Supporting and Serving Youth in the Foster Care System

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Overview of the Youth Focused Training and TA Centers
Equipping Leaders to Better Prepare Children & Youth for College, Careers, & Citizenship

The Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) accomplished its work through three centers that address crucial pillars of success required for young people and their communities to succeed:

1. Connecting community with public education to support the learning and development of young people.
2. Building more effective pathways into the workforce to help all young people transition to adulthood.
3. Preparing generations of leaders to drive cooperative efforts at all levels.

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The Y-TAC is a U.S. Department of Education’s Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA)-funded Technical Assistance Center that is charged with providing State VR agencies and related rehabilitation and youth service professionals with technical assistance to help more effectively serve students and youth with disabilities, including disconnected youth who need to re-engage with education and/or work such as those involved in the juvenile justice system, the foster care system, and other traditionally underserved and/or isolated youth populations.
Our evaluation is designed to ensure that we are providing high quality training and technical assistance that offers information that will be useful in designing and implementing services for and with youth.

**We need your assistance in understanding:**

- The quality and relevance of our professional development session,
- Whether and how useful you believe the knowledge and skills you learned will support your work with youth,
- What additional professional development opportunities you desire in providing high quality services for and with youth.
We will be asking the following questions at the conclusion of today’s session:

1. What is the most meaningful and useful information you learned in this session?

2. How will this information and these materials/activities help improve your knowledge and skills in working with all youth, including youth with disabilities and traditionally underserved youth in the Juvenile Justice and Foster Care systems?

3. What additional information would you like to learn about this topic or other topics related to your work with youth?

4. How can we improve the quality of today’s presentation?
Objectives

- **Participants will learn** about needs of youth in foster care and transition planning considerations.

- **Participants will be able to** apply basic techniques of Person-Centered Planning and Trauma Informed Care to their work with foster care youth.

- **Participants will learn** about resources related to youth in foster care.
Presenters

• Krysta Esquivel, M.SW., Executive Manager, YMCA Community Support Services

• Jacy Farkas, M.A., Sonoran University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) at the University of Arizona
YMCA of San Diego County

Social Services

- Transitional Housing
- Behavioral & Mental Health
- Family Preservation
- Focus on Youth in Foster Care & Homeless Youth

Recreation and Childcare

- Traditional Gym
- Camps & Childcare
- Childcare Subsidies
- Youth Development Programming
One Request for Proposal (RFP) = Collaboration

San Diego County Child Welfare Services (CWS) and Workforce and Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) Partnership
Joint procurement between County of San Diego, Health and Human Services Agency, CWS, and San Diego Workforce Partnership (SDWP)

- Collaboration between Independent Living Skills and WIOA Workforce Services
- $1.7 million funding allocated per year to provide services to foster youth utilizing County and WIOA funding
YMCA Connections: Economic Stability & Mobility

- Relationships are healing
- Brain science & Physiology
- Focus on self-regulation to increase social networks and relational competencies
- Work readiness training centered on self-regulation
- Adapted Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) intervention
Evolves with past experiences
Reshaped by relationships
Rewiring to adapt
Change our narrative
Connection is impactful
We can facilitate or frustrate this process!
Unmet needs
Chronic instability
Extreme poverty
Enhanced stress responses
Can’t develop under these conditions
Self Regulation skills needed
Self Regulation: Act of managing thoughts & feelings in order to engage in goal directed actions

- Organizing Behavior, Thoughts, and Emotions
- Constructive Problem Solving
- Controlling Impulses
Overwhelming stress

Insufficient capacity to cope

Lack of safety

Skill is to seek help help from a caring caring adult

Positive climate

Coaching & Instruction

Warm & responsive
THE C.A.V.E. APPROACH
A RELATIONALLY-FOCUSED FRAMEWORK FOR CONNECTION

**COMPASSION**
Empathy + Desire to help
- Protects YOU from burn-out
- Eases client shame
- Allows for client vulnerability
- Conveys a willingness to connect

**AWARENESS**
Pure observation
- Judgment-free
- Listen without your values interfering
- Know that values, choices, actions are not one-size-fits-all
- Increases the odds of odds of client engagement

