Building Hope: Self-Determination for All!

Supporting the self-determination and transition outcomes of young adults in Foster Care

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Pathways Game

Take a piece of paper and write your journey from adolescence to now. Emphasize some milestones, roadblocks and barriers that occurred, (examples: school, foster care, diagnoses, moving, graduations, children, work experience, hospitalization, homelessness, etc.) Turn it over and wait for further instructions.

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In the U.S., 402,266 youth are in foster care each year (Children’s Bureau, 2014).

**Approximately 27,854 nationally age out of foster care annually.**

- About 40% of foster youth are in special education (emotional/behavioral disabilities are most common)

- Casey Alumni Study found that over half of former foster youth have diagnosed mental health diagnosis (Pecora, 2005). In Oregon, we found that 70% of youth had a DSM diagnosis (Hogensen, J., 2007)

- 70-80% of youth in Foster Care and youth with serious Mental Health conditions aspire to go to college (McMillen, C., 2003).

- Only 20% of youth in FC and 34% of youth with MH conditions actually attend (Wagner M., 2007)
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
Barriers to Transition and School success

- Lack of parental advocate or adult mentor
- High mobility and multiple placements
- Providers focus on safety vs optimizing independence and participation
- Trauma, poverty, separation from family
- Challenges around navigating multiple systems
- Best predictor of positive adult outcomes for foster youth:
  - EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT
Self Determination

A System to Navigate for youth in foster care

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Increase visibility for transition-aged youth with mental health challenges

Eight research studies, including three randomized control trials

Website, blogs, interventions, publications, tools

Discussing two projects today, both developed by co-principle investigators, Laurie Powers and Sarah Geenen.
**Self Determination**

*Goal of the Better Futures Project* - Implement and test a comprehensive intervention to assist young people in foster care with a serious mental health diagnosis prepare for and participate in post-secondary education.

*Goal of the My Life Project* - to test an intervention to enhance the self-determination of youth in foster care by promoting transition outcomes.
DESIGN:

- Youth randomly assigned to Community As Usual (CAU) or intervention group

- Youth enrolled in waves

- Intervention components include individual coaching sessions using a peer coach model,
  *Summer Institute and mentoring workshops

- Youth will be assessed during time in project

*Better Futures only

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Details:

Randomized intervention with participants who are:

- Currently in foster care
- Experience a serious mental health condition and/or disability
- Live in targeted geography
- Open to the idea of college or working on goals
- Open to having a coach
PROJECT OUTCOME GOALS:

- Mental Health
- Postsecondary Preparation/Participation
- Employment/Career Engagement
- Recovery/Quality of Life
- Social Support
- Self Determination
**INTERVENTION:**

**Summer Institute:**
- 10 to 15 youth, 2 Foster All-Stars and Staff
- 3 nights/4 Days in Dorms at Portland State University
- Daily Panels, Tours, Activities and Workshops
- Evening Activities and Dinner

**Mentoring Workshops:**
- Bi monthly with 5 total
- Various panels of college students and transition agencies
- Potential topics include essay writing, wellness tools, field trips, allies, college supports, strategic disclosure and resumes and job hunting

**Peer Coaching:**
- Minimum 2x a month to weekly for 1 year
- Peer support and collaborative problem solving
- Self determination and empowerment lens
- Build relationships, offer resources and support
- Youth directed on their personally valued goals
- Skill building and experiential activities

*Better Futures only*
Elements of the Intervention

- One-to-one mentoring with a coach
- Group mentoring workshops with alumni and peers
- Summer Institute (Better Futures only)
- Coordinated transition planning
- Training for professionals
- Parent support
- Connecting youth to adult allies, partnership agreement
Peer Coaching:

- Skills (problem solving, hanging tough, narrowing goals)
- Experiential Activities (completing FAFSA, exploring resources on internet, investigating mental health supports, informational interview to explore career area)
- Information (application time line, scholarships, youth let meetings)
- Minimum 2x per month to once a week
- Use Taking Charge Manual
Self Determination definitions:

- Acting as the primary causal agent in one’s life and making choices and decisions regarding one’s quality of life free from undue external influence or interference. (Wehmeyer, 1996)

- Self-directed action to achieve personally valued goals. (Powers et al, 1996)

- The ability of individuals to control their lives, to achieve self-defined goals and to participate fully in society.

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Self Determination

Our definition:

- **Information** to be able to make decisions
- **Opportunities** to do activities, take risks
- **Support** from trusted others
- **Self-direction / other-direction skill**
- **Incorporate** accommodations as universal rather than special strategies
- **Believe in youths’ capacities and rights** to be self-determining and have typical lives, regardless of labels
- **Use strength based** theories and practices
- **Include** youth in decision making
- **Nothing** about them without them

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Self Determination

Coaching Approach:

- Work through the students, not around them
- Respect individual differences in learning and maturity
- Help youth learn how to direct support
- Keep communication open and positive
- Recognize student-initiated goals and support them
- Interpret lack of follow-through as a need for more support
- Support youth around youth-directed goal development and achievement.
- Coaching vs. training
- Assist, encourage and challenge youth to successfully apply generic strategies to achieve personally-valued goals

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Coaching Approach continued:

