

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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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Project and presentation made possible through a collaboration between:

- University of South Florida Institute for Translational Research in Adolescent Behavioral Health
- University of South Florida, College of Public Health
- University of South Florida, College of Behavioral & Community Sciences
- Hillsborough County Department of Children's Services



- 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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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

Survey No.			
Interview			
Date			

**Professors' Experiences Survey
YOUTH**

Please circle all that apply to your experience with Hillsborough County Children's Services.

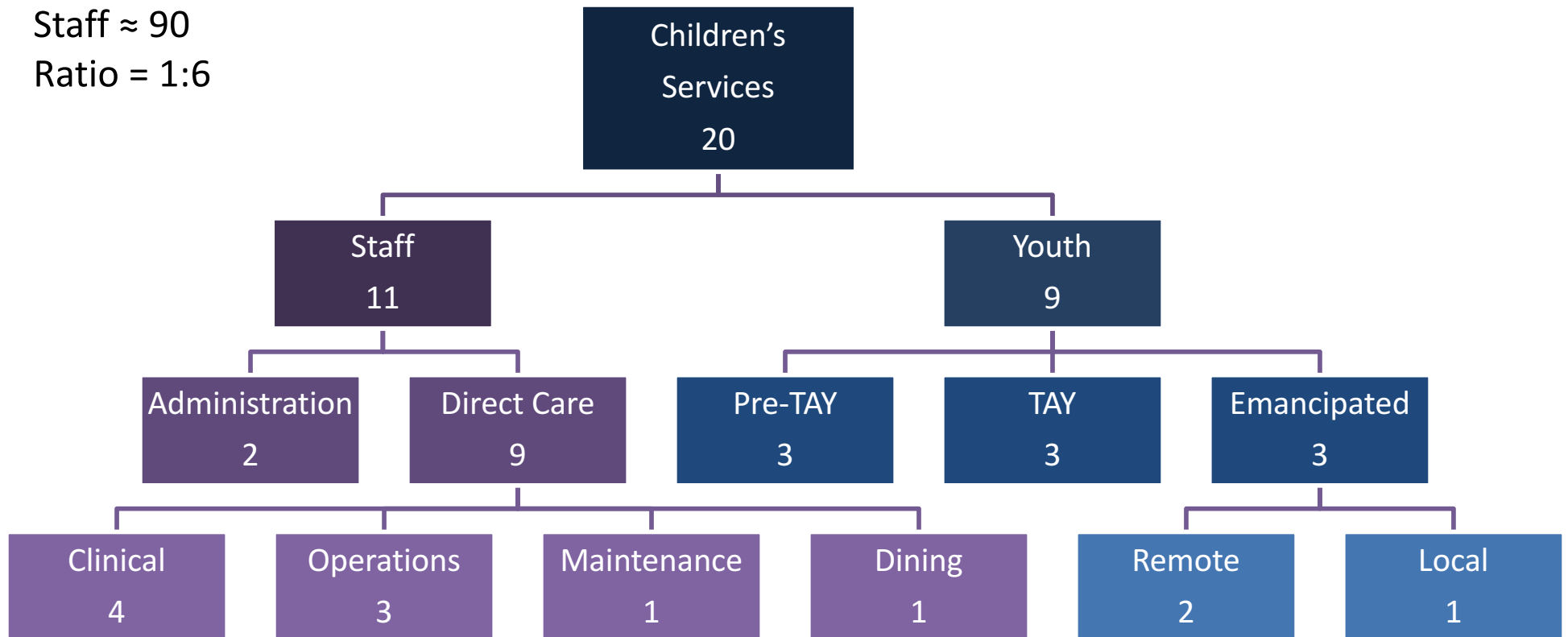
The staff provides for my physical and medical needs.	The staff has high standards for my school performance.	The staff has clear expectations for my behavior.	I have developed supportive relationships with staff members here.
The staff responds quickly to my needs.	There is a low ratio of staff members to youth.	The staff has high expectations of me.	I feel protected from harm and fear here.
The staff provides strategies to help me develop my self-interests.	The staff supports the development of my skills and interests.	The staff supports me in resolving disagreements or conflicts.	Staff members have positive relationships with one another.
The staff provides opportunities for me to engage in activities within my school and/or community.	The staff provides opportunities for me to connect with peers at school, in activities, and in employment activities.	The staff provides me with strategies for life skills I will use as an adult (e.g., budgeting, helpings).	At Children's Services, there are rules to enforce bullying.
The staff prepares me for what I will no longer live at Children's Services.	The staff provides structure, limits, rules, monitoring, and predictability.	The staff provides physical and psychological safety.	Parts of my program here have frustrated me.
The staff helps me connect with adults that can assist me outside of Children's Services.	The staff will help me connect with support before I leave Children's Services.	The staff provides strategies to help me control my emotions.	The staff provides me with opportunities to explore jobs.

METHODS – SAMPLE

RGC Youth = 15

Staff ≈ 90

Ratio = 1:6



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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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RISK FACTORS IDENTIFIED



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

Individual Domain	Family Domain	Community Domain
Physical Development Intellectual Development Self-Esteem Self-Regulation of Emotions Coping & Problem-solving skills Engagement in 2+ activities	Supportive relationships with: Family Friends Staff	Interest/Skill Development by mentor Engagement with School & Community Positive Norms Clear behavioral Expectations Physical & Psychological safety

Adapted from O'Connell, M. E., Boat, T., & Warner, K. E.. (2009). *Preventing mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders among young people: Progress and possibilities*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press; and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2009). *Risk and protective factors for mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders across the life cycle*. Retrieved from http://dhss.alaska.gov/dbh/Documents/Prevention/programs/spfsig/pdfs/IOM_Matrix_8%205x11_FINAL.pdf

Self-Esteem Development

- Self-Investment
- Independence
- Decision-Making

*“They have to know that they can do it...
They have to **see** the success.”*

Coping and Problem-Solving Skills

- Therapy Groups
- Modeling Prosocial Skills
- Communication
- Conflict Resolution
- Asking for Help

“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.”

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.”

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...”

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.”

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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- 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

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