Effectiveness of the My Life Project: A Self-determination Transition Intervention for Youth in Foster Care and Special Education

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Foster Care Statistics
- In the U.S. over 500,000 youth are currently in foster care
- 20,000 youth are emancipated from foster care each year when they reach the age of majority (typically 18)
- About 40% of foster youth are in special education (emotional/behavioral disabilities are most common)
- 70 – 80% of foster youth have an DSM diagnosis

Foster Care Statistics

Outcomes
- Midwest Evaluation Study
  - Foster youth more likely to experience early parenthood and have child outside of marriage
  - Foster youth had substantially lower levels of education and employment than peers in the general population
  - Youth with serious mental health conditions excluded from study

Outcomes
- 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

Other Findings
- Only 16% of foster youth in special education with a primary disability of emotional disturbance graduated from high school; even more worrisome, 18% left school because they were incarcerated (Smithgall, Gladden, Yang, & Goerge, 2005).

Policies
- The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (FCIA; aka the Chafee Act) provides resources to help foster youth plan and get ready for adulthood.
  - Assistance is often given to youth through state Independent Living Programs (ILPs).
MY LIFE STUDY

- Funded by NIDRR
- Partnership with Mike Wehmeyer at University of Kansas
- RRI PIs: Laurie Powers, Sarah Geenen
- First opportunity to experimentally study the longitudinal impact of self-determination enhancement
- First experimental study of self-determination enhancement or any transition intervention with foster youth, with or without disabilities

Project Goals

- Enhance the self-determination of youth with disabilities in foster care
- Document the impact of the intervention in promoting transition outcomes of youth in foster care
- Investigate whether the intervention results in different outcomes for youth than the ILP

Research Design

- Youth identified by comparing DHS and School District databases
- 69 Foster youth with disabilities, 16.5 to 17.5 years of age, were randomly assigned to either the control or TX group
- Youth were enrolled in waves over three years
- Youth were evaluated at baseline, conclusion of TX (12m) and 12m post-intervention
- Attrition overall at 13%

My Life Intervention

- Take Charge for the Future Self-determination curriculum (fidelity 90% for wave 1, 93% for wave 2, 95% for wave 3)
- Weekly coaching for a year (mean = 50.36 hours)
- Youth engagement in transition plan meetings
- Youth participated in mentor workshops conducted with foster care alumni (mean = 2.82 to 3.67)

Data Collection

- Demographics
- Youth self-determination
- Educational participation/attainment
- Individualized Education Plans
- Engagement in desired career areas
- Independent living

Measures used:
- Empowerment Scale
- ARC Self-determination Scale
- AIR Self-determination Scale
- Quality of Life Measure
- Transition Planning Outcome Survey
- Demographic Survey (administrative data)

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
- Trend toward more stable living for treatment group
Results-overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Tx</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Follow up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Life</td>
<td>M=76.87</td>
<td>M=84.30</td>
<td>M=87.63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arc Self-determination</td>
<td>M=102.38</td>
<td>M=111.83</td>
<td>M=115.02</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition Planning</td>
<td>M=21.79</td>
<td>M=27.97</td>
<td>M=27.93</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education-graduated</td>
<td>M=18.94</td>
<td>M=23.29</td>
<td>M=25.95</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with regular diploma</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>M=100%</td>
<td></td>
<td>24.1%</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepared for Life</td>
<td>M=100%</td>
<td></td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

T-tests show the mean difference between treatment and control at the post intervention stage and the follow up stage were significant (p≤.05).

Self-determination

Self-determination scores measured by the Arc

The mean difference between treatment and control at the post intervention stage and the follow up stage were significant p≤.05.

Education

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<th></th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Follow</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Still in HS</td>
<td>Tx 100%</td>
<td>(14) 48.3%</td>
<td>(3) 10.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Con 100%</td>
<td>(20) 64.5%</td>
<td>(9) 28.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enrolled in GED</td>
<td>Tx (3) 10.3%</td>
<td>(4) 13.8%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Con (1) 3.2%</td>
<td>(2) 6.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated reg HS</td>
<td>Tx (7) 24.1%</td>
<td>(9) 31.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Con (3) 9.7%</td>
<td>(7) 21.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated modified</td>
<td>Tx (4) 13.8%</td>
<td>(9) 31.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Con (3) 9.7%</td>
<td>(7) 21.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earned GED</td>
<td>Tx 0%</td>
<td>(4) 13.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Con (2) 6.5%</td>
<td>(3) 9.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropped</td>
<td>Tx (1) 3.2%</td>
<td>(4) 13.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Con (2) 6.5%</td>
<td>(3) 9.4%</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Currently Working

The mean difference between treatment and control at the post intervention stage and the follow up stage were significant (p≤.05).
Prepared for Life

Percentage of those who feel prepared for life

before intervention Post intervention Follow up stage

-63 72 59

-36 66 71

Tx Control

Thank You!

Treatment youth achievements and goals from Outcome Survey

Went to summer school, going to youth leadership program (Portland YouthBuilders), got a job, got into a career agency

Identified career goals, took cooking class, went to Teen conference, got into YAM, returned to school, completed 10th grade

Got states, lost 40 pounds, keeping an exercise journal, went to college

Learning to hold money, getting a job, completing my GED

Identified career goals, went to Teen conference, got into a career, kept speaking engagements

Graduating from high school, getting through life, taking the SAT, going to college

Went to college, applied for jobs, doing well in school, being motivated, being neat

I got myself an internship with the coolest cat who ever worked in a computer repair shop. Worked out family issues. I’m advocating for how I want to run my life. I ran my own YDM.

Passed my GED, graduated from a treatment school

Getting a job and maintaining my life in high school. I am having a great time. I am finding a new job and then I plan on getting a 10th grade job. I plan on getting a 10th grade job.

Got skills in facility maintenance, problem solving skills on the job, better communication skills, balanced life.