safety & protection vs. independence & autonomy
- Lack of connection to caring adults/allies
- Reconnection with birth family
- Accessing adult services and opportunities

MY LIFE STUDY



- Funded by
- Partnership with Mike Wehmeyer at University of Kansas
- RRI PIs: Laurie Powers, Sarah Geenen
- First opportunity to experimentally study the longitudinal impact of self-determination enhancement
- First experimental study of self-determination enhancement or any transition intervention with foster youth, with or without disabilities

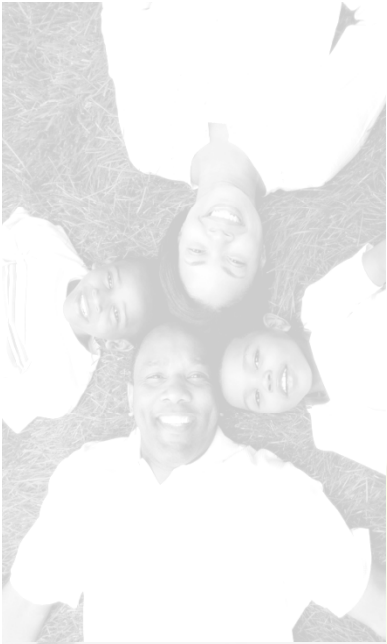
Project Goals

- Enhance the self-determination of youth with disabilities in foster care
 - Document the impact of the intervention in promoting transition outcomes of youth in foster care
 - Investigate whether the intervention results in different outcomes for youth than the ILP



Research Design

- Youth identified by comparing DHS and school district databases
- 69 Foster youth with disabilities, 16.5 to 17.5 years of age, were randomly assigned to either the comparison or TX group
- Youth were enrolled in waves over three years
- Youth were evaluated at baseline, conclusion of TX (12m) and 12m post-intervention
- Attrition overall at 13%





My Life Intervention

- Weekly coaching for a year in application of Take Charge for the Future Self-determination skills to identify and achieve youth-identified goals (mean – 50.36 hours/year; Fidelity 90% for wave 1, 93% for wave 2, 95% for wave 3)
- Interagency, collaborative transition plan meetings organized and led by each youth
- Youth participated in mentor workshops conducted with foster care alumni (mean = 2.82 to 3.67)



Data Collection

- Demographics
- Youth self-determination
- Educational participation/attainment
- Individualized Education Plans
- Engagement in desired career areas
- Independent living

Measures used:

Empowerment Scale

Arc Self-determination Scale

AIR Self-determination

Quality of Life Measure

Transition Planning

Outcome Survey

Demographic Survey (administrative data)

Comparison group

- All youth were referred to the ILP and we arranged for every youth to attend the ILP orientation.
- 24 (77%) of comparison group youth reported they participated in ILP post-orientation.
- 13 (42%) attended ILP classes
 - Average of 4.92 classes during the year
- 17 (55%) had an ILP case manager
 - Average of 5.88 contacts w/ILP manager per year



Results

Significant differences between the intervention and comparison groups were noted in the following areas:

