Building Hope: Supporting Youth in Special Education and Foster Care

Jessica Schmidt
Lee Ann Phillips
May Kane
## Characteristics of Youth in Foster Care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nationally</th>
<th>Oregon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>How many children in care?</strong></td>
<td>408,452</td>
<td>8,718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td>52% male, 48% female</td>
<td>51.2% male, 48.8% female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age of children in care</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 0-5:</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 6-12:</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 13+:</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reason for entering care</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neglect:</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>Threat of harm: 49.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical abuse:</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>Threat: 31.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual abuse:</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Sexual abuse: 8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other abuse:</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Other abuse: 8.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psych. maltreatment:</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>Medical neglect: 2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical neglect:</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>Mental injury: 1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>U.S foster care</td>
<td>Oregon foster care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>64.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/multiracial</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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

Research & Training Center for Pathways to Positive Futures, Portland State University
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 or without disabilities
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
**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
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
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

Control

Graduated Still in HS Dropped

Graduated Still in HS Dropped
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
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
Questions?

Contact Information:

• Lee Ann Phillips  
  lphil@pdx.edu  
  503-250-0008

• Jessica Schmidt  
  jdsc@pdx.edu

• Maylyn Kane  
  maylyn2011@gmail.com
The development of the contents of this presentation were 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.