**VALIDATION**
Recognize another’s inner experience
- Shows acceptance of their experience
- Does NOT condone condone actions
- Increases trust
- Helps you to better recognize what motivates a client

**EMPOWERMENT**
Present a range of possibilities & choices
- Accept that choices may not always be “good”
- Allows a client to take control of their life
- Conveys respect & trust
- Choices are very important important for trauma survivors

Impacts a client’s thinking and behavior
The Mindful Employee:
Personal brand, social media, digital footprint, what empowers and motivates them, giving and accepting feedback, and strategic sharing.

Diversity & Non-Judgment:
Inclusion in the workplace, working effectively with people of various backgrounds, experiences, opinions and perceptions.

Thoughtful Decision Making:
Importance of critical thinking in order to make sound judgments and apply learning from one situation to another.
Sonoran Center for Excellence in Disabilities
Education | Research | Service
Expanding Possibilities | Enhancing Independence

Jacy Farkas
What is the Sonoran Center?

- University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD)
- DD Act mandates that every state has at least 1 university center – federally funded by Administration on Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities (AIDD)
- DD Network: UCEDD, Protection & Advocacy, DD Planning Council
Person-Centered Planning?
Person-Centered Philosophy

Foundation of Person-Centered Practices and Planning

All people

• have the basic human right and responsibility to exercise freedom of choice in their own lives;
• need to be knowledgeable about the full range of choices available to them, and have the skills and supports to exercise those choices;
• regardless of the barriers they face, have the opportunity to find success and independence through engagement in community life and employment; and
• have the right to try, whether they fail or succeed.

Person-centered practices and planning help people have better lives, not just better plans!
Person-Centered Planning (PCP)

An individualized approach that helps a person discover what they really want by:

- identifying personal goals for living in the most inclusive community settings;
- accessing a personalized mix of formal (paid) and informal (non-paid) services and supports to achieve those goals;
- creating a comprehensive portrait of who the person is and what he or she wants to do with their life; and
- bringing together all the people who are important to the person.
Person-Centered Planning is NOT

☑ an attempt to “fix” the person
☑ a “behavior plan”
☑ a standardized process
☑ dwelling on reputations or labels
Person-Centered Planning IS…

- a way to organize information & in plain language
- toward a desired future
- giving respect for choices
- promoting valued roles
- positive, respectful & sensitive
- capacity focused
- an accurate picture
- action-oriented (plan-do-evaluate)
- useful for life changing events
- a community/team building tool
Person-Centered Planning…

Intentionally moves from an approach geared toward fixing or solving problems, to one focused on:

• providing opportunities;
• creating avenues for self-actualization;
• personal freedom;
• meaningful interdependence; and
• community involvement.

Ultimately, PCP is adhering to a set of principles that value self-determination and personal dignity.
Creating a “Picture of a Life” for Transitioning Youth with DD in Foster Care
History – Arizona (AZ) Climate

- For over 20 years the AZ state developmental disabilities agency (DDD) had legal custody of eligible children/youth in child welfare system.
  - Child Protective Services (CPS) investigated reports.
  - Established dependency with Court
  - DDD eligible children transferred to DDD foster care.

- DDD performed all child welfare functions.

- DDD provided all supports/services needed regardless of Arizona Long-Term Care System (ALTCS) eligibility.
2009 – Decision was made to transfer all child welfare functions back to CPS.

DDD no longer had legal responsibility and unable to provide supports/services to Non-ALTCS eligible children/youth in foster care.

Created the need for more intensive transition planning to address housing, employment, and independent living skills.

History of poor outcomes for youth in foster care.
Youth with disabilities are at even greater risk.
“Picture of a Life” (POL) Project

- Collaborative state-wide project funded by the Arizona DD Planning Council and managed by the Sonoran Center with DDD (2012-2017)

- Targets young adults age 14-18 with intellectual/developmental disabilities (I/DD) making their transition into adulthood and aging out of the child welfare system

- Focus on non-ALTCS youth first
Improve transition outcomes for foster youth with I/DD

- Develop Person-centered Plans (PCP) built on strengths, dreams, and choices.