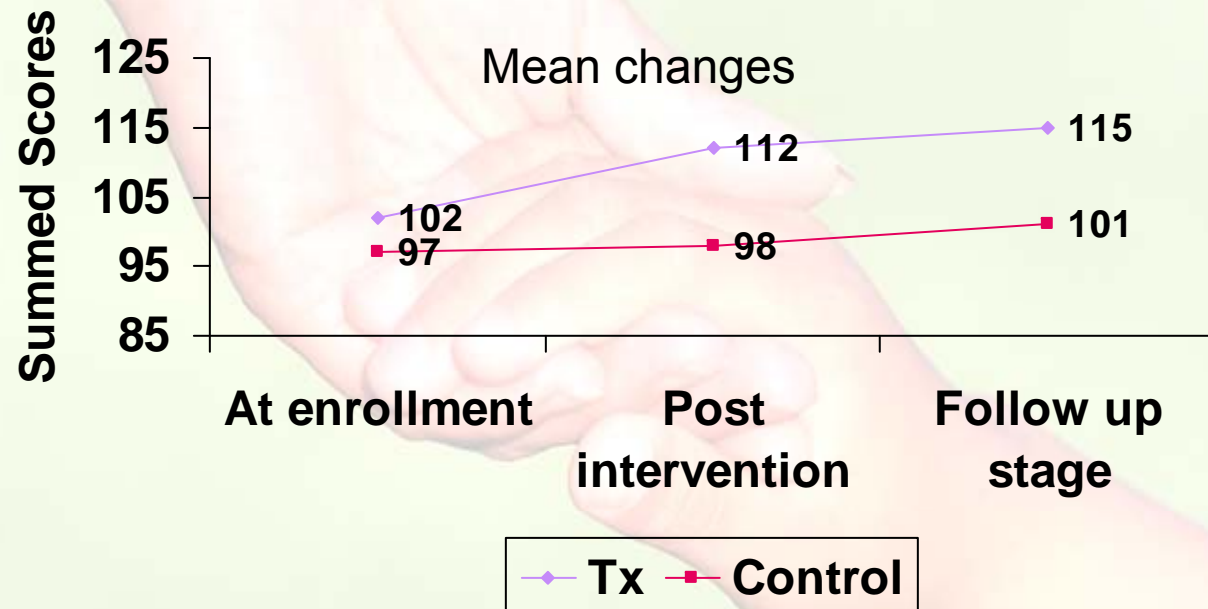
- Self-determination
- Perceived quality of life
- Transition planning

Other notable improvements:

- Educational outcomes
- Percentage employed
- Perception of being prepared for life as an adult
- Trend toward more stable living for treatment group

