My Life and Better Futures Programs

Building Hope: Supporting Youth in Special Education and Foster Care

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PATH WAYS RTC

Characteristics of Youth in Foster Care

	Nationally	Oregon
How many children in care?	408,452	8,718
Sex	52% male, 48% female	51.2% male, 48.8% female
Age of children in care	Age 0-5: 36% Age 6-12: 28% Age 13+: 36%	Age 0-5: 39.4% Age 6-12: 31.2% Age 13+: 29.4%
Reason for entering care	Neglect: 78% Physical abuse: 18% Sexual abuse: 10% Other abuse: 10% Psych. maltreatment: 8% Medical neglect: 2%	Threat of harm: 49.6% Neglect: 31.4% Sexual abuse: 8.7% Physical abuse: 8.4% Mental injury: 1.9%

Race/Ethnicity

Race	U.S foster care	Oregon foster care	Oregon children overall
African American	29%	8.3%	2.5%
Hispanic	21%	13.7%	19.8%
Caucasian	41%	64.4%	68%
Native American	2%	6.9%	1.3%
Other/multiracial	8%	8.4%	6.7%

Youth in Foster Care

How many teenagers age-out of foster care each year?

- Approximately 27,854 nationally
- Another 1500 or so run away
- In Oregon, approximately 400 youth age-out each year

Outcomes for youth exiting foster care

Youth aging out of foster care struggle as young adults:

- 50% use illegal drugs
- 25% were involved in the legal system
- 1 out of 4 experienced homelessness
- 2x more likely to be a single parent
- Substantially lower levels of education and employment
- Higher levels of poverty

Rates of Disability

- About 60% of older youth in foster care receive special education services (IEP) and 25% receive services for a Developmental Disability (DD)
  (Schmidt et al., 2013)

- Casey Alumni Study found that over 50% of former foster youth have diagnosed mental health problems (Pecora, 2005). In Oregon, 70% of youth had a DSM diagnosis (Hogensen, J., 2007)

Outcomes for youth with disabilities exiting foster care

Foster youth with disabilities were less likely than other foster youth to:

- Be employed
- Graduate from high school
- Have social support
- Be self-sufficient
- Only 16% of foster youth in special education with a primary disability of emotional disturbance graduated from high school; 18% left school because they were incarcerated (Smithgall, Gladden, Yang, & Goerge, 2005).

Outcomes for youth with disabilities exiting foster care: Education

Foster youth:

- Almost half repeat a grade
- Drop out 2x as often
- High rate of absenteeism
- Only 20% who graduate attend college while most want to go to college (84%)

Foster youth in SPED

- lower GPAs
- Changed schools more often
- Earned fewer credits
- Had lower state test scores
- Had more restrictive SPED placements
- Were more likely to attend an alternative school (Geenen & Powers)

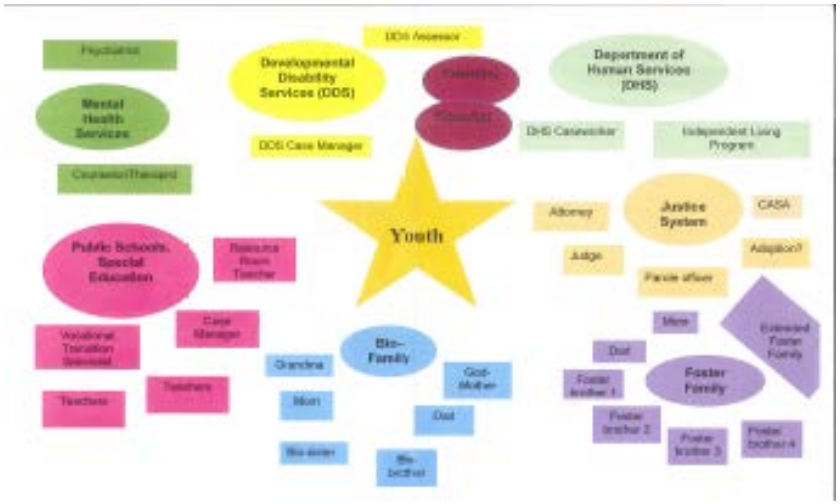
Barriers to School and Transition Success

- Lack of parental advocate
- High mobility
- Focus on safety vs optimizing independence and participation
- Trauma, poverty, separation from family
- Challenges around communication/collaboration between systems

- Best predictor of positive adult outcomes for foster youth:
  - EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

Self Determination

A System to Navigate for youth with Disabilities



My Life and Better Futures

- Funded by Department of Education and National Institute of Health, NIDDR, SAMHSA
- Principle Investigators: Laurie Powers, Sarah Geenen
- First opportunity to experimentally study the longitudinal impact of self-determination enhancement on youth in foster care with disabilities
- First experimental study of self-determination enhancement or any transition intervention with foster youth, with pr without disabilities

Project Eligibility

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 working on goals
- Open to having a coach

Project Goals

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.