- Increase knowledge about options available.

- Build on strengths of informal and formal supports and community networks to support young adults.

- Provide opportunities to gain AND practice self-advocacy, self-determination, & independent living skills.
POL Goals

Improve services for youth with I/DD exiting foster care in Arizona by offering a mechanism for youth to exercise meaningful choices.
Major Activities

- Developed and supported implementation of PCPs for foster youth with I/DD
- Supported youth to attend self-advocacy & determination workshops
- Trained PCP Facilitators & professionals/community on person-centered practices
- Project Evaluation
- Convened a State-wide Workgroup on PCP and Transition
**Collaborators**

- **Department of Child Safety (DCS)**
  - Legal Guardians of youth in foster care
  - Increase involvement of Case Managers in PCP Project

- **Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)**
  - DDD and VR developed a “Memo of Understanding” regarding youth in foster care.
  - 2 dedicated VR Counselors to work exclusively with DDD eligible youth in foster care 14yrs+ and aged out

- **Behavioral Health**
  - Many of the youth have co-occurring behavioral health diagnoses.
Collaborators

- Independent Living Centers (ILC) – DIRECT & Ability360 + Diverse Ability Incorporated
  - Providing self-advocacy workshops > Summer Picture YOUR Life Academy (PYLA)
    - Promote informed decision making
    - Promote involvement in community

- Office of Children with Special Health Care Needs (OCSHCN)
  - Providing training and materials for Health Care Organizers
    - Improve long-term health and well being
Over 60 youth engaged
33 enrolled in POL program | 22 PCPs completed

**Gender:**
77% male | 19% female | 1 youth identified as transgender, male-to-female

**Race/Ethnicity:**
48% White | 52% identified as a racial/ethnic minority (Hispanic, African American/Black, Native American)

**Disability:**
- 71% had an intellectual disability
- 74% had more than one disability label
- 61% dually diagnosed with a behavioral health condition
Topics Covered:

- Disability Rights History
- Self-advocacy
- Empowerment
- Voting
- Cooking & Nutrition
- Take Charge of Your Health
- Communication
- Coping
- Problem-Solving & Decision-Making
- Goal-Setting
- Transitioning, Options, Your Future
What Youth Liked Most about PYLA:
“learning new things”
“voting workshop”
“meeting new people”
“making new friends”

“[The workshops] were very helpful and taught me how I have my own voice and should speak up.”
What People Like and Admire about Shyanne
• kind, compassionate, loving, caring and generous – Has a big heart
• very good person and easy to get along with
• determined when learning new things
• Outgoing and thoughtful

What is Important to Shyanne
• I want to get a job that I enjoy – cooking
• I want to enroll in college
• I enjoy spending time with my family
• I like when everyone gets along and there is no fighting
• Having money
• I enjoy volunteering
• Being able to get around – rides the bus, knows the schedules well

Supports Shyanne Needs To Stay Happy, Healthy & Safe
• I need to take my medication to prevent me from having seizures
• I need to eat healthy food
• I need to be with someone that I trust during thunderstorms
• I listen to hard rock music when I am upset
• I will ask for help when I need it
• When I have a conflict with someone, I like to talk it out with that person
• I am not a fast paced learner, I need time to work through things at my own pace
• When learning new tasks, it is best to show me how to do it so I can watch and learn AND give me written instructions to follow later

Supports, continued
• I am allergic to green dye, red dye, and pollen
• I cannot take certain medications
• I am sensitive to strobe lights
• I do best with people who encourage and nurture me
• I’m gluten and lactose intolerant
Questionnaires (YR1 – YR5): Pre, Post, Post Annual Follow-Up (each year engaged in program)

Interviews (YR2 & YR5): 10 total with 6 youth

45% of PCPs had concrete steps for obtaining permanent living arrangements

81% of PCPs had concrete steps to plan for future employment incorporating job exploration and post-secondary education opportunities