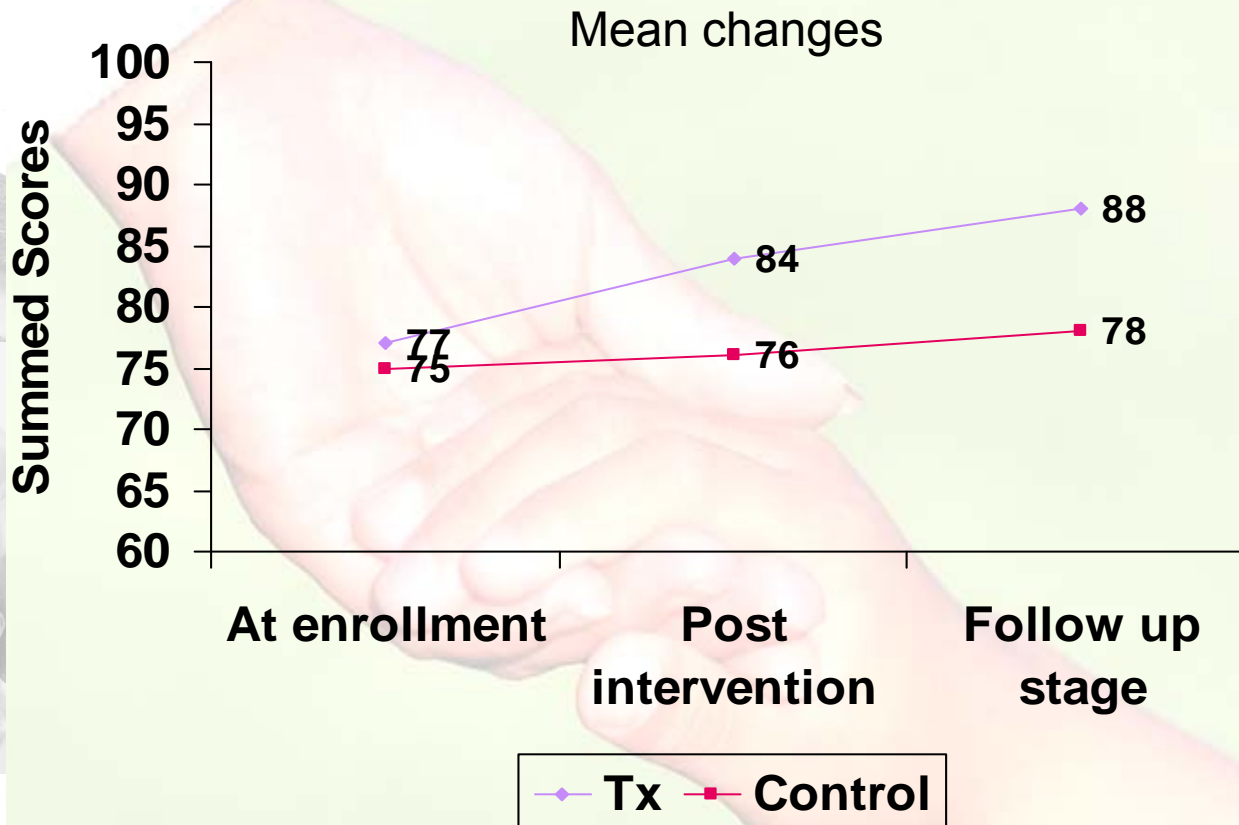
Self-determination

Self-determination scores measured by the Arc



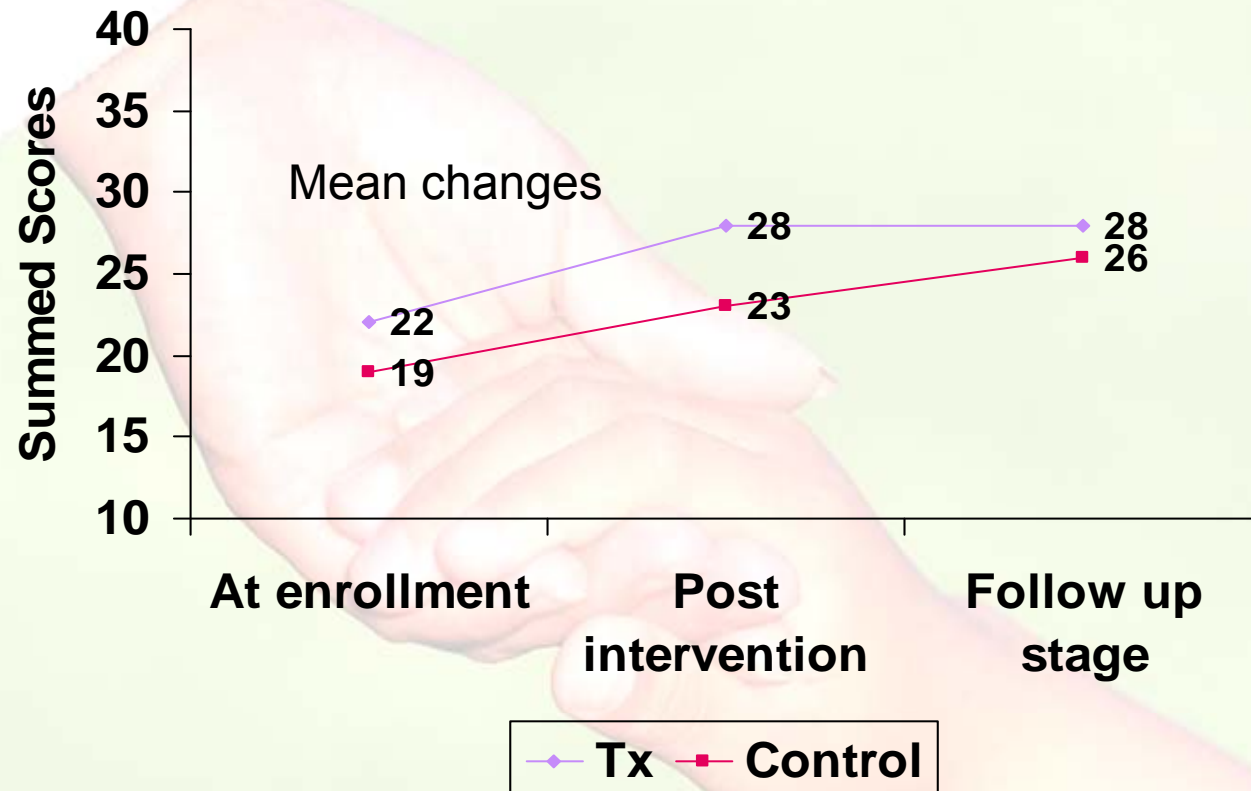
The mean difference between treatment and control at the post intervention stage and the follow up stage were significant $p \leq 0.05$.