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

Research Design

- Youth identified by comparing DHS and School District databases
- Foster youth with or without disabilities, 16.5 to 18 years of age, were randomly assigned to either the control or TX group
- Youth were enrolled in waves
- Youth were evaluated at baseline, conclusion of TX (12m) and 12m post-intervention

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

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

Self Determination

Youth in TX group meet with coach 1x per week. Using the *Take Charge* curriculum, coaches support youth around youth-directed goal development and achievement. Coaching model emphasizes:

~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

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

Results

Significant changes were noted in the following areas:

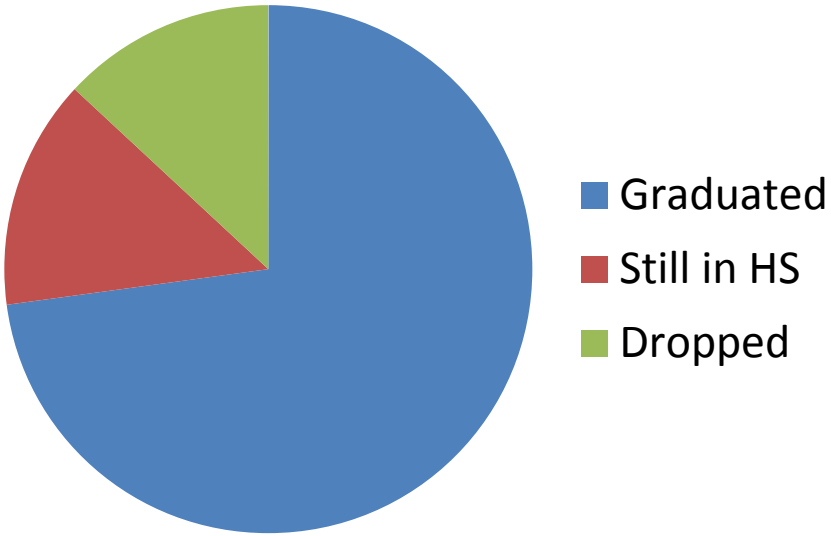
- Self-determination
- Perceived quality of life
- Transition planning

Other notable improvements:

- Educational outcomes
- Percentage employed
- Perception of being prepared for life as an adult
- Engagement in independent living activities

Educational Status at T3

TX



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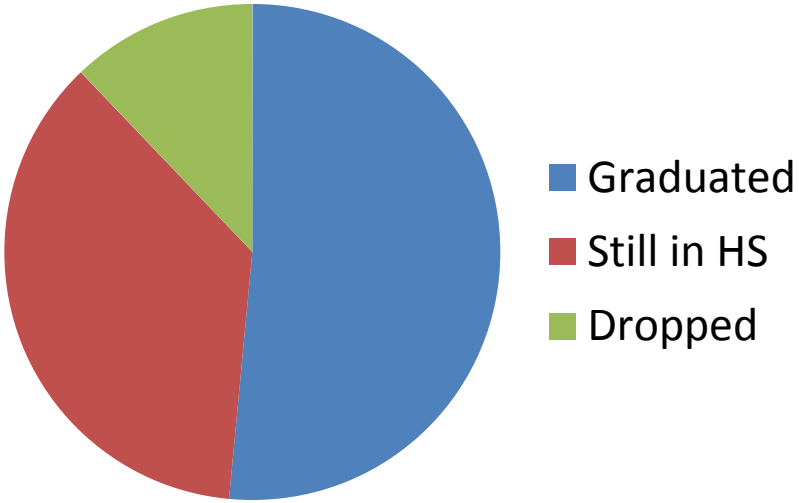

Self-Determination

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

Ideas and Suggestions:

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

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

-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

-Ensure that activities, therapy, classes feel relevant to personally meaningful goals (though goals can change)

-Focus as much on process as outcomes

-Build positive connections to family, peers, community

-Be transparent and instill trust

-Help them find that sense of purpose

My Life and Better Futures

- What was some barriers in your life that made it difficult to meet and reach your goals?
- How did your coach help you meet your goals?
- How was this program different from other support you have had in the past?
- Share about your Youth-Led Meeting.
- Suggestions for adults on how best to assist youth to be successful?

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 -Project Youth Video

My Life

Questions?

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