Operationalizing Success:
An Analysis of Risk and Protective Factors of Transition-Age Youth in Residential Foster Care at Hillsborough County Children’s Services

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• University of South Florida, College of Public Health
• University of South Florida, College of Behavioral & Community Sciences
• Hillsborough County Department of Children’s Services
AGENDA

• Background and Significance
• Purpose of Evaluation
• Methods
• Survey Results
• Interview Results
• Findings
• Implications for Service Delivery
CHILDREN’S SERVICES

Programs

- Outpatient
- CINS/FINS
- RGC
Residential Group Care youth

- Transition-age (16-17)

Literature on transition-age foster youth

- Poor outcomes
- Interdependence vs independence
- Heterogenous
- Developmental considerations
- Ecological considerations

Cultivating protective factors in residential foster care programs can help improve youth outcomes
PURPOSE OF EVALUATION

To explore residential foster care youth and staff perceptions of success

**Expected Results**
To identify important yet unmeasured protective treatment practices

**Develop programming**

**Attract program funding**
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METHODS

Recruitment
- Staff employed >6 months
- Youth in care >6 months

Data Collection
- Nov 2016 – Feb 2017
- Survey and semi-structured interview

Analysis
- Recoded interviews transcribed
- A priori coding based on youth.gov list
RGC Youth = 15
Staff ≈ 90
Ratio = 1:6
Staff and youth interview questions

– Definitions of success
– Support in transition to adulthood
– “Therapeutic Community”
– Protective factors fostered
– Meaningful anecdote
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SURVEY RESULTS

Most Youth Endorsed Items
- Clear behavioral expectations
- High outcome expectations
- High academic expectations
- Connections to mentors
- Supportive relationships

Most Staff Endorsed Items
- Physical health care
- Positive organizational climate
- High academic expectations
- Organizational stability
- Connections to activities
- Self-esteem development
Largest Relative Differences

- Clear behavioral expectations (72.5%)
- Support before leaving (58.5%)
- High outcome expectations (45.5%)
- Prepared for independent living (44%)

Youth report more protective factor development than staff;

Staff is concerned about preparing youth for aging out
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Physical abuse
Verbal abuse
Sexual abuse
Psychological abuse
Traumatic events
Neglect/abandonment
Parental use of illegal substances
Running away and school truancy
Behavioral health disorders
Describe successful emancipated youth.

Staff
• ...understand the role of being a good citizen.
• ...contribution to the community.
• ...fundamentals of adulthood...
• ...being plugged into the community...

Youth
• Achieving your goals.
• Something that somebody can look up to.
• ...having the ability to not quit but to keep going forward.
• A lot of money.
What has been most helpful?

Staff
• The **structure**. The stability...
• ...that **consistency**.
• ...stable **relationship** with another adult...
• ...supports...**follow-up** with them...
• ...**continued** support...

Youth
• ...the **one-on-one** therapy [and] interaction I got from everybody...
• The **staff**...they’re always there when you need them.
• ...giving me like, **knowledge** and experiences...they tell you how it is...
• ...given that **opportunity to speak**.
## PROTECTIVE FACTORS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Domain</th>
<th>Family Domain</th>
<th>Community Domain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical Development</td>
<td>Supportive relationships with:</td>
<td>Interest/Skill Development by mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual Development</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Engagement with School &amp; Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem</td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Positive Norms</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Regulation of Emotions</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Clear behavioral Expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping &amp; Problem-solving skills</td>
<td>Engagement in 2+ activities</td>
<td>Physical &amp; Psychological safety</td>
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<td>Engagement in 2+ activities</td>
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RESULTS – INDIVIDUAL DOMAIN

Self-Esteem Development

- Self-Investment
- Independence
- Decision-Making

“They have to know that they can do it... They have to see the success.”
RESULTS – INDIVIDUAL DOMAIN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coping and Problem-Solving Skills</th>
<th>• Therapy Groups</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Modeling Prosocial Skills</td>
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<td>• Communication</td>
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<td>• Conflict Resolution</td>
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<td>• Asking for Help</td>
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“We model good communication... We model it with each other. We model it with them, and what we see is deficits in the kids. We use that as a moment to teach.”
RESULTS – FAMILY DOMAIN

Supportive Relationships with Family
* Treatment
* Events
* Reunification
* Sign-outs

“A lot of the times, we’re a program that believes that we want our kids to have a connection with their families; if it’s safe, we do reach out.”
RESULTS – FAMILY DOMAIN

Supportive Relationships with Staff

- Trust
- Role model
- Family
- Resource

“Yeah, it took six weeks to get through my head because I would run away like every weekend...she would yell at me and she wouldn’t give up on me...you could feel the mother instinct come out...”
RESULTS – COMMUNITY DOMAIN

Personal Interest or Skill Development by Mentor

• Life Skills Training
• Community Experiences
• Employment Certifications

“I think we’re great at helping the youth find their gifts, and then meeting them where they’re at and then – I don’t want to say glorifying those gifts, but honoring those gifts.”
RESULTS – COMMUNITY DOMAIN

Physical and Psychological Safety

- Safety Plan
- Round-The-Clock Staff
- Referrals
- Safety Infrastructure

“In order for us to be able to even start to help our youth, we have to ensure that they feel safe.”
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Important yet unmeasured protective treatment practices are:

1. Establishment of safety
   – Night shift protocols
2. Encouragement of self-exploration
   – Summer Skills Camp
3. Facilitation of mentorship opportunities
   – Unstructured time, volunteering
4. Immersion in the community
   – YMCA, bus transit
5. Career and education preparation
   – College visits, applications
LIMITATIONS

– Small sample size

– Survey and interview instruments may not have adequately captured all protective factor domains

– Variable interest from staff and children to share experiences
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IMPLICATIONS FOR SERVICE DELIVERY

- CBPR and Youth-Adult Partnership
- Inform standardized RGC curriculum for service delivery
- Future research on outcome evaluation after transition
- Inform child welfare policy
- Improve outcomes for vulnerable youth