Quality of Life



T-tests show the mean difference between treatment and control at the post intervention stage and the follow up stage were significant ($p \leq .05$).

Transition Planning



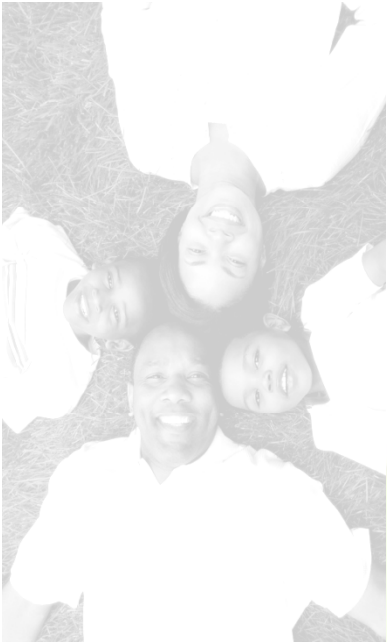
Both groups made significant gains from t1 to t2 but non-significant gains from post intervention to follow up. NS group differences.

Education

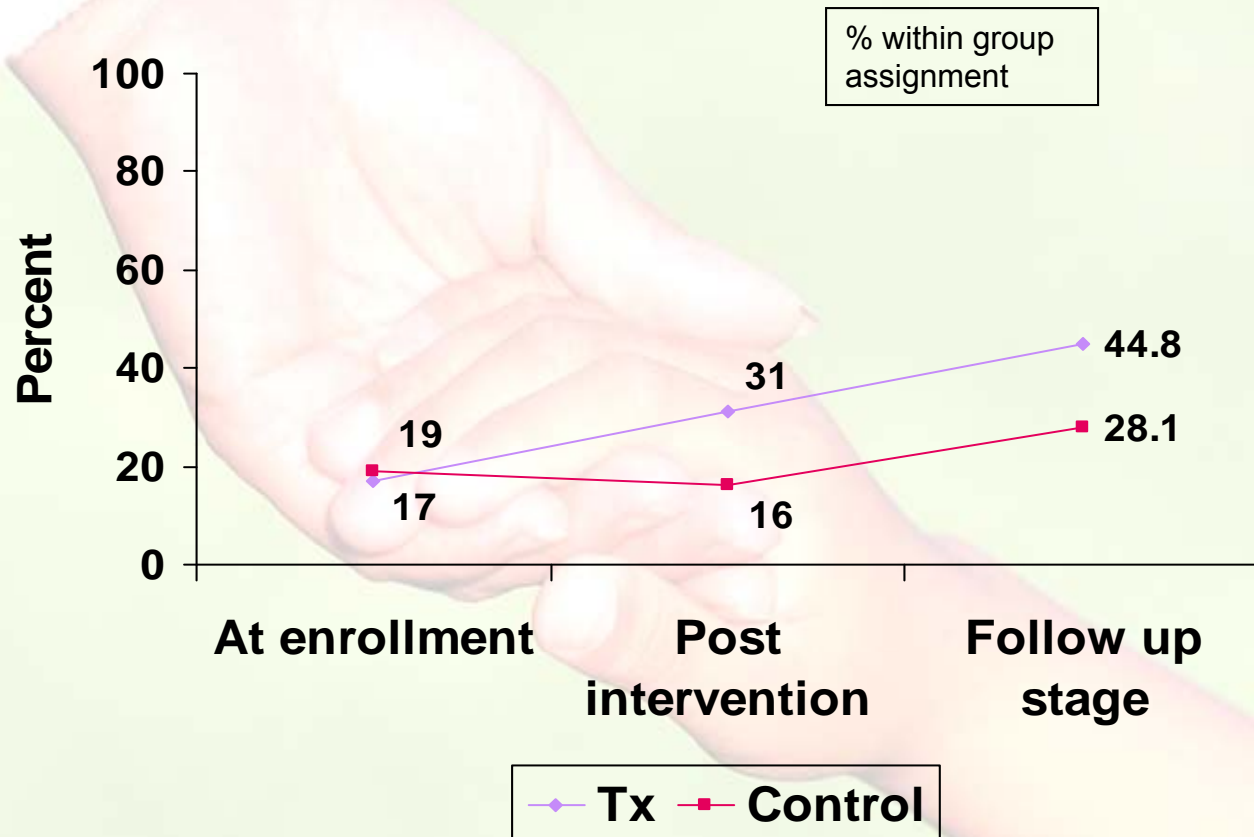
Treatment vs. comparison group within each category from post intervention (t2) to follow up (t3)