85% of youth felt better prepared for life after high school
Key Findings: Youth

- Youth learned more about the things they could do after they finished high school and places they can work.
- Readiness for life after high school increased after the planning process.
- Youth had little knowledge about skills related to finding work and wanted more training in this area, and this improved over time.
- Youth felt they could better describe and felt more comfortable talking about their health.
- Youth making decisions and being able to tell others what they want or need increased.
Nature of Child Welfare placements
  - Complicated personal histories – trauma, abuse
  - Issues of victims becoming perpetrators
  - Issues surrounding reunification with family members

Enrolled in multiple service systems: DDD, Department of Child Safety (formerly CPS), Behavioral Health, special education
  - Obtaining full participation and everyone on the same page
  - Turnover/Changes in case managers/support coordinators
Challenges

- Lack of access to the youth as most communication and scheduling had to go through guardians, group home support staff or foster parents

- Transient lifestyle – transfer to new residential placements

- Circle of support limited to paid professionals

- Lack of consistency of people in youth’s life

- Time and effort needed to complete plan

- PCP implementation dependent on team
Lessons Learned

- Starting early is important
  - Hard to get young adult to refocus if already aged out

- Participation from different stakeholders difficult to obtain

- System and community barriers present significant challenges to working with youth

- Ongoing support and education for facilitators, systems of care administrators and staff, direct supports (i.e., foster parents, residential staff)
Convened to promote the use of PCP and practices in youth to adult transition across the state

- Focus on systems change efforts > cultural shift
- Ensuring DCS is part of the effort

Representatives:
- Sonoran UCEDD
- Employment First
- DDD
- DCS
- Dept. of Education
- AHCCCS
- SILC/Diverse Ability Incorporated
- VR
- OCSHCN
- Behavioral Health
- Institute for Educational Leadership, Youth Technical Assistance Center
Gathered information on Best Practices & Gaps in AZ

Identified barriers and challenges to implementing person-centered practices and planning in the systems of care that support people who have developmental and other disabilities

Recommendations for Fostering a Person-Centered Arizona: Cultivating a Community of Inclusion, Respect, and Empowerment
Many of the youth have endured challenges in their life. Despite all this, they continue to be resilient.

Their person-centered plans reinforce and support their goals.

Youth appear to be more resilient if they have a supportive team, family, or network that are providing appropriate guidance at key transition points in their lives.
• **Jack** – his journey to employment & finding family

• **Valerie** – access to information > advocacy & determination skills

• **Shannon** – family reunification & living independently
Acknowldgments

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Michael Smull & Support Development Associates, LLC
DDD | DCS | VR
OCSHN
DIRECT Center for Independence
Ability360
AZYLF & Diverse Ability Incorporated

Most Importantly –
We thank the youth who participated in the program and to all who support them.
Additional Resources

- NCWD/Youth: Youth Involved in the Foster Care System
- Foster Club 21 Things: It’s T Time
- Foster Care to Success
- Financial Empowerment Toolkit
- I’m Getting Ready for My Next Move—Into Adulthood
Additional Resources

- The Keys to Your Financial Future Curriculum
- Know Before You Go
- Telling Your Money What to Do: The Young Adult’s Guide
- Things People Never Told Me
- NCWD/Youth: Guideposts for Success for Youth in Foster Care
Additional Resources

• Transition and Aging Out

• Health-Care Coverage for Youth in Foster Care

• State IL and ED and Training Voucher (ETV) Coordinators

• Extending Out-of-Home Care for Youth Past Age 18
QUESTIONS
Webinar Evaluation

Please complete the evaluation of this webinar while it is fresh on your mind.

Conclusion

Please tune in to the next Y-TAC sponsored webinar on October 10, 2018 on Supporting and Serving Youth Who are Homeless!

All webinars will be held from 2:30 pm to 4:00 pm EDT. All webinars will be open captioned, recorded and posted to the Y-TAC website. The Y-TAC is a sister technical assistance center of the NCWD/Youth, housed at the Institute for Educational Leadership and supported by the U.S. Department of Education's Rehabilitation Services Administration.
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