~Youth has mastery experiences
~Achieving bite-size goals
~Managing problems
~Academic success
~Youth attributes success to what s/he did and builds confidence
~Youth increases support network
~Strategies become “imprinted” in youth’s consciousness
~Learns about resources and accommodations
~Learning in a natural setting
~Building Partnerships
~Informed decision making

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Group Mentoring

- Foster care alumni serve as mentors (some are former project participants)

- Workshops held monthly and always include a fun event

- Topics for workshops include college, relationships, running your own meeting, employment/careers, transitioning out of care, wellness, other youth selected topics

- Provides opportunities for youth to hear the transition stories of alumni and ask questions

- Can provide opportunities for youth to explore/hear about college life, careers, and strategies to have positive transition outcomes

- Opportunity to meet youth in similar circumstances and provide peer support to one another
Self Determination

Training and Support for Peer Coaches

• Coaches are in college/voc. school and have lived experience with foster care and mental health

• Knowledge, credibility, experience

• Modeling through experiential activities

• Multi-level empowerment

• Symbiotic Relationship

• Role Clarity and boundaries

• Strategic disclosure

• Vicarious Trauma and Self Care

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Self Determination – Youth
Self Determination

Alex:

• Proactive in regards to taking himself to Independent Living Program and getting a mentor

• Keeps going strong even when faced with difficult times

• Finished resume and cover letter and looked for a job

• Didn't know he needed a transition plan, and after talking about it, asked his caseworker about it and now attends ILP meetings

• Starting to take charge of his life (finishing high school, starting college, and obtaining accommodations such as ILP and a long-term mentor)

“I finally have someone to talk to who knows where I’m coming from and who won’t judge me” - Alex
Troy:

• Grades have gone up and graduated from high school

• Finished scholarships and financial aid applications, applied and got a job

• Finished college application, placement testing, and had scheduled to meet with his program’s advisor and is now in his second year of college

“My grades are good. I actually got an A and some B’s and NO D’s! and I feel a little bit more motivated. I like the snacks we get when working on stuff and keeps me coming back! Oh and the help with college stuff is cool too” - Troy
Serena:

• Likes and takes advantage of all the opportunities Better Futures has offered (conferences, workshops, looking for a job, applying to college) and has never missed a meeting/workshop

• Finished scholarships and financial aid applications

• Didn't know she needed a transition plan, and after talking about it, asked her caseworker about it and now attends ILP meetings and is scheduled for Chafee housing

• Now knows what she wants to do in the Fall and is going after it when before she would change her mind every meeting. She now feels confident in her decision.

“I finished my goals and because of my coach I feel a lot more secure and excited for my future—Serena
Self Determination

Coaching Outcomes:

- Self-Determination and Self Efficacy
- Success in School/Community
- Development of Positive Support Systems
- Understanding Options and Responsibility
- Active in Futures Planning
- Making Informed Decisions about Life Directions
- Using Information, Skills and Opportunity to put life on track
- Positive Transition Outcomes
- Skills to achieve success
- Information to make informed decisions
- Support for independent action
- Opportunity to act on one’s own behalf
- Positive self-attribution
- Personal achievement

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Self-Determination

Positive Outcomes:

- Inclusion and Interdependence
- Builds through mastery including learning how to manage challenges
- Young people with high self-determination are more likely to be employed and live independently (regardless of severity of disabilities or MH condition).
- Youth has mastery experiences
- Managing problems and achieving goals
- Academic success
- Youth attributes success to what s/he did and builds confidence
- Youth increases support network
- Strategies become “imprinted” in youth’s consciousness

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Self Determination

Major Findings:

Promising trends towards higher rates of high school completion

73% of intervention vs 36% of the control youth were enrolled in higher education.

Increase in:

- Self determination
- Transition planning knowledge and engagement
- Perceived barriers to ones educational goals
- Career and postsecondary preparation activities
- Hopefulness
- Quality of Life

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Self Determination

Ideas and Suggestions:

- Convey respect and appreciation for the young person and their culture(s)

- Is driven by perspectives and priorities of the young person. Is transparent but also “motivational” toward youth.

- Promote self-determination, self-efficacy (and related skills), and hopefulness

- Avoid coercion / ensure processes are transparent

- Create an environment that feels safe and predictable, but also allows for some level of experimentation and failure

- Include youth in program development, advisory boards and direct service

- Affirm and respect young people’s perspectives and experiences

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Ideas and Suggestions continued:

- Build skills and experience for adult roles: Education, employment, social skills, independent living
- Ensure that activities, therapy, classes feel relevant to personally meaningful goals (though goals can change)
- Focus as much on process as outcomes
- Functioning more important than diagnosis or clinical assessment per se
- Build positive connections to family, peers, community
- Interventions/approaches should be evidence supported to the extent possible
- Be transparent and instill trust
- Help them find that sense of purpose
- Make it joyful and fun
Self Determination–Resources

www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu – Pathways RTC

http://www.rri.pdx.edu/ - Regional Research Institute

http://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/pdf/fpS13.pdf - Focal Point

http://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/pdf/proj2-ThingsNoOneToldMe.pdf - Things people never told Me

http://www.fosterclub.com/ - FosterClub

http://www.youthmovenational.org/ - Youth Move

http://vimeo.com/37129686 - My Life Project Youth Video
Questions?

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