% within group assignment

		Baseline	Post	Follow
Still in HS	Tx	100%	(17) 58.6%	(4) 13.8%
	Comp	100%	(21) 67.7%	(12) 37.5%
Graduated	Tx		(11) 37.9%	(21) 72.4%
	Comp		(8) 25.8%	(16) 50%
Dropped	Tx		(1) 3.4%	(4) 13.8%
	Comp		(2) 6.5%	(4) 12.5%

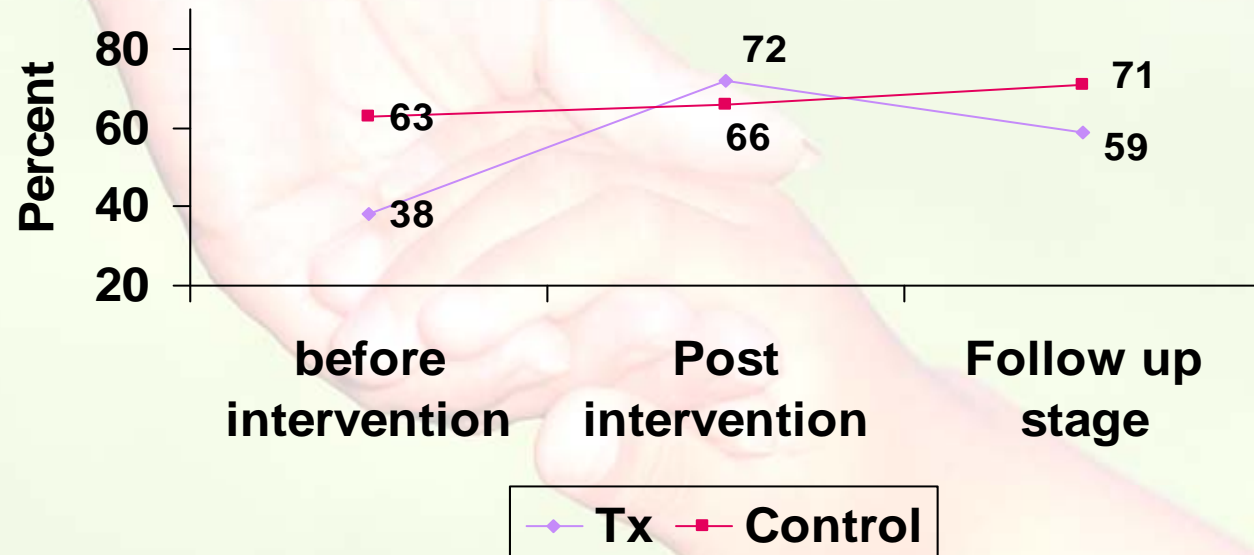


Currently Working



Prepared for Life

Percentage of those who feel prepared for life



Treatment youth achievements and goals from Outcome Survey

Went to summer school, going to youth leadership program (Portland YouthBuilders), got my ID, got into a talent agency

Got OR state ID card; only been to "D" room 3 times; more open at home (I don't shutdown); communication skills are better

Identified career goals, took cooking class, went to Teen conference, got state ID, improved grades and school attendance

Got permit; left Taylor house; looking at colleges; picked a college

Turning 18; finding credits; getting a job; completing My Life

Got a standard diploma, got my license, led my YDM-IEP, completed my FAFSA, created a resume, had speaking engagements

Graduating from high school and getting through My Life. Getting my state ID. Going to PCC. Going to OMSI and having fun when it is the fun day

Treatment youth achievements and goals from Outcome Survey

Visiting colleges, applying for jobs, staying in school, being obedient, loving my peers

I got myself an internship with the coolest cat who ever worked in a computer repair shop. Worked out family issues. I'm advocating for how I want to run my life. I ran my own YDM.

Getting a job, going to Texas for church, getting a bank account, own cell phone in my name, Job Corps

Passed my GED, graduated from a treatment school

Got ID, back into school, had baby, taking care of her on my own

Getting a life and maintaining my life even when I was having a rough time. Getting a new job 2 days after I found out my boyfriend was in jail. Rebuilding my relationship with my family.

I got out of school, I got a 3.5 GPA, I was a captain for the dance team and the Japan Club, I'm going to go to hair school

Got state ID, went to a big meeting and spoke in front of lots of people

Got skills in facility maintenance, problem solving skills on the job, better communication skills, balanced life



Essential Ingredients

- **Skills** to achieve success
- **Information** to make informed decisions
- **Support** for taking action
- **Opportunity** to act on one's own behalf
- **Self-attribution** for success
- **Achievement** of self-determined goals



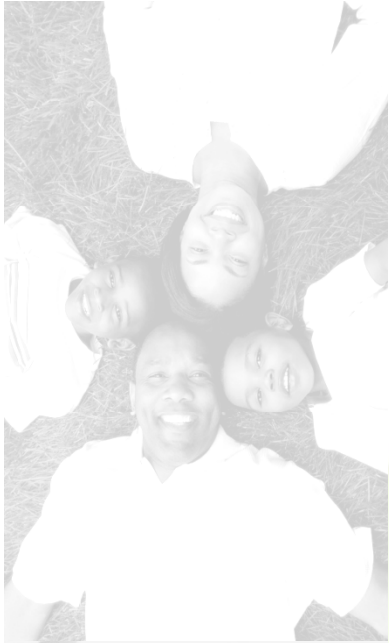
Implications for Traditional Models

- Recognize Youth as Change Agents
- Redefine Professional Roles
- Provide ***short-term investment*** to build ***long-term life skills***
- Emphasize organizational collaboration
- Adopt a community-based focus



Next Steps/Related Projects

- My Life IES
- Pathways to Positive Futures
 - Better Futures
 - Career Visions
- Project Success



Questions and Answers



Acknowledgments/Funders

www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu



The production of this webinar was supported by funding from the National Institute of Disability and Rehabilitation Research, United States Department of Education, and the Center for Mental Health Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, United States Department of Health and Human Services (NIDRR grant H133B090019). The content does not represent the views or policies of the funding agencies. In addition, you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

